

Contents

COMMENTARY

- Schoolhouse Solutions 1.3: Reflections on the Zimmerman Case 2
Wade A. Carpenter
- Buffering Decisions: Sources of Moral Hazard? 8
Edward G. Rozycki

FEATURES

- Public or Not—Education Is Functionally Religious 13
William F. Cox, Jr.
- Two Responses to “Public or Not”. 29
Wade A. Carpenter, Gary K. Clabaugh
- Kierkegaard: Existential Philosophy as Educational Philosophy 37
Risa Della Rocca, Michael Foley, and Colin Kenny
- Teacher Education: An Essential, but Highly Unlikely, Reform 44
Gary K. Clabaugh
- 49 Techniques That Put Students on the Path to College,
and *One That Won't*: Lemov vs. Theory and Research 53
Matthew L. McConn
- The Problem with Taking Democracy Out of American Education 62
Nancy Barno Reynolds

DEPARTMENT

- Interview with the Dead*
Thomas Jefferson 71
Gary K. Clabaugh

New Educational Foundations

A Trans-ideological Journal of Criticism, Research, and Review

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New Educational Foundations

A Trans-ideological Journal of Criticism, Research, and Review

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Schoolhouse Solutions 1.3: Reflections on the Zimmerman Case

by Wade A. Carpenter

My wife and I suffered a home invasion last summer. It was well after midnight on a rainy night when we were jolted awake by the sound of the back door crashing in. A loud alarm, a loaded Glock, and an unusually prompt police response scared off the intruder (there were no wet tracks beyond the doorstep), but nevertheless, it was a terrifying event. Since then, the wife has upgraded our security system and I do a lot more target practice. The police can't be everywhere, but bad guys can be anywhere. Speaking of which . . .

A couple of weeks later, while we were vacationing in Paris, three vans full of policemen squealed to a stop near our tour group. As the officers piled out, I looked around and saw a souvenir peddler running straight past us. My old high-school-teacher reflexes kicked in and I grabbed the man, holding on for a second or two until about a dozen cops clotheslined him. As they were hauling him away, the lawmen thanked me and shook my hand. I don't know why: no courage (much less thinking) was involved, purely force of habit, muscle memory employed at least a hundred times over the years, and it was good to know that at my age I still could. But that night I had some conscience problems: I really didn't want to help harass some poor unlicensed vendor. I kept reminding myself that nobody calls out half the Paris *gendarmarie* for an unauthorized knickknack salesman, and the next day I was gratified to learn that the guy was indeed a pickpocket who had snatched the wallet of some important diplomat. *C'est bien*: a thief is nobody's friend.¹

Then we got home with a week or two to spare before I went on jury duty. Damn.

After spending the summer uncommonly preoccupied with matters of crime and law, I probably couldn't help getting hooked on the Trayvon Martin–George Zimmerman trial or help feeling sympathy both ways. Ultimately, my conclusion was that the law was fulfilled but justice was not done. That kid is dead, and he didn't need killing. But like the jury, I ended up with reasonable doubt about murder and manslaughter, at least as Florida law defined them. I'm sorry, and I pray God finds a way to bless Mr. Martin's family, who have shown remarkable faith and dignity while suffering every parent's worst nightmare.² I support self-defense laws, but I also support excessive-force laws, so I welcome the national discussion on how to make those laws better.

I also think educators can find useful lessons, and at least useful questions, from that awful mess. Several occur to me.

Don't Overcharge, Don't Overpromise

Arguably, the prosecution charged Mr. Zimmerman with crimes beyond what they could prove. It's the old bazaar-wallah's dilemma: how high to start the bargaining without losing the customer? This time, the prosecution made a judgment call that didn't work. Similarly, public school advocates have overpromised for almost two centuries. And to make matters worse, current budgets indicate that lots of taxpayers believe that we have overcharged them as well.³

Maybe they're right. To begin with, we had Horace Mann persuading the public that common secular schools could unify a uniquely diverse, quarrelsome, and spread-out collection of peoples by establishing what we would now call a common "civil religion."⁴ Ultimately, however, that could only be achieved by "those consummate theologians, the Reverend Doctors Ulysses S. Grant and William Tecumseh Sherman."⁵ Then, after the war that finally united the states, Mann's disciples promised that the schools would "civilize" the losers as well as those who lost all the other wars that made this nation strong.⁶ Sorry, people, that didn't happen either, at least not as the teacher associations defined civilization. As the bumper sticker says, Custer died for your sins.⁷ Even after all that, we believed John Dewey's promise that the schools could simultaneously save the nation from ignorance and the kids from boredom with something called "whole child education."⁸ Okay, so maybe that

was a stretch, too. Nonetheless, ever since then weary teachers have been assigned every proposal that professors could publish and politicians could pander.⁹ Now the public expects us to fix the nation's drug problems, economic inequalities, racism, corporate ineptitude, adult indifference, teenage pregnancy, adolescent angst, childhood obesity, head lice, every conceivable kind of disability, and a never-ending plague of more transient ills, all while instructing tens of millions of individuals with countless talents to a common standard of . . . well, *commonness* . . . which we justify by miscalling it "community." Freaky!

Maybe the Common Core will make us focus on what schools can do well. Then we could stop overpromising and reconsider: What are the proper functions of schools? What are the appropriate limits on government now that technology and terror have made privacy a thing of the past? What are the rights of citizens, and the responsibilities of communities? How should children be instructed? What should be expected of teenagers? What should be demanded of parents? It's time to tell the public: teachers cannot do it all, so pay us well for what we *can* do well, and "downsize" the rest.

Remember the Serial Position Effect

In the Zimmerman case, the prosecution ignored the "serial position effect."¹⁰ To put it simply: smart lawyers, preachers, and teachers start off strongly, then in the middle explain (whether verbally, through demonstration, activity, or whatever), and then close strongly: Tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em; tell 'em; and then tell 'em what you've told 'em. The Zimmerman prosecution did none of that. They started with reports by eyewitnesses, dispatchers, etcetera, then the "detail" witnesses (a mixed blessing), and finally the victim's family. I cannot imagine any parent's heart not breaking during their testimony. But first the prosecution called up the medical examiner. His testimony was a near-catastrophe. Contrast that with the defense, which built a plausible storyline of a hopeless wuss getting pounded by a young man in his prime, and we were left with reasonable doubt and the presumption of innocence.

But that's when things got even more complicated.

Educate the Conscience as Well as the Mind

The defense made a strict interpretation of Florida law appear mandatory, and thus made it difficult to prove that doubt was not

reasonable. The prosecution appealed to a looser application that would take the defendant's aggression into account. Then they fell back on another old rule: "If you have the law, hammer the law. If you have the facts, hammer the facts. If you have neither the law nor the facts, hammer the table."¹¹

The defense won.

But in fact, that strict interpretation was not mandatory. At the most extreme, the jury could have ignored the strict interpretation of the law and employed a little-known power called "jury nullification," and legally there might have been nothing anybody could do about it. It's not new: the first chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court advocated informing juries of their right to *judge the law itself* rather than simply the facts in evidence. Jury nullification has happened occasionally ever since, most notably to defy the Alien and Sedition Acts and the Fugitive Slave Law, and less reputably, to ignore guilt in white supremacist murder cases. It has rightly fallen into disfavor over the years and is no longer considered a political right. It is, however, a political *fact*, the unspoken element of our system of checks and balances.¹² Officers of the court seldom inform juries of this option.¹³ Likewise, it is not prominent in any social studies curriculum. For jurors to disregard the courts' instructions systematically could make a shambles of our judicial system. For citizens to make law on the fly could threaten everything that has made this nation good. But something akin to jury nullification may be essential if our nation is to remain great.

What Does It Mean for Us?

We read about it in *Antigone* and Thoreau. We saw it in Dr. King and Nelson Mandela. But we don't see much about it in the Common Core, and for good reason: the potential for abuse by the immature and the fanatic. That is especially a danger now that the public schools' near-monopoly on K-12 education is crumbling: the kids no longer have to obey, because they no longer have to stay. Perhaps, then, educating the conscience should not be downsized in teacher preparation if we want our teachers to find better ways of getting students to learn. By "educating the conscience" I do *not* mean "scoring dispositions," a term for accrediting agencies, which is as morally flabby as it is legally contentious.¹⁴ What I *do* mean is a solid liberal education, tied to teacher preparation by a thought-provoking, well-conducted Foundations course.

Ever since *No Child Left Behind* schools have become ever more legalistic, data-driven, and narrow-minded. Zero tolerance, accountability, and standards-based instruction are major parts of our lives. That is good: they are sometimes needed. But do we *really* want our children to be taught by those who follow a script, who are trained in a few cutesy methods, and who are always bound by an inflexible curriculum map? Do we want our teachers, and ultimately their graduates, to become technically adept martinetts with little understanding of mitigating and aggravating circumstances? If we do, law may be fulfilled, but I doubt that much justice will be done. Test scores may rise, but will civility be furthered? To the extent that schools lose their humanity, they lose their value. An educated conscience may be necessary to regain it.

Notes

1. To any who still entertain romantic or ideological notions to the contrary, all I need is to remind them what sorts of people suffer most from thieves: the weak and the poor. They are easier targets.
2. My son, adopted from India, is very dark, and at any distance much more than ten feet is indistinguishable from an African-American. Hard experience in North Georgia has made me very sensitive to that nightmare.
3. An appalling example happened locally this spring, when our county school system RIF'd almost 10 percent of the teaching force in one day!
4. For basic yet penetrating explorations of this concept, see Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762), *The Social Contract*, VIII, 5, and Robert N. Bellah (1992), *Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in a Time of Trial*. University of Chicago Press.
5. For this felicitous turn of phrase I am indebted to Mark A. Noll (2006), *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. Fascinating reading by a fine evangelical scholar.
6. The latter-nineteenth century missionary zeal of the National Teachers Association and its successor NEA often comes across as patronizing and even racist when reading their contemporary literature with modern eyes. For a good example, see "Education as an Element in Reconstruction." *Proceedings of the National Teachers Association, 1865/1870*. In Walter L. Fleming (1907), *Documentary History of Reconstruction: Political, Military, Social, Religious, Educational and Industrial, 1865 to the Present Time, Vol. II*, 171-174 ff. Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark.
7. See Vine Deloria, Jr. (1969), *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*. New York: Macmillan.

8. John Dewey (1916), *Democracy in Education*. New York: Macmillan. For a good third person discussion, read Herbert J. Kliebard (2004), *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893–1958*. New York: Routledge/Falmer.
9. See Wade A. Carpenter (2000), "Ten Years of Silver Bullets: Dissenting Thoughts on Education Reform." *Phi Delta Kappan*. 81 (5): 383–389, and (2012) "Ten More Years of Dum-Dums: Dissenting Thoughts on Education Reform II," *New Educational Foundations*, 1 (1): 18–29. See <http://www.newfoundations.com/NEFpubs/NEFv1n1>
10. The term was coined by Hermann Ebbinghaus (1913), *On Memory: A Contribution to Experimental Psychology*. New York: Teachers College.
11. The origin of this little jewel is lost to history. Dr. Google suggests a range of celebrated jurists, from Alan Dershowitz to Oliver Wendell Holmes. See <http://quoteinvestigator.com> for some interesting variants.
12. To begin what should be a careful investigation of this notoriously troubling subject I would suggest Douglas Linder (2001), "Jury Nullification," <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/zenger/nullification.html>
13. Although I thought the prosecution came startlingly close to it at several points of their closing remarks.
14. To get an idea of how messy that practice has become in a related field, study the case of *Ward v. Wilbanks*, a recent case involving gay rights and conscientious objection, professional standards and religious freedom. Google conservative, progressive, professional and legal literature, and especially the courts' written opinions. It is a classic case of rights in conflict and wrongs in question, and ultimately, why law just isn't enough.

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Buffering Decisions: Sources of Moral Hazard?

by *Edward G. Rozycki*

A definition of moral hazard: "[A]ny situation in which one person makes the decision about how much risk to take, while someone else bears the cost if things go badly."

—Paul Krugman, *The Return of Depression
Economics and the Crisis of 2008*, 62

Buffering

Buffering is any position assumed or action taken to protect decision-makers from the consequences of their decisions. A variety of colloquial expressions identify buffers: for example, "running interference," "flak-catchers," "covering for," "press secretary," "security staff," "administrative assistants," "receptionists," "vice presidents," "terms of office," and even "transfer" or "promotion."

Most organizations have policies and practices that set up buffering to protect their decision-makers from being called to defend their decisions—to outsiders, particularly—on a short-term basis. Often such buffering is both necessary and morally unobjectionable. Judges, policemen, teachers, doctors, and lawmakers, for example, are buffered from personal attack on the assumption that they

follow good faith procedures in rendering decisions that affect others. However, buffering may have its pathological consequences: for example, protecting the incautious or the incompetent from retribution by those their misadventures have harmed. Consider the expression "fiddling while Rome burns," i.e., not exercising one's duties despite an existing emergency. Buffering enables such inaction. A legislator or leader, protected by terms of office and security staff, may well act, or avoid acting, on his or her own narrow interests; consequently, evil can befall the great majority that has had little or no say in the decision-making.

"Moral Hazard": A Matter of Perception?

A long-recognized kind of buffering is an insurance policy, a contract with an insurer who will pay monetary compensation if harm is suffered under certain circumstances.¹ Insurance companies often advertise to acquire clients by claiming to offer "protection" or "coverage." It is not protection in the same sense that an umbrella protects or covers you from getting wet, but rather in the sense that monetary compensation mitigates your financial loss.² Of course, such monetary compensation may protect against collateral damages, e.g., the maintenance of one's personal estate, but it may not make up for all damages. School insurance policies, for example, may offer compensation for the loss of their children's eyes or fingers. That is most likely a popular kind of "reassurance," a bet against misfortune, that seldom claims to allay the loss.

