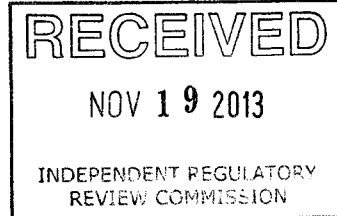


Cooper, Kathy

From: Joanne Yurchak <jyurchak@comcast.net>
Sent: Tuesday, November 19, 2013 12:04 AM
To: David Sumner
Subject: Please use this version. The one I previously sent had an error in the first paragraph. Reference IRRC #2976: Common Core
Attachments: Testimonial to IRRC Regarding Methodology.pdf



Dear Mr. Sumner:

Attached is a pdf file of a testimony to the IRRC that I would like published on line. Please use this version. I corrected an error in the one I sent previously. I would prefer that it be published as is, with the formatting in tact, but if this is not possible, I am also including the text below. Thank you.

Joanne Yurchak

November 18, 2013
Mr. David Sumner
Executive Director, IRRC
333 Market Street, 14th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17101

Reference: IRRC #2976

Dear Mr. Sumner:

Although I have serious concerns about a multitude of deleterious consequences of the Common Core initiative, this testimony focuses on certain of its "teaching" methodologies that I consider to be educationally counterproductive. My perspective is that of a retired educator who taught chemistry at the university level for decades.

My two grandsons are both taking Algebra I at the Paxon Hollow Middle School in the Marple Newtown School District in Delaware County. One is in sixth grade and one in eighth. Paxon Hollow uses a Common-Core-associated technique called "Power Teaching" that is designed to move from a teacher-centered classroom to a student-centered classroom with the use of cooperative learning. My grandsons have explained to me that in each of their classes, the teacher functions as a "facilitator," presenting a topic to the class for about 10-15 minutes. For the remainder of the class period, students are given problems to solve among themselves in groups. Unfinished problems are taken home for help from their parents which in itself is problematic since they have no books—only worksheets.

How can educators who devise these educational experiments delude themselves into believing that they will improve understanding and learning outcomes? A collaborative methodology of this sort will frustrate slower students and prevent the brighter ones from reaching their maximum potentials. In the opinion of this educator, algebra classes should be homogeneously grouped and taught by a trained

teacher. It should be **obvious** that having children “teaching” children the complex abstract concepts involved in algebra is not only educationally unsound but irresponsible.

When I asked a well-informed individual whether this collaborative, student-centered approach was characteristic of the Common Core methodology, she answered in the affirmative and explained: “The whole idea of the students working in groups stems from the ideas in Outcome Based Education where they think students need to know how to work together as they do in the workforce. The teacher becomes a facilitator instead of an instructor. **It is clear that people who come up with these ideas don't understand kids. Students must understand the material on their own before they can add anything to a group.** “Social justice” is in the middle of this movement. They would rather lower the bar for everyone, making it look like there is equal opportunity than to allow students to achieve to the best of their ability. If they cannot fix what is wrong in the under-performing schools, then they change the expectation for all students.” Her comments certainly fit the “one-size-fits-all” description that so aptly describes the Common Core paradigm.

Providing group activities has some merit if used *sparingly*, for an interesting change of pace, to apply what has already been thoroughly explained by the teacher. In general, however, team-building should be left to sports coaches.

In my college teaching years ago, I encountered far too many students who were severely deficient in their understanding of basic math concepts. This was a result of a different type of foolish educational experiment – one that muddled their minds with useless theoretical concepts, namely, the “*newmath*.” Now the granddaddy of all educational experiments is being foisted on our students. Common Core is a breeding ground for methodologies such as the collaborative/facilitator techniques described above that are equally foolish and even more educationally counterproductive than those that have been tried and discarded in the past. If these practices embraced by Common Core are allowed to continue, another generation of math illiterates will be spawned.

One has to wonder why educrats periodically create these preposterous methodologies for transforming our educational system. There are two answers... **FOLLOW THE MONEY** and **CONSIDER THE POLITICAL AGENDAS**.

Money: Each new initiative provides financial windfalls for innumerable special interest groups that are either directly or peripherally connected to education – book publishers, educational suppliers, technology companies, curriculum and test designers, educrats, etc., etc. It is significant that many of these special interest groups and corporations that serve to profit from the implementation of Common Core provided funding to the trade groups that initially led its creation, namely, the National Governor’s Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). In addition, some Pennsylvania organizations who have written testimonies to the IRRC in favor of the standards have received generous donations from the Gates Foundation (which itself strongly supports Common Core). There is no question that many people and corporations are profiting enormously from its implementation.

Political Agenda: The “spreading the intellect” collectivist mindset of the methodology utilized in my grandsons’ algebra classes is education’s version of our current administration’s agenda of “spreading the wealth.” This is even more chilling and disturbing than the profit motive. Common Core’s one-size-fits-all approach diminishes individualism. It is the great leveler – the “everyone gets a trophy” mindset.

I have always strongly supported the public school system, but the manner in which Pennsylvania’s Department of Education has enabled self-serving individuals and corporations to manipulate our educational system to the detriment of the students is fast changing my mind. The process of using our children as guinea pigs in untested, costly educational experiments must STOP!



Respectfully,

Joanne Yurchak
West Chester, PA
yurchak@science.widener.edu