

EDUCATIONAL FUTURES PROJECTS

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100 YEARS WAR AGAINST LEARNING

by

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The 100 YEARS WAR—on and off between England and France (116 years: 1337-1453)—has been cited as the longest in history. However, this conflict pales when contrasted with the centuries old on/off WAR AGAINST LEARNING. The battles continue between (1) TRADITIONALIST politicians and school people who favor “reforming *schooling*,” and (2) VISIONARY societal and educational critics who advocate “personalized *learning* environments.”

These latter voices profess that ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL schooling and testing does not benefit the great majority. The goal is to eradicate required edicts in favor of learner, mentor, family directed formats through options and choices. Research and experimental projects overwhelmingly support personalization. Why then are 95% of the mandated learners in America still subjected to Traditionalist demands?

The Visionaries have settled for defeat and a truce! Most are involved in writing and speaking, directing a program, organizing a conference, and their own lives; they have failed to unify an army of battlefield warriors to resume the war against *learning injustice*. They have not challenged Traditionalist politicians—face to face, not just in print—with a demand to be heard.

Political No-Child-Left-Behind, forced reading in kindergarten, required algebra for everyone traditionalist-style controls are allowed to exist when there is no learning validity to warrant such imposed wartime atrocities. The onslaught by the enemies has gained momentum through the Obama/Duncan plans for national standards and penalties. The Visionaries have lost the courage of Joan of Arc, who at age 19 (1412-1431) in the midst of the 100 Years War, donned a white suit of armor and personally led on the battlefield the French troops to victory at Orleans. Later she was captured, declared a heretic, and burned at the stake, but risked all in defense of her beliefs.

The analogies in education to a shooting war are valid, for though non-violent, it reflects the same mentality. There is a real struggle between the Traditionalists who are the current conquerors, and the Visionaries who are the suppressed. How often must people be reminded that traditional schooling—Germany was the best—produced not only V2 Rockets, but

Auschwitz, Treblinka, Dachau, and Buchenwald. *Doctors from Hell* portrays the brutal experiments performed by brilliant and *highly educated* German physicians. Though Poland was almost destroyed, the amazing resistance of the Polish people (*The Zookeeper's Wife*) provides needed inspiration to combine with the courage of those who stormed the beaches at Normandy. When will the learning Visionaries unfurl the war banner proclaiming that it is the AFFECTIVE DOMAIN that will determine the future—not the mandates that focus only on cognitive testing and limited subjects.

Should not the Visionaries be willing to risk personal sacrifices, become “Vice-Presidents for Learning Heresy,” don their white suits of armor, and openly challenge the wrath of the Traditionalists? Should they not war against the ill-grounded policies of those trained for lawyer, business, farm, political, schoolpeople careers? Should they not openly fight for learner choices to overcome the 400-year mentality of same-size mandates for all? *Is it not interesting to note that schooling, the institute founded to promote democracy, is now the most undemocratic institution in America?*

The desire to turn the tides of battle is alive; some progress has been achieved—Orleans was a victory. This spirit must be harnessed again, for in the existing political structure, the war for learning democracy and freedom is being lost. Nationwide, twenty-five percent of learners (on average) are pushed out. Thirty percent of those remaining receive “D/F” report cards; forty percent receive “C.” Seventy percent in required schooling in America are unsatisfactory or average. Of those earning “A/B” status, most are bored with their classes.

Increasing numbers are dropping out seeking alternate routes: exit exams, community college, independent study, charters or alternatives schools, and home-based education. There is rapid growth of virtual on-line schools with more flexibility but little personal touch; many are of questionable quality. Charters and other alternatives have helped, but most charters are too small, follow traditional curricula, and are open only to a handful (percentage-wise) of public school students. The same is true for most private alternative settings—plus tuition—and for most college and career programs.