From the perspective of the insurers, "moral hazard" arises if insured persons relax the caution and forethought exercised before they became insured. For example, driving more recklessly *because* one has insurance to offset the costs of an accident would be an example of "moral hazard" fostered by insurance companies with a monetary interest at risk. Is that a real risk, supported by clear evidence, or merely the paranoid worry of managers trying to explain a payout higher than expected?

Provided the insured provides no false information during the application process, expatiating about "moral hazard" is not so different from the high-horse moralizing of the casino industry regarding "card-counters" and its practice of excluding intelligent and skilled card players from participating in gambling. If the insured later behaves in a way that introduces what the insurer perceives as introducing new risk factors—for casino owners, playing in a

more strategically intelligent manner—the ensuing “moral” puffery obscures the fact that the insurers precipitously made a bet riskier than they are now willing to cover.

Importunity Raises Real Moral Issues

In contrast, Krugman's idea, introduced by the epigraph, focuses on a more commonly recognized moral aspect: i.e., that the injury suffered through the insured's recklessness will likely affect others not involved in the decision to act recklessly, whether or not those injured have a contracted monetary interest or potential legal claim in the matter.

Consider this case of buffering through promotion: in studies of several large corporations, Robert Jackal (1988) found that it was not unusual for leaders to escape the consequences of their bad decisions by leaving the environment in which they occurred. He comments,

One way of looking at success patterns . . . is that people who are in high positions have never been in one place long enough for their problems to catch up with them. They out-run their mistakes.³

Obviously, those who can't run away are left to live with the consequences. They are exposed to possible hazard by their lack of mobility and of participation in the damaging decisions. That appears to be more appropriately called a “moral hazard.”

Buffering: A Sword of Damocles

Buffering may not only protect a person from some threats but also make him or her vulnerable to others. Consider the situations of military personnel, policemen, and public school teachers. Their positions seem secure, immune—for example, to threats from market fluctuations and political controversy. Laws protect their tenure, income, and pensions, but those buffers often come with conditions of oversight. The overseers themselves may be buffered, usually politically, from the consequences of their own bad decisions.

Soldiers are fed, clothed, housed, and provided medical care; they are also subject to avoidable injury and death caused by faulty military decisions. Historical examples abound; similarly, police personnel can fall afoul of political interference into their normal functioning.

Public school teachers find themselves in a peculiar set of circumstances. People imagine them buffered by a sinecure tenure, school

law, and public esteem—an illusion that many educators themselves harbor. The reality is often different.⁴ In fact, public school teachers have little control over their working conditions, the students they are given to teach, the rooms in which they teach, the materials they must use, the discipline they can enforce, the schedules they must follow, or the grades they must assign for work completed.

One accepts buffering to defend against the importunities of one's potential victims, usually outsiders, only to become vulnerable to the demands of the insiders who provide the buffering. Multiple sources of buffering harbor multiple sources of moral hazard.

Must Leadership Generate Moral Hazard?

A conundrum seems to have arisen: if we need decisive leaders who must be buffered, we risk increasing moral hazard. If we wish to constrain moral hazard, then, we should de-emphasize decision-making as a function of leadership (or remove buffers—instituting seppuku, perhaps). But what is leadership without decision-making?

Jeffrey S. Nielsen proposes the “leaderless organization” as an answer to the quandary.⁵ Is that a realistic option, given the complexity of our institutions? On the other hand, Philip Selznick (1957) proposes that administrators transform themselves from administrative managers to institutional leaders, whom he envisions as “statesmen.”⁶ It is not clear, though, that “statesmen” can avoid, or even reduce, moral hazard.⁷

Which way ought we go?

We have, in fact, already institutionalized something of an answer to the conundrum. I offer the following paragraphs as a sketch of what the answer might be. [The full explanation of the answer is beyond the scope of this particular essay and must await a fuller development.—EGR]

Both Krugman and insurance-industry ideologues have conflated an important distinction: not everyone suffering damages from the implementation of a decision need be considered a victim of moral hazard. So long as people have made informed decisions to accept possible, clearly stated risks in, say, accepting an assignment or position, they ought not—nor ought we—consider them the victims of moral hazard when they are harmed by damage that they could anticipate. There is no moral hazard in their risks if they knowingly accept them. Insurance companies, banks, investment groups, and

credit-card issuers, which all cast a wide net for customers and disregard many risk factors to their reasonable acceptance, have no legitimate cause for complaint when their customers behave in ways that could have been anticipated.

In addition, there are the risks of duty: policing, soldiering, glass-blowing, culinary arts, governing, and teaching (some years ago a judge in Pennsylvania decided it was unreasonable for either teachers or students to expect guaranteed physical safety while in a public school), among many others, all have elements of risk associated with them. Practice and tradition (not infrequently, overoptimistic) determine what risks and what defenses are "normal" and expected. If the manifestation of a normal risk, suitably and normally defended against, causes damage, then no moral hazard has been fulfilled.

However, if damages stem from decisions that cause abnormal situations in which normal defenses have been overlooked or frustrated, then the resulting damage would result from moral hazard.

Normal hazards of duty, or other obligations, freely and knowingly chosen, do not constitute moral hazards. Nor is risky behavior a moral hazard, even if unanticipated by those who wager their fortunes on normalcy.

Notes

1. For the history of the development of insurance companies from gambling traditions, see Peter L. Bernstein, *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk* (New York: Wiley, 1998).
2. See Edward G. Rozycki, "Hurt, Harm & Safety," available at <http://www.newfoundations.com/EGR/HurtHarm.html>
3. Robert Jackall, *Moral Mazes: The World of Corporate Managers* (New York: Oxford, 1988), 90.
4. See, for example, Wade A. Carpenter, "Who Controls Teachers' Work?" at <http://goo.gl/SRqu4>
5. See Jeffrey S. Nielsen, *The Myth of Leadership: Creating Leaderless Organizations* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Davies-Black, 2004).
6. See Philip Selznick in *Leadership in Administration: A Sociological Interpretation* (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson, 1957).
7. See, for example, Edward G. Rozycki, "Leadership vs. Morality: An Unavoidable Conflict?" at <http://goo.gl/NmDbp>

religious issues, or both. The contrast is deceptive since it influences the reader to think incorrectly that public education is religiously neutral.

The second part of the title—"Education Is Functionally Religious"—challenges the popular viewpoint that public education in the United States is non-religious. The general misconception is that to be religious, education content must meet certain criteria, such as belief in a supreme being. In short, the simple truth is that whatever belief functions religiously is a religious belief.

Additionally, since formal education intentionally, though not necessarily avowedly, provides answers to religious questions, it is a religious activity. What we generally call formal education purposely answers and prepares students to live true to its answers regarding religious questions about, for instance, the purpose of life; what constitutes the good life; the nature of humanity; the question of objective reality; what constitutes good morality; whether the natural realm is orderly and fair; the nature of origins; and the existence and role of the supernatural (cf. Nord and Haynes, 1998).

Any content that provides an alternative to content which is recognized as sacred, religious, or sectarian ultimately, by its usage, constitutes a different but still a "religious" perspective. For initial understanding of this issue, the guiding formula is: Religious beliefs include traditional religious ideologies plus all competitors and substitutes (Nash, 1988, p. 25).

Religion Explained

The purpose of this paper is to reveal two hidden, unrecognized, or even perhaps denied realities about education, all relating to freedom of religion. The first reality, hardly ever acknowledged yet manifestly true, is that education serves religious purposes. Second, as typically conceived, government-controlled education invariably robs citizens of their inalienable right of religious freedom. In the final analysis, the civil controls, protections, benefits, and restrictions that apply to recognized religions should likewise apply to formal education. As long as civil government controls or taxes for education, it deprives citizens of their inalienable right of freedom of religious conscience.

Definitions of Religion

The common parlance in Western cultures typically envisions religion as that which possesses certain content characteristics such as sacred, morally based writings; belief in a supreme being; belief in an after-life; and formal representation through some type of ecclesiastical institution. Examples of such religions include Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, and Judaism. However, that content orientation is problematic since a number of recognized religions, e.g., animism, ancestor veneration, ethical culture, and naturalism, do not fit content classification schemas.

Reflective of those variabilities, religion has been popularly defined at one end of the spectrum as being necessarily God-inclusive. For instance, according to the extant constitution of the Commonwealth of Virginia, religion is "the duty we owe to our Creator" (Article I, Section p. 16). At the other end of the spectrum, religion has been defined as God-irrelevant, such as the "passionate desire for working out a new, better form of society" (cf. Leuba, 1912, p. 358). *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987, p. 282) suggests that the very attempt to define religion is basically the result of the Western world's "speculative, intellectualistic, and scientific disposition." The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead summarizes this universal definitional dilemma:

There is no agreement as to the definition of religion in its most general sense, including true and false religion; nor is there any agreement as to the valid [sic] religious beliefs, nor even as to what we mean by the truth of religion. (1960, p. 14)

Practical Complications

Two Supreme Court cases relating to conscientious objections to war—*U.S. v. Seeger* (1965) and *Welsh v. U.S.* (1970)—illustrate the problematic nature of content-based definitions. The litigants in both cases were appealing for religious exemption from military service based on conscientious objector (CO) qualifications. At the time of the appeals, CO exemptions were allowed if based upon "an individual's belief in a relation to a Supreme Being. . . ." Even though none of the litigants claimed to believe in a supreme being (as the statute required), the Court granted the requested exemptions because, to quote Justice Clark's court finding in *Welsh*,

The test of belief in a "relation to a Supreme Being" is whether a given belief that is sincere and meaningful

occupies a place in the life of its possessor parallel to that filled by the orthodox belief in God of one who clearly qualifies for the exemption. . . .

In principle, to hold a person's conscience accountable to religious stipulations set by others does not honor freedom of religious conscience. In the final analysis, it is inappropriate either to decide the validity of another person's definition of religion or to deny that someone's personal belief does not actually constitute a religion when functionally it does.

Reasonableness of Functionality

In support of this functional perspective, consider the following quotes, all from Supreme Court decisions. In the first case, the majority opinion noted that "the tenets of one man may seem the rankest error to his neighbor" (*Cantwell v. Connecticut*, 1940). Similarly, *U.S. v. Ballard* (1944) noted:

[I]t seems to me an impossible task for juries to separate fancied ones [religious experiences] from real ones, dreams from happenings, and hallucinations from true clairvoyance. Such experiences, like some tunes and colors, have existence for one, but none at all for another. They cannot be verified to the minds of those whose field of consciousness does not include religious insight.

In the same case, Justice Douglas stated in the majority opinion that freedom of religion "embraces the right to maintain theories of life and of death and of the hereafter which are rank heresy to followers of the orthodox faiths." Speaking to Constitutional provisions for the court, Justice Jackson likewise noted in *West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnett* (1943): "If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion. . . ." Similarly, Justice Brennan, commenting on the expanding heterogeneity of religions in the United States (*Abington School District v. Schempp*, 1963), included as religious believers those who "worship according to no version of the Bible and those who worship no God at all."

For all the importance and influence the Supreme Court has had on characterizing religion, it cautioned against letting "the determination of what is a 'religious' belief or practice . . . turn[s] upon a judicial perception of the particular belief or practice in question"

(*Thomas v. Review Board*, 1981). James Madison argued this point clearly and strongly in his *Memorial and Remonstrance* of 1785. To think, he said, that "the Civil Magistrate is a competent Judge of Religious Truth . . . is an arrogant pretension falsified by the contradictory opinion of Rulers in all ages."

Theological Basis

These examples of the Supreme Court's functional rather than content-based approach to defining religion are appropriately theologically based, most notably in the writings of the theologian Paul Tillich. Religion functioned, he said, as "being grasped by an ultimate concern" (1964, p. 4). This ultimate concern can take the form of "a sacred object, or an all-pervading power or a highest principle" or "towards objects like nation, science, a particular form of society, or a highest ideal of humanity" (1964, p. 5).

Likewise for another authority, Ludwig Feuerbach:

[R]eligion is to be understood better by observing its function than by analyzing any of its particular doctrines, and that it is to be judged by the way it works rather than to be tested by logical canons as an intellectual system. (Pratt, 1926, p. 6)

These quotations all trumpet the message that whatever belief serves in a parallel way to the way religion serves the orthodox believer is a religious belief. This orientation was succinctly clarified by Thomas Jefferson, who said that his still-existing Virginia Act for Establishing Religious Freedom (1786) "meant to comprehend, within the mantle of its protection, the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and the Mahomaton, the Hindu, and infidel of every denomination" (Alley, 1985, p. 62). It is important to note that Jefferson's statement included ethnic groups not necessarily seen as religious. For instance, probably not every Gentile in Jefferson's time was religiously Christian, and even more pointedly, an "infidel" was and is typically considered as someone without belief in certain religious content. Broadly protecting freedom of religion, Jefferson's inclusion of those groups implicitly argues for a functional rather than a content-based definition of religion. In free, democratic nations this has been the progression of religious thinking since that time—except when it comes to educational issues.

The relevance of comments like those of the founding fathers regarding freedom of religious conscience is centrally important to this paper. Paradoxically, the strengths inherent in a morally religious

citizenry are best obtained by honoring the principle of freedom of religion rather than by mandating religion (cf. Gaustad, 2005). Honoring human dignity through the preservation of inalienable rights such as freedom of religious conscience is still the best approach to attaining a flourishing citizenry. That is documented historically in the United States (e.g., Blumenfeld, 1985) and across the span of time (Coulson, 1999). Further, as expressed in the Declaration of Independence, governments are to preserve, not violate, the inalienable rights of their citizens. As we are about to see, "freedom of educational conscience" is invariably part and parcel of freedom of religious conscience.

