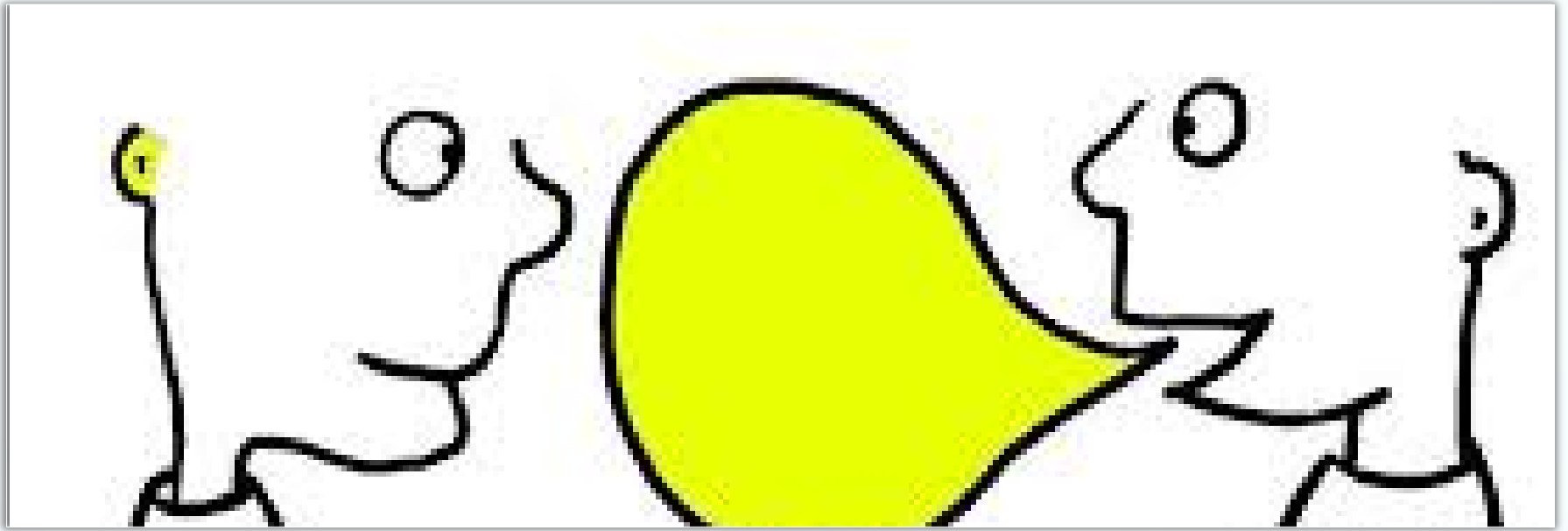


# Rethinking (mis)behaviour in schools: Towards the relational school

Barry Down  
Murdoch University



‘Kids as a problem’

# Bianca's story

Our problem in understanding forced schooling stems from an inconvenient fact: that what wrong it does from a human perspective is right from a systems perspective. You see this in the case of six year-old Bianca, who came to my attention because an assistant principal screamed at her in front of an assembly, “BIANCA, YOU ANIMAL, SHUT UP!” Like the wail of a banshee, this sang the school dance of Bianca (Gatto, 2001).

## DETENTION REPORT

DATE 5/31/06

NAME OF STUDENT Anthony [redacted] HR 910/329

REASON FOR DETENTION disrupting class by standing, unbuttoning his shirt to reveal a Superman T shirt and announcing he was Superman

