

The tsunami in education - not an act of nature

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A colleague involved in progressive struggles in education since the Civil Rights movement commented to me that changes in education in the past eight years make her feel like she's standing on the beach at water's edge and experiencing the sand being sucked out from under her feet. Standardized tests now control the curriculum in schools serving working class and poor kids. Teachers must often follow scripts - or be fired. Services previously provided by school districts, like transportation, meals, screening and hiring teachers, and professional development, are now outsourced to for-profit corporations. Funding has been cut. And cut. And cut. State legislatures have created charter schools and "quicky" methods of obtaining teaching certification (including a standardized test, with multiple choice questions) with the rationale that these alterations provide minority children with better schools and teachers. What is most chilling about this wave, really a tsunami, is that it is global. But let's be clear it is no act of nature. It has been methodically planned by networks of right-wing think tanks, transnational corporations, and the politicians who do their bidding. A school reform in Illinois, California, or New Jersey has often been borrowed from a policy tested in Africa, Asia, or Latin America. In nations that depend on World Bank funding, neoliberal policies are imposed as the price for loans. In more affluent countries, the neoliberal project (privatization, cuts to funding, and curricular control via standardized testing) is enacted with bipartisan consensus, under the banner of improving educational opportunity - and saving taxpayer money. Education is the last service that is still mostly public - and unionized. Teacher unions are the most stable, potentially powerful foe of the neoliberal project and are therefore frequently and viciously attacked as impeding school improvement. In late August I was interviewed about this global transformation of education by Equal Time Radio, which broadcasts live in Vermont on WDEV 96.1FM/550AM, from 1-2pm Mondays through Thursday. My interviewer confirmed that my explanation about neoliberalism's global agenda "rings true in Vermont." The podcast can be found at <http://equaltimeradio.com/?q=node/173> WDEV has interesting shows in its archives, enlightening for those of us who live quite far from Vermont. You can hear them at <http://equaltimeradio.com/?q=audio>