Education Is Avowedly Religious

This next section examines several ways that education serves a religious function.

Commanded by Religion

If an honored deity commands education, then for those adherents and believers education constitutes a religious activity. To be denied compliance with that command would surely offend the believers' religious consciences. As a single case in point, since the Bible in both its Old and New Testaments makes education about God and His creation a function of religious obedience, then for Christians, education is without doubt a religious activity. Even if a devoutly religious person disbelieves that education is a religious activity, that disbelief does not invalidate the matter if that religion declares otherwise. Similarly, if a parent allows his or her child to be educated in a disbelieved religious system, that child is still receiving a religiously based education.

Equipper of Conscience

Formal education invariably teaches that which is considered morally acceptable behavior. And it is a commonly accepted understanding that morality resides within the realm of conscience. Interestingly enough, the conscience is the same "place" where religious teachings and beliefs are held. Thus there is a compelling validation of the claim that education serves religious conscience.

Religious Entities

This section sets the stage for subsequently describing how by design education functions as a religion.

Communism. For most disciples, communism is religious (cf. Nord, 1995a) because it offers a goal for life, a faith in redemption from evil, an overencompassing interpretation of life's meaning, an authority structure, a doctrine, a statement of ethics, and more. "If religion is defined as man's relationship to whatever he regards as ultimate or to whatever he trusts most for deliverance from the evils and hazards of life, then communism is undoubtedly religious" (Vos, 1959, pp. 323–324). All in all, a communist, like a believer in a traditional religion, is a person of faith.

Democracy. Proponents of democracy make faith-filled claims about its ability to impact matters of ultimate concern. For instance, its proponents claim that democracy can bring peace, happiness, liberty for all, justice, and many benefits of an ultimate nature. It can reasonably be said that democracy even advertises itself as an ultimate cause for devotion because of its supposed salvific qualities. Representative of that orientation, one commentator says that to make democracy work, "we must make a religion out of it" (Rugg, 1941, p. 277), and another says it acts as an "ultimate faith" (Williams, 1945, p. 488).

Nationalism. The view that a nation is worthy of dying for is a religious view according to Tillich's standard (cf. Nord, 1995a). In nationalism, the fatherland becomes one's god, its mission the focus of one's faith, and its symbols the object of reverence. Just as with formal religions, nations likewise have ceremonies of a religious nature such as baptisms, marriages, and funerals and constitutional documents that serve as creeds. American nationalism has at times even represented a reaction against (and thus a religious substitute for) historic Christianity (Hayes, 1926, p. 117).

Science. The case has been made that "faith in science plays the role of . . . [a] dominating religion" (von Weizsacher, 1964, p. 12). Beginning with the Enlightenment, if not before, science took on the indispensable qualities of a religion: a common faith, an organized church, and a code of behavior. Science is largely based on faith in the orderliness of nature and power of rationality. The common bond scientists experience as practitioners of science's methodology represents a type of priesthood in the church of scientism. The code of behavior is revealed in the valued dispositions of objectivity, selfless devotion, ethics and morals of observing and reporting data, and assumptions made about the authority of experts to give ultimate meaning to the data.

Humanism. In the education realm, humanism is perhaps the most pervasive yet unrecognized religious counterpart to more-formal expressions of religion. This ancient perspective holds that mankind can solve all its problems, that humans represent the highest point of existence for any living creature (now or in the past), and that humans can achieve the ideal state.

Beyond the fact that the Supreme Court has called humanism a religion (*Torcaso v. Watkins*, 1961; *Malnak v. Yogi*, 1977), humanism is a religion because that is the expressed position repeatedly claimed in *Humanist Manifesto I* (1933) and *II* (1973). *Manifesto II* reaffirmed the position of its 1933 predecessor by declaring humanism to be a religion and man the object of worship (Kurtz, 1973).

Structurally, Education Is Functionally Religious

As demonstrated next, there are at least four different ways that structurally, or by design, education functions as a religion.

Experts Say Education Is Religious

When past U.S. education overtly included biblical teachings, it was not uncommon to view educators as “preparing souls for eternal happiness or everlasting misery” (Jorgenson, 1987, p. 59). For the same reason, contemporary Christian educators (e.g., Dejong, 1974; Harper, 1981; Van Brummelen, 1972) typically view all education—public or private—as constituting a religious activity. With the disestablishment of the Christian religion from government control, public education began promoting civil or natural religion, and specifically that of secularism or humanism. Thomas Jefferson, one of the key figures in disestablishment and a fervent believer in natural religion, is credited with establishing the public school system as the “church of the republic” (McCarthy, Skillen, and Harper, 1982, 41; Mead, 1963, p. 68). President Truman’s 1946 Commission on Education aspired that education would develop in students a faith in the democratic way of life. And this American way of life was considered by some (e.g., Herberg, 1974, pp. 77–78) as a civil religion, as “*the American religion.*”

The father of public education, John Dewey, affirmed his position on this matter in the title of his article “Education as a Religion” (1922). He affirmed education as salvific and appealed to educators to allow the conviction of sin to lead them to repentance for infusing education with lifeless dogmatic and ritualistic exercises. His

pedagogic creed spoke of the teacher as “the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God” (Greeley, 1985, p. 53). Alfred North Whitehead similarly considered education as religious because of its reverence for self-determination (1957, p. 14). A philosopher, Ivan Illich, considers the church of North America to be education (Neuhaus, 1974, p. 78); a historian calls education “the American religion” (Adams, 1991, p. 9); and a philosopher/psychologist has claimed that the presence of humanism in the classroom amounts to promoting the religion of “Unitarianism” (*World*, 1990, p. 10). Teachers of humanism are “the proselytizers of a new faith: a religion of humanity”—“ministers of another sort utilizing a classroom instead of a pulpit to convey humanistic values”—says an American humanist (Dunphy, 1983, p. 26).

Education Answers Religious Questions *If*

“[A]ll education pursued with concern for ultimate meaning is religious education, and all teaching and learning dedicated to the highest excellence and the deepest truth are in a fundamental sense acts of worship,” according to one educator (Phenix, 1966, p. 26). A theologian (Rushdoony, 1963, p. 315) claims:

[I]f education is in any sense a preparation for life, then its concern is religious. If education is at all concerned with truth, it is again religious. If education is vocational, then it deals with calling, a basically religious concept.

The impartation of moral and spiritual values endorsed by the National Education Association (Pfeffer, 1967, p. 361) is the promotion of religiously oriented values. An education authority (Tyler, 1949) agrees, saying that since those values address issues of ultimacy, they are religious in nature. Teachers cannot help acting as moral-religious figures when they answer, as they regularly do, students’ questions such as “What am I supposed to do in life?” and “Why were they fated to live where and as they did . . . ?” (Coles, 1994, p. A64).

Myth of Neutrality

Value neutrality in education is essentially impossible because values inculcation regularly happens in the classroom (Aarons, 1976; Edlin, 1994; Greene, 1990). In fact, moral education is not at all prohibited when the morals being taught agree with the system’s values. A renowned Harvard psychologist violated neutrality by asserting

that moral education could be permitted if in the name of justice it imposed no "beliefs of one group on another" (Kohlberg, 1981, p. 37). Kohlberg's imposition of his view on others regarding criteria for content (i.e., justice) acceptability was not neutral. The National Catholic Welfare Conference (1961) claimed such schooling would not be religiously neutral—"an 'orthodoxy' is expressed—inescapably so—even in a curriculum from which religious 'orthodoxies' are absent" (La Noue, 1967, p. 24). The conference additionally noted that "public schools teach students to see nature as purposeless and devoid of sacred qualities." They teach instead about the "temporal self" and "[valu]ng the goods of this world, not those of the world to come" (Nord, 1995b, p. 44).

As one theologian noted, "[B]anning the teaching of religion in school properly is to teach religion under another name" (Neuhaus, 1974, p. 74). Justice Stewart noted in *Abington v. Schempp* (1963) that "a refusal to permit religious exercises thus is seen, not as the realization of state neutrality, but rather as the establishment of a religion of secularism. . . ." Similarly, Chief Justice Burger noted in *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971): "What would appear to some to be essential to good citizenship might well for others border on or constitute instruction in religion" (Warshaw, 1979, p. 58).

True neutrality would mean that if public schools cannot teach that all men ought to worship God, then neither can they teach anything that implies its substitute or opposite. In fact, to not even address this matter about God where the context would permit and even suggest it is, by omission, to "say" something significant about a duty to worship God (Wolterstorff, 1967, p. 11).

In the New York City public school conflict of the 1880s, the Catholics rightly declared, in spite of the Protestant claim of school neutrality, that the schools' moral instruction was religious since it offended their religious consciences (Wolterstorff, 1992). They noted that education will always "favor one set of [religious] opinions in opposition to another, or others; and it is believed that this always will result in any course of education that the wit of man can devise" (McCarthy et al., 1981, p. 91). A contemporary education reformer claimed that any shift to natural religion created "just what the Constitution forbids; viz. a sectarian establishment consisting of schools, in which the tenets and dogma of *sect* are taught; for Infidels and Deists are as much a sect as Presbyterians, Catholics, or Quakers" (Duffield, 1857, p. 97).

Faith Basis of Education

Those who like Immanuel Kant attempt to separate faith and reason do so on the basis of faith. After all, it is a statement of faith to believe that a substitute for religion is even possible and that reason, as its substitute, will lead to ultimate good (Young, 1954).

Information that is taught in school is heavily impacted by faith orientations. It is not uncommon for educational content (e.g., fossils, historical accounts) to be interpreted from different and even conflicting points of view. Each such claim is typically the function of the respective interpretive schema or world view of the interpreters. And world views, being considered as within the realms of heart and conscience, are thus ultimately held as matters of faith (Sire, 2004).

Conclusion

Education serves a religious function from several different perspectives. One, educators, theologians, and social commentators directly acknowledge the inherently religious character of education. Two, education content addresses religious matters by purposely and selectively providing answers to religious issues and questions. Three, children, their parents, and both religious and social institutions acknowledge that a purpose of education is to equip the moral conscience of students. Four, education, both formal and informal, is the primary means by which religions perpetuate doctrinal beliefs.

Elaborating, public educational systems across the globe speak directly but conflictingly about religious matters. For instance, regarding the religious issue of purpose of life, school-based answers divergently endorse subjective morality, service to others, productive citizenship, and living for self. Regarding the religious issue of morality, school-based answers include diverse denominational and religious perspectives, relativism, absolutism, and eternal or temporal orientations. Regarding the religious issue of human origins, school-based answers divergently include God-created, Darwinian evolution, intelligent design, and reincarnation. Regarding the religious issue of an afterlife, school-based answers include a wide diversity: "none," a possibility, and/or multiple perspectives. Regarding the religious issue of the supernatural, school-based answers address many diverse religious views that include inviting imaginary spirit guides, chanting, and magic to contact supernatural forces; tapping into the universe within; and even denial of the supernatural. Regarding the religious issue of the role of faith, school-based answers include such

contrasts as negation of faith, equal valuing of all faiths, prejudicial protection of some and ridicule of others, and endorsing its absence. Clearly, formal education regularly addresses religious issues with a multitude of differentiated, conflicting, and even exclusionary perspectives (cf. Anderson, 2004; Buehrer, 1990; Cox, 2003; Gabler and Gabler, 1985; Hefley, 1977; Holland, 1995; Moore, 2002; Nord, 1995a; Rose, 1988; Shortt, 2004; Vitz, 1986).

Elaborating further, textbook content often provides a religiously biased coverage of the strong influence of metaphysical (i.e., religious) orientations. For instance, R. D. Anderson (2004) has documented that the bias toward individual autonomy and cosmological emptiness in character-education programs in public schools breeds an atheistic culture of therapeutic self-absorption. That is quite different from, for instance, the Hebraic educational orientation of theistic reverence based on a God-centered cosmology and a holy community identity (Barclay, 1974). Both perspectives, one labeled secular, the other formally religious, position students differently regarding crucial religious issues such as the nature of God and the nature of humans *vis-a-vis* their relationship with God. While all such outcomes have significant religious groundings, some are prejudicially affirmed as religious while others are prejudicially denied as religious.

One final example: the unlikely candidate of mathematics is firmly rooted in faith assumptions. The monumental assumption is that for each and every operation performed on numbers, the same result will occur to the entities they represent regardless of location in the universe or time of occurrence. That is certainly a faith-based assumption since there are no detailed historical accounts, revelations from future, or unexplored places in the universe to warrant such claims.

Closing, there is good reason to grant freedom of religious conscience in education. Not to do so is to perpetuate the tyrannical rule of religious injustice against human dignity and genuine education.

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freedom of religious conscience." (How about taxes for war? [Anti-Quaker.] Taxes on tobacco? [Anti-native American.] Taxes on whiskey? [Anti-Episcopalian.]) One could challenge the uses to which Cox puts the *Seeger* case and its relatives, as David McKenzie has discussed in a 1991 issue of *Journal of Church and State*.¹ To conflate a substitute for religion (like golf, or your '57 T-Bird) with religion could thus be seen to trivialize religion.

But I think my basic disagreement with his article is that he doesn't distinguish between *instruction* and *education*. And he makes no distinction at all between *education* and *Education*, with a capital *E*. Instruction can be about anything, from algebra to zygotes. Clearly, much of this domain gives little if any offense to religious sensibilities and is do-able for public school employees.