In the public schools, the Visionaries have allowed the politicians to **eliminate the best programs of interest** that are often the **keys to learning** for many: art, music, home economics, industrial technology, consumer and business offerings and physical education –the latter in K-4 where it is the most important. Yet, the “power districts” have continued football. It is well known that the *best way to reach learners is to build on their strengths and interests!* Politicians have erroneously been convinced to force the focus on the opposite: the perceived *weaknesses and failures!* Why did the oppressed not fight rather than just write against No Child Left Behind? Where was Joan of Arc and her army? Nationwide, test scores have not dramatically improved over the past twenty years of striving for world-class standards.

Most younger potential leaders of personalized learning do not know enough educational history—not even the history of alternatives. Overlooked is the fact that in the early 60s/70s, devoted public school optimists led the education reform movement. Often

forgotten is that Title III was passed by Congress and signed in 1966 by President Lyndon Johnson, to provide federal money for innovation, experimentation, and research to determine changes which could create significantly better public schools. As part of this effort, Minnesota and South Dakota rose from 49th and lagging to 1st in national leadership for change. Berkeley, Minneapolis, and Tacoma received large Title III grants to fund entirely different learning approaches. In conjunction, the Ford, Kettering, Danforth, and Chrysler Education Foundations provided sums of money to promote public school innovation, including the Model Schools Project and the Educational Facilities Laboratory. During this era, plans were drawn for the Minnesota Experimental City—a community of 250,000 with no schools or colleges. Early in the Johnson years, University City, Missouri was the most innovative district in America. The Amphitheater District in Tucson led change in Arizona. The eight Rocky Mountain states were propelled toward innovation by the Title III “Designing Education for the Future” project. The Visionaries were on the offensive!

The election of President Reagan began the counter-attack and the return to apple pie schooling. Ironically, the policies of Presidents Clinton and Obama have continued the buildup of the army of educational oppression. In contrast, the veteran Visionaries have failed to lead an army to reverse the losses of the past four decades, though the research is overwhelmingly on their side.

In 1959, Goodlad and Anderson published irrefutable evidence that the grade level self-contained classroom system, conceived in 1847 and adapted from a 1536 Prussian military system, was wrong. The twelve-year University of Oregon Medford Child Growth and Development Study (1957-1969) proved there is a six-year physiological spread among “7th graders”; some chronological 12-year-olds are physiologically only 9 or 10, while others are 14 or 15. Reaction time was proved to be a late-developing independent trait, leading to moving the pitching mound back ten feet and requiring helmets in Little League Baseball. The “academic” spread among “7th graders” reflects a ten-year range in achievement—from grade 3 to grade 13 scoring on traditional state tests. There can be no “7th grade” classification, yet it persists today as an edict from the Gods.

Further proof that most traditions are wrong is the political decision that entering kindergarten children must be age 5 by the magic one minute on the clock: 11:59 ½ versus 12:00 ½ determines eligibility for “formal” learning. How can Visionaries not battle in unison against such folly? “Kindergarten” teachers are faced with a 24-month developmental spread among the children: 12-15 months chronologically (with transfer students), plus home environment, maturation, language development, and physique factors. The 1924 yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education stated conclusively, with data from six diverse geographic and economic communities, that homogeneous grouping did not help academically and hurt socially. Yet today 90% of the school districts follow a form of such organization.

Students may learn to read by age 3 while others may not until age 13. Most learn to read well by ages 8-9 if allowed to progress at their own rate and have choices of perhaps 23 self-selected approaches and materials. The 1922 *Detroit First Grade Intelligence Study*

documented a range of from 12 to 77 days for individual students in one class to complete a given assignment. The need for remedial *reading* is caused by traditional approaches! Fortunately, schools do not teach *walking* or *talking*, or think of all the remedial classrooms!

The famous *Eight-Year Study* (1932-1940) proved conclusively that it makes no difference what courses are taken in high school related to success in life—whether college, employment, or parenting—yet Traditionalist politicians continue to impose even more rigid but un-validated mandates. The evidence is clear that knowledge is interdependent, not segmented, yet separate “subject courses” continue. Report cards have proved to be an evil tool designed to segregate students. They are of no value in a true student-centered learning system; testing is only useful for individual diagnosis, not group, teacher, or school comparisons.

