

Golarz, Harris, and Ravitch Readings

I believe the three books listed below will shed considerable light on the underlying issues that are impacting education and the tools of evaluation in the form of standardized tests. Specific passages are referenced and these works in their entirety offer valuable ideas. I found them helpful. -- Linda Shanks

Golarz, Raymond J. and Marion J. Golarz. *The Problem Isn't Teachers*. Authorhouse, 1663 Liberty Drive, Bloomington, Indiana 47403. Section 5, Chapter 12, PP 137-152. (re. the purpose of an education)

Harris, Phillip, Bruce M. Smith and Joan Harris. *The Myths of Standardized Tests – Why They Don't Tell You What You Think They Do*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 405 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706. From the Introduction on PP 6-8. (Re. unquestioned assumptions)

Ravitch, Diane. *Reign of Error*. Vintage Books, New York.

*I offer this section from **The Problem Isn't Teachers**, reproduced with permission of the author. If, due to time constraints, you can't read everything, consider this a concise description of the current situation, and recognize the use of standardized tests is merely evidence of much more serious cracks in the support system of our whole democracy. When women garnered the vote, LWV was formed to help educate them so they could take a rightful role in making the nation's decisions. It is worth considering what their voices would be saying today. – Linda Shanks*

The Problem Isn't Teachers, Chapter 12, p 138 ff. By Raymond and Marion Golarz.

The War Over Purpose

In the *Power of Participation*, my wife and I reported on a trip to the University of Ohio where I had been invited to speak to some of the faculty. As we slowly approached the gateway structure marking the entrance to the campus, we found ourselves fixated on faded words etched in its stone front. We stopped. Marion read aloud and I sat in awe, feeling as though I were being personally introduced to my benefactors, but they were not just my benefactors. I was meeting the benefactors of all the generations of children who had been privileged to attend, to grow, and to learn in American schools.

“Religion, morality and knowledge being necessary for good government and the happiness of mankind schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.”¹
Ordinance of 1803

Revisiting the Purpose of Public Schools

This Ohio Ordinance had its origin in the Ordinance of 1787 which was enacted by the Articles of Confederation Congress. Its language reflected the concern of the Founders of our country who wanted to ensure that there was **a clear understanding as to the purpose of schools in this emerging nation**¹. They knew this clear understanding would be critical to preserving the good government necessary for

¹ Highlighting mine – KarenKay Leonard, 8/20/16.

the democracy and the happiness of mankind, and they were convinced that an uninformed citizenry would lead to the eventual demise of the republic. This critical need was most urgently and eloquently expressed in the many writings of Thomas Jefferson. Merrell Peterson in his 1960 book titled *The Jefferson Image of the American Mind* elaborates on this view of the purpose of education:

Jefferson believed the elementary school more important than the university in the plan because, as he said, it is essential to have the whole people enlightened, [rather] than a few in a high state of science or many in ignorance as exists in Europe. He had six objectives for primary education to bring about this enlightenment and which highlighted what he hoped would make every person into a productive and informed voter:

1. To give every citizen the information he needs for the transaction of his own business;
2. To enable him to calculate for himself, and to express and preserve his ideas, his contracts, and accounts, in writing;
3. To improve, by reading, his morals and faculties;
4. To understand his duties to his neighbors and country, and to discharge with competence the functions confided to him by either;
5. To know his rights; to exercise with order and justice those he retains; to choose with discretion the fiduciary of those he delegates; and to notice their conduct with diligence, with candor, and with judgment;
6. And, in general, to observe with intelligence and faithfulness all of the social relations under which he shall be placed.²

This requirement for an educated citizenry is noted also by Benjamin Barber in *Public Schooling-Education for Democracy*. Summarizing the ideas of Jefferson and Tocqueville, Barber states:

Jefferson knew full well that liberty is acquired and that citizens are educated to a responsibility that comes to no man or woman naturally. Without citizens democracy is a hollow shell. Without public schools there can be no citizens. Tocqueville spoke movingly of the need in democracies for an “apprenticeship of liberty”—what he deemed the most arduous of all apprenticeships.³

Clearly, for our Founders, education was essential. If education achieved its goals then citizens would acquire, beyond the benefits to themselves personally, the following: first, the capacity to accurately judge the trustworthiness and responsible behavior of elected delegates; second, a clear understanding of their own duties to neighbors and country; third, an understanding of the obligation to provide order and justice to those employed; and fourth, the benefits that come naturally to those who are enlightened by the acquisition of a broad liberal education that includes the studies of great literature, the sciences, the arts, music, languages, the history of man, his religions, and his philosophies.

