

WORMS IN THE APPLES

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By
Thomas W. Westerfield

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Worms in the Apples

An old joke asks the listener, "What is worse than finding a worm in your apple?" "Half a worm", is the response.

The November 14, 2003 edition of the Louisville Courier Journal quotes Education Department officials response to Kentucky schools failure to, on average, achieve required levels in the Federal "No Child Left Behind" standards. "We're holding our own in reading, but we're still well below national averages for science and mathematics".

Caldwell, Christian, Todd and Trigg County Schools earn a Kentucky New Area headline on November 17th, 2003, *Area school districts fail to meet "No Child" standards.*

It is the intent of this paper to visit our nations educational system and identify some of the issues that occupy the discussions of such failures.

If you believe Kentucky Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence's chairperson, Fannie Louise Maddux, the lack of money is the problem. "Education needs to be funded adequately. We need to be involved because schools can't continue to do that they're doing now without more funding".

While the lack of financing claim is voiced annually by public school advocates, there is little evidence that funding is the root cause of poor performance. An evaluation of test scores on the national test standards compared to per pupil expenditures fails to indicate any direct correlation between the two variables.

A recent Gannett News Service release cites secondary school grade inflation as one of the flaws in the system.

High school graduates in Nevada with at least a B grade average can win \$10,000 college scholarships — a free ride through any public university in the state. But that ride has proved rough for many. Nearly a third of the kids who get the scholarships, which were created to keep the state's most promising students in Nevada, have to take remedial classes when they start college. They are not alone. Around the country, even students with stellar high school records have discovered that they don't have all the skills to survive in college. In Georgia, for instance, four out of 10 students who earn the popular Hope Scholarships to the state's university system lose the scholarship before they earn 30 credits — roughly a year's worth of work — because they can't keep their grades up.

Performances on college admissions tests point to possible grade inflation. Fifteen years ago, students with A averages accounted for 28% of SAT test takers, says Wayne Camara, who oversees research for the College Board.

Today, 42% of college-bound seniors have A averages, but they score no better on the college admissions tests than did A students a decade earlier. Some education experts say the trend is a clear sign that high school teachers are handing out high grades for weak work. But many say the real culprit is the typical high school course load. Students just aren't taking the rigorous math, science and writing classes in high school that they need to succeed in college and the workplace.

Only 1 in 3 18-year-olds is even minimally prepared for college, according to a report by the Manhattan Institute, a New York-based think tank. The picture is even bleaker for minorities: Only 20% of black students in the class of 2001 were college-ready.

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Ivrekia Stanley thought her prospects were bright when she graduated from Forest Park High School in suburban Atlanta in 1999. Her 3.6 grade-point average earned her a Hope Scholarship, but when she entered Georgia Perimeter College, a two-year community college, she had to take remedial classes in reading and math. "You get discouraged. You don't want to tell anybody you're in these classes," Stanley says. She recalls she kept telling herself, "I have a Hope Scholarship. I'm smarter than this." This fall, the 22-year-old transferred to Georgia State, where she majors in criminal justice. She has a 3.8 grade-point average and has retained the Hope Scholarship.

Statistics like those have inspired officials in Nevada to set up mentoring programs to help Millennium Scholarship recipients and students from the state's rural areas stay in school, says Barbara King, who oversees tutoring programs at the University of Nevada-Reno. King runs an Internet mailing list for the students where she posts reminders about finding tutors and deadlines for dropping classes. She also tries to improve their study habits. "I tell them to pay attention to repetition during lecture," King says. "The second time a professor says something, underline it. The third time, put a 'T' for 'test' next to it. It probably will be on the test."

Researchers say that when it comes to college success, what students study in high school is as important as their study skills. Those who study math for four years in high school, taking classes such as trigonometry and calculus that are harder than second-year algebra, double their chances of earning a bachelor's degree, says Clifford Adelman, a U.S. Department of Education researcher who has examined thousands of high school

and college transcripts. His advice to parents: "Encourage your kids to be challenged in (high) school, and worry less about grades." ✓

What children study in school, or shall we say, what they do not study has been the focus of educators, government and interest groups for years; hence, censorship in educational materials is the primary focus of this paper. ✓

The practice of censorship of educational materials and the name of the practice, bowdlerization, dates back as far as 1807 when Dr. Thomas Bowdler and his sister Henrietta Maria Bowdler published *Family Shakespear*. In this publication, they removed all of the lines and sections from the Bard's plays that contained sexual language, profanity or irreverent references to God or Jesus. Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis held, "The greatest dangers to liberty lurk in insidious encroachment by men of zeal, well-meaning but without understanding."

