

The Skeptimist: Education's Ultimate Weapon

The skeptimist is a person who does not -- because of nature, nurture, or stubbornness -- accept statements, theories, references, or conclusions without substantial accompanying evidence. In consideration of his will to survive, he wholeheartedly devotes himself to a creed of optimism. Man is ever improving; his imprisonment in an almost hopelessly muddled morass of confusion in education is transitory; things must get better.

The Skeptimist strongly believes that someday:

1. Panels and task forces will cease polling their members for recommendations.
2. Teachers will cease taking the aforementioned distinguished groups seriously.
3. Local chapters of professional societies will cease annoying teachers with invitations to meaningless meetings.
4. Organizations will cease annoying local chapters with demands for bigger and more frequent meetings.
5. Journals will cease publishing results of these meetings.
6. Darwinian theory (or is it Degeneration theory) will assert itself and all senseless panels, meetings, chapters, organizations, articles, and journals will become fit study for archaeologists.

With his unique personality, the skeptimist will provide leadership for fulfillment of the above predictions. With these monumental tasks accomplished, one million teachers (some antiquarians will continue to plan, attend, and summarize the proceedings of meetings) will have restored to them that most precious of all gifts -- time. It is a conservative estimate that each of these people will now have an additional one hundred hours of time a year available for work and study. These one billion teacher hours multiplied by three million (the approximate total weight of the brains of one million teachers) will release for meaningful professional contributions three hundred trillion teacher-brain-pound-hours. At the very least, more teachers, principals, school administrators and teacher-educators (especially teacher-educators) will be available to wathh the school-store.

The skeptimist has a genuine conviction that the unified effort of three hundred trillion teacher-brain-pound-hours will be more than equal to the task of solving the knotty problems faced by our schools today. And so, American Education may be saved.

P.S. The Skeptimist -- a skeptimist with a shade more of optimism.

P.P.S. This essay was written in 1956, however, my multitudinous crucial responsibilities to learned societies, professional associations, federal and state task forces, civic groups, and annual banquets during the past ten years caused this message to be misplaced and forgotten. It was found recently when I decided

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to change the paper doorjamb in my study. After two decades of fruitless wanderings in arid educational wastelands, I am more than ever convinced that I have not found the Promised Land. Nor will I ease this anxiety and ~~the~~ discontent unless a way is found to spend more time at home, more time in the clinic with children and college students, and more time in libraries, and less time on airplanes and at meetings. Although progress has been modest, I am working diligently toward a solution (1966).

P.P.P.S. The data gathered from this longitudinal report convinces me that I have a problem, one that resists treatment. The ~~Null~~ hypothesis continues to obtain; I have hardly changed, in spite of the application of that most powerful independent variable: my family. In spite of aversive response to my behavior (having to sit through meetings), I remain relatively invariant, relatively stable, relatively insensitive. Skinner, Lindsley, Lovass and even Freud and Bettelheim have failed me. I continue to work diligently toward some solution or amelioration but how long, how long must man suffer in this manner? (1969)

P.P.P.P.S. Note to typist: In title, please delete "Ultimate" and insert "Only" and add a question mark after "Weapon" (1970).