There seemed initially little doubt or confusion about the intended direction of public schools—a liberal education for the enlightenment of citizens—the kind of education the Founders themselves possessed. Jefferson's dream was to provide citizens with the skills and civility needed to participate in and contribute to the perpetuation of the American democracy, good government, and the happiness of mankind.

Confusion over the Role of Public Schools

The role of public schools was broadened over many years as the inevitable result of profound change with occurred over the evolution of this nation. Tragically, however, there was also an erosion from outside our country as ideologies and actions of some foreign countries were perceived as threats to our very existence. But many of the changes in the purpose of public education came from within our own country.

The purpose of public schools had remained fairly constant and had reflected much of Jefferson's curriculum until the mid-twentieth century. However, by the late fifties and early sixties, schools began to change dramatically. The rise of communism, the Cold War, and the fear of being bombed by Russia, especially throughout the Fifties, became the focus of politicians and the population as a whole. The need to be a superior atomic and nuclear power was an extremely high priority, and so the call for a better scientific education began to escalate. When the Russians placed Sputnik in orbit in 1957, the need to “catch up” and reaffirm our supremacy as the most powerful country in the world dominated political and national life. Schools became increasingly responsible for producing the scientists needed to maintain our defense. Thus curriculum and student achievement came under intense scrutiny.

The anxiety surrounding this threat from foreign countries continued to occupy this nation well into the Reagan years. But more unrest was starting to dominate the social political and economic agenda so profoundly that during the decades of the Sixties, Seventies, and Eighties, the very fabric of the country seemed to be unraveling. The war in Vietnam was violently protested and these protests spilled over into protests against the “establishment” on all levels. The authority of government and other institutions, including the armed forces and education, was challenged. The civil rights movement, which also raged during this period, brought its own measure of volatility as the battle for equal rights and access to power was waged across many fronts. Racial and gender equality, individual constitutional rights, the rights of disabled citizens, and the effort to desegregate public schools became issues which drove extraordinary change in the social and legal landscape. Schools at all levels came under attack as critics assailed the traditional curriculum and methods of teaching as racist, discriminatory, irrelevant, or ineffective. The U.S. Supreme Court in an attempt to clarify and establish the constitutionality relative to these issues, rendered decisions that affected all of our institutions. The purpose of public schools and the way in which they were to function were impacted profoundly by all of these factors.

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, schools as we had known them had drastically changed in response to legislation, the continued demand to produce superior students, and the need to address the growing severity of poverty, drug abuse, and child abuse. The emphasis on producing students who would be equipped to preserve the democracy has been pushed aside. At one time, the family and other social institutions had assumed the primary responsibility for teaching life skills, health and hygiene, ethnic history, and sex education, for example. Now public schools were assuming these responsibilities. In addition, where schools once referred students with problems to the appropriate court or social welfare agency, they were now expected to partner with, or take exclusive responsibility for functioning in many communities as medical clinics, psychological counseling services, vocational institutions, drug rehabilitation centers, outreach centers, and even shelters. Here again, while these efforts were—and still are—worthwhile and admirable, to make schools mainly responsible for the resolution of these problems allows for less and less time to be allocated to the essential purpose declared by our nation's Founders.

The Business Agenda

Despite the impact on schools brought about by the challenges and events described above, the most profound change in the purpose and direction schools has come from the steady, concerted, and powerful influence of the business/industrial community. Some of these efforts have been transparent—some downright stealthy.

Beginning right after World War II, when the rest of the industrial world was working at a feverish pace to regain an industrial foothold, major players in the U.S. business/industrial community, such as steel and car companies, took an extended leave. They sat back and leisurely sunned themselves in the pleasure of an industrial head start won on the backs of American wartime workers and the American G.I. While Japan and Germany installed new oxygen conversion steel-making furnaces, the U.S. industrialists sucked up profits by continuing to use the old open-hearth systems which had been built during the first decade of the 1900s. While all of Europe and parts of Asia began producing the most efficient and durable cars, the U.S. moved further and further into planned obsolescence which required loyal U.S. consumers to replace their cars much more frequently. By the 1960s, however, foreign cars, notably the Volkswagen Beetle, began to win the hearts, minds, and pocketbooks of a new generation of Americans who were conscious of the cost savings gained not only because of the need for less gasoline, but also because of the durability of the auto itself. Meanwhile, Japan continued to cut its manufacturing teeth by producing toys for the world market until it exploded overnight into an industrial power, utilizing American Ed Deming's Quality Management. While this is happening, U.S. companies went to war with American labor, the latest version of which has been the outsourcing of American jobs to foreign countries. This was necessary the business community claimed, because of the poorly educated American worker.