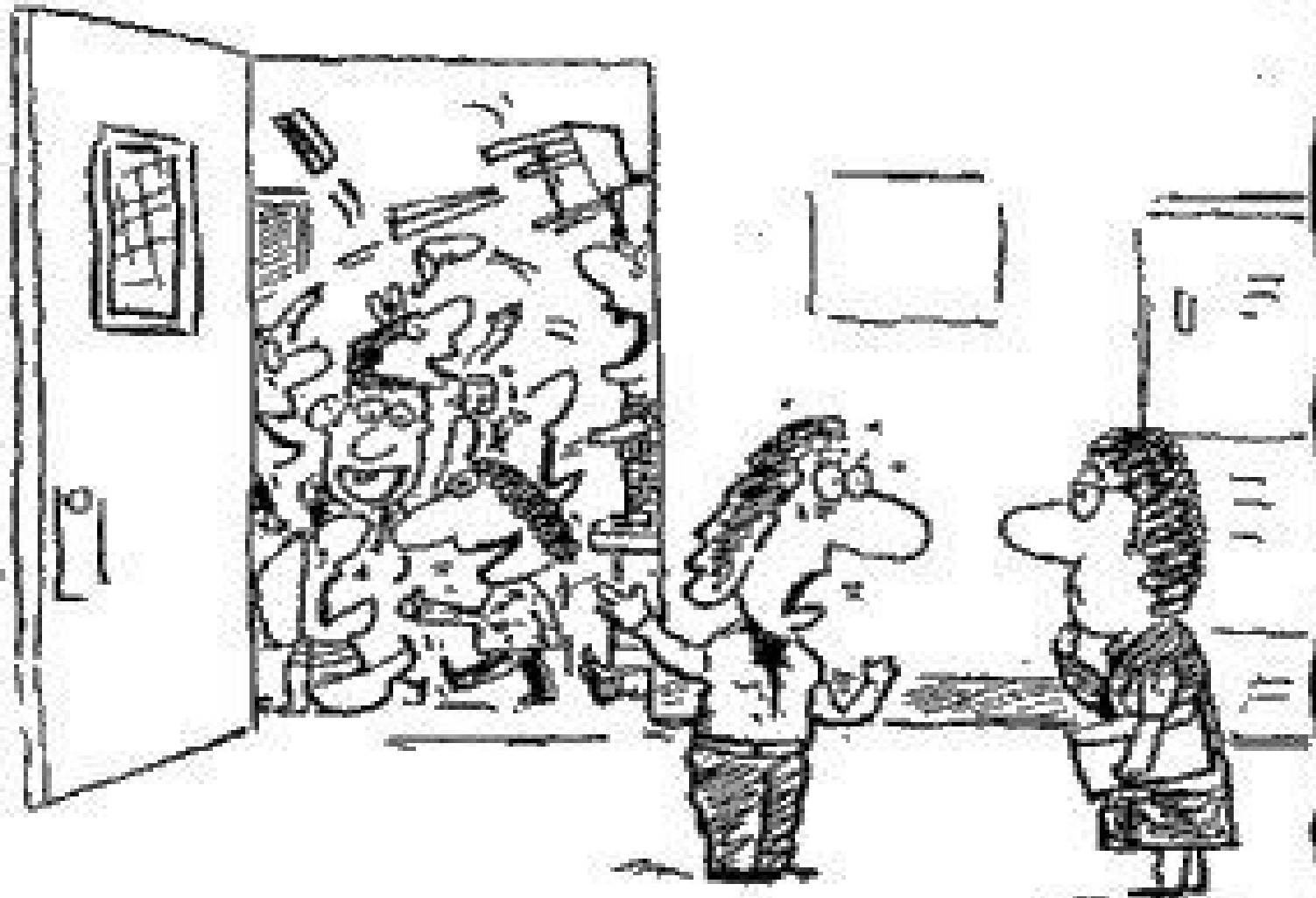
DATE OF DETENTION Mon 6/5/06

NUMBER OF CHARACTER POINTS DEDUCTED - 10

TEACHER'S SIGNATURE Nicol Eibel [Ms. Eiesland]

PARENT'S SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

WHITE-OFFICE COPY / YELLOW-GUIDANCE / GREEN-PARENT / BLUE-TEACHER / PINK-STUDENT



SIPRE 55

Can you help me, Mrs. Martin? This wasn't covered in any of my education courses.

