

The Passy Press

Letter to the Editor

From: andrew.block@undisclosed.com

To: Nick Gardiner enpg@thepassypress.com

Date: September 10, 2014 2:45pm EST

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

Dear Sir,

John MacMurray outlines the problems well and strikes some familiar themes. I have been involved in educational programs since the early 80s and continue to be. I have also taught in 8th grade classrooms both in South Africa and the inner city of Chicago from 1996-2003. I stopped being a classroom teacher when it became evident that I did not have the classroom management skills required to control my class, even though it was only 8 students! However, I then tutored and stayed involved with a Catholic pre K-8 school in one of the very low-income areas of Chicago. Just last week, we were discussing how can we get kids to enjoy reading at an early age since nobody reads to them at home or takes them to check out books at a library. When I see our grandchildren finishing Harry Potter in 3rd grade, I know the important role their parents played in whetting their reading appetites.

The above paragraph attempts to qualify me as a legitimate observer of educational efforts at the local, state and national level. As John points out, there is very little coordination between all these entities and even in Chicago where there are private initiatives, public schools, charter schools, contract schools plus a Catholic system that would be in the top 15 as far as size on the US, there is no coordination at all in terms of best practices. There are a lot of egos who think their way is the best.

I'm not sure that John gives us a road map. I think he describes the problem, but I'm not sure he gives us the solution other than requiring high school graduates to have public service before entering college. This could be an interesting program that would require the creation of public service jobs to accommodate a massive new work force. Would they be compensated? Could those in financial need afford it? Does this point out the dichotomy between public and private education which does a better job of emphasizing public service with many students entering that world after college? A lot to chew on!

Getting back to my main point is that I don't think there is a clear, solution path in John's position paper other than some generalities. It would also be difficult, if not impossible, to provide a detailed road map in two pages, so I am not critical of the paper, but only pointing out that it doesn't contain specific solutions. Mandatory public service won't solve our educational challenges alone. It can sensitize the student to the

social needs of the country and help in the maturation process of an individual, but won't necessarily develop a student in becoming a critical thinker, a great brainstormer, an inventive scientist, an author or even a teacher!

We need a national commitment to educational improvement. Teachers need to be valued more than they are in our society. They are hardly on pedestals the way they are in Asian societies. With pay scales in the business sector far outpacing those in education, many good people either leave the profession or don't go there, because it won't give them the lifestyle they covet for themselves and their children. We have a dilemma!!

Sorry if I rambled too much! It's only because I really care and am frustrated that our public officials who profess to be interested in education, do very little to help the cause!

Sincerely,

Andrew Block

Andrew Block is a graduate of Yale College who has been directly involved in education for over 30 years, at the local, state, and national level, with first-hand teaching experience in inner city Chicago and South Africa.