What Students Learn and Don't Learn

by Phyllis Schlafly April 8, 2011

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If you are attending college to get teacher certification, you will probably be required to attend classes on "multicultural education." This is supposed to bring diversity to the classroom and prepare teachers to teach pupils of various ethnic or national backgrounds.

The textbooks in these courses typically include Teachers as Cultural Workers by Paulo Freire, a Brazilian socialist who preached that society is divided into oppressors and oppressed. Other required readings teach that Americans are an institutionally racist society and are designed to train teachers to create political radicals to promote "progressive" social change.

The monthly journal Education Reporter published an informative expose by a teacher who attended a conference on training teachers how to teach students what is called "social justice," a code word for a specific type of teaching that is contrary to traditional American notions of justice based on individual rights. "Social justice" teaches children that America is an unjust and oppressive society that should be changed.

Social justice materials typically include far left proposals such as acceptance of homosexuality, alternate lifestyles, radical feminism, abortion, illegal immigration, cultural relativism, and the redistribution of wealth.

Social justice is often promoted through what is called "student-directed learning" because students are supposed to "construct" their own knowledge. These words put a new spin on what was previously called "unguided learning" or "minimal guidance learning."

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Common sense and hundreds of years of education tell us that anyone first needs a base of knowledge in order to know what to look for when conducting research and doing problem-solving. Instead of teaching students American history and what's great about our country, liberal policy is to have 12-and-13-year-olds "brainstorm" topics they want to talk about, which typically include marijuana, gun violence, Afghanistan, poverty, and youth culture.

More and more universities are telling incoming freshmen to read a book over the summer. One college says the purpose is to promote "a shared intellectual experience" and "campus-wide dialogue"; another college says its summer reading program "is an important first step in building a cohesive, dynamic, educational community."

However, the National Association of Scholars (NAS) issued a report called "What Do Colleges Want Students to Read Outside of Class?" that lists the books recommended by 290 colleges. These scholars found that the books are more suited to Oprah's Book Club than universities, and "rather than asking students to rise to college-level study, they shrink college-level study to the comfort zone of the average student."

The book selections are usually "short" and "emotional" and offer "little if any intellectual substance." The most popular book in 2010 was This I Believe, a collection of essays on personal philosophies gathered by National Public Radio. The second most assigned book was Enrique's Journey, the story of an illegal immigrant boy's trip from Honduras to the United States.

The NAS found that 70 percent of the books "promote a liberal political agenda or advance a liberal interpretation of events," and not one of the books advocated conservative political ideas. Only three books represented traditional values, and those were selected by religious colleges.

The most popular topics were multiculturalism, immigration and racism; after that came environmentalism, animal rights and food issues. On the whole, the books presented what the NAS report called "a distinctly disaffected view of American society and Western civilization."

These summer reading lists included no works of classical antiquity, Shakespeare, or any Renaissance writers. Three colleges ditched book assignments altogether and told students to watch a DVD instead.

A new study reports the dismal finding that 45 percent of college students show no significant improvement in the key measures of critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing by the end of their sophomore year. During their prior semester, half the students did not take a single course that required 20 pages of writing, and a third did not take a single course requiring so much as 20 pages of reading per week.

Those findings are set forth in a new book, Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses by sociologists Richard Arum of New York University and Josipa Roksa of the University of Virginia. They surveyed a representative sample of 24 schools.

Ohio University economist Richard Vetter reported that a majority of the increased number of college graduates are working jobs that historically have been filled by persons with less education. Over 300,000 bartenders have college degrees, and college is not an essential qualification for those jobs.

The Obama Administration claims we must graduate more college students in order to stay globally competitive, but there's no evidence this is true. If students didn't learn much in the first two years, why should we go into more debt to keep them in college more years?