Bowdlerization caught hold and it has been widely practiced ever since by editors and publishers. While the practice is not easily detected without comparing current writings with original text the effects are there, nonetheless. Some of the censorship is trivial, some is ludicrous and some is breathtaking in its power to dumb down what children learn in school.

With interest I noted last evening's Kentucky New Era, input on the revision of the Core Content for Assessment, a document used by the Commonwealth's teachers and CATS test developers to design student test instruments regarding "what children should know" was being sought. Fat chance that you'll be heard.

The efforts to control what children study, by every interest group in America representing both the left and the right, have focused on textbooks and standardized tests.

The initial broad based efforts began in the late '60's with examination of tests and textbooks for conscious or implicit statements of bias against African Americans. These efforts were considered by most to be valid and necessary. Unfortunately, what began with the best of intentions has spread in a cancerous fashion, totally out of control.

Concerned with student failures, in 1969, the federal government initiated the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The NAEP (the nation's report card) tests were given to national and state samples of students in reading, mathematics, writing, science and history. In 1990 the federal government established a nonpartisan federal agency, the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), to supervise national testing programs. A member of this board, Diane Ravitch, whose public service and educational credentials mark service in both Republican and Democratic administrations, notes her first awareness of censorship of national tests when their group studied the esteemed Iowa Basic Skills Test. Surprisingly, they became aware that bias and sensitivity reviewers of the tests questions, were applying assumptions that effectively stripped away everything that is potentially thought provoking and colorful. An example was the test's use of stories about peanuts. The stories were rejected because they implied that peanuts were a healthy snack, and that was wrong, because some students might have an allergic reaction to them. Another story removed from the test was that of a heroic young blind man who climbed Mount McKinley. The B & S reviewers rejected the story because it showed regional bias and it unfavorably characterized blind people. B & S reviewers reject any geographic presentation that would be unfamiliar to any test taker. Most children are not well versed with mountain climbing. Similarly they viewed

that it is demeaning to applaud a blind person who accomplishes a feat that would even be difficult for a sighted person.

It is likely that you are familiar with the famed AEsop's fables and quite possibly with a familiar one, "The Fox and the Crow". The fable, which stars Master Fox and Miss Crow, was scratched for a host of bias sins. Master suggested slave relationships. The Miss was a subordinate reference to women. The story line of the fable finds the fox tricking the crow by complimenting her singing. Responding to his compliments she started singing, dropping the morsel of food held in her beak. You can imagine the fodder the B & S crew found. Sexist suggestion that men were more clever than women. Women portrayed as foolish. No attention was given to the valuable lesson associated with false flattery. It won't be a surprise to you to find that current literature and reading references to AEsop are nil. Like the recent test given to show participants by a talk show host, 9 of 10 could not identify the location of the retina, even when they were told that it was part of their body. One would wager that even a smaller ratio would recognize AEsop's name, let alone his works.

During the Clinton years, the identification of test censorship came front and center. A White House workgroup was given the task of assimilating a national volunteer test for primary and secondary school children. Houghton Mifflin's Riverside Publishing Company, of Stanford Binet fame, was tabbed as the developer. In a meeting with the Riverside CEO the Whitehouse workgroup was surprised to the response they received when they expressed the desire for the tests to be more than basic skills, including samples of classic literature. The CEO informed them of the impossibility of that request, indicating, "Everything published prior to 1970 was either gender or racially

biased”. He proceeded to give the group a document titled, “*Bias and Sensitivity Concerns in Testing*”. The publishing house leader stated, “tests are designed to avoid language, symbols, gestures, words, phrases, or examples that are regarded as sexist, racist, otherwise offensive, inappropriate, or negative towards any group”. Samples of excluded topics included: death and disease, personal appearance, social problems, unsafe situations, references to guns or knives, animals eating animals, rodents, roaches and serious illnesses. Further, tests must contain “representational fairness” meaning that no group will be over or underrepresented. Something as mundane as the weather can be labeled biased. For example, referencing snow and freezing temperatures is tossed because of geographic bias.

Stereotypes, which gain their label because are in fact true, are banned at all levels. Emotional, occupational, activity, role, community setting, physical attributes or abilities characteristics cannot be included. No crying women, no Chinese laundries, no black athletes, no women cleaning house, or India natives managing motels are allowed. Goodness, we’re likely to think that this very establishment is owned by Susan and Pat Patel. In short, tests must deny reality in all instances.

