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~~Censors~~ vs. **Bashers:** The New Curriculum?

Oliver DeMille

In a recent conversation, a friend suggested that we should remove the writings of Robert Kiyosaki¹ from the George Wythe College curriculum. When I asked him why, he said that Kiyosaki's books contain a number of errors.

I said, "Do the writings of Marx contain errors?"

"Well, yes," he admitted.

"What about the writings of Freud, or Dewey?"

He agreed that these contain errors also.

"Should we remove them from the curriculum, too?" I asked, "or do you think the students actually get a better education by reading these authors and facing their errors head on?"

"That makes sense," he said.

I asked, "Which books do you know that contain no errors—that are totally perfect?"

He said that the scriptures came to mind, but he couldn't think of any other books with no errors. Before I could continue, he broke in: "But when you're reading these known classics, of course you point out the errors. In the case of Robert Kiyosaki, people just read it and accept it at face value."

I replied, "but isn't that all the more reason

that a great education would include reading Kiyosaki and other influential books of our time and considering their truths as well as their errors?”

We had an excellent discussion, and he left agreeing that students were better off reading Kiyosaki and really thinking about it than not reading it at all.

II. Thinking

But my friend’s question concerned me because I’ve heard it so many times before. Like the concerned parent who didn’t want her son to read or discuss *The Lord of the Flies*. After realizing that we would be discussing its flaws, she suddenly was very excited for her son to participate. Or the executive who objected to *The Tipping Point*² because he felt that some of the conclusions weren’t adequately substantiated. When told he could share his views with the group, he was excited to attend.

The amazing thing is that so many of us today just assume that if someone puts a book on a reading list she must agree with everything it says. Or we assume that if she has strong disagreements with something, she won’t recommend reading it—a sort of reverse censorship.

The result is the end of learning. If you don’t study new ideas that challenge the accepted wisdom, all that is left is brainwashing. You end up with people who just accept whatever they read at face value; or you get people who believe they are deep thinkers because they know how to disagree with whatever they read. Both of these extremes are lacking.

The whole point of an education is to learn the ability to discern between good and bad, right and wrong, excellent and mediocre, true and false, useful and irrelevant, etc. The best way to learn this is to experience great classics, and clarify their truths as well as their errors. Once we gain this skill, we should apply it to current books, ideas, candidates, etc.

So why do we sometimes want to only read things we already agree with? At one level, it’s just more comfortable. But at another level, education is about pushing ourselves beyond our comfort zones—especially in our thinking.

III. The Battle

Unfortunately, we may be living in a strange conveyor belt saturated world with two competing sides—the Censors and the Bashers.³ The Censors only want to read things without errors or personality. In other words, *textbooks*. Every teacher knows that the quickest way to get rid of controversy is just to “dumb something down”⁴ to professional or technical jargon. Ironically, when a book doesn’t say anything important, when it is “boring,” nobody seems to disagree with it. C.S. Lewis worried about just this thing when he wrote that our textbooks are educating “men without chests.”⁵

The new formula for selecting a curriculum seems to be: No Genius or Personality = Flat and Dumbed Down Reading = No Controversy = Good Curriculum. Of course, this makes for terrible education, because it shuts down thinking. The Censors don’t mean to do this, but the result of only reading what you agree with is the end of real thinking.

As for the second group, the Bashers, they thrive on controversy. But they never build anything. They just attack, criticizing those who are trying to make a positive difference. Bashers never risk anything to make the world better, but they think they’re helping if they attack those who do. They are the natural response to the Censors.

Censors try to make sure that no controversy occurs, and in the process they unwittingly stop thinking (and suggest that everyone else do the same). Of course, it’s vital to shelter children from evil and confusion, but Censors take it to the level of trying to shelter adults from dangerous ideas. In history, this always has terrible results—from Stalin to Hitler.

Bashers criticize the Hitlers of the world, but attack good ideas with just as much gusto. In fact, Bashers have come to believe that thinking *means* criticizing. They seldom use the word “thinking” without the modifier “critical.” But real thinking, including actually applying new ideas to positively build and improve the world, requires much more.

Are these two extremes the result of two full generations of conveyor belt education? Censors read *The Lord of the Flies*, Marx, Kiyosaki, or anything else that challenges the currently accepted wisdom, and say: “Let’s take this off the list—it has errors.” Bashers, on the other hand, read the same books and say: “Here are all the errors; let’s list them one by one and focus on them. Better still, let’s just attack the authors.” They believe this is critical thinking, but most of the time it only amounts to criticizing.

IV. Builders

Educated people, in contrast, read with an eye for errors and also an openness to truth and application—whatever the source. In fact, that’s a good definition of what it means to be educated: the ability to recognize and apply truth, regardless of its source or delivery. As a result, a truly educated people is a free people. What we need is to be *thinking* people, and that is the purpose of education.

Even if some of our schools fail to educate, we can still put thinking at the center of our reading. Consider this three step approach:

- Let’s read the challenging books of our time, and carefully think about what they say.
- Where they’re wrong, let’s discuss and learn from the errors.
- Where they’re right, let’s work hard and take risks to apply them and build a better world.

As my friend and I finished our conversation,

he surprised me—and taught me something. He said, “Before I leave, can you suggest several books I should be reading that will help me think more deeply?” The truth is, most people aren’t really Censors or Bashers at heart. We just get into bad habits. Most people are really Builders, if you give them a chance.

In a world where widespread conveyor belt thinking has conditioned many of us to automatically censor or bash new ideas, we all need to do more *thinking*. This simple but profound change could make all the difference in our society’s future. It would certainly have a wonderfully positive impact on modern education—or even just the personal education of anyone who applies it.

I think my answer surprised him, too: “I suggest that you start by reading Kiyosaki again, and this time write out a list of everything you learn that is true. Then put it next to your list of errors. Finally, as you study both lists, consider what you can use from the lists to make a positive difference in the world.” To his credit, my friend was open and excited to *think, learn* and *build*.

(Endnotes)

¹ See *Rich Dad, Poor Dad* and *The Cashflow Quadrant*, among others.

² By Malcolm Gladwell.

³ Thanks to James E. Faust for the concept of “Bashing vs. Building.”

⁴ Thanks to John Taylor Gatto for the concept of “Dumbing Us Down.”

⁵ See *The Abolition of Man*.

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