# TEACHER



What my friends think I do



What my mom thinks I do



What society thinks I do



What students think I do



What I think I do



What I really do



# The 'good' student

The docile, disciplined  
and compliant student

(Thompson, 2011, pp. 311-312)



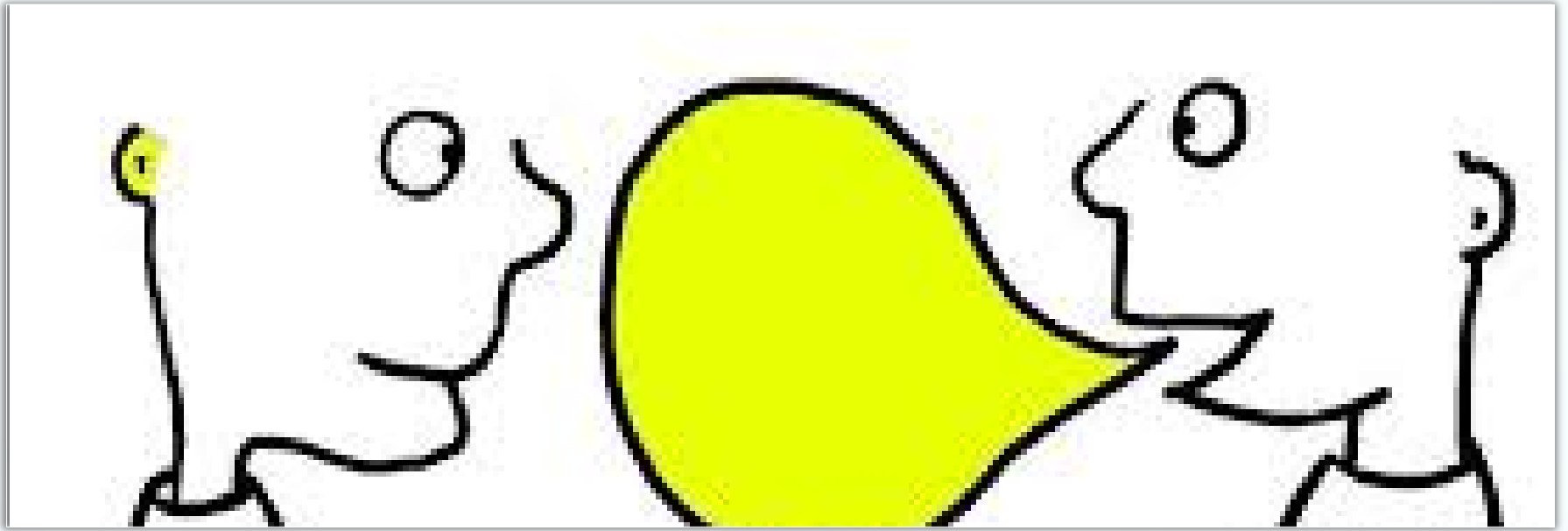
# My argument

- I want to start from a different place by arguing that a more relational (educative) response lies in analyzing the structural and institutional arrangements of schooling in which students' lives identities and behaviours are shaped.
- (Mis)behaviour in schools is not necessarily some kind of pathological or irrational failure on the part of individuals but a form of 'creative maladjustment' (Kohl, 1994, p. xiii) to boredom and oppressive authority born out of a fundamental 'conflict of desires' (Waller, 1932, p. 195)

