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Transforming EducaSHUN to EducaSUN: Replacing Iron Bars with Sunbeams

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Abstract

Rajni Shankar-Brown, an internationally recognized scholar in the areas of poverty and homelessness, diversity and inclusion, and social justice education, is featured in our *Art Corner*. She is an associate professor and the Jessie Ball DuPont chair of social justice education at Stetson University. Through her research, scholarship and service, Shankar-Brown is committed to transforming education and positively impacting the lives of marginalized students, particularly children experiencing poverty and homelessness in the United States. She is also an accomplished multi-media artist, and, in this issue, she shares her spoken word poem that depicts her concern and anguish regarding schooling today as well as the small “morsels of light” that inspire hope for her children’s educational future.

Keywords

testing, poverty, youth, teaching, justice

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Transforming EducaSHUN to EducaSUN: Replacing Iron Bars with Sunbeams

Spoken Word Poetry by Rajni Shankar-Brown
Stetson University

Education
You mean EducaSHUN

They say in multitudes
Shunned and confined to tiny desks like chickens in crippling cages
Pecking desperately
Becoming parables of cannibals
Eating their own decomposing brains.

There is nothing equal about the schooling system
Urban centers. Rural pockets. Poverty meccas.
Minority students
Majority shunned
Illiteracy feeding incarceration.

Eyes rolling to the back of heads.
Factories of yawns and drool.
Relentless. Spreading like a virus.
Tormenting uninspired ruler.
And constant replays of Ferris Bueller.
Anyone? Anyone?

EducaSHUN.
My son. 6th grade.
Naturally curious
Creatively yearning
Passionate about learning
Despises school.
Age 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 now 12
Already a truant of sorts
Pleading to stay home
Because of imaginary physical strife
Affecting his daily life.
“Ma, my toes are frozen and I can’t move”
Ten tiny toes covered in permanent blue Sharpie.

EducaSHUN.

My son. Pleading.

Eyes flooding with tears because of school

Which my baby boy describes as *worse* than prison

Because in school “the test” never-ever-ever ends

“Ma, even in jail they get to go outside and talk with friends.”

My son casually mentions at dinner

And my heart shatters

Breaks into a million pieces

Like a magnitude 9 earthquake striking thousands of glass cases filled with porcelain.

My heart shatters.

EducaSHUN

My son

Creativity squashed

His radiant soul hunched over in pain

And I pray he will somehow stay sane

Each day I find myself searching for air and light in enclosing walls

Trapped under layers of never-ending bowling balls

A perfect ad for: Prozac dispensers in public schools

Disappearing stars

The death of constellations

I dream of a magic wand. A genie lamp. A revolution.

To stop educa-S-H-U-N-shun

Each day I find myself searching for air and light in enclosing walls.

Yet, I am hopeful

Teaching a cosmic magnitude of amazing teachers

Educational leaders

Cardiac healers and mind reachers

I find morsels of light

Shining like nuggets of gold

Nourishing souls both young and old

Working alongside educators bold enough to ensure

“THE TEST” takes a fucking rest

Letting children glow like the beautiful stars that they are

Feeling the pulse of jubilation

Relentless. Spreading like a virus.

EducaSUN.

Igniting my inner fire
Singing locomotive choo-choos
I dance like a tribe of drunk cockatoos
Embracing hope
I ask all of you to join me in my daily rowing
For our children
My son. My baby girl. Five years and growing.
We must remain firm in this horrendous battle
Because our children are more than groups of cattle
Please. Make my poem more than words spilling out
Let these words stick in your heart like permanent bleeding grout.

Let us love our children.
Enough to stand up against this shunning system
This poem is for anyone who spent most of school staring at the clock
For my son, Valen Siddhartha
My daughter Romila Sitara
And the amazing teachers in my classes
Who march in solid masses
Breathing hope back into education
Hope
Almost extinguished
Hope
She now stands tall and gleams
Replacing iron bars with sunbeams.

YouTube videos of Rajni Shankar-Brown's spoken word performance:

<https://youtu.be/OONBAbTNaRc> (background images/visual transitions)

<https://youtu.be/kbPVsrX5-Sc> (plain background)