

# What everyone needs to know about education



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

essay: What everyone needs to know about education essay (NAEP): The most striking thing about our public schools is that they have been in perpetual decline for many decades.

Why? The government has its own tests called the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP); these tests regularly suggest that two-thirds of fourth-graders and eighth-graders are below proficient in reading. That's what decline looks like. It's guaranteed those two-thirds will never be literate as that term has been traditionally used.

Some may learn to read in a painful struggling way but they won't be reading a daily paper or curling up with a good book. And yet, a century ago, this country was said to be headed toward universal literacy. A single anecdote can tell you more than years of statistics. College professors report that incoming freshmen often do not know, for example, what 7/8 is. This is totally fascinating. Ask yourself, could schools be this bad by accident? Or wouldn't somebody have to carefully organize the school to be this bad? Another fascinating kind of evidence is a dozen books written from the 1950s to the present, with titles like *So Little for the Mind*, *Educational Wastelands*, *Quackery in the Public Schools*, *Brainwashing in the High Schools*, *Why Johnny Can't Read*, *The New Illiterates*, *Ed School Follies*, *Dumbing Down Our Kids*, *The Conspiracy of Ignorance*, and many others. These books are basically reports from the front lines, provided by the country's smartest and most sensitive people; always they write from the same perspective of stunned, what-the-hell amazement.

How, they wail, could the people in charge do such a horrible job? Everyone who studies public education comes to that question very quickly. Then you have to deal with the two most likely answers: our self-anointed experts are grossly incompetent; or they are grossly subversive. If the decline weren't so pronounced, over so many years, you might want to argue that we should give these experts the benefit of the doubt.

They've had some bad luck, they made some bad decisions, that's all. A relative of mine insists, They mean well. They just can't get their act together. This attitude is precisely the one that our Education Establishment hopes you accept. Please don't. Twenty years ago Charlotte Iserbyt, who once worked in the Reagan Administration, came up with this book title *The Deliberate Dumbing Down of America*.

When you first encounter this phrase and contemplate its implications, you are probably stunned. Deliberate implies conspiracy and Fabian termites (i. e., socialists) chewing away at the foundations. Conspiracy is an unpleasant word, much like pedophilia when that scandal rocked the Catholic Church 30 years ago.

People do not want to believe bad things about their authorities and their experts. But priests, in many cases, were in fact child molesters. Our Education Establishment, it seems to me, similarly works against the best interests of children.

(Siegfried Engelmann coined the phrase academic child abuse.) Professor John Dewey laid out a scheme more than a century ago: take over the ed schools, brainwash the teachers, send them out to brainwash the kids, and  
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thereby radically transform the society. This remains the primal mission today. The result is a secret agenda that deserves the word conspiracy. But how, you might be wondering, can they get away with it? They dumb down the country in plain sight; but nobody stops them. Here is one sweet irony. The Left often speaks of their contempt for capitalists and ad agencies; these pests create appetites for things that nobody needs.

I would counter that our Education Establishment has almost no skill aside from creating a market for educational theories and methods that are not only not needed, they are destructive. In order to keep all these gimmicks, as I would term them, in play, they have to keep the public perpetually befuddled. That is how they get away with it. They have two principal techniques. First, they constantly change the names, the jargon, and the selling points.

New Math, introduced in 1965 and quickly rejected by the country, was re-branded as Reform Math 15 years later. Despite all the minor differences, the common intent seems to be to prevent children from mastering elementary arithmetic. Mastery, in fact, was specifically denounced by Reform curricula. That's why students in college don't know what  $7 \times 8$  is.

The premier example of perverse marketing appears in the Reading Wars. You had Look-say, Whole Word, Whole Language, Balanced Literacy, Dolch Words, Sight Words, and many other phrases. Surprise: they all mean the same thing, that is, phonics is no good. Instead, kids should memorize words as logos. This goofy idea creates the NAEP statistics mentioned in the second paragraph. A second technique for befuddlement is to flood the nation's

psyche with dozens of alibis and excuses: kids are texting and taking drugs; the Internet is distracting; there isn't enough money; teenagers are sex-crazed; parents don't care; and many more.

The intent is to take attention from the real culprits and to wear everybody out. Look at the typical education article in the newspaper or on TV. You probably won't be able to discern what the article is trying to tell you or what you should do about it. Typically, our media report in great detail about surfaces.

These techniques" coordinated with great persistence" have been overwhelmingly successful. The average citizen understands nothing about education. Community leaders, the movers and shakers, the people who should be defending us against our home-grown barbarians are themselves as confused as the average mother of a first-grader. Nothing is solid. You don't know where to find the truth on any issue. I've never met a doctor, lawyer, etc. who knew anything about education. Their kids go to private school, what do they care? Further, the Education Establishment concocts jargon that neutralizes thought.

Test yourself. What exactly are Whole Language, Sight Words, Reform Math, and Constructivism? If you don't know what they are and why they're bad, then there's no way to defend yourself against them (or against Common Core which wraps those old scams in a shiny new package). As I've watched the Obama administration, I've often thought that to really understand it, you have to study education.

Similarly, to understand education in our country, you should watch Obama. The unifying theme is constant deceit and deception to ensure that people don't know what is being done to them. I'm not particularly interested in grand educational visions, nor do I think we need them. I believe the answer to our dilemma is remarkably simple. Get back to what works. In a pinch, make a list of the best hundred private schools, pick a few at random and copy whatever they're doing.

You'll be fine. Education ain't rocket science. Smart people who love knowledge will invariably create good schools. You want rocket science? That's our Education Establishment keeping an entire society ignorant and befuddled. I think of these people as evil. But I never said they aren't smart.  
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