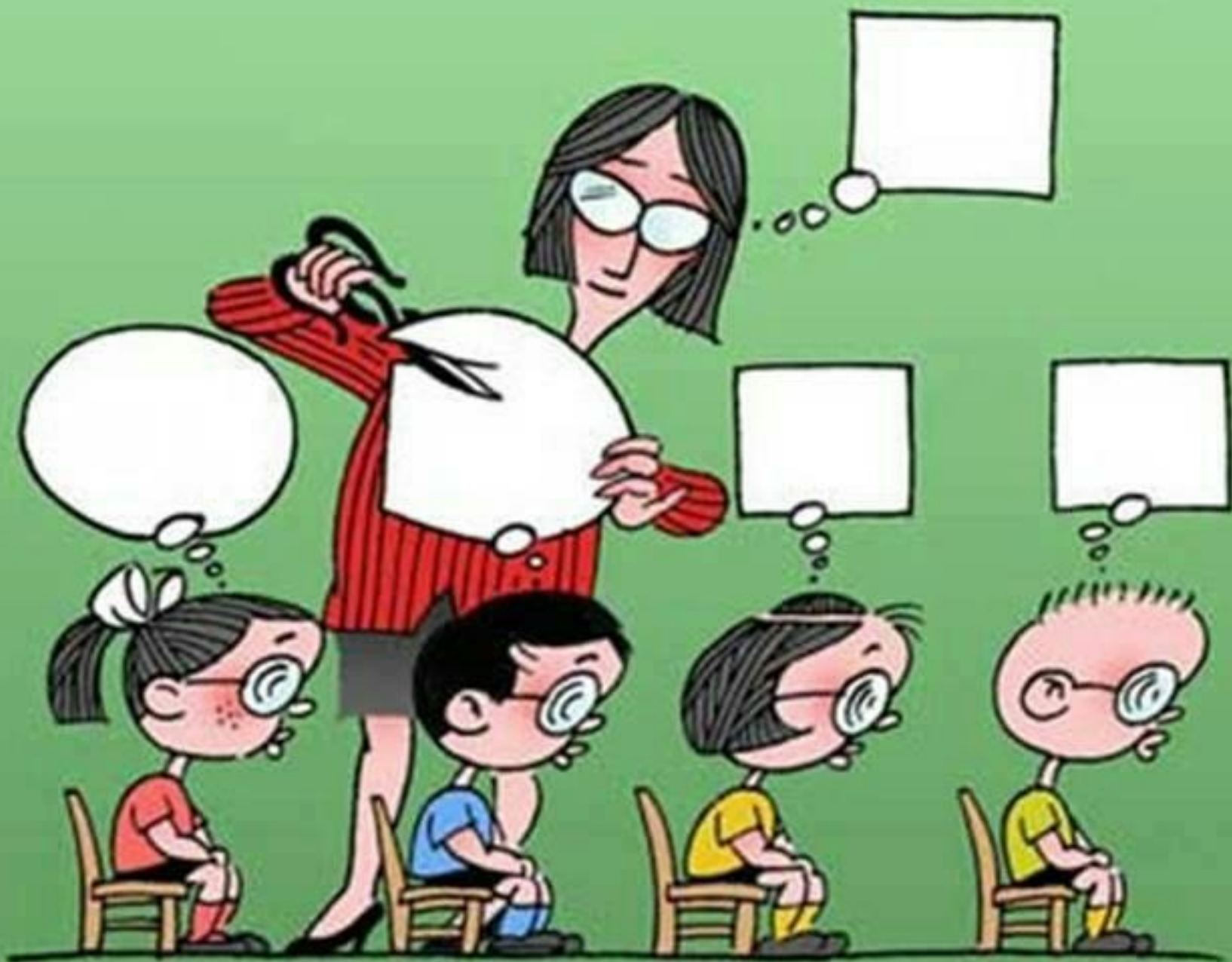


# Difficult conversations

To change what the students and teachers do to each other, or how and where they do it, would require sustained and rigorous criticism, accompanied by the invention of multiple alternatives of a practical nature (Postman, 1979, p. 5)



‘Schooling as a problem’

