

## Principal tells class, "I don't know why I pay your teacher." Teacher quits.

A teacher who used to teach at my school – really smart, funny guy...taught anthropology at the college level before coming back to New York and taking up teaching. He was at my school for a year, then transferred to another school in the district. Well, today he resigned. Just couldn't stand it anymore. His principal came in to observe him teaching a math lesson. The kids were struggling to understand, and the principal said, aloud, in front of the children, "I don't know why I pay your teacher." Up and quit. Amazing.

*Email to Ed. Notes, Mar. 21, 2005*

This teacher should be the poster boy for every teacher who feels like doing this probably at least 3 times a day. Boy, another sensitive principal. Perfect for the DOE model. Boy, wouldn't it be great if everyone could do this?

Greg Lundahl, Chapter leader at Washington Irving HS had the perfect comment: *Sounds like a great motto against the current administration. "We don't know why we pay this Chancellor."*

## Lemons for Sale at the DOE

The blurb above segues perfectly with Joel Klein's recent diatribe to principals in his weekly update warning them not to "pass the lemons" on to other schools when they encounter teachers they do not deem capable. This has resulted in much mirth and merriment among people associated with the NYC school system as they count the number of administrative lemons that have been passed from Tweed to the Regions and from the Regions to the schools. Every sour administrator with a sugar daddy managed to find a position somewhere in the vast administrative tree at the DOE – almost all at six figure salaries. Yes Joel, you are running a veritable mass production lemon factory.

**Not enough money spent on PR? ....**the United Federation of Teachers, has also hired Glover Park (run by Howard Wolfson, Hilary Clinton's campaign manager), at a cost of about \$15,000 a month – (NY Times, 3/22)

Don't we already have loads of PR people at enormous salaries?

## Diane Ravitch and John Dewey Award

### – not a match

*Let's call it the Pataki/Silver UFT Political Expediency Award*

With the UFT announcement that NYU professor and renowned education writer Diane Ravitch was going to receive the John Dewey Award we did some investigating because of Ravitch's reputation as a trasher of the American education system and the education establishment. The UFT is certainly considered part of that scene and has also gone on record of saying the things the Ravitches of this world are saying about American education distort all the good things we do. The irony here is that Ravitch has laid a number of ills assailing the American educational system at the feet of John Dewey's progressive ideas of education. I sent out a request for information and received some interesting responses.

Gerald W. Bracey of the Graduate School of Education at George Mason University and a leader of the fight against high stakes testing stated: "The idea that Diane Ravitch is to get a John Dewey award is appalling and unbelievable. In her various books and other writings, Ravitch has trashed Dewey as the father of failed reforms, the reason that American schools are so awful (she says). This is especially true in the book, *Left Back*. She hates Dewey." George Schmidt from Chicago writes, "If Ravitch is an heir to Dewey, the Pope deserves the Margaret Sanger award." Duane Campbell from California State U. says, "Rather than invest money in reform, most states have followed the lead of the Business Roundtable, Ravitch, and conservative foundations and the Clinton and Bush administrations and increased emphasis on testing to improve scores. This is the heart of school reform advocated by Ravitch, passed by the Bush

regime..." Another correspondent writes, "You might wish to point out that it's clear that the award committee hasn't read Ravitch...the UFT/AFT have lost their collective minds. It's like David Duke getting a social justice award, presented by the Southern Poverty Law Center." Dr. Joanne Yatvin from the Graduate School of Education at Portland State University writes, "She is certainly not a friend to teachers and this is not an honor she deserved. Dewey will roll over in his grave. Shame on you. [Ravitch] is a commercial professional who would not know a good classroom if she fell into it. What were you thinking???"

With testing-gone-mad mania being behind the insanity going on in our schools and the resultant pressures (and blame) being put on teachers, giving this award to Ravitch seems to make people scratch their heads. When ICE high school UFT Executive Board rep Jeff Kaufman raised the points above, UFT Elementary school

## De-Evolution

Now we hear that science centers, especially in the south are so worried at offending their religious constituents they are refusing to show IMAX films that even mention evolution or the Big Bang or any other scientific theories that might contradict the bible. I think it is time to declare the concept of the studies of genetics taboo and DNA illegal. After all, when the DNA of a chimp and a human is 95% compatible, it's time for the de-evolutionists to say, "Houston, we have a problem."

The Associated Press reports from Topeka Kansas "Eighty years after the Scopes Monkey Trial, State Board of Education members plan to hear arguments over whether they should add information on a form of creationism to Kansas' science standards." Toto, I have a feeling we're not making sense in Kansas anymore.

*Why is UFT not strongly opposing Jets Stadium ?*

## Read Klein's "Principals Week" before your principal

Find out what dastardly acts Joel Klein is inciting your principal to engage in with his weekly update. Our sources at the DOE send us a copy as soon as they receive it and we pass it on to our extensive chapter leader and delegate email list. Sign up at Norscot@aol.com.

**Education Notes full-size edition** now in production. Contact Norm Scott to arrange delivery to your school of enough copies for your staff.

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# Chapter Leader at Lafayette HS Defies Contract and UFT Rulings on Mailboxes

By Ira Goldfine

A banner headline in the February 17 edition of the NY Teacher proclaims “Permission not needed to put union materials in mailboxes”. The article goes on to summarize a landmark grievance decision won more than 30 years ago by Harriet Baizerman. This decision gave all teachers the right to communicate with their colleagues through the use of school mailboxes. The article goes on to give credit to the UFT Grievance Department for this great victory.

