

A Celebrity Education Reformer Beauty Contest (No, I am not making this up)

by R.P. Phelps

It had to happen eventually. The quality of the education research and information presented to the public has declined to the point where there genuinely is no difference between education policy discussions and early evening television entertainment news.

What you see below is widely-circulated, and, apparently, very popular education research dissemination, circa 2005, from one of the premier education policy Blogs. Probably more than 95% of extant, quality education research and information is ignored by celebrity education reformers but, so what? They have more important things on their minds.

[Note: Apparently, I missed the beginning episodes. We catch the "Hot for Education" series in midstream. I doubt that we missed any essential thematic threads.]

This Week In Education, A weekly roundup of the **best** education news and analysis
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Hot For Education (Update)

You are all cowards for refusing to post your nominees publicly -- but I'm fine with that. Just keep those anonymous nominations pouring in.

From the number of hits and emails I'm getting, the secret is out that nearly everyone in education has a crush or two.

Anonymous nominations so far today include NYC Councilwoman extraordinaire Eva Moscovitz, Wallace Foundation studmuffin Richard Laine, Gates foundation guru Tom Vander Ark, the Heritage Foundation's Krista Kafer, and research and policy god Rick Hess, who, I am told, "chicks dig."

Also, several late-afternoon calls for ex-Harvard professor Pedro Noguera (pictured), and more than a couple of mentions for Gretchen Sims and John Luzcek at the Joyce Foundation. There must be something in that foundation water.

A few folks have also mentioned Chicago superintendent Arne Duncan, which I sorta get, but I think that the NCLB triumverate -- Xavier Botana and Beth Swanson and Erica Harris -- are probably the best looking people on Clark Street. (Though I did always like talking to Joi Mecks when she was in the press office and I still like hearing her voice when I'm on hold.)

Other nominations: "Everyone in TFA."

Taking it all with the appropriate grace and grain of salt, uber-hunk Tim Knowles reports that the

portrait that started it all is actually not of him, it's his evil twin.

Evil twin or the real McCoy, fellow blogger Joanne Jacobs probably put it best:

"Tim Knowles would motivate me to, um, support school reform."

Hot For Education:

The Top Five Best-Looking School Reformers in the Nation

I was reminded by seeing this dreamy illustration of the University of Chicago's hunky Tim Knowles that -- just as in the rest of the world -- there are some real hotties in school reform.

Yes, hotties in education. You know there are. You just don't want to admit it. That's why I'm here to say it for you.

And Knowles, director of the Center on Urban School Improvement, is one of them.

Not that there's anything wrong with it. It's not his fault. It's not yours. Just look at the guy. He looks like a movie star.

Physical attractiveness is an obvious, though rarely-stated dynamic that plays out just beneath the surface at even the most mundane conference, job interview, faculty meeting, or professional development session.

Add some real excitement to the mix -- a new initiative, funders in the room, TV cameras, or the intoxicating whiff of TFA -- and you might as well be in the VIP section of the hippest lounge. Or as close to it as school reform gets.

And, yes, looks matter -- even in education. You know they do. OK, maybe they matter a little more to me than they should, but I'm not alone. There've been studies. People behave differently around and towards the highly symmetrical and genetically blessed. Parents. Teachers. Administrators. Funders. Policymakers.

Now, nobody's suggesting that looks alone can get you to the top of the heap. There's lots of additional hard work, ridiculous luck, overconfident hand-waving, and shameless brown-nosing that's required for that. Or exceptional virtue and smarts.

And there probably aren't many educators who should quit their day jobs and head for Hollywood or the runways of Milan. After all, being hot for education circles is like what Wonkette (the blogging hottie) calls being "famous for DC." It's all relative.

Without further ado, the remaining four of my top five:

Hunk Emeritus. Even in his 70's, Ted Kennedy is the epitome of the dashing education reformer.

Virile, passionate, a Kennedy.

[photos of Ted Kennedy]

The Face That Launched TFA. For my money, Wendy Kopp's tailored look and big smile are substantial parts of her success -- along with a great idea and mad skills.

[photos of Wendy Kopp]

The Boy Wonder. Jon Schnur, co-founder of New Leaders, can be pretty mesmerizing with his boyish grin and piercing gaze.

[photos of John Schnur]

A Brunette Ann Coulter? I might not agree with the USDE's Nina Rees about everything, but I'm not sure I care.

[photo of Nina Rees]

My criteria are admittedly loose (and by definition superficial). The person has got to be attractive enough that (a) it's widely commented on or alluded to, or (b) it's at least part of what you think about when you think about that person. They have to be nationally known. Oh, and Google has to cough up a picture of them so I don't have to search around too much.

Think you can do better? Have at it. Remember to include headshots along with any additional nominations.

ROLLING UPDATE: Anonymous nominations so far today include NYC Councilwoman extraordinaire Eva Moscovitz, Gates foundation guru Tom Vander Ark, the Heritage Foundation's Krista Kafer, and Rick Hess, who I am told "chicks dig." Comments, additions? Taking it all with the appropriate grace and grain of salt, Knowles reports that the above portrait is actually his evil twin. See "Hot For Education (Update)" for additional nominations.

Alexander Russo:

I am an education writer, editor, and consultant whose writing has appeared in *Slate*, *The Washington Monthly*, *Teacher Magazine*, *City Limits*, and *Education Next*, among other publications. I wrote and edited the 2004 book "School Reform in Chicago" (Harvard Education Publishing Group). I am the regular education contributor for WBEZ's news magazine, "Eight Forty-Eight," as well as a regular guest on Chicago Public Television. Before I began writing, I was a policy advisor to two U.S. Senators and to the Chancellor of the New York City Public Schools, as well as a 7th and 10th grade English teacher. I am currently a contributing editor at *Catalyst* magazine, as well as a senior editor for the Title I Report.

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