

Washington Post, “The Answer Sheet” blog by Valerie Strauss,
November 19, 2014 (Note: This version differs slightly from that posted on the blog):

A paradigm shift schools need now — and it’s not Common Core, tech or rigor

By Marion Brady

Modern education, worldwide, has lost sight of its primary mission—helping humankind survive.

Survival requires adapting to technological, environmental, demographic, and cognitive change. Adapting to change requires new knowledge. New knowledge comes primarily from the discovery of relationships between parts of reality not previously thought to be related.

Because the math-science-language arts-social studies “core” curriculum ignores important fields of study, and fails to treat those it doesn’t ignore as parts of an integrated whole, it radically limits relationship-discovery options. Locking the core in permanent place with the Common Core State Standards perpetuates the most serious problem with modern education—its imagination-limiting boundaries.

Below, from my much longer list, nationally and internationally known and respected scholars weigh in on the problem:

Leon Botstein: “We must fight the inappropriate fragmentation of the curriculum by disciplines . . .” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 1, 1982, p. 28,

Neil Postman: “There is no longer any principle that unifies the school curriculum and furnishes it with meaning.” *Phi Delta Kappan*, January 1983, p. 316

John Kemeny: “The problems now faced by our society transcend the bounds of the disciplines.” Quoted by William Newell in *Liberal Education*, Association of American Colleges, 1983, Vol. 69, No. 3

Ernest Boyer: “All of our experience should have made it clear by now that faculty and students will not derive from a list of disjointed courses a coherent curriculum revealing the necessary interdependence of knowledge.” (Paraphrased by Daniel Tanner in his review of Boyer’s book *High School*. *Phi Delta Kappan*, March 1984, p. 10)

John Goodlad: “The division into subjects and periods encourages a segmented rather than an integrated view of knowledge. Consequently, what students are asked to relate to in schooling becomes increasingly artificial, cut off from the human experiences subject matter is supposed to reflect.” *A Place Called School*, McGraw-Hill, 1984, p. 266

Harlan Cleveland: “It is a well-known scandal that our whole educational system is geared more to categorizing and analyzing patches of knowledge than to threading them together.” *Change*, July/August 1985, p. 20)

Robert Stevens: “We have lost sight of our responsibility for synthesizing knowledge.” (*Liberal Education*, Vol. 71, No. 2, 1985, p.163)

Arnold Thackray: “The world of our experience does not come to us in the pieces we have been carving out.” Quoted in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 1987, p. A 14

Buckminster Fuller: “American education has evolved in such a way it will be the undoing of the society.” (Quoted in *Officer Review*, March 1989, p.5)

David William Cohen: “Testing companies, textbook publishers, teacher specialists, associations representing specific content areas, and other agencies all speak in different and often inconsistent voices...The U.S. does not have a coherent system for deciding on and articulating curriculum and instruction.” (*Phi Delta Kappan*, March 1990, p. 522

Peter M. Senge: “From a very early age, we are taught to break apart problems, to fragment the world. This apparently makes complex tasks and subjects more manageable, but we pay a hidden, enormous price. We can no longer see the consequences of our actions; we lose our intrinsic sense of connection to a larger whole.” *The Fifth Discipline*, Currency Doubleday 1990, p.3

TheodoreSizer: “The fact is that there is virtually no federal-level talk about intellectual coherence. The curricular suggestions and mandates leave the traditional ‘subjects’ in virtually total isolation, and both the old and most of the new assessment systems blindly continue to tolerate a profound separation of subject matters, accepting them as conventionally defined... The crucial, culminating task of *making sense of it all*, at some rigorous standard, is left entirely to [the student].” School Reform and the Feds: The Perspective from Sam. *Planning and Changing*, v22 n3-4 p248-52 1991

Thomas Merton: “The world itself is no problem, but we are a problem to ourselves because we are alienated from ourselves, and this alienation is due precisely to an inveterate habit of division by which we break reality into pieces and then wonder why, after we have manipulated the pieces until they fall apart, we find ourselves out of touch with life, with reality, with the world, and most of all with ourselves.” *Contemplation in a World of Action*, Paulist Press, 1992, p.153)

David W. Orr: [Formal schooling] “...imprints a disciplinary template onto impressionable minds and with it the belief that the world really is as disconnected as the divisions, disciplines, and subdivisions of the typical curriculum. Students come to believe that there is such a thing as politics separate from ecology or that economics has nothing to do with physics.” *Earth in Mind*, Island Press, 1994, p.23

The Common Core State Standards, high-stakes testing, school choice, vouchers, value-added measurement, replacing public schools with charters, abolishing teacher tenure, busting unions, winning international competitions, instilling grit, increasing rigor, putting mayors in charge, grading schools, adopting new technology, flipping

classrooms, increasing funding, going back to basics, firing the worst teachers, (your favorite silver bullet here _____) –none of those will do what needs doing.

Schools are in the knowledge business. Not until curricula respect the holistic, systemic nature of knowledge will they begin to meet their responsibility. Deal successfully with the problem, and the schooling that emerges will be so illuminating, so powerful, so relevant, so useful, so satisfying, so easily taught and learned, it will change everyone it touches.

Note: A free e-book (<http://www.marionbrady.com/documents/WWL.pdf>) on the subject explores the problem. A free adolescent-friendly course of study (<http://www.marionbrady.com/CIR.asp>) illustrates a solution.

##