Many Children Left Behind: Educators Uncover Effects of Bush Education Plan

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is not only failing to help our nation’s underprivileged kids succeed in school, but may in fact be widening the achievement gap, according to new studies in the latest issue of *Equity and Excellence in Education* (Volume 38, Number 3).

Researchers in this volume find that with its impossible demands for 100 per cent proficiency and its failure to acknowledge individual differences, the No Child Left Behind Act may in fact promote academic inequality.

“The major shortcoming of NCLB is that it might very well increase the achievement gap,” says guest editor Gerald W. Bracey, an educational researcher and writer who specializes in assessment and policy analysis. “While some children fail and have to spend more time practicing on test-related material, students who pass are free to move on to more advanced material.”

Educators from across the country provide original research showing how NCLB’s requirements have misled students and teachers, transforming a program that once had bipartisan support into a platform for the conservative education agenda.

“The volume contributes a number of pieces on issues that few or no other people have written about,” says Bracey. The authors offer a number of strong critiques of the act:

- The law’s requirement that 100% of students be “proficient” is infinitely costly and possibly even unconstitutional, according to economic and legal analyses of the Act’s requirements.
- The universal provisions of NCLB create a “colorblind racism” that ignores the realities of racial disparities, according to Eric Freeman of Georgia State University.
- The law requires schools to provide the names, addresses, and phone numbers of juniors and seniors to military recruiters, creating recruiting mills in low-income areas, as described by Rosa Furumoto of California State University.
• Rural schools are disadvantaged by NCLB’s “choice option,” because traveling from a failing school to a successful one is not an option in many rural areas, according to Lorna Jimerson of The Rural School and Community Trust.

• Republicans have consistently failed to fund the law’s requirements, creating a “soft bigotry of low expenditures,” say Kevin G. Welner of the University of Colorado and Don Q. Weitzman of the University of California, Berkeley.

In addition, detailed case studies of NCLB in action in a poor Northeastern school and in a segregated school district in North Carolina highlight the Act’s narrow focus and its failure to foster racial equality.

“What is missing in the story of scientifically-based research and accountability is the role that context and individual student needs play in the professional role of a teacher in the classroom,” write Cynthia I. Gerstl-Pepin and Haley Woodside-Jiron of the University of Vermont. “Even if research has shown a program to be effective, teachers realize that a given school reform model may not work with each child in their classroom.”

This special issue of *Equity and Excellence in Education* will be of interest to educators and policy analysts alike, Bracey says. “Policy makers and professors with policy interests need to take a look at this volume.”

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*Equity and Excellence in Education* publishes scholarly articles that focus on equity and social justice in K-12 or postsecondary schools. Published quarterly, the journal highlights efforts to transform education systems as well as relationships between people at all levels of schooling.

Subscription information for *Equity and Excellence in Education* can be obtained from the address below. A single issue copy of “No Child Left Behind” (Volume 38, Number 3) can be purchased for US$25/£16. Visit the web site for more information or view the journal online at http://www.tandf.co.uk/journalstitles/10665684.asp.

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