

The Passy Press

Letter to the Editor

From: charles.deahl@undisclosed.com
To: Nick Gardiner enpg@thepassypress.com
Date: August 30, 2014 at 1:23pm EDT
Subject: John MacMurray's Essay on US Education

Dear Sir,

In terms of getting a lot of important things said in a short piece, John MacMurray's effort is marvelous. He lays out the terms of the debate clearly, and his organizational framework allows him to propose specific, succinct remediations to public education. The tone is excellent. All too often those who comment on the state of our public schools exhibit a snide quality implying that it would be foolish to disagree. MacMurray has none of that. He states his position, but he does not look down on anyone else.

I am shocked at his final point that two years of public service should be required of all high school graduates. It is something I have been thinking about for years, and it seems such a worthy idea on so many levels. But I considered it so radical that I thought I couldn't say or write it if I wanted people to take me seriously. MacMurray has shown me my error, and it is impressive that he has put the idea out there.

I question his assertion that a goal of public education should be to guarantee that its graduates "exhibit a moral compass that points to an ethical choice when individual interest and the common good conflict." That is more properly taught through example by our political and business leaders. All of us, not just school children, have lost the textbook that outlines a path to the common good.

Even though MacMurray's position is much more reasonable and much more rationally stated than the typical anti-teacher, anti-union, pro-testing advocate, I still find that we are essentially on different sides. I have finally been able to distill my own views and conclude that the two approaches to the issue are on

the one hand to fix the child, and on the other to fix the school. Those who want to fix the child say that we can test him and make him work (Paul Tough's grit) and fire his bad teacher and leave him right where he is and not spend a cent to do something about his squalid neighborhood. I want to fix the school, and by fix I mean to make it a nice place which graduates students who have been attending. I do not mean students who have scored such and such on the PISA or the SAT or the Common Core test. An editorial in the New York Times on June 8, 2014, pointed out that, out of 12,600 public high schools in the U.S., about 600 of them are seriously failing. We can attempt to fix each disadvantaged child, which means testing him and pointing out that he is unfixable, or we can fix five percent of the nation's public schools and transform the society.

Charles

Charles Deahl is an American Educator living in Hastings-on-the-Hudson, New York and a member of the Junto founded by Benjamin Franklin