

# The Passy Press

## Letter to the Editor

**From:** [john.viener@undisclosed.com](mailto:john.viener@undisclosed.com)

**To:** Nick Gardiner [enpg@thepassypress.com](mailto:enpg@thepassypress.com)

**Date:** September 10, 2014 2:45pm EST

**Subject:** My views on John MacMurray's Essay on US Education

Dear Sir,

Most of my knowledge about the education system is impressionistic. I would observe that in my experience, the institutional vested interests in the public education system constitute impediments to improvement. The teachers' union, seeking to preserve lifetime tenure and other benefits, has routinely fought all efforts for better quality education. The NEA for many years opposed any variant on the traditional approach to the 3Rs.

When I was a founder and 20 year director of The Foxfire Fund, an extraordinarily successful application of experiential education, the NEA tried to keep the program out of the public school systems, but ultimately its virtues were recognized by individual educators who spread it around the US and internationally.

In New York City, the statistics achieved by Success Academy Charter Schools were so embarrassing to the UFT that they enlisted De Blasio, whose election they funded, to try to close those schools down. The governor had to step in and overrule De Blasio, because it was evident that these schools were so much better. It is not that they had better students, because all were drawn from the same inner city communities, or better classrooms, since they used the public school facilities. The difference was exclusively in the fact that they had non-union teachers, far better qualified, and had an attitude to try to get the children to learn.

The core problem, as noted peripherally by MacMurray, is that the much of the public school student body in America nowadays come from cultural backgrounds that do not value education and have little respect for institutions. These are the same people who comprise the majority of Americans who do not work or pay taxes and exist on transfer payments from the government. This is not to say that they are genetically driven to welfare, but the government has trained them for generations into a culture of dependence and lack of initiative. The newer immigrants have more of a desire to learn and succeed, but many lack the familial infrastructure and support and respect for education.

The situation is indeed dire, and it appears the approach used with former generations of immigrants from Western European cultures will not work generally, although charter schools like Success Academy have achieved results with children whose families care enough about education to get them out of the public school system. If enough parents could care, it would be a start, and getting interested children challenged by better quality teachers, would be another step in the right direction.

John Viener

John D. Viener is a graduate of Yale College and Harvard Law School. After a forty-year career building in his firm's global law practice, he segued into investment management, travel, sports and non-profit involvements, including education.