

Opinion

Achieving quality education requires homework

In our recent concern over the quality of education in this country, Americans have looked to other nations, specifically Japan, to find a way to overcome our academic inadequacies. What we found was not encouraging. In education, America is being outclassed.



Loren Steffy

Studies of foreign school systems have led to speculations of how we could adopt the other countries' policies and incorporate them into our own education system. Japan's high literacy rate, tough standards, national commitment to education and the teaching of moral values are seen as worthy of adoption by American schools.

While many of Japan's techniques are admirable, we must be careful not to leap gung ho into line with Japanese educational philosophies. Before we laud

Japanese education as the sole harbinger of hope for our schools, we need to recognize the cultural differences that support their techniques.

Take, for example, moral education. In Japan, moral education in public schools is not questioned, largely because Japanese society is homogeneous. The nation has a minuscule minority population, and everyone pretty much shares a common philosophy.

But in the United States, we pride ourselves on the "melting pot" concept behind our society. What makes us great, we say, is the many different cultures and outlooks that make up our society. We also pride ourselves on preserving the equality of all these different outlooks. Mimicking Japan's approach to moral education would mean ignoring the basic freedoms we have worked so hard to establish and maintain.

There are as many different definitions of "moral" education in the United States as there are demands that it be taught in our schools. In the Jan. 31 issue of *Human Events*, Secretary of

Education William J. Bennett said the best way to form character in schools is by using the examples of great literature.

Stories of Abe Lincoln could be used to illustrate honesty, Joan of Arc and Harriet Tubman of the Underground Railroad for courage, *A Christmas Carol* and *The Diary of Anne Frank* for "kindness and compassion and their opposites." Even stories from the Bible, Bennett says, should not be overlooked.

But the education secretary's proposal is nothing new and does not solve the problem of mass teaching moral education. Many of the books and characters he cites as examples of morality in action already are taught to school children. Even stories from the Bible are presented through Bible-as-literature courses.

Morality definitely is exemplified by these works, but the trouble is getting people to listen without taking offense. For example, a group of fundamentalists in Tennessee recently fought and won a court battle to keep their children

from being subjected to one of Bennett's examples of morality — *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

In an attempt to teach morality to the youth of America, Bennett has stumbled onto an even greater lesson — morality comes in a myriad of packages.

And what works in Japan may not work in the United States. Students in Japanese schools learn to answer teachers' questions in a group, or *han*. They are taught to work for the advancement of the whole, not for personal gains.

In the United States, we value our individuality far too much to accept such a concept. Our national heroes are rugged individuals — the cowboy, alone on the range, taming the West at any cost. We thrive on stories about individuals who take on the whole of society. They may change social norms or succumb to them, but we admire their guts to stand up for what they believe in.

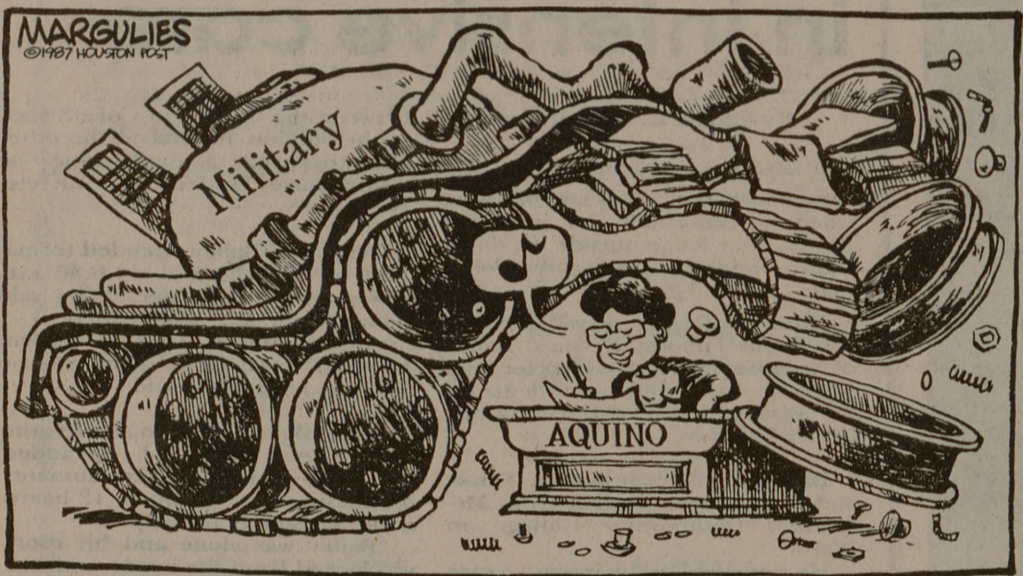
Even more prevalent than our administration for the rugged individual is our adoration for agrarian values. We still like to believe that our country's

roots are in agriculture, that the farm — not agribusiness — is the economic base for the nation.

