



Education in Crisis

THE ELEPHANT THAT
NO ONE SEES

With all due respect to Dr. Richard Elgin, who wrote the original piece ["The Demise of Basic Surveying Mathematics," May 2007], and editor Marc Cheves who commented on the same problem in his July/August 2007 editorial, I think their take on the problem is somewhat narrowly focused. The same could be said of Clive Crook's piece in the June issue of the *ACSM Bulletin*. The lack of mathematical ability of students taking post-secondary surveying education is but the smallest tip of a socialized education iceberg.

In fact, many present day students are just as deficient in all the core academic subjects—mathematics, natural science, language, and reading comprehension. Education, in North America is in crisis. The elephant in the room, that no one sees, is the socialized education approach now used across

North America in our elementary schools. The solution to the problem is not to add more years of education, it is to simply fix the problems in the early years—restore academic objectives!

How did it get this way? What happened?

During the 1960's as more students enrolled in and graduated from the newly-popular social science degree programs, many of these new-wave grads entered the education field. This rising interest in, and commitment to, the social sciences lead to the belief that these sciences could cure many of society's ills (poverty, education failures, social injustice, marital problems, low self-esteem, etc.). A trend started (across North America) to socialize education and other key areas of society (even policing). In the social approach to education (practiced widely in the years before high school), students would be encouraged to set goals for themselves and to proceed in their pre-high school years according to their interests and abilities. Students would

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move lockstep through all six-to-eight years of elementary school regardless of academic achievement. Students would enter the high school years even if it were obvious they were academically unprepared to perform at that level—that was the high school’s problem; the social educators had done their job.

“Direct instruction” was out and socialized education techniques were in (for example, social teaching techniques include: “child-centered learning”, “holistic education”, “active learning”, “whole language learning”, “self esteem”). The direct teaching of reading was stopped because, as the social educators saw it, children should learn to read just the same as they learned to walk and talk—that is, naturally; the present illiteracy problems of many thousands of “educated” students who are now in post-secondary education do nothing to sway the views of our social “educators”. The social theories of the sixties and seventies did not allow for an elementary-level teacher to stand at the front of the room (authoritatively) anymore and tell students what they would be

learning that day—as they sat in rows of regimented seating. The teacher became a “facilitator” who moved about the room encouraging small groups of children to work cooperatively on subject matters that theoretically interested those at that small table. “Working cooperatively in

(700,000 students) and most expensive (\$1 billion) education study ever undertaken. One of the teaching techniques favored by social educators was that if you taught a student to have high self-esteem, that student would then do well in education. The final results of the nine teaching

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small groups” and “age-appropriate placement” became the system’s objectives as academic objectives were discarded.

Is there scientific proof that this social approach to education doesn’t work? In the USA, in 1967, Project Follow Through (a follow-up to Project Head Start—a program for disadvantaged/poor children) was created as part of President Johnson’s “War on Poverty”. This project, which lasted from 1967 to 1995, was the largest

models (direct instruction and eight types of social teaching) tested in this huge, expensive, long-lasting project essentially showed that Direct Instruction (a teaching technique long used at high schools and universities/colleges (particularly in professional programs) was the only technique that showed good results (previously failing students moved up to the 50th percentile); several of the social education techniques actually showed

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negative results—yes negative results!—in acquiring basic academic skills, thinking skills and yes, even in the attainment of self esteem. It was concluded that “Self esteem, in fact, appears to derive from pride in becoming competent in the important academic skills....” (see <http://jefflindsay.com/EducData.shtml>)— commonsense observation perhaps requiring no study at all. (To learn more about these massive tests, do a Google search for Project Follow Through.) Modern education bureaucrats dismiss complaints that the system does not provide students with important academic skills by saying that the somewhat vague social skills acquired (whatever they may be) are far more important. End of discussion! Our education bureaucrats are no longer educators—they are simply social bureaucrats.

In the face of indisputable evidence, why hasn't the Direct Instruction teaching technique been returned to elementary education (where it had flourished before the social experimentation began)? Why are there few, if any, academic standards in the early years? Why do students no longer have to show that they are capable

of performing at the high school level before being promoted to that level?

Bureaucratic resistance and inertia together with a complete commitment to socialized practices is probably the reason. Apparently, it would be heresy to abandon these prized social theories in favor of academic education practices that demonstrably work. As well, this huge bureaucracy is not about to admit it has made very serious mistakes and thus adversely affected the lives of millions of people—as well as putting an entire society at risk. Politicians who have tried to improve education have come up against a brick wall of union-protected social educators and “education” bureaucrats who do the bureaucratic shuffle until the politician gets defeated, dies or simply gives up. Pockets of change are occurring in various areas but not at a scale that could reverse this catastrophe. If an enemy of our North American society wanted to destroy us, they couldn't come up with a better idea than introducing socialized education.

Why hasn't his disaster affected the North American society more? Simply

put, in the short term, we don't need as many capable people as we used to because of technological advances (for example, in some cases, we now have one-person survey crews where we used to have four-person crews doing the same job). People without academic skills (and the resultant thinking skills) can be utilized in various service industry jobs—although there is probably a limit to how many people we need working in tanning salons.

An additional problem associated with producing uneducated masses is that people who have been socially “educated” without acquiring mature thinking skills are easy “marks” for all kinds of tyrants—religious, environmental, political, etc.

Many who read this article will dismiss it saying that what is being said here simply can't be true! It isn't possible that our education system could be destroyed without us noticing (even those of us who worked for many years in post-secondary education). During a visit (early 1990s) with the Head of Mathematics at a local high school, I was very surprised to learn that the high school curriculum (defined subject and topic content) had

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been discarded decades earlier because the students coming out of the elementary level simply could no longer do high school academic work. There was nothing in the "curriculum" document I had just previously examined in my office to indicate that it wasn't a curriculum (as I had assumed) and only a guideline. High school teachers were told "to regard the curriculum only as a guideline and just do the best they could."

Although socialized education is practiced mainly at the elementary school level, its impact on subsequent levels of education has been profound.

How do elementary teachers and high school teachers compare? High school teachers have (for the most part) proven their ability to understand and teach their assigned subjects by first obtaining a degree in the subject area. For example, in high schools, you seldom find anyone teaching mathematics, or physics, or chemistry, or English, or music whose degree is in sociology, or anthropology, or psychology, or women's studies, or economics, or religious studies, or social geography.

On the other hand, in elementary education you may find some schools

where none (or few) of the teachers have degrees in what used to be called the academic core subjects. Social science degrees are plentiful but core-subject degrees are scarce. Who, do you think, is teaching your eighth grader's mathematics class? In some math-phobic schools, it is the teacher with the least seniority—who probably possesses a degree in a social science instead of in mathematics. Many elementary teachers with seniority won't touch math with a ten-foot pole. How can this illogical and inefficient practice be justified? Because, as one elementary school teacher told me, "high school teachers teach subjects while we elementary teachers teach students!"

How do you fix this mess? According to some reports, when Rudy Giuliani was Mayor of New York City and was asked how he could get the city's education bureaucrats to improve education, he reportedly replied, "It would take a bomb."

It may be that bad! We may already be well beyond the tipping point in the long, relentless slide to complete failure of public education. Education bureaucrats at all levels—federal, state/provincial, and

municipal are well organized and seem to have unlimited public funds at their disposal to beat back any criticisms of their unproductive practices. Perhaps we will have to rely on future employers to provide suitable education for their employees and leave the public education facilities for continued social warehousing. Perhaps universities will have to widely expand their pre-college subject offerings to try to get suitably-prepared students into their programs. It might be a good time to invest in proven-successful private schools. *AS*

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