On the other hand, education is a bit more difficult to define. Its etymology is itself uncertain: According to some Latin scholars it comes from *educere*—to bring out or to draw out, and according to others, from *educare*—to govern or to mold.² The distinction is actually quite significant, implying different philosophies and methodologies: one Platonic idealism and the Socratic method and the other Aristotelian realism and Direct Instruction. Despite all the ink spilled over the centuries over the difference, it seems to me that those two approaches are merely two sides of the same coin, certainly in no way mutually incompatible. Hence my own definition is a blend: to bring out and to build up. That, of course, leaves a mighty big hole—to bring out and to build up *what?* I calmly respond, "The Good in the person." To which the inevitable Philosophy 101 student smugly responds, "And what is 'the good'?" I patiently point out that "Good" as I used it is a proper noun, capitalized, and hence elevating the *definiendum* to its proper form, *Education*, with a capital *E*. The sophomore panics for a moment, but if *really* sharp, stammers something about my "begging the question," to which I reply, "Only if the word is a question to be answered or a problem to be avoided. It is not. Education is an adventure, to be engaged." Which completely flummoxes the tiresome little bastard, who reels away to take refuge in his favorite gloomy scribblers. So here I agree, and as strongly as

I possibly can, with Professor Cox: Education (capital *E*) really does engage us with issues not susceptible of easy answers—adventures such as the meaning of (one’s) life, justice versus injustice, and that one true universal, death. Unfortunately, therein lies the rub: Serious explorers of these issues tend to be unusually impatient with facile answers. Hence, I’m afraid that public school isn’t about that kind of Education. Strict Separationists’ concerns about the competence of government-provided schooling to supply that kind of Education are justified, seeing how government demonstrates its incompetence in dealing matters of faith and morals every day.

But can government schools *educate*, with a lower-case *e*? Yes, of course they can. It happens every day, whenever a committed teacher somehow succeeds in making contact with a troubled child and good (lower-case *e*, as defined by society) results. But can it happen *systematically*, and to a high level, in politician-governed schools? I don’t know, but I’m getting increasingly skeptical. Therefore, I don’t especially fear efforts to promote diversity of educational provision . . . *if they are done in ways that do not hurt kids*.

Every subject, no matter how pedestrian, has prudential guidelines, which teachers call “scope and sequence.” Efforts in public schools to elevate these subjects from instruction and education toward the realm(s) that I would call Education (capital *E*) are notoriously difficult to square with constitutional safeguards to 1) prevent government from screwing up religion and 2) limit religion’s attempts to keep government from screwing up the country.

Okay, so that was a cheap shot. But I write it only half-humorously: Religion can be and has been a great influence on government for good. Once, while driving in Atlanta on a warm day, I pulled up beside a snazzy convertible, driven by a middle-aged gentleman suffering an apparent midlife crisis, which sported bumper stickers urging us to “Keep Church and State Separate,” among other things. I smiled pleasantly, rolled down my window, and asked if his bumper sticker implied that we should have barred the *Reverend* Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., from our national conversation about civil rights? Unfortunately, a sudden green light and a more-powerful engine didn’t permit me to hear his reply, if he came up with one. (I don’t know, but he didn’t look overly pleased with the encounter. But to be fair, I am rather large.) One could go on, asking if we should have excluded the Quakers from our debates over slavery? The Scots-Irish Presbyterians from the American Revolution? Episcopalians from

voting on Sunday liquor sales? Religion has often been a powerful force for good, and, of course, has also often been a dangerous one for evil. Therefore broad principles and exacting judgments are both essential, and these are problems that have often frustrated far finer minds than mine.

But perhaps I can at least suggest one simple change in our thinking that perhaps both Dr. Cox and my Audi-driving acquaintance might find helpful: Let's drop the metaphor about a "high wall of separation" and replace it with one about a *fence*, instead. After all, one can see and hear through a fence. We can learn from one another, and advocates for both a protective separation and an enriching accommodation of religion and public education might perhaps benefit from the wisdoms the other can offer. We've achieved such slogan switches before. There was a time when "free-thinker" and "masterless man" were not compliments. We used to chatter glibly about a "melting pot," until some identity-advocates suggested that the pot was melting away too much identity of value, recommended a "tossed-salad" metaphor, and thereby deepened our discussion in worthwhile ways. Likewise, the "high wall of separation" is awfully extreme, and may sometimes be just another cloak for bigotry. Contrary to what may be popular belief, the term came from only one of Jefferson's letters (interestingly, *not* the one where he recommended "raking the best geniuses from the rubbish"), and was not enshrined anywhere in American law until the *Everson* case in 1947.³ And as *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Brown v. Board* so splendidly demonstrated, exclusive metaphors can be easily replaced when more thoughtful inclusion . . . or at least consideration . . . is called for.

—Wade A. Carpenter

Notes

1. David McKenzie (1991), "The Supreme Court, Fundamentalist Logic, and the Term 'Religion,'" *Journal of Church and State* 33(4): 731-746. In fairness to Dr. Cox, I should note that McKenzie points out that the Supreme Court itself misinterpreted Tillich's notoriously difficult theology, too.
2. Ronald Woods and Robin Barrow, *An Introduction to Philosophy of Education*. 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 115. For some interesting reflections, see Randall V. Bass and J. W. Good (2004), "Educare and Educere: Is a Balance Possible in the Educational System?" *The Educational Forum*, 68(2): 161-168, ERIC Number: EJ724880.

3. Jefferson's letters: Thomas Jefferson (1782), *Notes on Virginia*, viii, 388. Ford Ed., iii, 251, as quoted in *The Jefferson Encyclopedia*, Ed. John P. Foley, Funk and Wagnalls Company, New York, 1900, 275.

Everson case: Although the Heritage Foundation's literature is so conservative it occasionally gives me the heebie-jeebies, its First Principles Series Report #6 (June 23, 2006), "The Mythical "Wall of Separation": How a Misused Metaphor Changed Church-State Law, Policy, and Discourse," by Daniel L. Dreisbach, presents an interesting argument that Jefferson's letter using the phrase "high wall of separation" was more for personal political purposes than for binding judicial interpretation. Further, Dreisbach argues that the letter was intended to refer more to questions of federalism—Congress's versus states' jurisdiction. As Dreisbach points out, some of Jefferson's own actions as president certainly seem incompatible with the "High Wall" extreme separationism he believes Justice Hugo Black inappropriately attributed to Jefferson in the *Everson* decision: <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2006/06/the-mythical-wall-of-separation-how-a-misused-metaphor-changed-church-state-law-policy-and-discourse>. See "Letter from Jefferson to Messrs. Nehemiah Dodge, Ephraim Robbins, and Stephen S. Nelson, a committee of the Danbury Baptist association in the state of Connecticut," 1 January 1802, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress), Series 1, Box 89, December 2, 1801–January 1, 1802. See also *Everson v. Board of Education of the Township of Ewing* (No. 52), 330 U.S. 1, 16, 18 (1947).

Wondrously Capacious Definitions of Religious, Religion, and Religious Activity

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master—that's all."

—Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

IN "EDUCATION IS FUNCTIONALLY Religious" Professor Cox declares: *"The general misconception is that to be religious, education content must meet certain criteria, such as belief in a supreme being."* But what Professor Cox describes as a "misconception" is in fact correct. For an education to be religious, it does indeed have to meet certain criteria.

Let's check the *Oxford English Dictionary*—"the definitive record of the English language." What does it say "religious" means? The OED entry reads: *"Of, relating to, or concerned with religion."*

Now, let's look up "religion." Here the OED offers two pertinent meanings. The first is: *"Action or conduct indicating belief in, obedience to, and reverence for a god, gods, or similar superhuman power; the performance of religious rites or observances."* The second is: *"A particular system of faith and worship."*

These are the criteria that must be fulfilled to classify an education as "religious." It must encourage a particular system of faith and worship, involve religious rites or observances, and promote actions

or conduct indicating belief in, obedience to, and reverence for a god, gods, or similar superhuman power.

The OED also offers a third meaning of "religious" that bears mentioning only because Professor Cox makes much of it. It is: "*A pursuit, interest, or movement, followed with great devotion.*" In this sense one can demonstrate a religious devotion to baseball, or follow *Dancing with the Stars* religiously. However, that is not the religion referred to in the Establishment Clause of the Constitution. Nor is it the religion focused on in *Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 U.S. 18 (1947), the landmark Supreme Court decision that forbids laws that aid religion generally, or levying taxes to support religious institutions or activities, or governmental participation in religious organizations.

Professor Cox asserts, "*Since formal education intentionally, though not necessarily avowedly, provides answers to religious questions, it is a religious activity.*" True believers regard many questions as religious because they place great reliance on religious authority. But other folks rely on different authorities, such as science or their own common sense.

Consider this question: "How did life on earth begin?" For true believers this is a religious question.¹ But for those who rely on the authority of science it is a scientific question. Plus it is a scientific activity for them to answer this question.

Come to think of it, even answering what most might regard as an obviously religious question need not be a religious activity. Consider this exchange: *Question, "Do you believe in God?" Answer, "Such metaphysical speculation is nonsense because no conceivable answer can be empirically verified."* Logical positivism informs this answer, and this particular school of philosophy is certainly not religious. Is formulating such an answer a religious activity? No, it is a philosophical activity.

Professor Cox offers wondrously capacious definitions of religious, religion, and religious activity. But the meanings he ascribes violate ordinary usage. These violations make it possible for him sell his otherwise unsellable program of action, which is nothing less than the destruction of public schooling.

Are his redefinitions a deliberate deception? No, I think Professor Cox honestly believes the meanings he assigns are accurate. But they are not.

Public schooling does involve the inculcation of values, as Professor Cox claims. (How could it not?) But encouraging kids to come to school on time, hang up their coats, not to speak when someone else is speaking, keep their place in line, and say “thank you” is in no wise equivalent to trying to convince them that Jesus Christ is the son of God and savior of the world, or that there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.

The truth of this becomes particularly evident when we consider the imposed religiosity that, in times past, really was a standard feature of U.S. public schooling. During my first year of teaching, for example, Pennsylvania law required me to daily lead my students in the Lord’s Prayer and read, without comment, three verses of the Bible. The state imposed this blatantly Christian exercise on everyone, whether they were Christians or not. (Kids who objected could ask to leave the room, but that was the rough equivalent of volunteering to wear a “Kick Me!” sign.)

Partway through the year that historic practice was brought to a skidding halt by *Abington School District v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963). That was when the Supreme Court decided, 8–1, that state-sponsored Bible reading in U.S. public schools was unconstitutional.²

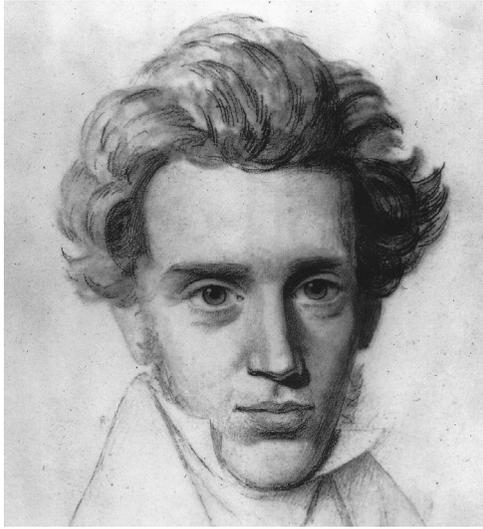
Note the stark difference between state-imposed Christianity and the non-sectarian socialization that Professor Cox claims to be religious. Such socialization is “religious” if and only if we accept his quite extraordinary redefinition. Stick to ordinary usage, and the charge he levels at public education evaporates like water on a red-hot griddle.

Not only is Professor Cox in error, he has this thing exactly backward. Far from teaching sub-rosa religion, public schooling tiptoes around questions of value to avoid alienating key constituencies. That is what makes it so lifeless and boring. Tedious amorality, not sub-rosa religiosity, is the modus operandi of today’s public schools. And it can be nothing other.

—Gary K. Clabaugh

Notes

1. A multitude of questions becomes religious if one is a true believer.
2. The Americans who think that this decision turned the nation’s face away from God will find Professor Cox’s argument particularly congenial.



Kierkegaard: Existential Philosophy as Educational Philosophy

by Risa Della Rocca, Michael Foley, and Colin Kenny

SØREN KIERKEGAARD (1813–1855)—A DANISH philosopher and religious thinker who is widely regarded as one of the founders of present-day existentialism. Unappreciated and scorned in his day, Kierkegaard's works have become a dynamic force in contemporary intellectual life. He insisted that man must find meaning within himself and for himself. While he did not write extensively on education, his philosophy is clearly at odds with the direction and intent of contemporary school reform. His views may be entirely mistaken, but to the extent that they are correct, they provide a stinging condemnation of most of the changes imposed since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*.

What Is a Proper Education?

For Søren Kierkegaard, schooling must be individualized, rooted in experience, and essentially spiritual. The result should be the discovery of "a mode of existing in the world, that has to be practiced at each instant, and the goal of which is to transform the whole of the individual's life" (Gary, 2007, p. 151).

Education focused on knowledge and critical thinking typically assumes that if one knows and can critically appraise an ethical ideal or rational course of action, then he or she can freely live it. Kierkegaard, however, emphasizes the qualitative leap between knowing and willing and stresses "ethical truth is only true when it actually is appropriated or lived" (p. 151).

What Is Knowledge?

