

Better Cogs in the Wheel or Free Thinkers? It's up to You. Choices in American Education.

By Connie Marlow for Grassroots TV August 1993

Hello. I am Connie Marlow. I have been a resident of Aspen for 20 years. I have 3 children ages 7, 11 and 13. Two attend the Aspen School district. I am your basic all-American mom. I was educated at our country's best schools, having graduated with honors from UC Berkeley in Economics. Members of my family have been leaders in education and politics in this country for many generations. Public service in support of the American dream and the democratic experiment was at the backbone of forming who I am and how I think.

Well, I feel that the American dream has come to a critical point and I ask each of you to listen carefully to what I have to say. I join thousands of parents throughout the country who are alarmed at the role the Department of Labor is playing in the education of America's children.

The Department of Labor wants better workers, and has found an ideal vehicle for producing them, the American school system through a new educational concept: Outcome/Standards -Based Education.

If you want your children to be trained to become a better cog in the wheel of a system that I consider to be out of control, please sit comfortably and assume that all is well with the American dream. If you want your children to become free thinkers who will one day make the world a better place to live, please listen carefully.

Outcome/Standards-based education is an assessment-driven concept based on the premise that children will be expected to "live up to" certain standards before they will be allowed to graduate from a school system. These standards will be in the academic or content areas as well as the value or affective areas. Your children will not only be judged and categorized on how they how they read, spell, or do math, they will also be brought to task on what kind of people they are. This information will be put in a

computer and will precede them wherever they go. What business will want to hire workers who haven't shown that they "work well with others", "create quality products," "cope well with change," "demonstrate integrity, and tolerance."

There is something in how we think that makes us say "Right on, that's great. What's wrong with that, - what more could we ask for, finally a school system that cares about the whole child!"

I challenge you, as bright, well-educated people, products of 200-odd years of a system that promotes human rights and freedom, to look beyond the words that sound so good and try to understand what their implementation means to our children. Have you ever not coped well with change? Demonstrated a lack of tolerance? Would you like that information to be on a computer portfolio of you and have it color people's perceptions of you wherever you go, knowing that today you are a different person than you were yesterday, let alone when you were 7, 11, 15, 20, 30?

I would now like to share with you the values that the Aspen School District, in association with Mid Continent Educational Laboratory (McRel) in Denver and a handful of community members and teachers have arrived at and to which your children will be held accountable. As I go over these please imagine yourself as a 7 or 8 year old child, a 10 or 11 year old, or a high school student. The Aspen School District expects your children to demonstrate the following attributes as they progress through their school years k-12. See attached standards.

The Aspen School District will be implementing these values standards based on the assumption that they have been accepted by the Aspen community because a few community members on their steering committee were in favor of them. They have repeatedly ignored the concerns of many community members who spoke up in the meetings. These values have not been taken to the community at large.

The assessment vehicle for these values will be the "authentic task". An "authentic task" is defined as a "rich, relevant (real-world) learning and knowledge application task

that provides a context within which students may acquire, practice and perform/demonstrate the learner outcomes /standard considered to be significant.”

How are these tasks developed? I will take you through the “Questions to Consider When Developing an Authentic Task.” and the “Forms of Authentic Assessment “from the McREL model. I will now take you through an actual task as it was presented to a second grade classroom. The papers I am showing you are from the “Authentic Task Guidebook” given to the children at the outset of this procedure.

Authentic tasks are assessment vehicles. Assessment is a kind word for testing. Testing brings fear. Fear brings anxiety, that all-pervasive sensation that brings headaches, body problems and sickness and leads to drop-outs, suicide, drug and alcohol abuse and a host of other societal ills.

