

I Am Not a Test Score: Lessons Learned from Dreaming

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Introduction

By Marilyn Julius and Kristina Berdan

“A nine-year study by the National Research Council (2011) concluded that the emphasis on testing yielded little learning progress but caused significant harm.” *

Our own nine year “study” yielded much more.

The Youth Dreamers is a youth-led nonprofit organization founded by nine middle school students in 2001 with a mission to decrease violence among youth after school by creating a youth-run youth center in the community. For nine years, students and adult allies worked diligently and with total determination to raise the funds, design the Dream House, build the house, and run effective youth-led programs that both employed and served young people from grades one through twelve. In May 2010, we celebrated our grand opening of the Dream House and continued to run programs that employed and served youth.

Today after a dozen bright years, we are forced to change the direction of the organization. The recession and the slowly recovering economy was disastrous for urban school systems, already beleaguered by the demands of an educational policy that measures student learning through standardized test scores instead of celebrating their learning through multi-dimensional assessments.

This book is designed, however, not to rehash how “the system” failed students, but rather to show readers how a group of young people spent their time learning everything they needed to know to accomplish their dream of building a youth-run youth center.

Filled with hope and inspiration---lessons, stories, opinions, research, and more – I Am Not a Test Score: Lessons Learned from Dreaming is informative, entertaining, and interactive. We hope it will engage and inspire youth – the one group without a voice in educational policy making – and also encourage teachers, parents, and community members to bring about positive change in their schools and communities.

Think about it: What would happen if school districts redirected just part of their contribution to the billion dollar testing industry to programs that promote youth leadership, skill development, and character?


Read on to find out.

*<http://fairtest.org>

How To Use This Book

Our story is told through lesson plans, student work, alternate forms of assessment, reflections, images, artifacts, and research our young authors did on the impact of standardized testing on students, teachers, and schools. Our narrative is the glue that holds it all together.

Each chapter begins with a summary page that tells part of our story and indicates what you should

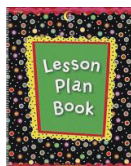
 look for in the chapter. Embedded throughout the book are the following symbols to assist you on your journey...



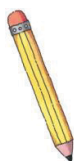
Here you will find statistics about the impact of standardized testing. We call them “Interesting Factoids.”



This is the creature from one of those old horror movies that represents standardized testing and how it has “swelled and mutated to the point that it now threatens to swallow our schools whole.” When you see it, testing is threatening! (for the full quote from Alfie Kohn, visit Chapter Seven)



When you see this, you are looking at a real lesson plan, activity, or template used with real students! With lessons, you will see just the procedures. We have left out the standards, objectives and assessments ONLY because 1) they are obvious to a teacher and 2) we had to limit the number of pages in order to publish this book within budget! Our hope is that you will take what you see, modify it to suit your needs (adding standards, objectives and assessments) and do it with young people!



This pencil indicates that you are looking at real student work! It may be connected to a lesson plan or activity you just read, it could be a journal entry, it may be a student written report, it might be a portion of a grant, or it may be an example of an alternate form of assessment.



When you see this guy, you are looking at real press about the Youth Dreamers. We were certainly blessed through the years to have some fabulous coverage. Thank you to all the writers who chose to tell our story.



You now have all you need to start your journey....