Kierkegaard postulates that purely objective truth is unattainable. In fact, much of his work suggests that he does not believe in objective certainty at all. That is why he dismisses the aspect of liberal education that tries to search for, know, and teach such truths. He recognizes the declarative knowledge that is available in science and mathematics (objectivity) but focuses on the deeper knowledge that grows out of one's own feelings and experiences (subjectivity) (Evans, 1998, p. 164). Kierkegaard repeatedly refers to doubt, and how it immediately comes into play whenever we absorb any sort of sensory information (Kierkegaard, 2000, p. 222). Evans (1998) explains that, for Kierkegaard, there is always some form of doubt involved in the acceptance of knowledge outside the self. Therefore, no information from the outside world can be accepted as an absolute given (pp. 169–170). Kierkegaard argues that the central issue is how a person internalizes, interprets, and accepts those "facts" for himself (Kierkegaard, 2000, p. 206). He has little faith in objective knowledge—the sort of learning that high stakes tests measure.

Kierkegaard's focus on subjectivity as the only true knowledge complements his emphasis on faith and belief. For him, belief and knowledge are inextricably intertwined, and no true knowledge can come without a leap of faith. In fact, a person cannot even gather information from the outside world without some sort of faith or belief (Evans, 1998, p. 165). That is why Kierkegaard's definition of knowledge includes introspection and the willingness to believe in things that cannot be objectively proven.

There is another dimension to Kierkegaard's definition. Mooney (2007) describes how intimacy fits into Kierkegaard's definition of true knowledge. The moment a person comes across what appears to be objective knowledge, he begins to create personal connections to it. One cannot really know something without it having touched that person on a personal, internal level (pp. 82–83). Therefore, even the objective can be considered true knowledge only after one has created an intimate, subjective bond with it.

The implications of that claim for education are many. For one, it provides support for the constructivist approach to instruction. For another, it raises fundamental questions about the priorities of present-day school reformers.

What Should Be Learned?

Kierkegaard thinks it unwise for educators to provide students with answers. He thinks it far better to keep them in a state of disequilibrium that encourages personal choice. For education to be adequate, it has to encourage the kind of choices that help an individual become fully human—the “choice of oneself.” That process, according to Emmet (1941), begins in the dread that accompanies the realization that one is responsible for oneself, of “one's existence over against the crowd” (p. 261).

For Kierkegaard the self is both finite and infinite. It is finite in the sense that an individual is bound by the physical constraints of his or her body, environment, and society. It also is finite in that it is bound by its “facticity,” or natural state. At the same time, the “self” is infinite in terms of “possibility.” What one can imagine, within the constraints of one's reality, one can become (Elrod, 1973, p. 225).

For Kierkegaard, the central task of life is choosing oneself by means of critical self-reflection and self-conscious choice. Thus the central purpose of learning is the discovery of the “self” that arises out of “the freedom of being self defining” (Walters, 2008, p. 116). So educators should focus on helping each individual grow into full personhood. A proper education facilitates the process of becoming fully human, although that process itself is “a way of life [that] involves a deep, personal and internal transformation” (Gary, 2007, p. 152).

To Kierkegaard a “human being” begins life “essentially irresponsible” (Emmet, 1941, p. 260) in the sense that an infant neither has, nor desires, control over his or her environment or fate nor really makes choices. And Kierkegaard thinks it is quite possible to go

through one's entire life in this state—capable of seeing and appreciating the nature of one's surroundings, but without ever making the choices that determine one's own fate. According to Stack (1973), ". . . one can refuse to seek self-knowledge . . . [b]ut the life of such a being is not the life of a person nor of an authentically existing individual" (p. 109).

Becoming a Person

Kierkegaard recognizes that human beings are products of, and bound by, the environments in which they exist. They are "natural" creatures that "emerge out of natural processes" and are "dependent upon a natural world." However, individuals are "not so immersed in nature" that they are free from making decisions (Stack, 1973, p. 110).

Individuals represent a "synthesis" of necessity (determined by one's environmental and societal surroundings) and possibility (limited only by one's own imagination) (p. 117). To be human is to become, or at least to strive to become, an actualized individual who is self-conscious, self-critical, and self-determined (p. 125). However, "it is by no means necessary, or inevitable, that one becomes a person or an integral self" (p. 115). And "not to choose ourselves . . . is a passive yielding of our life to a necessity that makes personal self-existence impossible" (p. 111). It follows that any education that limits or discourages such choosing is fundamentally flawed.

For many contemporary school reformers the human being is an individual conforming to others' expectations. For Kierkegaard, the human *being* is the human *choosing* and the human *becoming* as he forms his own expectations. It is "the act by which an individual may become a person" (Stack, 1973, p. 112).

An individual who can see, or imagine, all the possibilities of his own future is liberated to pursue those possibilities. And it is the proper function of education to expand that vision and imagination.

The Weaker Sex?

Kierkegaard's view of women is relevant here. He considers females inferior to males. He reasons that since woman (Eve) was derived from man (Adam), they have a weaker connection to the spiritual world (Howe, 1997, pp. 227–228). That links back to the concepts of possibility and opportunity. Howe (1997) explains, "What we have here, then, is a fairly consistent identification of woman with

the physical or natural (including instinct), and of man with spirit or reflection (consciousness)" (p. 228). Consequently, Kierkegaard argues, only males require true opportunity, and even then only some are capable of acting on it.

What Should Be Taught

For Kierkegaard, ". . . the main duty of a teacher is not . . . providing facts or delivering a lecture" (Walters, 2008, p. 112). Learning is far more than just the understanding of facts as they are presented. That is due, in part, to the Kierkegaardian principle that "human existence is a mode of being in which subjectivity is the truth and . . . such truth cannot be communicated directly" (Broudy, 1961, p. 225). What is more, Kierkegaard thinks that every person can understand things only from his or her own perspective. Of course, there are certain fields for which that is less true. In mathematics, for example, evidence supports the so-called "golden ratio." But learning always has a subjective aspect, even when it comes to "objective truths."

Kierkegaard contends that while "objective" knowledge is worth knowing, attempts to transmit it can be counterproductive because it encourages the agent to remain static. Choice, on the other hand, helps the learner construct him or herself. And for Kierkegaard, the most important form of learning is that which contributes to one's understanding and definition of oneself. Such transformative learning requires "life experience, critical reflection, and personal development" (Walters, 2008, p. 113).

Education should aid the transformative process by encouraging individuals to participate collaboratively so they gain a richer understanding of not only the subjects they might study, but also of themselves. To enable that, education "must offer more than 'instruction' and more than the mere offering of facts" (Walters, 2008, p. 114). Educators must recognize the non-negotiable importance of the individual and accommodate their subjectivity relative to the lesson being presented.

In that regard, Kierkegaard finds great promise in democracy, because it provides the possibility of "developing each person into a full and responsible individual" Kirmmse (1998, p. 17). However, relationships with other individuals are helpful only so long as either "self" is not lost.

For Kierkegaard, "the active sharing of views between learner and facilitator and between learner and learner is the path to knowledge"

(Walters, 2008, p. 113). But learners must feel safe and secure, so that they are able not only to explore the material but also to feel comfortable enough to make choices that contribute to a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the self (p. 113).

To enable transformative learning, "education must offer more than 'instruction,' and more than the mere offering of facts" (Walters, 2008, p. 114). Educators must recognize the absolute importance of the individual and appreciate their subjectivity relative to the lesson that is being presented.

Who Is Responsible for Learning?

Growth comes only about when an individual notes the possibility for change and then acts, but there are many individuals who, even when noticing the potential for change, will not act upon it.

Contemporary school reformers place the bulk of the responsibility for learning on educators. Kierkegaard would disagree. For him a key barrier to learning and growth is the individual's own laziness or fear of change. Additionally, Kierkegaard views a large portion of the human population as either incapable or limited in their deliberation and self-reflection (Stack, 1973, p. 111).

The Role of Faith

In the final analysis, Kierkegaard's views are intricately connected to his own Christian faith—with regard to the existential development of self, for example, "One is on his own, but there is an authority which must be obeyed" (Sontag, 1979, p. 144). That authority is God.

Kierkegaard maintains that the search for truth ultimately leads the individual to a relationship with God. While the interpretation of life is entirely an individual responsibility, in the end, God is there as an authority to keep mankind connected. As Sontag (1979) states, "[T]here is a norm to conform to—if we can find it" (p. 144).

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It might seem that the United States has already addressed the teacher quality issue. The No Child Left Behind law requires every state to hire only “highly qualified teachers,” but the meaning of “highly qualified” was shrewdly left up to the states. And to avoid the expense and other difficulties associated with actually upgrading the teaching force, most states concocted weak definitions.

California, for instance, allows aspiring teachers to earn a preliminary credential—called an intern certificate—at night and on weekends while theoretically learning to teach in a full-time paid position. The interns begin experimenting on students after the equivalent of just five weeks of training, under the dubious guidance of “lead teachers.”² The guidance is dubious because the novices themselves can become “lead teachers” after completing just 120 hours of pre-service training—the equivalent of fifteen days.

Are there enough of these interns to really matter? Last year they constituted almost one-quarter of California’s new teachers.

California’s stated goal in adopting quickie certification is “diversifying the workforce and meeting the need for math, science and special education teachers by appealing to local residents and mid-career professional who can’t afford to go a year without earning a salary.”³ A more honest explanation would read something like: “Given present pay and working conditions, we can’t find enough math, science and special education teachers, so we are willing to have inadequately trained people practice on impoverished children in hopes they will, in some measure, fill the gap.”

How can rank beginners possibly be classified as “highly qualified”? That miracle, akin to the Biblical loaves and fishes, was accomplished by an act of Congress. In late 2010 that majestic body approved legislation defining novices still in training as “highly qualified” under the No Child Left Behind law. A federal appeals court found that preposterous action bogus (*Renee v. Duncan*).⁴ But Congress, with support from the Education Department, attached riders to two appropriation bills circumventing the court’s ruling.⁵

Although President Obama claims to want the best possible teachers for America, he signed those riders into law. The president says, “America’s future depends on its teachers,” but he adds, “That is why we are creating new pathways to teaching and new incentives to bring teachers to schools where they are needed the most.”⁶ Those vaunted “new pathways” feature skimpily trained amateurs

trying to learn to teach by practicing on poverty-stricken children who already have enough problems.

Despite much research evidence to the contrary, the president seems to think that traditional teacher training makes little or no difference.⁷ Perhaps he has been influenced by the 2002 U.S. Secretary of Education's report titled "Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge."⁸ This influential Bush-era document asserts that teacher education and certification are unrelated to teacher effectiveness, that traditionally prepared teachers are academically weak, that verbal ability and subject matter knowledge are the most important components of teacher effectiveness, and that alternatively certified teachers are highly effective.

The Secretary of Education who presided over the creation of this report was Dr. Roderick Paige, a former Texas high school football coach and George W. Bush appointee who demonstrated his objectivity by calling the National Education Association a "terrorist organization." Paige rose to prominence as superintendent of the Houston public schools, where he presided over the so-called "Houston Miracle." It was thought to have produced greatly improved high stakes test scores until widespread cheating was discovered.⁹

The Department of Education's own standards require reliance on scientific research for policy formulation, but "Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge" cites a grand total of one peer-reviewed article and relies instead on a mixture of news stories and position papers from conservative advocacy groups.¹⁰ After conducting an exhaustive review of this report, Linda Darling-Hammond and Peter Youngs concluded that its results are "fictionalized" and "not supported by scientifically based research."¹¹ As a matter of fact, the report gets things exactly wrong. Research demonstrates that traditional teacher preparation is at least as important as verbal ability and content knowledge for teacher effectiveness. Moreover, traditionally trained teachers think they were reasonably well prepared, while recruits who "skirted the core features of teacher preparation" find they were underprepared. Also, principals find alternatively trained teachers are less competent and less effective with students, with a higher rate of attrition.¹²

Instead of making entry into teaching easier, it should be made more difficult. Let's look at a nation that did just that. Finland, troubled by mediocre schooling in the 1980s, instituted rigorous, highly selective, tuition-free, graduate-level teacher preparation. In the

ensuing years new teachers' test scores zoomed from mid-pack to superior. Meanwhile, America's scores remained mired in mediocrity as our "reformers" moved in the exact opposite direction.

Failing to improve relatively weak undergraduate teacher education programs or to stop their being milked as cash cows by revenue-hungry colleges and universities, our reformers encouraged lax, low-effort, "alternative routes" into teaching—plus, by disrespecting and disempowering teachers, they have been transforming a career in education into a third-rate occupation.

We should emulate Finland. More than a million teachers will retire over the next ten years, a development that presents an unprecedented opportunity to upgrade the nation's teaching force. Here, specifically, is what needs to be done:

- Eliminate all alternative certification. There should be no easy routes into teaching—if for no other reason than that children are precious and amateurs should not use them for practice.
- Phase out all undergraduate certification programs. Most of the youngsters in these weak-kneed programs lack the maturity, focus, and general education for professional training.
- Phase in teacher preparation in newly minted, two-year, post-graduate professional schools similar to those preparing individuals for occupations we actually respect. Existing undergraduate programs that do not, or cannot, upgrade could provide pre-professional instruction that prepares students to meet the professional schools' demanding entrance requirements.
- Provide full federal scholarships to all who meet the tough entrance requirements. That opens candidacy, regardless of income, to those who qualify and makes an unmistakable statement regarding the importance now assigned to teaching.
- Require those who complete such rigorous programs to contract to teach at least five years or pay back the scholarship.

Is there sufficient consensus in the United States to support such radical change? Probably not. We are a much more numerous, diverse, and divided nation than Finland. On the other hand, no attempt was made to develop a national consensus supporting our current reliance on high stakes tests or our single-minded focus on international competitiveness of the economic kind. They simply were imposed. So widespread agreement may not be crucial.