Does the task I just described to you encourage free, creative, original thought or does it state in a clear, concise and controlling manner exactly what is expected of the child? Perhaps the child can see that nothing can be done to protect the environment by electing one of the three candidates. Where does that response fit in the authentic task/authentic assessment vehicle? What if the children’s views do not match any of the three candidates views? When the children’s thinking does not fit the expected outcomes, do they then infer that they are not knowledgeable, not complex thinkers, or quality workers and are they judged accordingly by this system? What if they didn’t use any sources to arrive at their thinking because they are original thinkers? Your children are on the line in this system, all aspects of their being are being judged and categorized.

There used to be areas which were the private domain of the child, which were safe from judgement while they were being developed, consciously and individually over a lifetime. Most of the people who have made a difference in this world did not fit a mold as children or adults. Mahatma Gandhi was a shy fellow who seldom read newspapers. How would he have stacked up as a “global citizen”? He transformed overnight at age 25 into one of the most powerful leaders the world has ever known. Albert Einstein walked in solitude a “lone traveller” -the father of modern physics and a tireless

campaigner for mankind's highest ideals. How would he have rated as "someone who worked well with others?" What's going to happen to your little genius in this system. The one who doesn't fit at age 7, 11, 15 but if given a rich environment, trusted and left to his own destiny becomes someone that surpasses all expectation at some point in his life and contributes in his own way, at his own pace to making this world a better place to be.

The Aspen School District has told us that exit/outcomes -their name for this standards-based system is mandated by law. They have developed the value standards that they have already begun to implement them in the elementary school and they will be developing the content or academic standards over the next year. I would now like to share with you the latest law that has been passed regarding standards-based education in Colorado. See attached law HB 1313.

This law charges all people in a child's life to take responsibility for creating appropriate environments for children and recognizes the innate potential of the child. Are we ready to accept the challenge this law presents us? Are we willing to take the steps necessary to create a rich environment for our children? If so, we must look closely at what we value and our resulting childrearing practices birth through adulthood. Are we creating environments in which human bonding can occur in our babies and small children when we leave them shortly after birth to pursue a material well-being that condones a rate of consumption that is destroying our planet at a rapid pace? Aren't we teaching them through modelling that money is more important than they are and that excessive consumption and the destruction of our planet is ok, even as we take all our bottles to the recycling center on our way to buy the newest plastic gadget? Are we instilling a desire to take risks and go beyond expectation through a school system that demands right answers through fear of failure? Not only in school but in life?

The Aspen School District's interpretation of this law - that it is up to our children to demonstrate OUR success or failure as parents and teachers takes US off the hook and

puts THE CHILDREN IN THE HOT SEAT. If we were to take this interpretation seriously we would have to look at the epidemic of teen violence, drug and alcohol abuse and suicide and say “we have failed as parents and teachers.” Are we willing to admit that WE have failed, and change how WE live our lives, what WE value in the home and in the schools?

As I have pointed out, The Aspen School District is implementing values standards and assessments at the elementary level- Is it the business of our very young children to be concerned with demonstrating that they are knowledgeable, self-directed, globally responsible quality workers? Or is it their job to be children to the best of their ability and be the best sponges ever created? The law very clearly states that content or academic standards are to be the vehicle of educational reform. There is no mention of value standards. Where did they come from? Why are they even being contemplated in our system? Why aren't they being implemented at the high school level where capable, thoughtful young adults can evaluate them and say whether they are appropriate or not?

What is being imposed upon our elementary children in the name of good intentions and high standards is in my opinion an inherently dangerous system of control that must be stopped. If something in what I have said triggers a response in you that something is not right please contact me at 927-3652 or Sandy Jones at 925-3208. Join **Parents for Choice in Education** so that we may join together to create safe, healthy school environments. There is a steam roller forging ahead at this time, the school district has spent a lot of time and money to get them to this point, and they have no intention of stopping the forward momentum of the implementation of this system. It will be a shame to allow an inappropriate environment to damage our children's psyches. We will all pay the price in years to come. I would like to summarize the points I have made here today and ask you stop a minute and think about the things I have said. Our children are counting on you. See attached summary statements.

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