

*Orlando Sentinel*, March 22, 2025 ([Insight@orlandosentinel.com](mailto:Insight@orlandosentinel.com)):

## **Core curriculum is root of education inadequacy**

By Marion Brady

John Padget’s guest column (*Sentinel*, 3/6/25) called Florida’s poor showing on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) “an alarming wake-up call for our state.” His concerns should prompt an effort to deal with the problem, but they won’t.

The problem is the core curriculum that schedules most of the secondary school day. Adopted by America’s high schools in 1894, the core’s roots are buried so deeply in multiple interlocking bureaucracies, and its adequacy is so taken-for-granted, significant change is all but impossible.

But absolutely essential.

The American electorate’s political differences, the complex problems created by the accelerating rate of environmental, demographic, and technological change, the lack of trust in once-respected institutions and sciences, the increasing sophistication of strategies for spreading misinformation, a complex, unknowable future—those demand the broad attention that public dialogue about schooling can provide.

For emphasis’ sake, I’ll call attention to only one problem with the core. For the same reason, I’ll suggest a single solution. Years of firsthand classroom experience assure me that one cost-free change can lift secondary level learner performance to levels not now possible.

### **Narrow vision**

Humanness and civilized ways of life are possible because we’re born equipped to learn, begin doing so no later than at birth, master the basic process long before reaching school age and continue for a lifetime.

We fix attention on a matter of interest—texting a friend for lunch, starting a business, building on Mars. Our brain immediately integrates five kinds of information systemically—the major elements of stories. If interest continues, we elaborate and refine the five with thought processes—hypothesizing, inferring, generalizing, valuing, estimating, imagining, correlating, analyzing, and dozens more.

A simple example illustrates the ubiquity of thought processes (\*): We want to mail a package. \*Recalling the office supply store’s location, we \*choose a route and go. \*Finding the right aisle in the store, we \*compare tapes, \*hypothesize needed strength and adhesiveness, \*select, and pay. *Thought processes enable humanness.*

Six different thought processes to complete a routine task—processes core-based schooling doesn’t teach *because they can’t be tested. They can’t be tested because the merit of a thought process depends on its quality in a specific situation, and standardized tests can’t make qualitative judgments.*

But trained teachers can and did before standardized testing began dumbing us down. The GI Bill benefits that paid for my college education after WW II, bought “bluebooks” for final exams. The pages were blank except for horizontal lines waiting for what I had to say about a matter the professor wrote on the blackboard when everyone was seated.

## **Solution**

Traditional core-based schooling fails because of its narrow focus on learner recall of secondhand information, most of it from textbook text and teacher talk.

To revolutionize secondary level academic performance, *switch instructional emphasis from recalling to relating*, the master thought process that elaborates and refines thought processes and puts them to work: Fussing and the appearance of a nipple with food relate; sandspurs, bare feet and pain relate; black ice on pavement and skidding relate; ocean tides and moon relate; unfair distribution of wealth and societal instability relate; tectonic plate movement and earthquakes relate; fear and prejudice relate, space and time relate.

*Relating is the primary creator of knowledge.*

Start institutional reform in middle school. That level’s “*This we believe*,” position paper gets everything right. Integrating subjects has been a problem, but relating solves it. Hammer relating relentlessly and use the remaining instructional time to identify and develop the interests, abilities and fresh thinking kids bring to school.

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Note: Hundreds of lessons consistent with the above can be downloaded by teachers without cost or other obligation at [marionbrady.com](http://marionbrady.com).