Of course, few will submit to truly rigorous teacher prep unless the payoffs match the pain. That raises the issue of teacher salaries. Would taxpayers be willing to pay three and one-half million public school teachers a salary commensurate with high-quality professional preparation? Perhaps they would not—but present pay and benefits might suffice *if* teacher preparation were fully subsidized *and* teachers were supported and respected instead of disempowered and bullied. Remember, America has a history of disdain for teachers. (“Those who can, do; those who can’t, teach.”) Replace those sneers with appreciation and respect, and material rewards might be less pertinent.

What would it cost to give every qualifying candidate a full scholarship? Let’s generously estimate the amount at \$100,000 per candidate—\$50,000 per year. That amount is similar to the tuition and fees of first-year medical students in private medical schools.¹³ Right now the United States requires some 240,000 new teachers per annum, primarily due, by the way, to skyscraper-high attrition.¹⁴ (In 2011, 46 percent of new teachers left the profession within five years at an estimated cost of \$7.3 billion annually.¹⁵) That rate would diminish if teacher prep required more commitment and teaching enjoyed higher status.

At a replacement rate of 240,000 per year, the proposed scholarships would cost about \$24 billion annually. Is that affordable? Consider this: *A Nation at Risk*, the pivotal 1983 report of Ronald Reagan’s National Commission on Excellence in Education, asserts: “If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. . . . We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament.”¹⁶

“War”? “Unilateral disarmament”? All right, let’s put our teacher-training expenditure in the context of national defense. The general outlay for defense in FY 2014 was \$648 billion.¹⁷ That doesn’t include veteran’s benefits or funding for the Department of Homeland Security. Then there is the \$1.5 trillion (yes, “trillion”) spent so far on our dubious wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁸ Twenty-four billion dollars for teacher professionalization is a mere pimple compared to those fiscal carbuncles.

Of course the United States can afford to professionalize teacher preparation. It isn’t a matter of finding the funds, but of finding the wisdom.

Naturally, we are not going to convince each of the fifty states to rewrite its teacher education statutes. The federal government could, instead, reemploy its successful Race to the Top strategy—offer a big sack of federal dollars to every state that adopts the professional school model of teacher education.

An abundant supply of students on full federal scholarships would also motivate colleges and universities to establish the requisite professional schools. Institutions now preparing teachers but not in a position to initiate professional schools could offer pre-education programs.

- Now let's discuss why this game-changing reform is unlikely: a change of that magnitude would send tremors through the entire educational system. Here are some areas in which problems might arise: Federal, state, and local officials would have to reconsider their top-down "reforms" and become more respectful and consultative.
- School boards, superintendents, and principals would have to relinquish some of their power and authority to self-confident, well-trained professionals.
- The present practice of running factory-like schools, with teachers acting as semi-skilled labor, would have to be reconsidered.
- Teacher union leaders would have to stop thinking organized labor and start thinking organized profession.
- College presidents, provosts, deans, and faculty would need to reevaluate their often exploitative and/or condescending view of teacher education.
- The more than one thousand undergraduate programs currently preparing teachers would face major change or dissolution.
- The current veteran teaching force would have to come to terms with a new breed of teachers.
- School districts serving impoverished children could no longer depend on a supply of alternatively certified cannon fodder.

None of those eventualities are bad in themselves. In fact, most are highly beneficial. But expect significant opposition when so many vested interests are threatened.

There is one more thing to consider. Excellent schools generally require first-rate teachers. (Try imagining a first-rate school with

lousy teachers.) But outstanding teachers are never sufficient. Positive school outcomes are the consequence of many factors, some of which are beyond educators' control: sufficient funding; adequately sized and passably maintained school buildings; sufficient and up-to-date text books and electronic learning aids; adequate support services; the absence of gangs that usurp adult authority and turn neighborhoods into battle zones; the absence of poverty in the neighborhood served; and most important, the presence of loving, competent parent(s) who respect learning.

When all the factors influencing school outcomes are considered, it becomes obvious that low standardized test scores do not necessarily indicate "failing schools." Many schools charged with "failing" are doing the very best they can, given their circumstances.

Would-be school reformers typically minimize the critical importance of non-school elements—perhaps because they often are responsible for them. In fact, public school outcomes measure the nation's injustice and social problems in much the same way that a thermometer measures the severity of an infection. Right now, for instance, 22 percent of all American children live in families with incomes below the federal poverty line.¹⁹ Living in poverty devastates school achievement. An extensive body of research, for instance, demonstrates that poverty and its accompanying toxic stress actually stunt the development of children's brains.²⁰ In one such study, for example, Joan Luby of the Washington University School of Medicine found that poverty and toxic stress actually reduce the volume of a child's hippocampus—the part of the brain that plays a critical role in conscious recollection and detecting novel events, places, and stimuli.²¹

None of the above is meant to imply that educators never fail. But in the Alice in Wonderland world of many school reformers, it seems that no student is ever so abused, neglected, emotionally damaged, hungry, unloved, anxious, or angry that a competent teacher cannot bring them to grade level. In like manner, no school is ever so decrepit, underresourced, or undermined by disorder and decay in the surrounding community that the educational process is short-circuited. All of that is pure nonsense.

Reformers do not have similar expectations for more well-regarded occupations. Take medicine, for example. Worldwide, the United States ranks fifty-first in infant mortality (behind Cuba) and forty-eighth in maternal death (behind Iran).²² Despite those abysmal rankings, and many more like them, public officials do not accuse

physicians of failing, nor do they institute accountability measures or promote alternative routes into medicine. (Try to imagine a "Doctor for America"-style alternative route to become a physician.) Reformers realize that the rankings reflect not the competence of American physicians but the appalling conditions in the other America.

Despite the promise of the Finnish model, the smart money says America's school "reformers" will continue on their present course. The Finnish option threatens too many interests. Besides, even if it were adopted, serious school problems would remain. Pope Francis explains why: "As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world's problems or, for that matter, to any problems."²³

Notes

1. Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 22.
2. For a succinct summary of this evidence, see Linda Darling-Hammond and Peter Youngs, "Defining 'Highly Qualified Teachers': What Does 'Scientifically-Based Research' Actually Tell Us?" (*Educational Researcher*, Vol. 31, No. 9, Dec. 2002), 13-25.
3. California Alternative Route to Certification (Intern Programs), Commission on Teacher Credentialing, <http://www.ctc.ca.gov/educator-prep/intern/>
4. Kathryn Baron, Higher standards coming for state's intern teachers (Ed Source) <http://edsources.org/today/2013/higher-standards-coming-for-states-intern-teachers/28143-.UsCNDv1VNiY>
5. United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, No. 08-1661, D.C. No. 3:07-CV-04299-PJH, Order and Opinion, <http://cdn.ca9.uscourts.gov/datastore/opinions/2010/09/27/08-16661.pdf>
6. Jane E. West, "Possible New Teacher Preparation Regulations and the Definition of 'Highly Qualified Teacher,'" https://www.osep-meeting.org/2012conf/largergroup/Tues_SpecialEducationPerspectives/West.htm
7. President Barack Obama Remarks to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, March 10, 2009.
8. Darling-Hammond and Young, "Defining 'Highly Qualified Teachers,'" 13.
9. As Secretary of Education, Paige helped develop the No Child Left Behind Law.

10. "Rod Paige," from Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rod_Paige
11. For a rigorous, scientifically based critique of this report see Darling-Hammond and Young, "Defining 'Highly Qualified Teachers.'"
12. Ibid, 23.
13. Idem.
14. AAMC, Tuition and Student Fees Reports 2012–2013, https://services.aamc.org/tsfreports/report.cfm?select_control=PRI&year_of_study=2013
15. "Predicting the Need for Newly Hired Teachers in the United States," <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs99/1999026.pdf>
16. "High Teacher Turnover Rates Are a Big Problem for America's Public Schools," *Forbes*, March 8, 2011, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/erikkain/2011/03/08/high-teacher-turnover-rates-are-a-big-problem-for-america-public-schools/>
17. <http://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>
18. National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2014, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), May 2013, http://comptroller.defense.gov/defbudget/fy2014/FY14_Green_Book.pdf
19. "The War in Afghanistan: How Much Are You Paying?" http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/04/18/afghanistan-war-cost_n_850293.html
20. Child Poverty, National Center for Children in Poverty.
21. Caroline Cassels, "Childhood Poverty Linked to Poor Brain Development," *Medscape Medical News—Psychiatry*, <http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/813470>
22. Hippocampus Functions, *Medical News*, <http://www.news-medical.net/health/Hippocampus-Functions.aspx>
23. *The World Factbook*, United States Central Intelligence Agency, 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>
24. Apostolic Exhortation: "'Evangelii Gaudium' of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World," para. 202 (emphasis mine), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.html - [The_economy_and_the_distribution_of_income](#)

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theory and research to question Lemov's approach and attempts to reveal why his "cult of efficiency" perspective can mislead teachers.

Key words: appreciation of literature, comprehension, direct reading instruction, extensive reading, free reading, intensive reading, literature circles, novel groups, reading instruction

THE PUSH TO ADOPT the Common Core State Standards and implement more rigorous high-stakes testing has established a "cult of efficiency" model that favors leaders with a business background—such as Doug Lemov, a charter school director who earned his M.B.A. from Harvard University. Lemov has been described as a "successful teacher, principal, and charter school founder" (Green, 2010, p. 1); the *New York Times Magazine* online (March 2010) featured "Building a Better Teacher," focusing on Lemov's nationwide observations of successful teachers; and Lemov's book, *Teach Like a Champion: 49 Techniques That Put Students on the Path to College*, is poised to impact education as teacher quality, Common Core Standards, and the charter school movement take center stage.

Teach Like a Champion is basically a teacher's manual for all educators. The book is divided into two parts: Part One describes the actual forty-nine techniques for becoming a teaching champion, and Part Two addresses the challenges of reading instruction. Part One is rich in practical approaches to many problems common to new teachers. Experienced teachers can gain insights into breaking unproductive habits, as well as pick up fresh ideas for the new school year. The strategies in Part One of *Teach Like a Champion* are sufficiently comprehensive that many introductory education classes have adopted it as a textbook.

However, Lemov's lack of attention to theory and research in Part Two, "Helping Students Get the Most Out of Reading: Critical Skills and Techniques," concerns me. The author challenges several proven methods of reading instruction but mentions no research that supports his assertions. His disregard for the text-to-self connection separates comprehension from engagement, which in turn diminishes established, effective reading approaches such as book clubs, individualized reading programs, and free reading. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which have been quickly adopted by forty-five states and the District of Columbia, emphasize close, analytical reading of texts: unsurprisingly, Capitol Hill decision-makers listen to voices like Lemov's that advocate a purely intensive reading approach. It is therefore important to challenge Lemov's "cult of efficiency" and thus, perhaps, familiarize Washington, D.C., with the best findings on the subject.

Where Lemov Goes Wrong

Lemov's most questionable theory on reading instruction concerns text connections, since that philosophy provides the foundation for his misconceptions about teaching reading. Lemov (2010), examining the differences between text-to-self and text-to-text connections, claims,

The connections students are most likely to make ("Hey, this is just like something that happened to my family!") are least rigorous and least useful to engendering long-term reading comprehension. ("Hey, this is just like the introduction to the other book we read," is probably a more useful connection in the long term than is a text-to-self connection.) (p. 304)

Simply considering what you enjoy reading might refute the idea that text-to-self connections are "least useful" to long-term reading comprehension (Lemov, 2010, p. 304). The books we read most intensely are those that connect to our lives directly. We do not read more voraciously because we make connections to other books we have read: on the contrary, we search for meaning in the words so we can make sense of our lives. A text-to-self connection can be as simple as reading about the applications on your new phone or discovering the effects of chemotherapy treatment. If the text connects strongly to your life, to your "self," your attempt to comprehend it will be at its peak. That kind of reading requires you to hone your comprehension skills, such as looking up crucial technical terms for your iPhone.

Dismissing the text-to-self connection or trivializing it disregards a student-centered approach to teaching. Comprehension suffers when a text holds no authentic connection to the reader. Louise Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration*, written in 1938 and now in its fifth edition, strongly argues for the importance of text-to-self. In the chapter titled "The Literary Experience," Rosenblatt (1995) discusses how a student derives meaning from a text:

The literary work exists in the live circuit set up between reader and text: the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meanings into the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings. . . . It is easy to observe how the beginning reader draws on past experience of life and language to elicit meaning from the printed words, and it is possible to see how through these words he reorganizes past experiences to attain new understanding. (pp. 24–25)

Merely thinking about a book that changed your perspective on a topic can prove the efficacy of Rosenblatt's transactional theory. And diminishing the connection made by the reader only lessens the effectiveness of the teaching. Rosenblatt shows how that mistake can be avoided:

The teacher of literature, then, seeks to help specific human beings discover the satisfactions of literature. Teaching becomes a matter of improving the individual's capacity to evoke meaning from the text by leading him to reflect self-critically on this process. The starting point for growth must be each individual's efforts to marshal his resources in relation to the printed page. The teacher's task is to foster fruitful interactions—or, more precisely, transactions—between individual readers and individual literary texts. (p. 26)

Lemov (2010) would have you believe that a connection to self is not as "fruitful" as a text-to-text connection; however, text-to-text is impossible without meaningful self-connection, where we all start. By stipulating which texts should be taught, Lemov disregards effective teaching practices that encourage meaningful reading experiences—the "fruitful interactions" that instill a lifelong love of reading. If you dislike most of what you read, why keep reading?

