

# Fraudulent Educational Reform in America

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Region: [USA](#)  
Theme: [History](#)

*“Curiosity is the wick in the candle of learning.”—William Arthur Ward*

*What goes on in America’s schools is essentially identical to what goes on in the Madrassas of the Muslim world. In both, orthodox beliefs are taught as truth and critical examination is discouraged. Two worlds clash in loggerheads.*

In the 1960s, I came across a little book entitled *Master Teachers and the Art of Teaching*. This unpretentious little book, written by John E. Colman of St. John’s University, not only enlightened me as a young university professor but proved to be invaluable. In it, about a dozen different teaching methods are described along with some information about the master teachers who designed them. Each of these methods was used successfully to teach some subjects to some students. None was used successfully to teach all subjects to all students. Throughout my teaching career, I found opportunities to utilize many of these methods when the right situations arose. The lesson I learned from this little book is that there is no one teaching method that works for teaching all subjects to all students. Finding the right method for the students at hand is at best an art, never a science, and is never easy.

Few people understand this. In fact, teacher training suppresses it. Teaching methods are taught to prospective teachers as fixed, reliable procedures that never fail when in reality, they rarely succeed. And although carried out in numerous variations, the predominant way of teaching in America’s schools at all levels has been the teacher’s lecture and the student’s need to memorize it. Today the lecture is often presented in various ways. The student listens to a teacher speak, or reads a teacher’s words in a textbook, or watches a televised presentation or a computerized video. And students are asked to memorize some portion of the presented material. Furthermore, the memorization of presented material is the most boring way of teaching anyone anything. No one likes having to memorize stuff. Some teachers, like orators, are better at lecturing than others which leads many to conclude that the quality of the presentation is what really matters and that that quality depends on the teacher’s talent. But it doesn’t. Teaching is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for learning. Human beings had been teaching themselves and others for millennia before what we know as a “teacher” ever existed.

The history of education in America makes this transparently clear. Even the Puritans had ways of teaching their children, but the first normal school, a school to train students to be teachers, didn’t come into being until 1839, less than two centuries ago. It resulted in building a school system modeled on an industrial, manufacturing model that still controls thinking about education today. Unfortunately it was faulty then and still is today.

Using this model, our schools are thought of as factories, the teachers are thought of as factory workers, and students are thought of as raw material. Each student enters the

school system as a *tabula rasa* and exits as a book engraved with “knowledge.” The engraver, of course, is the teacher who is responsible for what is written on the *tabulae*. The system is devoted to mass producing educated people, and even anecdotal observations of people clearly demonstrate that it has never worked. Had it worked, everyone who attended school would have been equally educated, just like the buttons produced in a button factory are all alike. Two and a half centuries of graduate counterexamples absolutely refute the theory.

But so does the experience of most students. It is the rare graduate of any school on any level who can't name a teacher s/he considers exceptionally good. Yet even those teachers never taught every student in their classes equally well. Some learned a lot, some learned less, and perhaps some learned nothing. No teacher can be responsible for such disparate results. Something other than the teacher's ability must be accountable for them, because each student in each class was subjected to the same presentations. Mill's method of difference must be used to identify the other, but no reformer is attempting to use it. Blaming the teacher is so much easier, and putting the blame there proves that the improvement of education is not the aim of reformers.

Even though we routinely ask children what they would like to be when they grow up, except in trivial ways, our schools rarely make attaining their goals possible, because the system is designed to make products not educated human beings. Prospective college students are always being told, even by the President, to study subjects that the commercial community needs to carry out its enterprises. Lindsay Oldenski, Assistant Professor, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, [writes](#) that the need is to match graduates to the areas where labour demand is growing. Students are not told to study the subjects needed to become what they want to be because unless the commercial community wants people who want to be what they want to be, this society has no place for them in it, which proves that this society does not exist for people, but that people exist to fulfill the purposes of the commercial community.

The President says more scientists are needed. No one asks him why? No one points out that we don't pay any attention to those we already have. Why are more scientists who are not going to be paid attention to needed? What the commercial community wants is not scientists, but scientists who fulfill the commercial community's needs. So the schools need not produce environmentalists or climatologists or anthropologists.