Finding a Scapegoat

By 1980, as a consequence of the inept leadership of the American business/industrial sector which resulted in continual losses to foreign competition, a scapegoat had to be found. Who better than the American schools? The narrative that was proposed (and was eventually accepted in many quarters) was that schools were failing to adequately prepare young people for the world of the workplace. Americans were told that it was this failure that was responsible for the weakening of the national economy. Schools were blamed for the erosion of our position as the most productive and competitive country in the world. Thus, there would need to be a new direction and purpose of schools. This approach provided two major benefits for business, especially for large corporations. First, it would absolve the business/industrial community of any responsibility for the weakening economy, or for the loss of American jobs. Secondly, if the mission of schools could be refocused to train a work force, industry would no longer need to accept this responsibility or bear this cost.

A full-fledged assault was undertaken to make schools K through 12 places where a remodeled curriculum would focus on the skills deemed necessary for the world of work. This function of work preparation formerly had been reserved primarily for vocational high schools, vocational colleges, regular colleges, and universities. Most businesses and industries had invested in their own training of new employees. Apprenticeship programs were common throughout the business/industrial community. Efforts were already underway in the Seventies to promote this shift in purpose when the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, justified the dramatic takeover and helped to speed up the process. The following commentary is taken from Clinton Boutwell's book, *Shell Game: Corporate America's Agenda for Schools*, published in 1997. This passage highlights how and why this hijacking of purpose

came about:

In essence, America's corporate elite charged that their incompetence was not responsible for the loss of America's competitive advantage. The “real” reason was that the United States did not have a highly educated, world-class work force. The schools were causing this economic decline, they claimed. And their media apologists perpetuated that charge. Interestingly none of those critics has ever defined clearly what was meant by “world-class,” so educators may have been chasing a will-o-the-wisp when they contritely responded by tooling up to produce a “world-class work force.”

Opinion formulators reported that American factories and jobs were going to foreigners because American students—high school and university graduates—were not educated well enough to provide American business with the kind of workers it needed. They pointed to the educated workforce found in countries that were successfully eating into America's advantage, such countries as Japan, Korea, Singapore, Germany, France, or whatever other country whose students appeared for the moment to have higher test scores than American students.

By placing the blame on the schools for America's economic doldrums, the decline in good jobs, and consequent rapid decrease in decent wages, business had found a potent vehicle for deflecting blame from itself. And the campaign worked. Their charges gave affluent Americans a rationale to understand business down-turns, and they gave middle-class and working Americans a target on which to focus in hopes of preventing wage slippage and unemployment. Suddenly, getting schools up to snuff became *the* American cause.⁴

The speed with which this new direction of school purpose was implemented was astounding. The manipulation of public opinion, legislation, and corporate effort was ruthless and relentless.

The principal architects of this new American direction for schooling were leaders from many professions, elected officials in both American state and federal legislative and administrative bodies, along with the American/international business community itself. This community, in particular, had come to view children as future production components. Timothy J. McMannon, in *The Public Purpose of Education and Schooling*, attests to this new use of American children:

By the 1990's the rhetoric had changed. The job for which school children had to be prepared was no longer saving the nation from communist aggression, but saving the nation from Japanese economic competition. The United States had to win the battle of the market and schools were to be the boot camps.⁵

The SCANS Report

The press to move schools totally in the direction of job preparation was strongly opposed by all who fought for a liberal education and the schooling needed to educate our youth regarding the principles of how to sustain our American democracy. The anger, concern, and resentment grew quickly, and soon pressure was coming from American parents and educators. In response to this growing dissension, the following olive branch was offered in 1991 by the United States Department of Labor in the form of a letter to American parents and legislators:

We, your Secretary of Labor and members of the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), write as concerned representatives of the nation's schools, businesses, unions, and government. We have completed our initial examination of changes in the world of work and the implications of those changes for learning.

