



Changing the Schools Can Change the World...

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Wake Up, America!

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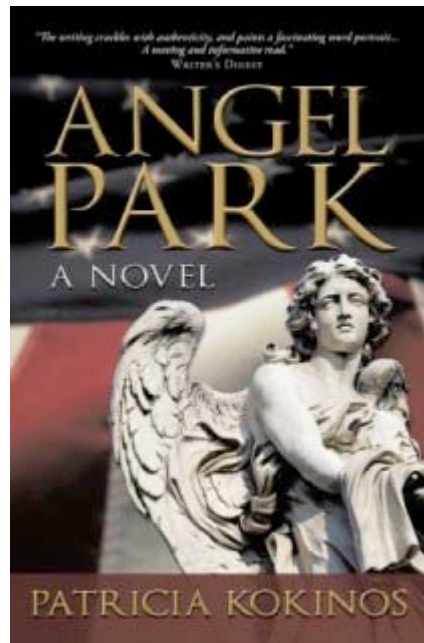
Changing the Schools at LA Business Expo



Here I am on stage at the recent Black Business Expo at the Los Angeles Convention Center, speaking (as always!) about Changing The Schools on two occasions during the weekend.

People came up afterward to let me know how much they agreed with what I had to say, including numerous parents who have been forced to pull their kids out of Los Angeles Unified to go to private schools all around the city. Once again, it is a problem of a too-large, too top-heavy school district too paralyzed by its own bureaucracy to do anything meaningful about meeting the needs of kids or teachers or parents or the community!

I was a guest of [Norma Hollis](#)



HERE IT IS!!

How do you like the new cover of ANGEL PARK? We're right in the middle of the "transition" from old edition to new edition, so all online book sites (and even my own) won't have all of the correct information for a couple of weeks yet. This new 2009 edition contains blurbs from reviews and endorsements, a Reader's Guide for leading discussion questions (attention, Book Clubs!) and an Interview with the Author, where I talk about Changing the Schools to that human-friendly, creative, collaborative structure we all see in our mind's eye. My goal continues to be providing a "wake-up call" to the nation that once led the world in education and needs to recapture its inspiration to excel. You can see the new cover up close and personal and order the book at a great price, too, on Amazon.

[Companies](#), a super team of entrepreneurs who are changing people's minds all over the country about what is possible for each one of us to accomplish. Thanks, Norma, and the whole "authenticity" team!



Are Kids Products OR Are They People?

There are no simple answers to school reform. As much as I applaud the Obama administration for putting [education near the top of its agenda](#), I want their concept of "reinvention" to be much more radical, much more thoughtful, and much more child-centered in its approach. Whether school boards, nonprofits, or mayors run the system, it is still "the system," impervious to our efforts, deaf to our pleas for "real change."

To his credit, the new Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, is traveling to 15 states to talk to real teachers and real kids about how we're going to save public education. [In California last week](#), he was dismayed (as are all of us who live here) to discover that the whole state is going down the tubes, especially in regard to education.



He talked about the changes he wants to make in No Child Left Behind, which he wants to make "inspirational," rather than the "toxic" reputation the federal act has now. I'm grateful that he's gathering views from people

The designers at iUniverse did a super job of reconceptualizing the cover for this new Star Edition-- THANKS, guys!! And now it's up to all of us who believe in our new vision to encourage others to read all the ways that the traditional system is just not about kids--or teachers, for that matter--anymore. If lawyers, CIA agents, spies, vampires, comic book heroes, detectives, serial killers, love-sick heroines, sci-fi inventions, and dysfunctional families can have their huge niches in the great universe of fiction, we can probably carve a little niche for teachers, kids and schools, too--and help create positive social change in the process. THANKS so much for your support!

What people are saying . . .

In case you can't read the small print on the new book cover above, here's what it says:

"The writing crackles with authenticity, and paints a fascinating word portrait . . . A moving and informative read."
Writer's Digest

On the back cover, which you can see on Amazon, is a "Highly recommended" blurb from Jim Cox, the veteran reviewer and originator of *Midwest Book Review*, as well as a blurb from Fran Halpern, host of a book review program, "Beyond Words," on regional NPR for my area, KCLU at California Lutheran University. She says,

"Engaging characters and other literary delights wrapped in a wonderful puzzle. A great choice for book clubs!"

Among the numerous others who were kind and generous enough to provide endorsements, here are a couple from educators:

"After reading *Angel Park* many times, I am still uncovering hidden layers . . . If you ever wondered what really goes on in schools, this book provides the answers. But be warned, *Angel Park* will challenge you in many ways."

**Justin Heard, Program Chair
in Educational Leadership, Touro University**

"*Angel Park* is an artfully woven expose of the politics and corruption that keep students and teachers under the thumb of school districts and unions. A must read for everyone who wants to change schools for the better!"

**Larry Sand, President, California
Teachers Empowerment Network**

on the ground in schools and that he's calling it as he sees it. But what I want to hear is that we are going to look a little deeper for the school solution, right down to our philosophical roots. And here's the question we need to ask ourselves:

Are kids products or are they people?

