

## WILL STANDARDS SAVE PUBLIC EDUCATION?

By Deborah Meier  
Beacon Press. \$25

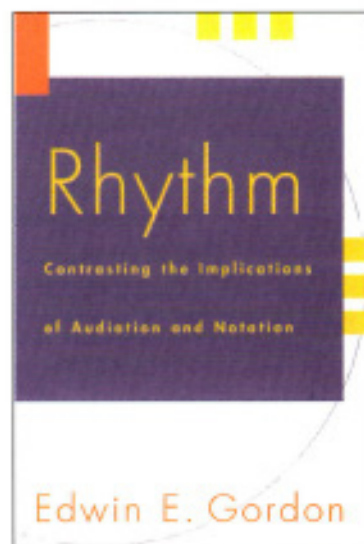
This little book may jump out of your hands as the words wrestle with each other to address the title question. Part of the New Democracy Forum, a series of paperbacks which explores creative solutions to some of our nation's most urgent issues, this volume contains thoughtful essays by authors who position themselves on both sides of the standards reform movement. There are no answers here, but an introduction by Jonathan Kozol, essays by Deborah Meier, and responses by seven other leading educators raise questions worth the attention of thoughtful educators.

In her opening essay, Meier makes a case against standardization while advocating a model of educational standards based on her teaching experience. This creates some confusion between the terms "standards" and "standardization." Once the reader understands that the two are not the same thing, it becomes easier to identify the perspectives of the writers. Perhaps it has been a similar confusion of these two terms by the media that has led the public to a polarization of perspectives on this issue. Meier sums up the argument within these pages when she says, "We are not debating the value of standards, but how to raise them and who should decide them." (p. 84)

Deborah Meier begins with a set of assumptions that represent the "dark side of the standards-based reform movement." (p.4) According to Meier, "standardization" assumes that a single definition of "well-educated" can be defined by experts operating within a political system. The use of that term also implies that objective tests will allow for uniform comparison of students, that centrally imposed sanctions should be instituted to punish poor performance, that educational equity can be imposed through testing, and that rewards and punishments will serve as motivation for success.

Meier rejects these assumptions and proposes her own which emphasize a plurality of definitions of "well-educated," local control of educational decisions, multiple sources of evidence of academic progress, a fairer distribution of resources, and the replacement of rewards and punishments with improved relationships between all parties in the learning community. She describes a model, based upon her experience at Mission Hill School in Boston, where the standards "are intended to deepen and broaden young people's habits of mind, their craftsmanship, and their work habits." (p. 21) "Standards, yes. Absolutely." But these standards should be "held by real people who matter in the lives of our young." (p. 23) The opinions of the authors responding to Meier's essay range from "Schools that taxpayers fund must meet the standards that those taxpayers and their representatives set." (Abigail Thernstrom p. 38) to "Simply, the detailed contours of culture—and, willy-nilly, schools are crucibles of culture—are too important to be given to central authorities to define and then to impose." (Theodore Sizer p. 73) There is a lot of difference of opinion in this book but constructive dialogue about differences is at the core of a democratic society. Most of us are dealing with the implications of the standards movement in our teaching positions. This book offers insights into the opposing voices and will help you to articulate your own response to the title question.

- Marjie Van Gunten



## RHYTHM: Contrasting the Implications of Audiation and Notation.

By Edwin E. Gordon

Book with CD

GIA Publications, Inc. 2000  
\$32.50

We as teachers create vocabulary, pictures, and experiences for our students so that they will internalize and think for themselves. In this book Dr. Gordon creates a unique vocabulary to describe rhythm. To understand this text, one must put aside preconceived ideas and labels for rhythm and take in a new vocabulary for musical thought, rhythm components, classifications of rhythm, and rhythm solfege for rhythmic patterns.

The book provides a detailed historical context of written notation and existing rhythm syllable systems to support the need for a new rhythm vocabulary. Current rhythm vocabulary is based on the theoretical ideas of dividing and counting beats as derived from the study of notation. In order to describe rhythm outside of notation, the book sets out a detailed new vocabulary and taxonomy of rhythm patterns.

Key vocabulary words for Dr. Gordon include audiation, macrobeats, and microbeats. The term "audiation" is

*continued on page 38...*