These values also maintain the belief that formal education isn't as important as home-spun values. Being "educated" ain't as important as having a good heart. The Ritual of Becoming a Man given more significance than the act of becoming an educated man. No matter how hard a boy works in school, not a man until he shoots Old Yeller.

Japan's approach to education offers many good lessons: teachers given social prominence, parents involved in the educational process, students and teachers. But just as fundamentalists in Tennessee disagree with Bennett's foundation for moral education, so would the majority of Americans disagree with the Japanese approach.

Our zeal for educational excellence is admirable and long overdue. But shouldn't we try to get all the answers copied off of our neighbors in the vicinity. After all, we don't have the questions.



Iran and Iraq — fiction or fact?

A number of things bother me about the Iran-Iraq war.

First, did Iran invade Iraq or did Iraq invade Iran? And, is it the Iraq-Iran war, or the Iran-Iraq war? Do we have the basis for rock lyrics here: "Did Iran invade Iraq/or did Iraq invade Iran?/Iraq-Iran, Iran-Iraq/Iraq around the clock/Stay and be my lovin' man."

Secondly, I never know what to believe when I read about the war.

One day, the headlines read, "Iraq claims 7 million Iranians killed in a desert battle."

The next day, I get, "Iran says nobody left in Iraq but dogs and camels."

For all we really know, there might not be a war going on at all. This could be just some public relations firm's way of introducing a new line of desert tents.

What else bothers me is that I'm not certain who to pull for in the war.

Would the United States benefit more if Iran won, or if Iraq won? How would the war's outcome affect my winter heating bill and gasoline prices? Which side has the best looking uniforms? (I often use that to determine who I'd prefer in a sporting contest, which is why I never pull for the Houston Astros, whose uniforms look like they were patterned after a dish of orange marmalade.)

If Iran wipes out a few million Iraqis

(Irocks, Iraqianians, Iraquonians) should I sleep a little better at night, or vice versa?

Just off the top of my head, I'd say I should pull for Iraq. The Iranians took Americans hostage; the ayatollah, who looks like Gabby Hayes with a bad case of constipation, has given our last two presidents that same condition; and two of its leading exports are hatred and terrorism. But Iraq's not exactly a bastion of freedom and good will to all, either. If Iran is John Dillinger, Iraq is at least Pretty Boy Floyd.

I interviewed some other Americans to see which side they favored.

Tossing out those who hadn't heard about the war, didn't have an opinion, were drunk, who thought I was a member of some strange religious sect, who were busy writing Oral Roberts a check, and who were blowing bubbles with their saliva when they were asked, the results were too close to call.

One man did put the matter in its proper perspective, however.

"It's like asking to pick between cancer and AIDS," he said.

Perhaps what we all have here is the same position the late Georgian, Bill Munday, pioneer sportscaster, found himself in one evening before he was to broadcast the Yale-Harvard football game. "Who do you prefer in tomorrow's game?" a Harvard student asked him, "Yale or fair Harvard?"

"Neither one," he said. "You're all a bunch of damn Yankees and I hope you both lose."

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Lewis Grizzard

No way

EDITOR:

In response to Mike Sullivan's idea of abolishing the Corps, I would like to say the idea stinks!

Let's imagine Texas A&M without the Corps. The word "Howdy" would become extinct. There would be no yell leaders. On Friday nights at midnight during football season, students would be just hanging around getting drunk instead of practicing yells for the games. At the games — football as well as other sports — the only spectators would be Mom and Dad. At halftime, the fans would have to watch the other team's "entertainment." When t.u. comes to Kyle Field they would bring their big bass drum and would not have any competition.

What about Reveille? She wouldn't have an escort. She would probably be stolen. Silver Taps would become a thing of the past. When an Aggie died he would be forgotten. These are some of the things that make A&M unique. Without them we would just be another university. I was attracted to A&M because of the unique people and the friendly campus. To abolish the Corps would abolish the upkeepers of tradition. I'm getting a good education here, and I'm enjoying it.

Are we willing to sacrifice our uniqueness to become just another "world university"?