People, of course, we want to say, but wait! Let's take a closer look at the way we deal with kids in schools: Our current "factory" concept is more attuned to "manufacturing" kids with factoids, skills, labels, statistics--and our current love affair with "standardized testing" is surely the arch-example of my point. So, while we're reimagining NCLB, Mr. Secretary, let's also bring our school structure into congruence with our deepest beliefs!

In an age when the Information Revolution has pulled us from our industrial moorings into a flood of ideas, opinions, arguments, and in-your-face marketing; in an age when the Green Revolution is creating a new economy of entrepreneurs waiting to grow up through the rubble of the old; in an age when the Global Revolution is shrinking the world every moment and transforming our concept of "nation"--**we MUST have more to offer our kids than an outdated, traditional, and bureaucratic school system that is prey to petty politics, self-serving agendas, numbers and quotas, and monumental absurdity.**

Enough fingerpointing and blaming! Sure, good teachers inspire kids to learn. Sure, smaller, more personalized environments allow the kind of collaboration and attention that help kids learn. Sure, kids need to feel a sense of belonging in their schools. We know all that. The only question that remains is how can we extrapolate those

Radical Reinvention, Please

In the Interview with the Author that follows the story in the new 2009 edition of *Angel Park*, I have a chance to answer the big question on everybody's mind: **How do I think my novel can have an effect on an issue as big as school reform?** This is what I said there, and this is what I believe and will continue to discuss, speak about, write about, and gather support for as we move through this year of monumental personal, institutional, and societal changes:

"My novel *Angel Park* can help with the most important first step, which is opening readers' eyes to a new way of thinking and providing a new perspective not only on school systems but also on how we live our lives. This IS a big issue, and one of the most important ones we will face this century: How can we create schools that will train our students to be productive and happy contributors to our way of life and to the world? Isn't that really the main question? "

After twenty-five years in the public school trenches, fighting for [change in all aspects of education](#)--I am finally beginning to figure out and, more importantly, say out loud that the people running the system are not going to be the ones who change it. Having been there and done that many times myself, watching the system snap back into place like an overstretched rubber band the minute my back was turned, I can tell you that we are going to have to **offer new ideas, raise the level of dialogue, spread word of the new dialogue, and bring together the best examples of progress in public education to get the attention of the public and then the attention of policymakers.**

We need radical reform in the way schools treat kids.

A little cosmetic tweaking or more studies or more pilot programs will just not get it. We've had 40 years of that kind of piecemeal change, and our schools are in a deeper hole than ever, wouldn't you agree?

Raising test scores and throwing more money at the problem are just more futile attempts to disguise the underlying issues, which are huge and societal in their import. That's the kind of perspective that *Angel Park* will help you see. I wrote a fictional expose, an insider's view of what is really going on in schools, to help readers all over the country feel the emotional drag that keeps kids, teachers, and parents fighting a battle every year, just to keep kids in school and their heads above water. I hope my story provides **America's wake-up call to the vast industrial complex we have created around a system that needs**

concepts to the reinvention of our entire system of public education?

Mr. Duncan, I want to see federal money become a REWARD for states that equalize school funding, flatten the hierarchies and decimate the bureaucracies, and put more highly educated people into daily contact with KIDS--all of that in smaller, more personalized environments where teaming, collaboration, and creative/critical thinking are paramount.

If you agree, here's the Secretary's email address: arne.duncan@ed.gov

Let him hear what you think, and please feel free to tell him I sent you!

to be trimmed down, flattened out, simplified, and most critically, humanized to serve the purpose for which it was really created. As noted in one of the epigraphs to *Angel Park*, this is the statement engraved on the Boston Public Library, in the city where this great experiment in democracy began:

The Commonwealth requires the education of the people as the safeguard of order and liberty.

Indeed. Please consider this whole effort a labor of love: The novel, this newsletter, my companion website ChangeTheSchools.com. If you love public education as much as I do and want to save it from its own self-induced demise, then please read the solutions I offer in "[Exploding the Paradigm: Five Ways Schools Must Change to Rescue the American Dream](#)", the free report on my website, and join me in this growing grassroots movement to provide ideas and inspiration for REAL change. We don't have to accept the tired, outdated structure anymore, and we don't have to give in to policymakers who play political games.

The reauthorization of No Child Left Behind is coming up this fall (see article at left), and we have lots of work to do in the meantime to make sure high-stakes testing is stopped in its tracks so that creative, collaborative, intelligent solutions can grow in its place. Here's my mantra:

- **Human-friendly schools, not factories**
- **Creative & critical thinking, not testing**
- **Collaboration and synergy, not politics**

Read more opinions and research on [my website](#). More articles and reports are coming, along with a completely redesigned website, and a giant push on nationwide and web radio and the internet, as I move through the summer, launching the new edition of *Angel Park*, and using the book and the occasion to talk about REAL change for public education. Stay tuned for more ways to help, join in, and spread the word--and thanks for your ongoing support!

To teachers, kids, and parents everywhere, take a deep breath . . . It's almost summer!

With all best wishes,
Patricia Kokinos
www.ChangeTheSchools.com