We understand that schools do more than simply prepare people to make a living. They prepare people to live full lives—to participate in their communities, to raise families, and then enjoy the leisure that is the fruit of their labor. A solid education is its own reward.

This report concerns only one part of that education, the part that involves how schools prepare young people for work. It does not deal with other, equally important, concerns that are also the proper responsibility of our educators. We do not want to be misinterpreted. We are not calling for a narrow work-focused education. Our future demands more.⁶

Following this letter, however, the push for work-focused education and standardized assessment did not abate. Rather, it continued relentlessly and eventually included the thoroughly unrealistic *No Child Left Behind* mandates. The veiled—but clearly heard—threat from the business/industrial community was emphatic: either use schools to prepare American students for the workplace and teach the curriculum they supported, or they would go to foreign shores for their employees. To demonstrate their intent, they demanded that the effectiveness of teachers be determined by the success of their students on standardized tests. Further, they advocated that employment of teachers be tied to their students' success on these tests. Support for this modified purpose of education and methods proposed to judge the effectiveness of teachers gained huge support from federal and state legislative leaders.

ALEC

Recent sources have confirmed that substantial efforts have been made over a considerable period of time to ensure that the goals discussed above are actualized. Actually, efforts to control and shape the purpose and function of public schools have been proceeding in an organized manner since at least 1973. One of these entities was noted by Diane Ravitch who on an *Education Week* blog where she recently warned about an organization know as ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council). According to Ravitch, ALECW (hich was founded in 1973 and counts among its members 2,000 conservative state legislators nationwide) has engaged in an organized effort to influence negative attitudes toward public schools and has supported the privatization of public schools. Ravitch explains:

This outburst of anti-public school, anti-teacher legislation is no accident. It is the work of a shadowy group called the American Legislative Exchange Council, or ALEC. Its hallmark is promotion of privatization and corporate interests in every sphere, not only education, but health care, the environment, the economy, voting laws, public safety, etc. It drafts model legislation that conservative legislators take back to their states and introduce as their own “reform” ideas. ALEC is the guiding force behind state-level efforts to privatize public education and to turn teachers into at-will employees who may be fired for any reason. The ALEC agenda is today the “reform” agenda for education.⁷

Could there be a more potent threat to the purpose of education as envisioned and fashioned by the Founders? How are schools supposed to guide students with an education that will equip them to nurture and preserve the intent of this democracy if efforts like those described above are allowed to prevail?

Earlier in this chapter we quoted from Clinton Boutwell's book, *The Shell Game: Corporate America's Agenda for Schools*. Boutwell, as you read in those quotes, stated that “America's corporate elite” placed the blame on schools for “America's economic doldrums, the decline in good jobs, and the consequent rapid decline in decent wages.”⁸

Taking such a position has allowed the business community to use the mantra—the schools are to blame—to dominate for many years the conversation regarding the proper role of education. The message has not changed as they continue to propose the following: Give us an endless supply of highly qualified, highly educated, top-end standardized test takers, and we will provide America with a smooth-running, highly productive, fully-employed economy.

Paul Krugman, winner of the 2008 Nobel Prize in Economics, in *End This Depression Now! Takes* exception to this position. He states unequivocally that our current national economic condition reveals that the answer does not lie in simply more highly skilled workers:

There are no major corporations or skill groups doing well. Between 2007 and 2010 unemployment roughly doubled in just about every category—blue-collar and white-collar, manufacturing and services, highly educated and uneducated. Nobody was getting big wage increases; in fact as we saw in chapter 1, highly educated graduates were taking unusually large pay cuts, because they were forced to accept jobs that made no use of their education.

The bottom line is that if we had mass unemployment because of too many workers lacking the right stuff, we should be able to find a significant number of workers who do have that stuff prospering—and we can't. What we see instead is impoverishment all around, which is what happens when the economy suffers from inadequate demand.⁹

This year I was asked to keynote a conference of school superintendents in one of our northern states. In order to prepare properly, I asked those bringing me to the conference to send information regarding recent legislative educational efforts and considerations in their state and surrounding region. Some of these were as follows:

1. Art and music curriculum courses shall no longer be considered core.
2. Tenure of teachers shall discontinue, except for those who are already on tenure and have over 20 years of experience.
3. The compensation of teachers and administrators will be tied to standardized test scores of students on state proficiency exams.
4. Obligations of administrators to meet regularly with representatives of teacher unions in order to discuss contemplated new practices or programs will stop.
5. The bargaining rights of teachers will be curtailed.

