



IN MEMORIAM: LINDA McSPADDEN McNEIL



Linda McSpadden McNeil has passed away. McNeil died April 1st of cancer, according to a [tribute site](#) created by her former colleagues at Rice University.

A professor in the Department of Education at Rice University, and Director of its Center for Education, [McNeil](#) was a longtime NEPC Fellow and a friend and inspiration for so many of us. Her first book, *Contradictions of Control: School Structure and School Knowledge* (1987), was required reading for anyone hoping to make sense of why top-down attempts to control teachers and their students generally backfire.

Throughout her career, Linda's research focused doggedly on educational equity. She examined young people's experiences in classrooms and schools, situating them in the context of larger power structures. Her broad array of interests included privatization, curriculum theory, secondary education, school organization, urban schooling, teaching and learning, and the consequences of standardization.

In a post on the blog *Educational Equity, Politics & Policy in Texas*, NEPC Fellow Angela Valenzuela of the University of Texas remembered McNeil as a “fierce warrior in Texas against high-stakes testing and for anti-racist curriculum,” adding:

She was also a dear friend who stood in solidarity with me when I was denied tenure at Rice University many years ago . . . Linda uplifted me when I was at my lowest point in those difficult years as a struggling assistant professor—and as one of only two Mexican American professors who taught at Rice in its entire

history at the time. Linda believed in me at a time when I didn't believe in myself. Professionally, I am who I have become in great part because of her.

Another former colleague and friend, sociologist Mary Metz, [wrote](#) of McNeil:

Linda was passionate about education and especially about education for children who did not arrive at the school door with advantages. She was also passionate about education as formation for citizenship. She was able to clarify how experience on the ground, the daily mutual labors of teachers and students, is intimately affected by the larger forces of educational policy. And she was also able to illuminate how educational formation of students has profound effects not just on individual lives but on the life of the body politic. Her work lives on and will continue to have profound effects, both through the many people she touched face to face and through those who encounter her ideas only through the printed page.

Please take a moment today to celebrate Linda's life and her work in ways that make the most sense to you. She was a kind, creative, and brilliant scholar and advocate for children and their schools. And she will be greatly missed.

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