

Public school curriculum: How reform efforts should proceed

by Lyndon LaRouche

The following is excerpted from the pamphlet "School Integration and Busing: A Fresh Look," issued by The LaRouche Democratic Campaign in 1988.

From much of recent years' discussion of education, a school is a place to which children and youth are sent to receive "information." It is a place which certifies its graduates as "literate," whether or not they are capable of much more than such chores as reading simple signs, learning brand names, or reading text on the level of comic-book cartoons. We hear that the school's purpose is to issue diplomas to such informed and illiterate graduates, as passports to the prospect of some form of regular employment. The trend has been, to accept such definitions as typifying the minimal goals of education, and to define "equality in educational opportunities" by that sort of yardstick.

According to the principles of natural law reflected in our republic's Declaration of Independence, each person is distinct from, and above the mere beasts, in the respect that each of us is endowed with a divine spark of potential for reason, a spark which is inborn equally in persons of each of the ancestries of which today's human population as a whole is composed. "Equality of education" must signify something consistent with moral principle.

"Equality of education" must signify equality of access to a well-defined quality of education. It must signify fostering each student's potential to generate and assimilate valid discoveries, such as scientific discoveries. It must signify the fostering of a sense of personal identity consistent with that; a sense that there are no distinctions of biological ancestry which cause one person to be genetically naturally better with his hands than with his mind. Equality of social identity signifies that the mind, not the flesh, of the individual is the true substance of personal identity.

The proper goals of education are so defined. We must measure "equality in education" as nothing less than a quality of education consistent with those guiding goals of practice. The history of the rise of public education in Western Europe and North America already defines the proper principles of a quality public education.

Modern public education began in Europe during the last half of the fourteenth century, around such new schools as

those established by the Brothers of the Common Life. Some of the students of these schools, such as Cardinal Nicolaus of Cusa, Erasmus of Rotterdam, and the painter Hieronymous Bosch, became leaders of the Renaissance. Many among the leading figures of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had been students from families in humble circumstances, who developed their moral character and mental potentialities to high levels by the age of leaving such secondary schools.

These students studied the Latin and Greek classics in the original writings. They studied these writings in a way which made the pupil familiar with the most important features of 2,000 years of history up to their time. They also mastered pre-science subjects in geometry and other mathematics in the same way; this produced the founders of modern physical science during the Renaissance period.

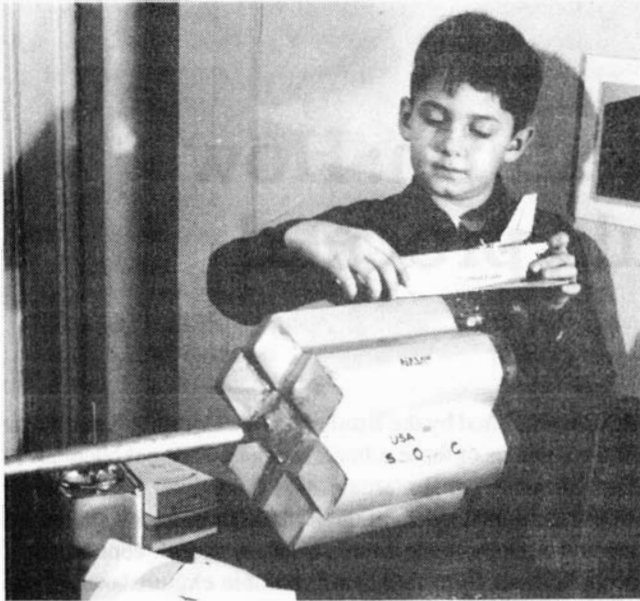
As soon as the Massachusetts Bay Colony began to be consolidated, the colony established compulsory public education and the college later named Harvard. The quality of education at those Massachusetts schools in the time of Cotton Mather, then, was higher than most education in the same state today. The citizens who rallied to create our national independence during the years 1776-83, and to adopt our federal Constitution, were known in Europe as the "American Latin Farmers," because the level of literacy and productivity of the typical American was more than twice that in England at that time. . . .

The general content of the curriculum

History and Language: The foundation of such a program of excellent public education, is the teaching of all subject-matters from the standpoint of universal history.

Our culture is Judeo-Christian Western European culture, the impact of the work of Philo Judaeus and Christianity upon the classical Greek cultural heritage of ancient Athens. The medium of our culture is the Indo-European family of literate forms of spoken and written language, as Dante Alighieri and the later European classical philologists approached this. The history of 2,500 years of Western European civilization is the history of a kind of living organism, the community of nations sharing the heritage of Western European culture.

That is the culture within which the student's family lives;



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the student's first challenge as a person, as process. "Today" is not "current events," but "present history." "Today" is the changes we add to what we have received from past history, to shape future history.

We learn from past history how the conditions of nations and our civilization as a whole were bettered or worsened, by the shaping of policies in one way or the other. We see everything which has happened in that past history so. We relive the hopes, anxieties, successes, and calamities of nations and persons in the past. We learn this from many parts of past history, and gain from this learning-experience a sense of our individual selves as more or less influential individual persons in a long historical process. In this way, we learn that we seemingly powerless individuals, are important to society and history in the large; if we understand how historical processes work, what we do—or fail to do as we might have done—does make a difference in history as a whole.

As we look back to persons in the past, so we are forced to imagine how future generations will look back at us. We desire to shape our lives, that we become persons of whom we need not be ashamed in the eyes of future generations. Thus, the historical standpoint helps to form our moral character.