The war on public schools is being waged all around us, daily creating more and more pockets of disheartened teachers while a nation stands flat-footed and inept in the distance.

As we move to close this chapter we have chosen to share a quote from Timothy J. McMannon's book *The Changing Purposes of Education and Schooling*. We find it particularly appropriate to our discussion.

To the uneducated mind, music may be mere noise, art work simply agglomerations of media,

books merely so much paper and ink, and conversations just the sounds of voices. Education, however, allows a person to perceive meaning in musical tones, in visual stimuli, and in the spoken and written word. In short, education enables one to participate more fully in the human conversation.¹⁰

The purposes of schooling crafted by this nation's Founders had been carefully and patiently thought out, discussed, debated, and finally set to pen. A vibrant democracy of free thinking and astute future Americans was their dream, for they understood that an uninformed and ignorant citizenry would lead to the demise of the republic. They placed their hopes in schools—schools that would be sacred places where, with each new generation, young Americans would be sent forth into the forums of liberty. As we now stand flat-footed and inept, we can see before our eyes that dream is now fading along with the slow erosion of the treasured vision.

As a young school child, I sketched a picture of Christ. The image that I chose to recreate with my yet unschooled young hand was from a picture of an angry Lord. This image rather baffled and confused me. He appeared angry and the picture revealed people who were running from him. I was perplexed. When I finished my sketch I showed it to my teacher. She looked at it, smiled, and then complimented me.

Then she said, “Raymond, you look confused, why?”

“Sister, he looks so angry.”

She explained, “He's chasing them out of a sacred place, Raymond, for they were using the place for their own purposes and not for the special reasons for which it was made. His anger is called a 'just anger.' Do you understand?”

“I'm not sure, Sister. I think so. We shouldn't violate sacred places.”

“That's right, Raymond. Ours is the responsibility to preserve sacred places—to protect sacred places for the purposes they were made.”

I reflect on her words so often today and ask myself. Is it our time for “just anger”? Is it our time to rid schools of dysfunctional purposes? Is it time to return schools to the purposes intended by our Founders? If they are allowed to continue along the current path, what will happen to the effectiveness of the democracy envisioned so long ago?

To build on these thoughts and Sister's wise advice, consider the challenge articulated in the following passage from Carne Ross in his recently published book, *The Leaderless Revolution*.

It is pathetic to witness the injustice of the status quo and yet do nothing, however slight, to amend it. Above all, this inaction in the face of inequality and looming crisis is to render ourselves less than we are.¹¹

Finis

Notes:

1. "Ordinance of 1787," West's *Encyclopedia of American Law*, pp. 2-6, <http://www.answers.com/topic/northwest-ordinance>.
<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h365.html>.
2. Merrell D. Peterson, *The Jefferson Image of the American Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 239.
3. Benjamin R. Barber, "Public Schooling: Education for Democracy," in *The Public Purpose of Education*, John I Goodlad and Timothy J. McMannon, eds. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 27.
4. Clinton E. Boutwell, *Shell Game: Corporate America's Agenda for Schools*, (Bloomington, Ind.: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1997), 86-87.
5. Timothy J. McMannon, "Introduction: The Changing Purposes of Education and Schooling," in *The Public Purpose of Education*, John I. Goodlad and Timothy J. McMannon, eds, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 9.
6. United States Department of Labor, Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), What Work Requires of Schools: A SCANS Report for America 2000 (Washington, D.C.:1991)
7. Diane Ravitch, "What You Need to Know About ALEC," *Bridging Week/Bridging-Differences, Education Week*, May 1, 2012, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/Bridging-Differences/2012/05/dear_deborah...5/3/2012.
8. Clinton Boutwell, 86-87.
9. Paul Krugman, *End This Depression Now!* (New York: W.W.Norton, 2012), 37-38.
10. Timothy J. McMannon, "The Changing Purposes of Education and Schooling," in *The Public Purpose of Education and Schooling*, John I. Goodman and Timothy J. McMannon, eds. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997) 9.
11. Carne Ross, *The Leaderless Revolution: How Ordinary People Will take Power and Change Politics in the 21st Century* (New York: Blue Rider Press, Penguin Group, 2011), 214.