The most innovative preK-12 and college public learning system in America in the late 60s-mid 70s was the Wilson program at Minnesota State University, Mankato. SIXTY-NINE changes, away from traditional patterns to student-centered learning, were made literally overnight at no additional cost and without firing teachers, forcing the State Department to waive all requirements, and the Legislature to change five Education Codes. As example, year-round education was illegal in Minnesota under ADA attendance counting, but when the system was changed to ADM, year-round and a host of other improvements became “legal.” The *Christian Science Monitor* described Wilson as a “cradle-to-grave personalized learning system under one roof,” offering a flow of **mixed ages** from pre-birth/pre-school to BS and MS college degrees, and senior citizen options. Wilson and other similar programs proved that all the traditional rituals were not necessary; in fact, they hindered learning for most. The Wilson documents are in the MSU Library Archives.

The 100 YEARS WAR analogy is further reinforced by the 1880-1910 period in England, when Edmond Holmes, as Chief Inspector General, enforced very rigid curriculum and schooling requirements. After 30 years of enforcement, he resigned, apologized for hurting so many students, and vowed to spend the remainder of his life trying to undo some of the harm he had imposed. In 1911 he wrote *What Is and What Should Be*, followed in 1913 by *The Tragedy of Education*. In 2011, there is an even greater “tragedy of schooling.” Will the 100 Years War continue until 2111? Where is Joan of Arc to lead? Where are the Visionaries?

Bertrand Russell in *On Education* (1926) described the need to overhaul “schooling.” The 1917 Winnetka Plan, the 1922 Dalton Plan, and the 1907-1937 Gary Indiana work-study-play Platoon System of William Wirt provided models to illustrate that major change can be successfully achieved. Ironically, the *1910 Russell Sage Foundation* report on the **status of education in the United States** supported the 1911 status in England documented by Holmes. Later J. Lloyd Trump, a great education leader, led the way toward innovation and improvement in the 1960-1980 period—including his plan for a *A School for Everyone*. Over the past five decades, the writings of John Holt, Carl Rogers, Ivan Illich, Paul Goodman, Jonathan Kozol, George Dennison, Wayne Jennings, Dwight Allen, Eugene Howard, Roland Meighan and his books from Educational Heretics Press, and many others have called for massive reform of

the schooling system. Earlier, John Dewey and George Counts, and before that, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Parker and more over two centuries reflected historical educational dissent.

The 64 global dilemmas—in reality one Macroproblem—must be priorities for the global community. One cannot live without air, water, food. Yet the term “Education” is one of the 64 micro-dilemmas. What must be done now to tackle this aspect of societal futures? It is well beyond time for the Joan of Arc passion to emerge within the ranks. Leaders need to come forward with battle plans and weapons. ACTION is the only answer. There is no need for more books, articles, speeches, or conferences. How many of such avenues have been pursued just from 1950 to 2010? ENOUGH is ENOUGH! Visionaries must realize they are in a war. It took six years of allied effort to free Poland from the Nazis; the inspiration of the Polish people needs to re-surface. The battle of schooling versus learning must be resumed.

WHAT TO DO: SIX STEPS!

1. Four with Joan of Arc commitment accept leadership; these fighters invite 25 others who support learning philosophies as opposed to schooling mandates, to join in creating a plan to renew the war for educational choice, not mandates.
2. NO “speeches” or “debates” over implementation methods of personalized learning philosophies are allowed. The focus is an agreement to take action to overcome the losses in the longstanding war. The call for volunteers to join a committed army goes nationwide through Visionaries outlets.
3. The battle plan creates a coordinated four week national “strike” against the controlling army of the political school establishment. Appeals for coverage reach media outlets as CNN, New York Times, Associated Press. The Visionaries insist on extended hearings for their spokespersons to meet with the Congressional Education Committees. They meet individually with their representative members of Congress, supported by statements from the national army members.
4. Participating state groups meet with their legislators to confirm that they will no longer be a party to unjust demands, such as requiring Algebra I and II for graduation and invalid GRE scores for public graduate school entrance. The 900 members of the Minnesota Alternatives Association (MAAP), once the Joan of Arc leaders nationally, but now just part of the existing truce, once again rise and RISK! Where possible, they close their schools for the march. The 900, accompanied by many parents and students, ascend the St. Paul capitol steps and remind all why Minnesota was once the number one state for educational innovation and improvement. Minnesota was the first state to approve charter schools, the result of heretics such as the Mankato Wilson and St. Paul Open programs. The *Tribune* and *Pioneer Press* cover for the nation the renewal of the war.

