The Idiocy of Policy: The Anti-Democratic Curriculum of High-stakes Testing

Wayne Au
California State University, Fullerton

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Abstract

Making use of the body of literature outlining the various controlling aspects of high-stakes testing on classroom practice, the analysis presented here finds that vertical hierarchies are both established and maintained through the top-down structure of education policies in the United States, as exemplified by the No Child Left Behind Act. By looking at the effects of such policies through Parker’s (2005) discussion of key aspects of democratic education, this article finds that educational policies based upon systems of high-stakes, standardized testing represent a curriculum that teaches anti-democracy.

Author Biography

Wayne Au, California State University, Fullerton
WAYNE AU is Assistant Professor in the Department of Secondary Education at California State University, Fullerton and author of Unequal by Design: High-stakes Testing and the Standardization of Inequality (Routledge, 2009).
A high-stakes test is a test with important consequences for the test taker. Passing has important benefits, such as a high school diploma, a scholarship, or a license to practice a profession. Failing has important disadvantages, such as being forced to take remedial classes until the test can be passed, not being allowed to drive a car, or difficulty finding employment.