

Radical Education Reform

By Crispin Sartwell

Capital Times Advisor

As you send your kids off to school, I want to tell you a couple of things I've picked up in a lifetime of teaching and learning:

(1) People fundamentally teach themselves. You can offer instruction, but you can't force anyone to learn.

If students want to master a skill or a body of knowledge, you're not going to be able to stop them. And if they're learning it just to get through the test, they won't do all that well on the test and will forget the information faster than they picked it up.

The best a teacher can do is create an atmosphere in which people can learn if they're in the mood.

(2) Great teachers are born, not made. Teaching is a talent, like playing a musical instrument. The talent can be refined through training and practice, but you'll never be a good musician if you don't have it and you'll probably end up being a good musician if you do.

Teacher education makes a negligible difference in teaching quality, and often for the worse. Theories of education change globally every few years and what is fashionable today is anathema tomorrow.

Meanwhile, good teachers ignore the theories and just engage the students at a human level and try to show them that learning is a blast.

A couple of years ago I tried to get certified to teach high school English. I figured it would be no problem, since I was a professional writer with a Ph.D. and many years of experience teaching college.

But the folks in charge of certification practically laughed me out of the state; or rather, I just got ever more deeply entangled in the incomprehensible bureaucracy.

It was obvious that -- teaching shortage or not -- I could never obtain any sort of certification without taking a whole bunch of education courses and asinine standardized tests.

The present certification process is simply an attempt on the part of education programs to monopolize the teacher training process, and an attempt by school systems to have a consistent product to put into the classroom.

Principals would be much better off watching a teacher for an

hour in the classroom than looking at a transcript.

My parents were both public high school teachers, and I watched as they became profoundly frustrated by a school system that did not allow them to work but tried to dictate every facet of the process, from book orders to exams.

They spent most of their time trying to meet the arbitrary standards of the system and less and less actually teaching something they cared about to their students.

Finally, they quit in disgust. Taking seriously principles (1) and (2), here are some suggestions for radical education reform:

- Institute aggressive voucher programs. This would give the public schools some serious and desperately needed competition. No monopoly is responsive or efficient.

- Reduce the size of schools. Warehouses like Columbine (and most suburban high schools) are irritating places to be, especially considering that attendance is compulsory.

- Eliminate most teacher education programs. Make teachers get a degree in the subject matter they will be teaching or a related field, and perhaps take a couple of courses in teaching along the way.

- Leave teacher hiring decisions to each school. Ditch state certification standards. Give the principal of the school the opportunity to hire her own faculty. Emphasize classroom observation in hiring and retention decisions.

- Eliminate standardized testing, which arises as much from laziness as anything else: folks want a simple number, but education is not reducible to a number. Evaluate students and schools through grades, portfolios, recommendations, observation.

- Stop treating children like chattel. Respect basic rights of association and expression. Al Gore's proposal to ban gangster clothing, utterly unenforceable, is also an expression of disrespect.

- More recess, less homework. Quit expecting children to behave like middle age office workers. Let them relax occasionally.

- Let teachers teach. Let them choose their own books and their own teaching styles.

- Let them design odd or interesting programs. Hire weirdos. Encourage eccentricity.



Letters to the Editor

Job Well Done

Capital Times Staff,

I would like to commend you guys on a great job this year. Your efforts have not gone unnoticed. Everyone knows that all you met your goals by providing us with timely informative issues.

As you all know the awards are chosen by the OAB. In addition, you all know that this group consists of club officers and the V.P. of SGA.

Personally, I feel you guys did a great job and are very deserving of an award.

Hopefully next year there will be more participation among clubs with the OAB. Thanks for a job well done.

Roderick L. Lee

SGA President 1999-2000

April 19, 2000

Bike Racks for Lazy Bastards

Editor:

Well, another Earth Day has come and gone, and thanks to school programs and a plethora of little Al Gores and Ted Kasinskys, maybe we'll all start using less plastic spoons.

Now that we have the sublime covered, let's focus on the obvious. Our school desperately needs more bike racks at the new library, the CUB, Olmsted East, and the Meade Heights Community Center.

Doing so will not only help bikers, but also potential bikers and even lazy non-bikers. Why do we need more bike racks? If motorists have to walk, why can't bikers?

Because we don't have to. Walking wastes my precious drinking time. If there were a way to put every parking spot within a few feet from the doors, I'd be for it. But there's not.

Why should I be punished just because the laws of physics are on my side.

Furthermore it would encourage biking, once people realize the obvious advantages of riding a bike, as opposed to the subtle ones, everyone would start riding a bike.

I know what you're saying.

"It'll take a helluva lot more than a new bike rack to get me on a bike, 'cause I'm a lazy pansy bastard."

Well this part is for you, but it involves some thinking so you better sit down. If more people ride bikes, then that means fewer people driving. That means you'll get a better parking spot, and spend less time in a big car line trying to get out of the lot.

In conclusion, our campus needs more bike racks; not for us bikers, who would benefit from school funds for the first time in about 30 years, and not for the environment, but for all you lazy bastards who would be able to park at least five feet closer.

Steve Bielski

Computer Science

April 19, 2000

Gore's Record

Editor:

While I have never worked for a campaign, I also feel the upcoming presidential elections are very important. I commend Mr. Werner for getting involved and encouraging others to do the same.

Here are a few facts about Al Gore anyone who is thinking of voting for him should know. His actions often contradict his words.

He says he is for more gun control, but his voting record in the Senate shows he voted against the semi-automatic weapons ban in 1990.

He voted to relax federal gun control laws in 1986, and voted to exempt gun collectors from licensing requirements, and to lift the ban on the interstate sale of guns in 1978.

At the Democratic National Convention in 1992, he tearfully told the story of how his sister died of lung cancer, and how he would "pour his heart and soul, till his last breath, into protecting children from the dangers of smoking."

Then four years later bragged how he has been, and will be a tobacco farmer all his life.

He claimed to have invented the Internet while in Congress. The Internet started as the ARPANET in September of 1969,

the same year Al Gore graduated from college.

He claims the novel *Love Story* was based on his and Tipper's college romance, but the author, Erich Segal, said he was "befuddled" by the claim.

He claims to have discovered the Love Canal hazardous waste site. He did hold hearings on Love Canal but only after President Carter had declared it a disaster area.

He illegally accepts campaign contributions and then claims we need reform and new laws. If he did not live inside the current laws, why should we believe he would obey new ones?

He stated his strategic goal is to ban the internal combustion engine (cars) by the year 2020. I guess we will all walk or ride horses. (Which is probably why he has been silent on the rise in gas prices?)

He wrote in his book *Earth in Balance* that increased use of fresh water would lead to "poverty, hunger and disease," but allowed four million gallons of fresh water to be poured into the Connecticut River in order to have his picture taken in a canoe.

The Pennichuck Water Works calculated the four million gallons cost \$7.1 million.

As for racial profiling, it is a state and local issue and the president cannot do anything about it. If he could why hasn't Clinton/Gore done it?

Remember, this is the administration that rushed armed forces to Europe when 2,000 whites were murdered, but sat back while 500,000 Rwandans were murdered.

We are just now starting to see the effects of the Clinton/Gore economic policy, raise taxes and bring lawsuits against tobacco companies, gun manufacturers, Microsoft and Intel.

Companies are scared they will be next and the stock markets around the world are falling.

We need someone with integrity in the White House, not a Clinton Mini-Me who lies with the same ease as the rest of us breathe.

Sincerely,
Ross Paterson
Information Systems
April 13, 2000