Pre-Science and Science: So we relive the great discoveries given to us by individuals from the past. We study the original writings and experiments through which those persons lived in contributing their discoveries. The teaching of science as the internal history of science, in this way, provides the student with the ability to understand science as

a process of discovery and related controversies. By living through the experience of those past discoveries, in that way, the child learns to recognize, much better than he or she could otherwise, what kinds of activity within his or her own mental experience correspond with the power to generate and assimilate new knowledge of the way in which the physical universe is organized.

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The Classical Arts: History, language, and science are the core of the general curriculum of an acceptable quality of public school curriculum. However, that alone does not produce a sufficiently rounded development of the student's potentials. Classical art—literature, classical tragedy, classical poetry, music, and the plastic fine arts—is essential.

Children should learn to sing, according to what are termed "bel canto" principles, beginning during pre-school years. They should learn a fixed, well-tempered scale, and learn the portion of the classical repertoire composed for children's voices. Male students should continue with singing up to the "voice change" ages, and not resume it until after voice-change has been completed. Female students should continue throughout. Pre-professional training for gifted voices should be available as a supplementary optional program for students as part of secondary school programs.

Training in musical instruments should be included, with working school ensembles as the point of reference. The standpoint of vocal polyphony should be emphasized in instrumental education. Adolescent males should focus upon instruments.

Simple drawing, introducing Albertian perspective at an early age, should lay the basis for the plastic arts. This is taught to young students more easily by aid of wire models of perspective, referencing the constructions used for this educational purpose by Brunelleschi, Alberti, et al. during the fifteenth century. At a later age, the advances in perspective contributed by Leonardo da Vinci should be introduced.

The teaching of constructive and projective geometry, as primarily secondary-school courses, should begin during about the eighth grade. The mastery of the scope of the tenth through thirteenth books of Euclid's *Elements* should be taught from the standpoint of constructive (synthetic) geometry, rather than deduction. This should be completed prior to introduction of trigonometry to senior secondary pupils.

The scope of Luca Pacioli's *Divine Proportion* should be taught in this connection, and that applied directly to understanding of Leonardo da Vinci's, Dürer's, and Raphael's revolution in the plastic arts. Sculpture and architecture, as well as more advanced draftsmanship in drawing and painting should be taught to upper secondary classes from this constructive-geometric standpoint.

Poetry should be introduced to younger classes of pupils in conjunction with classical song-forms. The correspondence between the prosodic structure of classical song-forms and poetic prosody should be made sensible knowledge, and this knowledge enriched.

Classical tragedy should be taught as simultaneously art, language education, and history instruction. The Aeschylean tragedy should be part of the secondary curriculum, and modern classical tragedy presented as a modern form of the Aeschylean. This should include Shakespeare's tragedies, Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and *Interludes* for Spanish students, and Lessing and Schiller for German students. English translations of portions of the writings of Cervantes, Lessing, and Schiller, as well as Aeschylus, should be provided generally.

Goals of secondary education

During the past 20 years, the average quality of teachers in public schools has fallen catastrophically. The quality of instruction given has, on the average, fallen way below the potentials of the average of current teachers. In large degree, this reflects the worsening of the pervasiveness of drug-usage and drug-culture-related conditions in the schools and in the classrooms. In the largest part, this deterioration has been the intent of powerful lobbies which have shaped national educational policy.

One of the frequent weapons used in the intentional effort to destroy education standards is the popularized use of the word "relevance." "Education must be made relevant to the pupils," usually precedes and accompanies destructive innovations in the curriculum and classroom practices. The object is to develop the students' minds, not bring education down to the average level of development and interests which the student brings in from the streets on each first day of the new school-term.

In Western Europe, as in the United States, parents are in agony over the condition of progressive deterioration in the schools. Unfortunately, among the so-called "conservative" faction of such parents' groups there is the stated belief that education ought to be tuned to the prospective quality of future employment of the students. These persons argue that students "tracked" for pre-professional higher education should be awarded education preparing them for college-entrance competitions; the same viewpoint argues that students destined for lower grades of employment should receive only that education which is directly relevant to such "job skills."

That argument for educational "tracking" is based upon two principal errors of assumption.

First, it ought to be our objective to recruit as many from the so-called "lower-economic social strata" as possible into professional and high-grade technical employment. This will not occur if they are "tracked" through educational programs destining them for the lower-paid and lower-skilled workplaces. All, excepting those who are of impaired potentials, must have the same quality of educational curriculum avail-

able to them at their families' choice.

Second, public school education should not be employment-oriented education. If we develop the potentials of the child's and youth's minds to their highest potentials, along the curriculum-lines indicated here, the youth already has the highest possible development of employment-related potentials: a greater ability to learn strange things than by any other means of education.

There is no need to educate pupils in what they will "pick up on the streets," or as employees. Education must afford the young those important developments of their potential which they are unlikely to acquire in any other way but a classical public educational program. The function of public education is to produce a graduate of secondary schools who has the highest relative potential, as a citizen, for adapting to any situation, whether in employment or elsewhere.

By avoiding education in "job-related skills," we foster a graduate who is a higher quality of potential employee than could be achieved by any program of education focused narrowly upon "job-related skills." We produce a citizen who "can learn rapidly" in any expected range of circumstances. . . .

For further reading

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Susan Welsh, "How a Great Physicist Taught Science to Children," *EIR*, May 15, 1992.

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