What schools need to produce are scientists like Wernher Magnus Maximilian Freiherr von Braun who was quite content to use slave labor to produce weapons of mass murder. Our commercial community needs scientists like that and apparently quite enough of them are being produced. The educational system exists to produce factory fodder, and educational reformers are concerned not with improving education but with producing factory fodder better. But it won't work! CNN recently [released](#) a list of the 16 colleges in the country that produce the highest paid graduates. Princeton University was first on the list; yet only 49% of its graduates considered their jobs to be meaningful. Training for work is not education for living, not even when highly paid. The average rate of meaningful work for the 16 colleges is a mere 51%. Can you approximate the average for all workers, especially the lowest paid? What does this say about the quality of life Americans enjoy?

Our reformers' love affair with technology has also shown itself to be ineffective. American love for science and technology is grounded in religious-like faith, not reality. This love

produces a deeply held belief that science and technology will solve all problems. That it may not is never even considered, so reformers go from one technology to another in an endless search for the holy grail of learning. Television was introduced into college classrooms in the early 1960s. It enabled one professor to “teach” hundreds of students, but they never learned very much. A decade later, computers were introduced into the public schools. A lot of computers were bought; little increase in learning was observed. Now the classroom is being shifted to the Internet.

But test scores keep dropping. Despite decades of reforms and billions of dollars spent the American education system badly needs improvement; yet no relevant improvement is even in sight. “Most of the nation’s 2012 high school graduates aren’t ready for college, and their reading skills continue to steadily decline, hitting their lowest level in four decades, [new data show](#).” In fact, piles of evidence reveal that Americans are getting dumber. People who have graduated from high school since the pocket calculator was invented can’t calculate in their heads, not even simple addition, subtraction, and multiplication. Many people addicted to the Internet have difficulty reading anything more complicated than a tweet, and the technical constraints imposed by the internet are making it impossible to teach spelling and the nuances of grammar. What can seriously be written about in 140 characters? Articles become mere headlines and headlines become mere soundbites.

America is, and always has been, an anti-intellectual society. It is a conservative nation with deeply held conservative views. This conservatism stems from its widespread fundamentalist religious values. Numerous progressive attempts to change this have failed and are failing again. When the Republican Party of Texas recently approved its 1912 Platform, it included the following paragraph:

### **Knowledge-Based Education**

We oppose the teaching of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) (values clarification), critical thinking skills and similar programs that are simply a relabeling of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) (mastery learning) which focus on behavior modification and have the purpose of challenging the student’s fixed beliefs and undermining parental authority.

And the Alabama Legislature considered a bill to stop the teaching of evolution as a fact. That even a part of America’s governing elite tries to enact such reactionary views into law means that they are attempting to make improving the American schools impossible. The American elite does not want anyone to improve the American schools. America’s schools will never be reformed because the culture impedes it. The reform movements are not about education. They, like everything else in America, are about money. Both the American political and economic systems rely on a thoughtless, unintelligent, uneducated populous. Einstein said that it is a miracle that curiosity survives formal education. In America, it hasn’t. To become learned, a person, especially a child, must be imbued with curiosity. But marketing to children and entertaining adults are based on mindless activities. How does watching a sporting event, a televised situation comedy, a music-video, a cartoon awaken curiosity? What does any of this make a person want to learn? The culture doesn’t make Americans want to learn anything about anything. Such people do not make willing students. Schooling to them is something being forced upon them; they naturally resist it. Students who don’t want to learn won’t, and the society has developed no means of awakening curiosity. For educational purposes, the lack of curiosity is fatal. It cannot be cured.

A healthy curiosity is the only weapon against ignorance. Teaching is nothing but the art of awakening the natural curiosity of students, but learning what is taught is not enough. Learning whether what is taught makes sense is ultimately essential. Unfortunately that aspect of educating people is not part of American education.

So, in a sense, what goes on in America's schools is essentially identical to what goes on in the Madrassas of the Muslim world. In both, orthodox beliefs are taught as truth and critical examination is discouraged. Two worlds clash in loggerheads. "Where ignorance is our master, there is no possibility of real peace."—Dalai Lama

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