Lemov continues to place personal connections to texts in a bad light by stating,

Connections aren't inherently valuable; only good connections are. A good connection serves to help readers understand something about the text, not the thing connected to—in most cases, having the discipline to use the world to understand the text rather than the text to understand the world. (p. 304)

Again, simply recalling how the last book you read better revealed the world around you refutes Lemov's claim. If that is not enough, Rosenblatt (1995) provides a much clearer perspective on text connections in *Literature as Exploration*. She rejects Lemov's definition of a "good connection":

The students value literature as a means of enlarging their knowledge of the world, because through literature they acquire not so much additional *information* as additional *experience*. New understanding is conveyed to them dynamically and personally. Literature provides a *living through*, not simply *knowledge about*: not the fact that lovers have died young and fair, but a living through of *Romeo and Juliet*; not theories about Rome, but a living through of the conflicts in *Julius Caesar* or the paradoxes of *Caesar and Cleopatra*. (p. 38)

I would never have learned about the Vietnam War had it not been for an author named Tim O'Brien. I have no experience of war, nor have I ever visited Vietnam. But thanks to *The Things They Carried*, I can understand how war impacts the human spirit and envision the harsh jungles surrounding the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Vietnam War literature takes me as close to *living through* the war as possible without actually participating.

Lemov's perspective on text-to-self connections underlies his other ideas about reading. He asserts that "it's also important to note that making a student want to read a book and ensuring that they comprehend it are different issues" (Lemov, 2010, pp. 300–301). From a research perspective, Lemov's stance on "different issues" is understandable. However, research and presenting reading techniques to teachers are mutually exclusive activities. Children try hardest to comprehend books with which they are most engaged. Comprehension and engagement are interwoven, working synergistically to improve one another and keep the reader reading. Should teachers stress comprehension strategies, lessons that students may not necessarily find enjoyable? Yes. Students need exposure to the material they will see on the SAT, for instance, and some of the more difficult material can make reading laborious without personal connections.

I am not claiming that reading instruction should be all fun and games and free reading of high-interest texts; rather, I believe that students engaged in what they are reading will adopt comprehension strategies most fully. We cannot forget that engagement improves comprehension, and by separating the two, Lemov denies the teacher the strategies that best improve comprehension.

Proof That Lemov Is Wrong

The connection between engagement and improved reading comprehension is well-documented. Many landmark studies demonstrate that extensive reading and high interest improve reading comprehension (Appleby, 1967; Krashen, 2004; LaBrant and Heller, 1939; Norvell, 1941; Willis, 1961). Curiously, Lemov claims that DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) "fails the accountability test. As a result, the rate of return on this activity may be low"; i.e., the teacher may be unable to "Control the Game" (Lemov, 2010, pp. 255–257). A low "rate of return" occurs, however, only when free reading is implemented poorly—and teachers can indeed "Control the Game" with an extensive array of widely available resources. Some examples are Donalyn Miller's *The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child* (2009), which describes an individualized reading program that utilizes forty books a year, and two works by Teri Lesesne: *Making the Match* (2003) and *Reading Ladders* (2010).

Perhaps most ironic, throughout *Teach Like a Champion* Lemov unknowingly endorses extensive reading strategies. Citing the writings of Ernest Gaines, an admirer of Greek tragedies and Russian writers, Lemov warns against creating a literary diet for students based solely on the students' culture (Lemov, 2010, p. 53):

But imagine the loss not just to Gaines but to all of us if the teacher who first put Turgenev in his hands and inspired the spark of genius to grow into a flame had looked at the color of his skin, assumed that Gaines wouldn't find interest in anything so foreign, and thought better of Turgenev. (p. 54)

Yes—what better way to open up reading choices than through extensive methods such as individual reading or novel groups? Yet Lemov proceeds to cite *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Hirsch, 1987), a restrictively oriented work that omits Turgenev from "what every American needs to know." No Turgenev, no inspiration for Ernest Gaines—and we might have lost what Lemov himself calls "the most highly acclaimed novels of the twentieth century,

including *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, *A Lesson Before Dying*, and *A Gathering of Old Men*" (Lemov, 2010, p. 53).

Lemov not only criticizes extensive reading approaches based on the free reading model, but he also refuses to address the extensive reading strategies that might align with his idea of "Control the Game." In the 1920s, Nancy Coryell conducted the first English education study, an attempt to determine the effectiveness of assigning additional reading versus assigning fewer works with additional guided instruction (Bernard, 1981). Coryell (1927) concluded that an extensive approach is as effective or superior in all areas of comprehension and appreciation of literature. Most impressively, students prefer the extensive-reading method, even if they must read six times more literature (Coryell, 1927, pp. 40–42). Several studies have corroborated Coryell's work (Dean, 1933; Manicoff, 1939; McConn, 2012; Williams, 1929).

Conclusion

Let's not forget Lemov's successes, though. He points out that Uncommon Schools, the charter school system of which he is the founder and director, recorded the highest percentage of success on the 2009 New York State 3–8 Grade English Language Arts Exam (Lemov, 2010, p. 21). Are those high scores the result of a purely intensive approach to reading? The causal relationship between that approach and his schools' reading scores is not quite so obvious. For one thing, in Lemov's schools students or their parents have accepted an invitation to learning. That acceptance itself removes the greatest hurdle between failure and success in school. No doubt, the characteristics of Lemov's charter schools—uniforms, longer school days, summer programs, teacher accountability, signed parent-student agreements, and high expectations—are all part of what constitutes a successful school. Regardless, the relationship between successful reading scores and the intensive or close reading method is not established by research.

The current system of education, including Common Core standards and high-stakes testing, is predicated on a "cult of efficiency" model, to use the phrase coined by Raymond Callahan (1962). That model does not allow for a personalized curriculum; rather, it treats all students as if they will grow up with similar interests. It predicates that all students begin their college careers upon entering kindergarten—a patent overgeneralization. Teachers cannot enhance students'

differing backgrounds and abilities if they are always teaching the same book to the entire class. They need the help of authors who can speak to children in a shared language, one that is personalized and unlikely that the entire class will find in a single text.

The "cult of efficiency" climate increasingly places reformers with business degrees as the putative saviors of the nation's schools. Yet at best, Lemov's failure to integrate intensive and extensive reading methods is erroneous; at its worst, it confuses the ideologies of classrooms and blocks the past century's progress in implementing extensive reading methods. Lemov's discussion of reading instruction, employing words like "hurdle rate," "investment," "efficiency," and "rate of return," better resembles BP's approach to drilling in the Gulf of Mexico than guiding children to become better readers. Although efficiency and productivity are issues educators must address, they cannot be driven by profit margins that show only short-term gains. Schools are not businesses. If we conflate the two, then inadequate reading instruction will pollute our nation's classrooms much like the oil in Louisiana's coastal grasslands.

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in particular, made me feel like his compadre rather than the squirt I was. After all, I was wielding an actual red teacher's pen and telling high school kids that they got an answer wrong! It was a heady job, for sure, instilling self-confidence I didn't know I was craving. I thought the trust in me that my father showed meant I was smart—as smart as the teenagers he taught—or why else would he let me correct their papers? Of course now, as a veteran teacher, I finally know the truth: he let me correct those papers because they were the types of assessments that were unimportant to him—the dry record of memorized facts and good guesses.

What really excited Dad as a person and a teacher was playing devil's advocate and provoking dissent. At home, we were on our toes, making sure we had reasonable explanations for our digressions from our mother's house rules. At school, my father's students left sweating, angry, impassioned, and curious enough to try to prove him wrong. That was when the real learning took place. It was his easy way of seeing who was a thinker and who was a follower, who had a moral code and who hadn't given their life or their world a single thought. That was how he helped to form adults from rough, hormonal, selfish clay. Creating thinking, questioning, critical, and responsible citizens was his goal; instilling self-confidence in the meek and exposing the timid to the wonders of argument were the byproducts. He was *in pursuit of truth and beauty*, as he put it.

The idea that schools and teachers have hidden curricula is not shocking or new (Freire, 1968/1970/2000; Kincheloe, 2008; Giroux and Penna, 1983; McLaren, 2006; and others). The opinions and personalities of individuals help shape their teaching styles; they are the very things that probably made you bond to one teacher and tune out another. When people's personalities and expectations don't match our own, we may feel frustrated and angry.

What we do with that anger and frustration depends on our view of dissent as either a starting point for discussion or as a stalemate. The founders of the United States created this particular democratic government out of dissent, debate, and discussion. The amendments to the Constitution prove that more discussion and dissent are healthy ways to move toward a higher ground—and that we don't always get it right the first time. In public education, however, the adoption of an almost-national core curriculum, coupled with standardized assessments measuring miles of minutiae, has all but eliminated the chance to search for complex answers.

What's happened to the pursuit of truth and beauty, dissent in the classroom, contextualization of the daily schooling experience, and valuing important questions and processes of learning over "right" answers that even a machine can grade? (Forget little kids with red pens!) In the pursuit of an excellent education and college and career readiness, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010) have abdicated responsibility for teaching toward democracy in at least three ways:

1. By building the CCSS framework on "the critical use of literacy" (reasoning) instead of on a critical framework;
2. By purposely choosing goals and language that are exclusionary and that strengthen inequities; and
3. By not planning for those most marginalized by language, ability, and poverty

I'll stop here only to mention that former avenues for civic engagement, dissent, and lessons about the workings of a democracy have all but been eradicated, with support for social studies and civics education dwindling toward oblivion.

Can democracy flourish in countries that have established a national (or almost national) curriculum? I presented findings on this very topic at the International Organization for Social Sciences and Behavioral Research Conference in April 2013. My presentation (Author, 2013) examined the research of the past ten years coming from three democratic countries with a national (or virtually national) curriculum. Although resources exist for proponents of critical teaching in America (Rethinking Schools, Teaching Tolerance, etc.), the scope and sequence of the Common Core State Standards severely limits opportunities for teachers to engage in prolonged activity with unpredictable returns. In contrast, empirical evidence suggests countries such as Australia that adopt a national curriculum based on a *critical literacy understanding* are likely to produce many more opportunities for students to pursue civic engagement and democratic ideals through schooling (Author, 2013).

By a "critical literacy understanding," I mean a belief that language in all forms is situated: that is, it is tied to the individuals interacting with it—contextual, fluid, and possessing multiple interpretations. A critical literacy understanding can be Freirean (assuming there is an agenda that should be upended in the interest of social justice) or Australian (which does not assume an agenda, but does

recognize multiple readings of text) and still bring positive results in the way of a transformative, passionate, sweaty education. That is where encouraging a forum for dissent comes in handy for finding all truths and deciding the merits of what we consider beautiful. A red pen may still be useful for offering student guidance if you are willing to respond to the meaning students convey and open doors to other options for thinking about the problem at hand. Unfortunately, computer grading won't cut it here—with a democratic education, expect the answers to be complex, debatable, and not easily cornered.

Although our Common Core State Standards strive to offer a complex and "rigorous" education to all children, the program is identical in mandates from state to state (forty-five states total), making it the most undemocratic national initiative I've seen in my lifetime. Because of its inflexibility and lack of grounding in communal and student context—and with teachers having to implement pre-made "modules"—many students are "left behind" when they can't keep up, must communicate by alternative means (ASL, Braille, Dragon Speak, etc.), or lack the cultural context and experiences necessary to understand word problems. The poor, otherly abled, and already-marginalized in-school communities suffer the most.

Though years of federally subsidized initiatives sought to bring quality education to *all* people, the end game of the CCSS is not to eradicate poverty or provide access to education and the job market, but to weed out early those who can't, according to these guidelines, "compete."

Previous federal initiatives had features built in to guarantee that at least some democracy was preserved. Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA, P.L. 89-10, 1965), the Improving American Schools Act of 1994 (IASA), the We the People Initiative (NEH, 2002), and the College and Career Readiness standards (NHSC, 2009) all had features that helped preserve their democratic nature. The War on Poverty developed as a way to attack poverty specifically through education—without penalty or much government intrusion. Funds were allocated specifically for textbooks, more teachers, safer, better facilities, and targeted programs (eventually, Title I money) for every school that fell within the bounds of poverty. However, it was left to the districts and schools to figure out exactly what was needed to help the poor in those areas. Decision-making was localized and contextual, decided by the people, for the people. The Elementary

and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965) also expressly forbade the formation of a one-size-fits-all national curriculum.

The civics classes that began in the 1960s and experienced a resurgence in 2002 with *We the People* were intended to interest and inform children about our democracy, not to test them to death or penalize their teachers if they didn't become the hoped-for citizen test takers. The principles were guides—there if you wanted to use them or needed help finding documents to support your teaching. Even the College and Career Readiness Goals, Pathways, and Outcomes (NHSC, 2009), on which the Common Core State Standards are based, offered suggestions and information to teachers to fold into their curricular plans *if they chose*. Additionally, according to that document, the decision to assess students was left first to each high school, then the district, and finally the state (see NHSC, 2009, "Accountability and Improvement Feedback"). The College and Career Readiness Initiative also clearly indicated where the information originated: the authors surveyed some seventy businesses and organizations to generate a "needs" list, and high schools had that information. CCSS, conversely, has downplayed the significant role played by non-educational specialists (politicians and businesses) in the creation, implementation, and profit resulting from those mandates. Additionally, by ignoring dissenting teacher, student, and parent voices—particularly in terms of reform—the CCSS continues its move away from a democratic intent.

Granted, democracy can mean anything from civic education to patriotism to the desire to teach toward higher goals like freedom, equity, and social justice—depending on whom you ask and the political climate of the times. The democracy I'm talking about is the latter, with a general understanding that schooling should be transformative (self, community, and world), not just for transmission or transaction (Miller and Seller, 1985): the kind that fosters sweaty passion and a lifelong desire to learn—a pursuit of truth and beauty that makes us worthy of a democracy.

