

The Passy Press

Letter to the Editor

From: jmcogswell@undisclosed.com

To: Nick Gardiner enpg@thepassypress.com

Date: September 27, 2014 1:05PM EST

Subject: Observations: John MacMurray's Essay on US Education

Dear Sir,

Despite the constraints of a 1,000-word limitation, Mr. MacMurray is commended for stating the national public education goal (doing those things which realize the “American dream” – preserving a free society – and dealing with other important issues: 50 years of decline and the need for citizens of character, teacher discretion, limited federal support for innovative methods, and universal public service).

One needs to keep in mind that for 300 years our educational system produced smart kids without SATs, data reports, formal teacher evaluation, Common Core, and so forth. We had smart teachers, mostly female. My first grade teacher in country school was a 17 year old high school graduate named Thelma Lee Larson.

Something happened about the same time women employment started rising. “Certificated” educators decided that what we needed was not good enough and started coming up with new ideas which, in the aggregate over the last 50 years, have resulted in our serious decline. Most of these ideas were union motivated to protect teachers rather than educate students.

The 1981 report, “A Nation at Risk”, commissioned by the Reagan administration, included the following:

If an unfriendly foregoing 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.

Unmentioned by Mr. MacMurray are numerous other issues relevant to educating our children to meet the stated goal in a manner that contributes to their happiness and insures the survival of a nation dedicated to self-rule, independence and creativity. However, regulation of each element of the education process will not improve education but bury it in a morass of bureaucratic red tape. Nevertheless, a proper resolution of relevant issues by qualified teachers and supporting school administrations will explain why Singapore, South Korea, Hong Kong and others make our education system look like a product of the hunter-gatherers.

Some of these issues are (1) the importance of **parenting**, dining at the dinner table, and discipline within the family, (2) the **false history** our children are taught, (3) education as a means of dealing with numerous **social problems** including classification of people based on intelligence to improve educators and education, filtering those who attend college and those who do not and educating unusually intelligent people to be leaders, (4) the importance of **emotional intelligence** (self-motivation, self-control, self-discipline, sensitivity to others – to name a few), (5) the pernicious consequences of tenured **pseudo-intellectual professors** who have preached for a social power to control economic power and in the process equipped their devotees with enough passion and ignorance to ruin the whole country (Patrick Moynihan said in the 1960s, “The elite intelligentsia of the country are turning against the country – in science, politics, in the foundation of patriotism.”), (6) the **cram down method** of education, a blessing when joined with stimulated curiosity (James Crichton, Samuel Johnson, John Stuart Mill, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Henry Adams, Ralph Waldo Emerson, to name a few), (7) education to think **outside the box** (e.g., how do we choose our rulers?), (8) educating **success** in terms of character versus intelligence in making money, (9) college **admissions** (should they be determined by lottery from a pool of the clearly qualified applicants), and (10) **single sex classrooms, diversity, and affirmative action.**

Most importantly, school boards should require a liberal education in an increasingly success-driven society. You have to unlearn to learn. (“Liberal education...seeks to free men and women from the tyrannies of unexamined opinions and inherited prejudices. It also endeavors to enable them to make intelligent, free choices concerning the ends and means of both public and private life.” Christopher B. Nelson, President, St. John’s College.) Teachers should be conscious of teaching balance in determining when governance is by the “few or the many”. (Harvey Mansfield, Harvard professor, “The great debate is a permanent feature of politics and will always continue; because there is reason in human nature to defend both the equality of all and the superiority of some, any settlement between them in the regime is open to challenge from partisans of the defeated side.”)

One thing is clear. After decades of alleged reform by well-intentioned persons, our education system is close to mutating our national goal unless prompt and decisive action is taken. I recall that Phelps Dodge Corp. avoided bankruptcy in the 1980s when copper prices fell by having courage. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that what’s required is “slash-and-burn tactics...unless you have a blitzkrieg mentality, you can’t restructure.” It is time for boldness and courage if our national goal is to be preserved.

I can’t help but believe the solution to better education is simple: Better teachers and more curiosity or, in practical terms, teach the kids five new words a day and to stand up straight. The rest will take care of itself.

John M. Cogswell

John Cogswell started his education in a one-room schoolhouse and is a trial lawyer living Buena Vista, Colorado.