

**Testimony of Alan Feigenberg  
Professor of Architecture, City College  
Before the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York**

**Concerning the Pathways Initiative**

**June 18, 2012**

Good afternoon.

I am Alan Feigenberg, a professor of architecture at City College and an affiliate professor of environmental psychology at the Graduate Center.

On every level of education in the U.S., administrators, politicians, CEO's and bureaucrats are pushing for a unified, standardized, oversimplified, uncreative, non-challenging approach to education—an agenda that is in direct opposition to the process of real, authentic, meaningful and constructivist learning.

This top-down imposition vividly contrasts with the internationally acknowledged leader in education, Finland, which differentiates itself with the highest-level of learning in the world. The major factors that contribute to this stellar achievement are totally contrary to what the trends in the U.S. are—and particularly what is being pushed as Pathways here at CUNY.

The Finish model is one of the most written about educational approaches and successes. There are numerous books and articles about their approach to education and their successes, most recently including the AFT's American Educator, the Smithsonian Magazine, the Atlantic Monthly, BBC News, the New York Times, the Guardian, and many more.

In Finland, it is assumed that teachers-facilitators are the most critical component of the educational process, and that these educational leaders should be respected and acknowledged as the professional experts. They are praised for their dedication and intelligence in facilitating deep and meaningful learning.

The most outstanding students are actively recruited to become educators who are highly respected, well paid and among the most highly unionized workers in the world.

In each school, along with parents, administrators and students, educators-facilitators assume the task, challenge and responsibility of developing and implementing the operation, the curriculum, and the pedagogical goals of their school. It is assumed that they have the deepest and most comprehensive understanding of their particular conditions, acknowledging that every learning environment is different and that each is in the best position to evaluate what is best suited for their community of active learners.

Teachers develop a pedagogy, a curriculum, and a process that best addresses the students they are working with. There are no “standardized tests,” nor “standardized curriculum.” Teachers are seen as professionals and educator autonomy is basic. They are acknowledged as experts in determining what best meets the unique conditions of their learning environments.

Each teacher has the time to dialogue with others, to discuss their students, and to work out what they understand to be the best way of reaching their students and engaging them in a continuous and critical pedagogy.

The development of the environment and the curriculum is seen as a community effort, and a community responsibility—teachers, administrators, parents and students are all actively involved! They seek a process of critical investigation, of constructivist questioning, and of collective problem-solving—a continuous process that cannot be judged by the highly questionable results of corporative developed standardized testing.

It is acknowledged that teachers are the ones who can best assess and facilitate the growth of their students, not outside paid self-acclaimed experts!

The essence of Pathways is an attempt to pull us in just the opposite direction. It is an affront to all of us as critical educators, and to our students who are treated as faceless quantifiable statistics, reinforcing the image of education as an assembly-line process to produce predetermined results with predetermined efficiency. This is not the way to facilitate the development of critical, creative, problem-solving minds for future needs and challenges.

The pathway being proposed is a pathway to conformity, to mediocrity. It is a pathway that is unidirectional, that leads us further and further away from the embellishment and the realization of human intellectual potential and the creative spirit that we as educators seek to nourish.

Thank you.