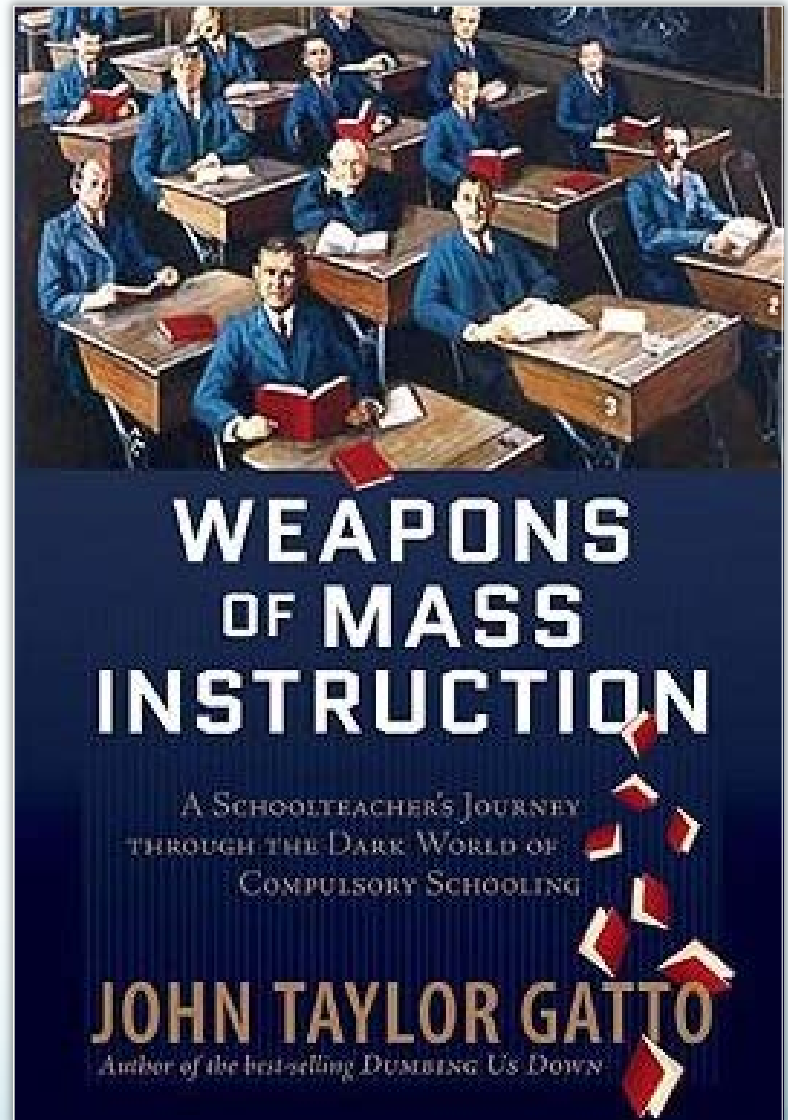


# The way its supposed to be!

[Students] sit, largely passively, through one after another different subject matter in no special order of relevance, directed by people they can't imagine becoming, much less would like to become. The older they get, the less like 'real life' their schooling experience is – and the more disconnected and fractionated' (Meier, 2002, p. 12).

# Sluggishness

Work in classrooms isn't important work. ... The net effect of making work abstract – “subject” centred – external to individual longings, fears, experiences, and questions, is to render students of this enforced irrelevance listless and indifferent (pp. 63-64)



## Irrelevance

I used to dream about amps and stage setups in school, drawing diagrams and planning stage layouts. I didn't do real well in those classes (p. 24).