With the test control battle in full swing the next frontier for the censors was the textbooks. Reading, history and social science works gaining the most focus. Expanding from just test developers and testing organizations, bias and sensitivity guidelines were soon developed by all educational publishers, states and professional associations. The APA, the American Psychological Association, is a prime example of the latter.

Mergers and acquisitions in the textbook publishing world have made the censorship more workable. Publisher that I knew as a teacher, like Scott-Foresman,

Addison-Wesley, Silver Burdett, Ginn, Prentice Hall are all now owned by a British company, Pearson. Vivendi(vi-ven-di), a French company, now owns Houghton Mifflin and Riverside Publishing. A Dutch company owns Harcourt Brace, Holt, Rinehart and Winston and the GED test. The single large American company, McGraw-Hill owns Macmillan, the SRA and CTBA tests. Capitulating to the pressure groups these major entities invoke bias and sensitivity reviews at every level, from author selection to specific texts.

So you thought textbooks reflect the best research that can be found relating how children learn and how to convey important subject matter. Guess again. I suppose you also think that history books are to expose children to the past and the effects of it on the here and now. Wrong again! To the contrary, history books are to raise self-esteem, consciousness about social issues and the portrayal of society as the censors think it should be. ✓

You would think that little could be done to change 2+2, but it has surely happened. The review guidelines for math and science textbooks diminish the value of the fundamentals of mathematics and science while elevating the multicultural themes. Much attention is given to biographies. Much is made of the contributions by the ancients with considerable criticism of Europeans, who the new guidelines claim did not actually develop the principles. And you thought that Newton created gravity sitting under that tree. Ironically there is no recognition that scientific principles are the one element of learning that transcends cultures.

The reference guide for bias and sensitivity guidelines is exhaustive. Originally the publishing company lists were devoted exclusively to racial and ethnic topics. In

1972, Scott Foresman set the pace with its “Guidelines for Improving the Image of Women in Textbooks”. In 1996 they took a bold new step forward with the publication of “Multicultural Guidelines”. While your own review might prove otherwise, to this reviewer this guideline are intended to cause all educational literature to promote sweeping social and teaching methods changes. A whole new society is envisioned, not of individuals but groups of persons who act and believe in distinctive ways. Skirting the political prohibition, an example of how aberrations to these new models confound the multiculturalists is their recent response to a black female and Hispanic male nominated by the President to high-level judgeships. According to the pundits, these nominees, as individuals, do not fit the expected model for black women and Hispanic men; therefore being unpredictable, they are not acceptable positions of authority.

A whole new theoretical science of education and teaching is being invoked. Phrases like “collaborative learning”, “constructivism” and multiple intelligences” dot the pedagogical landscape.

Operationally, collaborative learning expects a heterogeneous group of students to work together on a project, with all of the children receiving the same reward, regardless of their individual work. No academic stars permitted in this effort. From my contacts with children in these projects, the results are exactly the opposite desired by the educational architects. The poor performer is a liability on better students. Better students tend to resent poor performers, growing intolerant of their leach like characteristics. In contrast, student groups, which are self-selected, do emulate the desired interaction and “community” learning. The self-selected groups do however, promote segregation at the grassroots level.

Constructivism is a philosophy of learning founded on the premise that, by reflecting on our experiences, we construct our own understanding of the world we live in. Each of us generates our own "rules" and "mental models," which we use to make sense of our experiences. Learning, therefore, is simply the process of adjusting our mental models to accommodate new experiences. In this model there are no "standards" for learning, no required reading, no tests, no grades, no failure, no success.

Multiple Intelligence Learning Theory takes education and teaching in yet another direction. Based on the 1983 model proposed by Dr. Howard Gardner of Harvard University, this model suggests that IQ measures are too limited and therefore not adequate. Gardner proposes that there are 8 intelligences paraphrased as word smart, number smart, picture smart, body smart, music smart, people smart, self smart and nature smart. ✓

Do you detect any incongruity between these models? One promotes the individuals development of his own world model while the other thrives on group dynamics. The third suggests that the stereotypical behavior held in such disdain by the political correctness advocates is in fact attributable to a legitimate form of basic intelligence.

Is it any wonder that children are confused when a spattering of each model is superimposed on their learning environment? Did the article on Advanced Placement Programs, published recently by the New Era, surprise you? It was filled with the lamentations of local educators regarding the poor showing of their students in these program tests? They seem unable to figure out why all the theories don't work

magically. Have they forgotten “new math”, “open classrooms” and a host of theoretical ideas of academia that have been foisted on our children?