Now think about truth and beauty while considering the origins and purposes of the current standards:

As specified by CCSSO and NGA, the Standards are (1) research and evidence based, (2) aligned with college and work expectations, (3) rigorous, and (4) internationally benchmarked. A particular standard was included in the document only when the best available evidence indicated that

its mastery was essential for college and career readiness in a twenty-first-century, globally competitive society. (2010)

Terms such as "mastery learning" and "globally competitive" abound in the English Language Arts (ELA) CCSS, suggesting an aggressive and possibly exclusionary outlook. Qualities of "college and career ready" students, outlined in the ELA introduction (2012), focus on attributes that describe students as warriors, using words such as "strategically," "strong," "demand," "capable," "independent" (in this case meaning not needing help or "prompting"), and of course, "rigorous." These words might be seen by some to promote a language of aggression rather than care (Noddings, 2011); myopic thinking rather than attempts at a higher social goal (Dewey, 1938); and unfair and hegemonic positioning of students (Davies and Harre, 1990) that actually promotes and strengthens inequities.

That creates questions of intent regarding the CCSS paradigm and its notable disconnect from a democratic paradigm whose goals could have included working for freedoms, equities, and social justice. The CCSS is based on "the critical use of literacy," a.k.a. proficiency in the English language in order to use reasoning to figure out the "correct" meaning of a text, not a critical understanding of language and text.

It doesn't help that the "banking system" (Freire, 1998) has become the most efficient means of transmission for this type of education. That educational paradigm, bereft of spaces to explore civic responsibility, moral dilemmas, and a variety of ideas of real character, has been supplemented in many schools by something called "character education," which provides outside writers (such as Steven Covey) a direct opportunity for indoctrination, authoritarianism, and urging a common set of mores. As Tianlong Yu puts it in his must-read missive on the history of character education, *In the Name of Morality* (2004), handing kids an unyielding set of anything (strict standards, pre-determined moral codes, one-size-fits-all assessments) and squeezing out any spaces for multiple perspectives and critical narrative produces conformity, control, or the maintenance of the status quo. Even "the construction of virtues," Yu explains, "is always tied to privilege, power, and control" (p. 2). Democracy is about informed choice, dissent, and seeking higher goals. A critical literacy framework could help us address those undemocratic practices.

It's difficult to pursue democratic ideals through the guided practice of dissension or debate in most American classrooms today, or

to get the time to bring students individually from what they know to their highest ground, á lá Vygotsky's ZPD (Kozulin, 1990). The opportunities to channel raging teen hormones into a transformative passion for "truth and beauty," or to slow down long enough to teach all students well, have all but evaporated. Freedom, social justice, and equity have become vocabulary words on multiple-choice tests while the characteristics of diversity, personality, and creativity one associates with an engaging education have vacated the premises. Opportunities for civic engagement have been deemed too time-consuming, a nebulous use of a teacher's time that can't be placed on a schedule, won't yield predictable results, and defies a standard assessment. Public education in America, now based on a global marketing plan, is "smart" because it's efficient: uniform and "easy" to measure—the very qualities a child can be trusted to assess with her dad's red pen.

Last week, I joined an educational discussion on LinkedIn, a social network website for professionals. Somebody posed the question, "Are schools responsible for creating good citizens?" I couldn't resist responding. My answer felt like the beginning of an argument with my dad. Define "good"! Define "citizen"! However, the central issue for me is how a government based in democracy could come up with an almost-nationalized education that doesn't include much in the way of a democratic pedagogy. Considering that children spend most of their lives at the mercy of educational policy, it would behoove our policymakers to examine the effects of disengaging its citizens through a nationalized educational plan that is essentially devoid of democratic principles.

By training students to think there are always right and wrong answers, we strip them of the ability to see themselves as individuals and their neighbors' differing opinions as anything other than anger-inducing and incorrect. We are training them to develop the false confidence of ignorant children wielding great power with their daddy's red pen—or else dooming them to a sense of failure when all their answers are "wrong." Either way is bound to foment apathy, a quality that cannot possibly induce good citizenry for a democratic nation. That's the problem with taking democracy out of American public education, and the problem becomes an epidemic when the only option is an almost-nationalized curriculum that leaves little time for the pursuit of truth and beauty.

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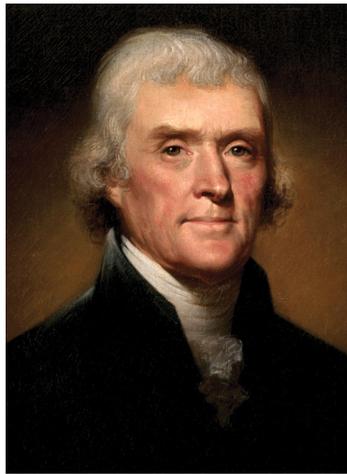
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INTERVIEW WITH **THE DEAD**

Thomas Jefferson



Jefferson, 1800

Interviewer: Thank you for consenting to this interview, Mr. President.

Jefferson: I should thank you. I have been incommunicado for 187 years as penance for failing to free my many slaves.

Interviewer: Incommunicado? Then you must not know that President Lincoln abolished slavery by proclamation during the Civil War.

Jefferson: Civil War!

Interviewer: Yes, the war erupted not thirty-five years after your death. It was primarily about slavery and it took the anti-slavery states four bloody years to defeat your native Virginia and the other slave states.

Jefferson: You say the President simply abolished slavery by proclamation?

Interviewer: Yes, President Lincoln issued an executive order proclaiming the freedom of slaves in the states that were in rebellion.

Jefferson: He can't just unilaterally do that. Such an action far exceeds presidential authority. What about Congress? What about the Constitution?

Interviewer: He issued the proclamation as a war measure. Two years and much maneuvering later, Congress voted to amend the Constitution. Then the necessary majority of states ultimately ratified it.

Jefferson: Were slave owners compensated?

Interviewer: No. But I have just been reminded that the rules for this interview are that it be confined to education.

Jefferson: Yes, of course. There is just there so much that I have missed. I suppose you know that I championed public education all my adult life. Only an enlightened people can support a democracy. That is why I championed universal education for free males in tax-supported schools.

Interviewer: I understand you wanted to use schooling to create a "natural American aristocracy."

Jefferson: Yes, I much prefer a natural aristocracy based on brains and hard work to a pseudo-aristocracy based on wealth. I envisioned a selection process in which every free child would receive three years of local free primary education. Families could pay for more. The academically talented few would move on to grammar schools free of charge. Parents willing and able to pay could also send their children. Then the best half of the grammar school class would have the opportunity to study free for three more years at university.

Interviewer: Did you imagine these people rising to positions of leadership in the democracy?

Jefferson: Absolutely. That was the point of the graduated system—to rake the geniuses from the rubbish.

Interviewer: Why do you think your idea failed?

Jefferson: It was ahead of its time. Although the Virginia legislature eventually approved my tax-supported university concept, it never funded basic public education.

Interviewer: Better that than nothing, right?

Jefferson: Yes, but their decision to raise the apex of the pyramid without the foundation was a big mistake. Elementary education is more important than university education. It is safer to have the entire male population enlightened than only a select few, as in Europe.

Interviewer: You mention schooling only the male population. Why?

Jefferson: Women should be confined to a more rarefied and less-contentious domain than men, and are properly excluded from public affairs. No effort need be made to educate them in any way that is not useful in their place as wives and mothers. Their interests should be chiefly housekeeping and childbearing.

Interviewer: Earlier you also said you championed public schooling for every free child. I assume that means you excluded slaves?

Jefferson: Yes, I did. In my experience, black people are in reason much inferior. I never knew of a black person capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid. But despite the imbecility of blacks and their general lack of foresight, I always favored their emancipation and thought such would eventually become a law in Virginia.

Interviewer: Imbecility and general lack of foresight?

Jefferson: Yes, indeed: for example, though they received blankets very thankfully on the commencement of winter at Monticello, when the warm weather returned they frequently cast them off, without any thought as to what might become of them, wherever they happened to be at the time, or lost them in the woods or fields from mere carelessness.

Interviewer: But records from Monticello show that you only allowed them a blanket every three years and your overseers often failed to deliver those.

Jefferson: Well, no person living wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a complete refutation of the doubts I myself entertain and express on the grade of understanding allotted blacks by nature.

Interviewer: But sir, you owned black men who learned to be skilled coopers, painters, smiths, glazers—even gourmet cooks. Some even built you carriages and made real your house designs. In fact it was you who pioneered in the industrialization and diversification of slavery with your gristmill, textile mill, nailery, coopering shop, tin-smithing operation, and so forth, and your estate at Monticello was utterly dependent on this black talent.

Jefferson: Yes, thank you for reminding me of the many instances of respectable intelligence in that race of men. But learning a trade is different from managing one's own life. In the 1770s, when the Quakers freed slaves, the experiment failed miserably and it soon became obvious that they had set free a parcel of lazy, worthless Negroes. Brought from their infancy without necessity for thought or forecast, Negroes are by their habits rendered as incapable of children of taking care of themselves and raising young. In the meantime they are pests in society by their idleness, and the depredations to which this leads them. The march of emancipation takes time. Just abandoning persons whose habits have been formed in slavery is like abandoning children.

Interviewer: That Quaker experiment you label a failure actually proved successful. What is more, while in Philadelphia, you must have observed its prosperous community of free black Americans who had clearly mastered literacy, marketable skills, and independent living. Perhaps your slaves simply were too valuable to be set free. Your own calculations reveal how financially essential slavery was for maintaining Monticello's profitability.

Jefferson: Well, I am still waiting to find a natural aristocrat among the men of this race. It is not their condition but nature which has made them inferior. They are equal to whites in memory, but in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous.

Interviewer: Do you recall, while you were secretary of state, receiving a lengthy letter and a complex almanac containing much astronomical data compiled by a free black man named Benjamin Banneker? In the letter he tried to persuade you to stop publishing statements about the alleged inferiority of blacks, made a persuasive case for there being only one human family, and scolded you and the other framers of the Declaration of Independence for hypocritically tolerating the "groaning captivity and cruel oppression" of his brethren.

Jefferson: Yes, I recall, and frankly I think Banneker had help in developing the astronomical calculation for that almanac. And so far as his letter is concerned, it shows him to have a mind of very common stature indeed.

Interviewer: All right, what about the hundreds of black children you owned, worked, used as collateral, and sold for profit over your lifetime? How were they educated?

Jefferson: Most of the boys worked at my forge learning to turn iron rods into nails.

Interviewer: Yes, your accounts report that the labor of the nail boys provided completely for the maintenance of your family.

Jefferson: It was a profitable enterprise.

Interviewer: Were the boys returned to their mothers at the end of the day?

Jefferson: No. Those who worked at the forge lived there. Initially I housed my slaves without regard for family ties. Later I allowed families to live together, but only until the children were put to work.

Interviewer: Was it difficult to teach children to forge nails?

Jefferson: Slaves of any age can often be a burden, and these boys were no exception. It took a stern hand to keep them in line. I recall my son-in-law complaining that the overseer was whipping the small ones. The ten-, eleven-, and twelve-year-olds did not take kindly to beginning work an hour before dawn, so the overseer whipped them for truancy.

Interviewer: When you learned of it, did you put a stop to these whippings?

Jefferson: I abhor that sort of thing. But some people require rigor of discipline to make them do reasonable work. Besides, the small ones had to be kept busy, and building their character required them to be policed. So far as the overseer is concerned, I could never find a man who fulfilled my purposes as well as that fellow. I recall him suggesting his pay be based on nail production, and when I agreed production soared.

Interviewer: Were the nail boys taught to read and write?

Jefferson: No, they were taught to forge nails. But the most diligent could expect to be trained as artisans and not to become common field slaves.

Interviewer: What about the slave girls you owned? What were they taught?

Jefferson: From ages ten to sixteen they learned to spin and weave; then most of them, the least skilled, would go into the ground.

Interviewer: When you were a young man you championed emancipation. But as your estate became more elaborate, your lifestyle more opulent, and your slaves more plentiful, your ardor for emancipation cooled. In fact, when you became secretary of state, vice president, and twice president of the United States, you not only failed to use your authority to end, or even weaken, slavery, you actually promoted its establishment in the newly acquired Louisiana Territory. Was there a connection between your dimming enthusiasm for emancipation and the increasing heft slavery gave your pocketbook?

Jefferson: No, not at all. I still favored emancipation, but realized that it had to be very gradual in order to lessen the shock, which an operation so fundamental could not fail to produce. Besides, American slaves were better fed and clothed than England's workers and labored less.

Interviewer: Throughout your lifetime you repeatedly expressed an abhorrence of race mixing. Yet Jeff Randolph, your grandson, reported that you had a parallel family living on the mountain. He also said you made no effort to conceal the resemblance between yourself and the slave children being brought up as house servants at Monticello.

Jefferson: This interview is supposed to be about education. I think we should bring it to a close.

Interviewer: Thank you, Mr. President.

Jefferson's actual statements were used in the construction of this "interview." While minor modifications were made to fit them to this format, his thoughts and sentiments remain intact. For a detailed treatment of Jefferson and his slaves see: Henry Wiencek, *Master of the Mountain: Thomas Jefferson and His Slaves*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York (2012). For extensive bibliographies on Thomas Jefferson, race, and slavery, see "Thomas Jefferson and Slavery," Monticello.org, The Thomas Jefferson Foundation.

*I never considered a
difference of opinion
in politics, in religion,
in philosophy, as cause
for withdrawing from
a friend.*

— Thomas Jefferson