NEIL YOUNG

WAGING HEAVY PEACE

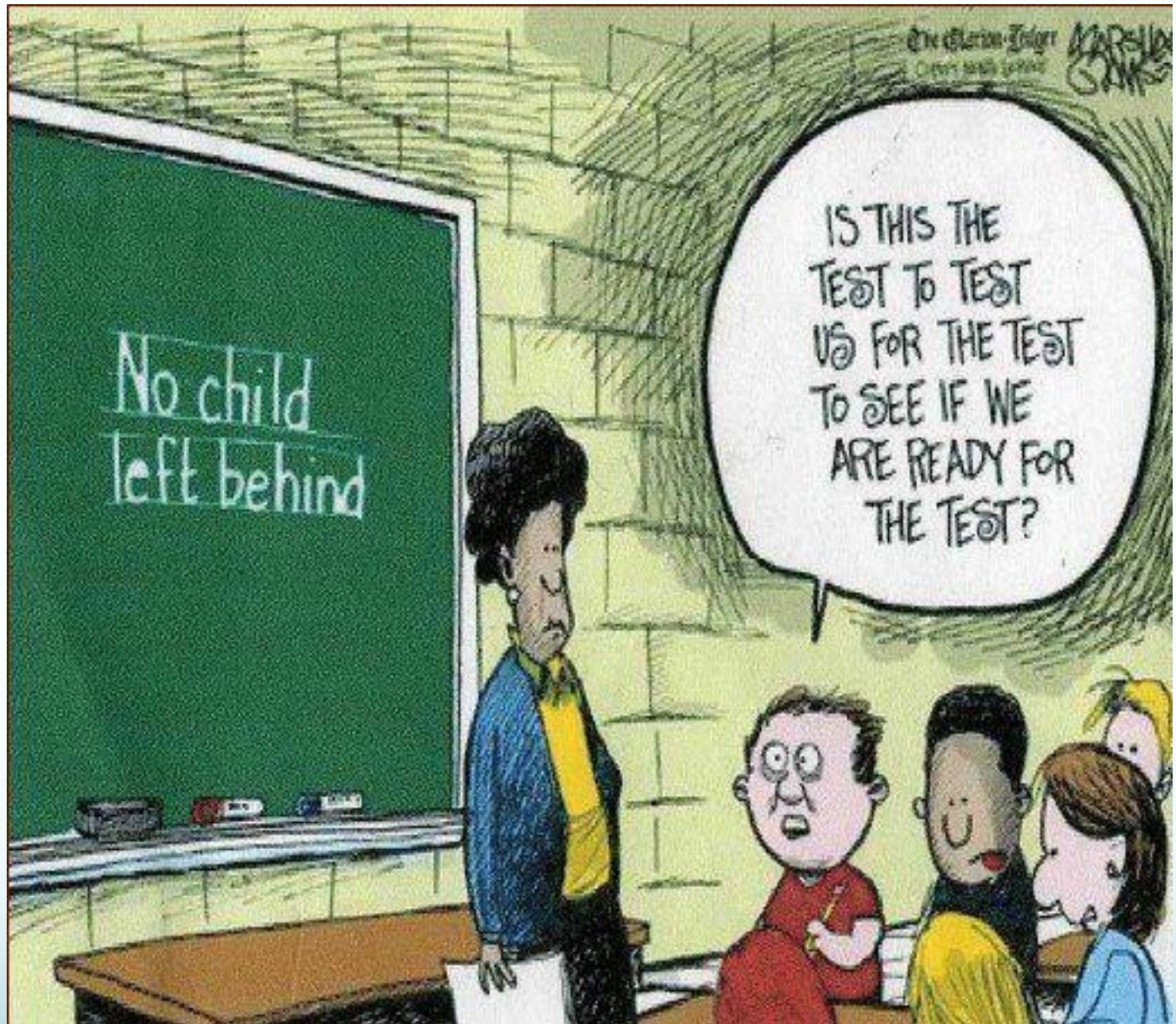




# Worlds apart

The teacher-pupil relationship is a form of institutionalized domination and subordination. Teacher and pupil confront each other in the school with an original conflict of desires, however, much that conflict may be reduced in amount, or however much it be hidden, it still remains

(Waller, 1932, p.195)



# ‘The problem of schooling’

Tough reality minded critics [e.g., Kohl, Holt, Silberman, Kozol] ... ripped into the curriculum, the regimentation, the industrial mentality, the grading system, standardized tests, school bureaucracy, homogenous grouping, and all the other assumptions and conventions which gave the classroom (and still do) its peculiar character (Postman, 1979, p. 7)



# School Wounds

- Students believe they aren't "smart"
- Students believe they don't have what it takes to succeed in school (and by implication, life)
- Students believe their ideas lack value or validity
- Students believe all their efforts, no matter how hard they try, are below standard