Tennessee, Arizona, Oregon, Texas and California were the first battlegrounds with educational textbook authors and editors. Holt, Rinehart and Winston a national known publisher of text books in literature, reading and the sciences experienced the brunt of action by CBIS (Council on Interracial Books for Children), NOW (National Organization for Women) and the other alphabet soup organizations. It is interesting to note and compare the NAEP test scores of these states with those of less aggressive revisionist ones. Without exception the 1992-2002 data shows these states below the national averages in science and math.

Disappointingly the “academic freedom” proposed by many educators has long been banished into oblivion. Publishers have found it easier to exclude anything that offends anyone. Literary quality became secondary to representational issues. Many of the publishing fraternity describe censors from the right as from a “totalitarian society” while they were much friendlier to those from the left, called “positive pressure groups”.

Two of the organizations on the left, the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association are due the credit for the dumbing down of children’s literary experiences. I suspect that most of us believe that our schools are supposed to lay a foundation for the love of literature, exposing them incrementally to the best writings of our common language and to the extend possible, the best writings of other cultures. Unfortunately, these two groups take a contrary position. Students should explore their interests and role in society. One would wonder how the student could expand their horizons if they only study their current interests. These groups adopt a

laissez-faire approach to teaching English. They endorse bilingual education; avoid the endorsement of any conventions in spelling, syntax and grammar. Forty of the 50 states have adopted the NCTE-IRA guidelines. The result is astounding. There is only one state, Massachusetts, which has adopted a “required reading list”. Several states list a number of good reading examples, but no requirement; hence the choices are left to individual teachers. Here in Kentucky the individual schools’ council makes the choice if any. The failure to make choices appears to come from a fear of making a wrong choice that is criticized. The result.... A muddled mess. In the absence of standards, children minds are molded by our commercial pop culture, television and worse than that, MTV.

One group on the right is represented by a husband-wife duo, Mel and Norma Gabler. Originally, very active in Texas and now nationally, the Gablers were among the first outside of the higher education-publishing fraternity to call attention to the erosion of strongly held values in the “sanitized” educational materials. They amazed parents by calling attention to the anti-American, anti-democracy, anti-capitalism, anti-family bias presented by the bias and sensitivity experts. While they have had a dramatic effect raising the awareness of individuals and parents, unfortunately, the Gablers frequently are found following the same tactics of those they least respect.

You likely remember and read a book that was subjected to severe criticism by many, George Orwell’s 1984. Published in the 1940’s Orwell described a civilization that was controlled at every level, a manipulated Utopian society. Do you recall the permitted language? Newspeak. Orwell, whose tongue in cheek novel criticized those who would manipulate learning, stated, “Newspeak is the only body of language where the expanse of learning get smaller. Reflect on the degradation of language in 1984;

here is Orwell's greatest warning to the free world. Unless words have specific, precise identifiable and common meanings, how is it possible to conceive ideas such as freedom, oppression, resistance and the like? If it is no longer possible to formulate abstract ideas and communicate them then action and creativity are no longer possible and control is absolute and complete. Consider a quote from the classic. Syme bit off another fragment of the dark-coloured bread, chewed it briefly, and went on: "don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thought crime, literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed, will be expressed by exactly one word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten."

"Four score and seven years ago our forefathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal".

You recognize this phrase as the initial stanza of Lincoln's Gettysburg address, a historical document that most of us were required to memorize in elementary school history. Unfortunately this too has been subjected to the censors edit.

"score" suggests winners and losers and must be deleted
"fore fathers" is sexist....delete
"conceived" suggests birth and death....delete
"all men are created equal" is sexist....delete
"reference to war" too violentdelete
"dedicating, consecrating, hallowing" smacks of religion....delete

Once the revisionists are done, there isn't much remaining.

Abraham Lincoln's Biglersville Address

"We have a nice country here and we need to keep it that way."

Two more quotes seem appropriate here.

"They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty or safety." Interesting enough Benjamin Franklin stated this in 1759.

C. S. Lewis once said, " The scholar has lived in many times and is therefore in some degree immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and microphones of his own age"

It may seem that all is lost. Unfortunately we parents and others at the local level have little control over "what" children is taught in government schools. An educational critic calls the public schools, government schools, because it has been years since the control of what is taught has been vested in the "public". The real control is vested in state and federal departments of education and their control over textbook publishers, editors and authors through their control to textbook adoptions.

As expressed however by Lewis, there is hope. First, regardless of what you call it, intelligence exists and none of us have all of it, not even the academic intellectuals. Second, they always fail to account for one of those principles of physics that cross all cultures, inertia. Theories that are unproven will not be influenced greatly by external forces; they will die of their own weight.