5. The national army leaders contact key politicians, for as in the past—Humphrey, McGovern, Mondale--there are those who support learning as opposed to schooling. The February 16, 1966 speech by Lyndon Johnson, presented to 10,000 school superintendents in Atlantic City, NJ, called for dramatic new VISIONS. A “masterpiece,” it was the best education speech ever given by a sitting President. A copy, via political connections, is read by President Obama. He is asked to rethink his policies and the misguided direction of Secretary Duncan. A new “Title III,” but with teeth, is proposed. Johnson may have failed in Vietnam, but he was arguably the best President ever for education.
6. The Visionary army leaders expand their arsenal of weapons:
 - a. In contacting politicians, teachers, and the public, they present an extensive portfolio of 100 research and experimentation results proving the fallacies of traditional schooling when mandated for ALL LEARNERS; “Startling, Disturbing, Delightful Research” by Wayne Jennings provides a great start. The portfolio also contains methods by which schools, colleges, and education centers can be made significantly better for most learners. RESEARCH—such as the “7th grade” dilemma, and the *Eight-Year-Study*—is the key component. The once famous *political* Carnegie Unit, which spread like wildfire throughout the “academic nation,” came into existence to create a system for college professor retirement pensions. It had no educational foundation; yet to graduate from high school, for decades most districts required completion of “16 Carnegie Units”!
 - b. Accompanying the research portfolio is a compilation of books, articles, CDs, and websites supporting personalized learning positions. Included are 100 exciting quotations from well-known figures over the past 100-plus years of the war indicating the sad state of “education.” **Until the tide is reversed**, the negatives of mandatory one-size schooling will apply to the future.
 - c. One weapon is a clarion that those who are risking their positions and stature have adopted a “Just Say No” policy. They will not enforce, or will forcefully oppose, bad mandates as reading for ALL in kindergarten/first grade, and massive expensive testing for reading and math programs which reveal nothing new: high economic neighborhoods have had higher test scores. If the Traditionalist armies try to overpower the “Just Say No” policy, the suppressed go to court over segregation. All that cognitive comparative test scores do is segregate the “fast from the slow” (as measured by invalid exams), an atrocity that is a worse War Crime than separation by ethnicity, culture, gender, or religion.
 - d. Among the weapons is an outline of the 69 or more immediate changes that can be made in programs of choice—ones that can improve the learning environment for many volunteers at no additional cost. In fact, millions of dollars can be saved by NOT purchasing the mass test materials and required textbooks from which corporate publishers make obscene sums of unjust profits. Moving from a graded to a non-graded organizational structure costs nothing, or only a little to connect a row of traditional classrooms into a suite or learning center. Year-round operation can

- be neutral or save money, not cost more, as advocates of the obsolete nine-month calendar profess. Most of the immediate desired changes (eliminating report cards) can be accomplished within existing budgets. All that is needed is IMAGINEERING; Imagine, Invent, Implement.
- e. The arsenal of weapons includes a summary of the philosophies and methods that remove the TYRANNY of traditional schooling mandates. A simple book, *Letter to a Teacher* by the Schoolboys of Barbiana, inspires; the boys wrote: "School is a war against the poor." Visionaries again don their white suits of armor. They resume the conflict with the Traditionalists, overcoming the defeats suffered during the 100 YEARS WAR AGAINST LEARNING. There can still be positive outcomes for personalized learning futures.

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