## **Wounded by School**

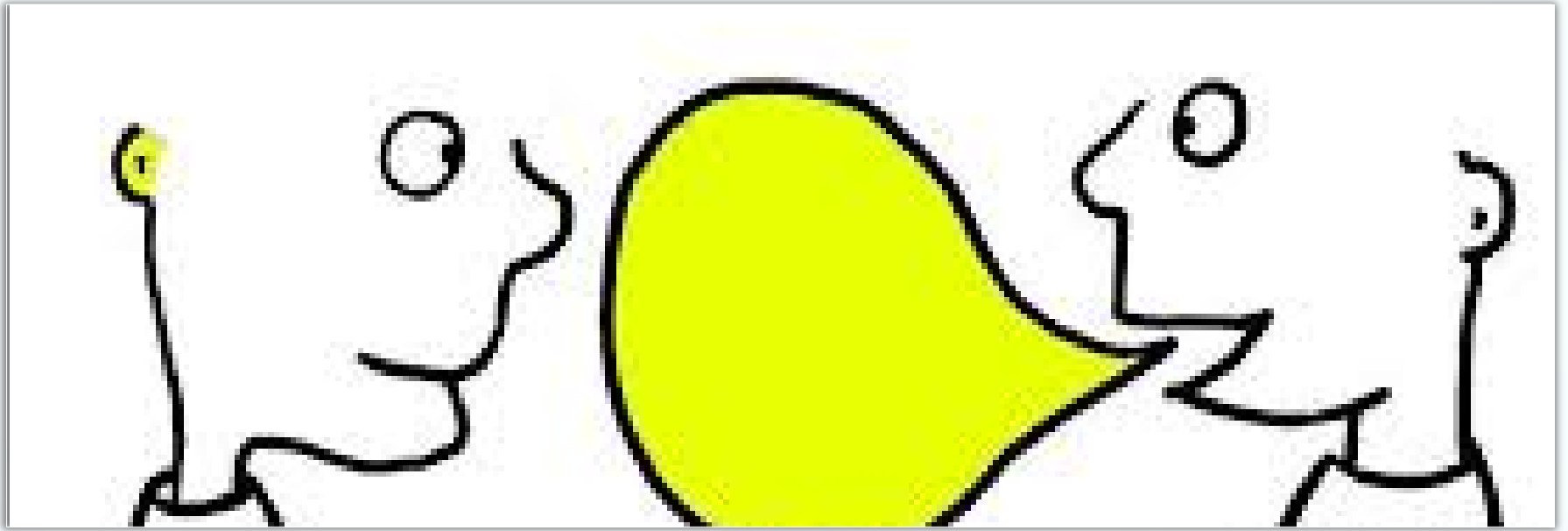
*Recapturing the Joy in Learning and  
Standing Up to Old School Culture*

**Kirsten Olson**

*Forewords by*

**SARA LAWRENCE-LIGHTFOOT**

*and* **PARKER J. PALMER**



# Towards the relational school

'Schools of hope'

# Elements of the relational school

- De-institutionalizing relationships – removes the distant and impersonal ways we relate to children
- Fostering relational power – acting collectively to achieve things together
- Emphasizing capabilities – identifying the kinds of lives people want to lead and providing them with the S & K to do that
- Building relational trust – respect, regard, integrity and competence



# Elements of the relational school

- Negotiating the curriculum – what and how we learn
- Humanizing relationships – to remove fear and create safety to take risks
- Eliminating stress and harmful competition
- Removing conformity that comes with a scripted view of teaching

# Elements of the relational school

- Having an improvisational view of teaching – experimental and imaginative approaches
- Encouraging dialogical forms of teaching –with people, objects and places
- Recognizing the crucial importance of belongingness and connectedness
- Recognizing that there is no education without relation (Smyth, Down & McInerney, 2010, pp.74-76)

# Schools of hope

Schools of hope are places where children are honoured and well served ... They are safe and welcome places, comfortable environments that have a homely feel. They are places where students can work without being harassed, but also places where the joy of learning is expressed in the work of children and in their sense of being a part of a convivial learning community. They are places where teachers and staff are delighted to work and free to innovate while at the same time they are willing to take responsibility for their students' achievement. If you talk to children in schools like these, they express a pride and sense of ownership that are also manifest in how the rest of the community regards the school (Kohl, 1998, p. 332).