In a letter to the editor, Harriet now retired, wrote: “back in 1974, when I was struggling to establish this right, I did not have much support from the UFT leadership. The UFT chapter leader in my school did not support me, and by the time I reached the third step grievance hearing, it was Eve Cary of the American Civil Liberties Union that represented me. In fact, the UFT Grievance Department sent Edward Barnes as an “observer” as noted in the report of the hearing.”

Although this right was “won” so many years ago, it has had to be refought over and over because of the many attempts by school administrators and some dictator-like chapter chairpeople to block teachers from exercising this right of free speech. It is no surprise when the principal tries to curtail our rights but it is a travesty when elected leaders of the union are the ones doing the dirty work.

Since January, the principal and UFT Chapter Leader of Lafayette High School have blocked the distribution of literature by Peter Bobrick, a member of ICE (Independent Community of Educators). The most outrageous incident occurred recently when the chapter chairperson removed, from the mailboxes, copies of the minutes of the February Delegates Assembly meeting, written by a member of TJC (Teachers for a Just Contract) and distributed by the ICE member. After the first incident in January when the principal threatened the ICE member, a

former Unity Caucus chapter chairperson advised him to call Leo Casey, the UFT Special Representative for the High Schools. At the time Casey told the teacher that the right to distribute existed only during UFT elections. In a subsequent e-mail exchange with Norm Scott, a member of ICE, Casey says that he told the teacher there is a need “to draw a clear distinction between literature related to union business and other literature, making the point that there was no right to place literature in mailboxes that related to a person’s private opinions on political issues of the day, such as the war in Iraq, but only for material that was related to union business.”

Perhaps the Department of Education should hire Mr. Casey on as part of their legal department where he could assist Board of Education lawyers in defining all grievance decisions that protect teachers as narrowly as possible. Who appointed Leo Casey as the arbiter of what is acceptable and not acceptable to hand out to colleagues in their mailboxes? There are many people that would make the argument that the huge costs of fighting the war in Iraq have a very direct impact on the union and their contract struggle because so much money is being taken away from education and other social services to pay for the war.

The struggle to use mailboxes was fought for by many members of the union over the years who had to confront principals charging them with insubordination, and in one case, a teacher in District 14 was arrested and strip searched as a result of distributing materials in teacher mailboxes. It is time once and for all for the UFT leadership to issue a clear and compelling directive to all UFT staff members and Chapter Leaders about the need to support the right of all teachers to communicate through mailboxes with their colleagues without trying to define for us what is suitable and valid material to be distributed.

*When Peter Bobrick and Paul Baizerman of ICE raised the mailbox issue at a UFT Executive Board meeting after Bobrick was called into the principal’s office for putting ICE material in the boxes at Lafayette HS, Randi Weingarten did not hesitate to affirm the right to use the mailboxes. Staten Island Borough rep. Jim Tabert called the Region 7 Superintendent, who affirmed the right to use the mailboxes. We praised the entire UFT leadership for responding so quickly. So we were surprised to get this email from Bobrick, which illustrates the point made in Ira Goldfine’s article calling for a UFT directive to every chapter leader since some claim only they have the right to use the mailboxes.*

“I am glad you reprinted my comments on Professional vs. Traditional unionism. Perhaps ‘professional,’ at least as it is practiced at Lafayette, should be in quotes because discouraging discussion and debate on union issues, and denigrating all views opposed to one’s own are hardly worthy of that name.

“Here is the latest development in the mailbox wars. I made 75 copies of Marian Swerdlow’s (TJC) 02/09/05 notes on the DA meeting on my trademark salmon-colored paper and prefaced them with the following note:

“From: your ad hoc ICE rep (Independent Community of Educators), P. Bobrick  
To: all Lafayette High School UFT members  
I am passing this on to you so we can all have a more complete picture of what went on at the Delegate Assembly meeting. Please compare it with the “official” blue version [CL uses this color paper].

“I placed the copies in teachers’ mailboxes today, March 8, at about 12:30. When I checked my mailbox at 3:30, I found a manila envelope with 63 of the 75 flyers in it, and an unsigned note on the envelope: Bobrick– Only official caucus material can be placed in mailboxes – not something from a delegate at another school.

This raises the mailbox issue all over again. It seems to me that this was about union business, and came to me through ICE-mail, and that I am a bona fide member of ICE and I identified myself as such. Shouldn’t this be good enough to pass the test of what is “official”? Or do we have to have the full ICE heading on all literature distributed? And who decides that? I am not aware of votes being taken on every leaflet that comes out.

Peter

## ***Ravitch continued***

VP Michelle Boden put it all in a neat package: “The John Dewey award has nothing to do with John Dewey. It doesn’t matter if Diane Ravitch disagrees with him. It only matters that she’s the last national education figure out there who supports the UFT.” Randi Weingarten and others said that Ravitch was getting the Award because she showed courage and John Dewey, even though Ravitch may totally disagree with his philosophy, also showed courage to stand up for what he believed. We suggest they just rename the award after two recent winners – the Pataki/Shelly Silver Political Expediency Award.

In the weird UFT world of policy-driven-by-public relations, the fact that Ravitch has become a critic of the BloomKlein reforms becomes the primary motivational factor – the enemy of my enemy is my friend. The UFT, besieged by an all-out assault on the contact, will make alliances with anyone. Who gets the award next – Sol Stern, a major BloomKlein critic who has made his career claiming the power of the UFT is the reason for most of the problems in the schools?