Mary King '90

Scary

EDITOR:

The very persuasive argument presented by the editor of the Opinion page of *The Battalion* is a misguided one. I could call it the Impossible Nightmare. Making Texas A&M world-renowned has been the hope of every Ag who has ever been here. Disbanding the Corps of Cadets might work, but it probably won't.

The cadets are the greatest supporters of every student activity this University offers. The Corps has the highest voting percentage of any student organization. We attend more football, baseball, basketball and other sports events than other students. We build the hell out of bonfire and support the March of Dimes every year. These are just the headliners.

I say if you want to disband the Corps because it decreases the integrity of an academic society, then we might as well stop supporting student activities as a whole. Having a student government takes time away from studies. Tear down Kyle Field and G. Rollie White and build another Chemistry Building. We can't have sports, they take too much time. All fraternities and sororities need to be abolished. We sure don't need bonfire anymore, because that undying Aggie Spirit died.

Last but not least, tear down Old Sully. I'm sure he wouldn't want to look over such a place.

This University then might become known as the place to learn but not grow. It is important to grow both intellectually and socially. They go hand in hand.

One more thing, you had better disband the Corps before you tear down Old Sully, and send Reveille to the pound, because throwing away traditions while the Corps exists is the Impossible Nightmare.

Cadet Cpl. David L. Dover

Uninformed

EDITOR:

You don't make sense when you assert that disciplined men and women stand in the way of our school's widening its reputation for academic excellence.

Rather than speculate about the Corps of Cadets and Texas A&M's future, you'd be well advised to expend your energies on finding a job after your soon-to-come graduation. I think you might find that the market puts a value on the opinions and pontifications of journalists that is much lower than the one you yourself would assign to them.

Holger Schricker
Graduate Student

Mail Call

Later, Sarge

EDITOR:

Mike Sullivan's attempt to use the Corps of Cadets as a scapegoat for Texas A&M's lack of recognition as a "world university" makes about as much sense as cutting off your head because you occasionally pick your nose in public. The Corps is not the reason people picture A&M as a pseudo-military institution, it's the "Old Sarge" we use as a caricature. He's everywhere! He inundates almost every facet of University publicity. Even the military academy at West Point has the good sense not to use a symbol that makes them look like a boot camp. But here we are in Aggieland, allowing something that represents a scant five percent of the student population to adorn a majority of the publicity sold to the public at large. No wonder we have problems getting attention — we're letting something that looks like the tough guy in a Bugs Bunny World War II War Bond cartoon set our image.

Martell J. Stroup, '90

Yankee, go home!

EDITOR:

Abolish the Corps, Mike Sullivan? Can you really be serious? I have a better idea. Let's forget the men who founded this institution. Let's do away with yell practices, bonfire, Silver Taps, and Aggie Muster. Let's walk on the grass and wear our hats inside the Memorial Student Center. Let's forget all the things that make A&M unique — including the Corps of Cadets; after all, we are striving to be a "world university," aren't we? Oh, one last thing, let's change the letters A&M to t.u.

The only thing I have left to say to Sullivan (since he's not originally from Texas anyway) is Highway 6 runs both ways.

Samantha Gordon '90

Tastes great

EDITOR:

This letter has nothing to do with any past or present controversies here at A&M, or anywhere else, for that matter. I just have something I want to get off my chest.

In response to a recent A-1 Steak Sauce commercial, don't see anything wrong with putting ketchup on steak.

Gregg L. Leissner '88

Best friends

EDITOR:

First of all, I would like to applaud Mike Sullivan on his approach for getting his name recognized and remembered; it's not how you write, it's what you write about. Obviously, Sullivan has asked Karl Pallmeyer how he too can get people to write in to Mail Call and remember his name. The conversation probably went something like this:

Mike: "Hey Karl, every time you write a column, people write in to Mail Call with their opinions about your column. How can I get people to read my articles, much less write in to Mail Call?"

Karl: "It's simple Mike, just pick a topic that students feel strongly about here at A&M and twist it around and make an idiotic suggestion such as abolishing the Corps of Cadets."

Mike: "Gee Karl, you are so intelligent. I wish I could be JUST LIKE YOU!"

Well Sullivan, you have achieved Pallmeyer status with that one FOOLISH column. So why don't you just take your great journalistic abilities to the University of California, Berkeley. I hear they have an "outstanding liberal arts program."

Steven M. Taber '89

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must be signed and must include the classification, address and telephone number of the writer.

The Battalion

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