**Real problem behind schools' poor performance**

By Charlie Reese of *The* *Orlando Sentinel*, Sunday, January 11, 1998

One of the peculiarities of the post -modem American Empire in decline is the refusal to recognize reality and to substitute for it politically correct dictates.

This same characteristic was found in the latter days of the Soviet Union. If the Party said you needed more fertilizer, you poured more fertilizer on the ground even if it killed the crop.

In our country, everybody is blaming everybody and everything connected with education for the poor performance of students except the real culprits - the students.

It used to be common knowledge that teachers teach but that only students can learn. A student motivated to learn can learn no matter the condition of the school. This common-sense observation, well known around the globe, can be verified for post-modem American morons who think that knowledge does not exist except in the form of study. There is a study that showed that children of Asian immigrants excelled whether the schools they attended were suburban schools or slum schools, nearly all-white schools or nearly all-minority schools, well-equipped or poorly equipped. It didn't matter. The Asian immigrant children learned.

The reason is quite simple. They learned for the same reason people of my generation learned. Their parents put a high premium on education. That means that parents insisted that the children do the hard work of learning and obey the rules of the school. Children who are not motivated to learn, who care more about clothes, sex, music or dope and who are uncivilized in their behavior cannot be taught There is a simple two-step reform that wouldn't cost taxpayers a dime yet would improve student performance dramatically.

One step would be to repeal compulsory attendance laws. The reason is this would send a message to parents - many of whom today are bad parents - that the state would no longer serve as their baby-sitter. An opportunity to learn would be provided only so long as the student does his homework, obeys and respects his teachers, and does not disrupt the class. If he refuses to do this, he is expelled. The parents can then live with his bad behavior and support his incompetence at their own expense.

The second step would be just to enforce iron discipline in the classroom. The left-liberal idea that adults cannot control the behavior of children is absurd and laughable. With discipline and civility in the classroom, even a mediocre teacher can teach. Without discipline and civility, the best teacher would fail and eventually leave for a saner work environment).

I do not expect these reforms to be made any more than I would have expected the Communist Party in the Soviet Union to admit that it was wrong. You will continue to see the entire blame placed on the school system and the teachers. You will continue to hear the clamor for more money, more resources. You will not hear one word about clearing the schools of punks and sluts who have no intention of learning anything.

For that reason, I recommend to those parents who can afford it that they abandon the government schools. They are sinking as, surely as the *Titanic*. They will get worse. Whenever you reach the stage or decadence at which adults choose to deny reality and no longer have the backbone to enforce civilized standards on the barbarians, regardless of their age or race or ethnic background, it's all over.

Let the barbarians and the left-liberal sickies have the government schools with armed guards and metal detectors. They deserve each other. But don't sacrifice the health and welfare of your children to their stupid theories of liberal fantasies. Just walk away. The good must preserve and protect the good or there won't be a future.

**Real problem is oversimplification of the answer**

by Carter Hammond

*The Orlando Sentinel's* Charlie Reese raises some interesting issues and suggests answers that will be embraced with enthusiasm in certain quarters. However, he oversimplifies and avoids workable solutions in favor of bombastic rhetoric. Reese's column is, in reality, a diatribe against "morons," "political correctness," "left-leaning liberal sickies," and poor people. It is not about the problems facing education.

It is interesting that Reese complains about the lack of civility and respect in modem society, and then chooses derogatory terms to describe others. I suspect that Reese can find a category for anybody who does not agree with his way of thinking. Pat Buchanan would be pleased that the mean-spirited policy of exclusion he verbalized in 1992 is still alive and well.

It is true that teachers have long been blamed for the ills in education, and certainly they share some of the responsibility. But society at large is the major culprit here. How can we expect students to be interested in learning when we are constantly sending false messages about the value of education, life, and the work ethic? Children are told (by example) that the end justifies the means, it's every man for himself, and that getting something for nothing is the ultimate achievement If Reese points fingers, as a member of society he must also point to himself.

It can be shown that people learn under any circumstances. Reese cites a study to prove his point, but one can find data that will prove or disprove anything. Here's an example. A study commissioned in the late sixties shows that overcrowded conditions among laboratory rats leads to increased violence and depression. These findings were used to explain the volatile situation in the inner cities. They were also used to explain why more New Yorkers were in analysis than in any other area of the country. It didn't say anything about the rats.

Reese correctly asserts that money will not solve all of the problems facing education. But it can alleviate overcrowding and it can assure up-to-date materials and equipment. These tools are a necessity (not a luxury, Mr. Reese) needed to prepare students for the future they must face. Billions of dollars are poured into the military budget to ensure readiness through state-of-the-art training facilities and material. Few argue that this expenditure is unnecessary. It is hard to understand why a nation as wealthy as ours begrudges the money needed to update, improve and/or rebuild the educational system. Wake up! Education is as necessary as the military for the United States to remain a strong and vital world force.

Money would also enhance teacher salaries and attract bright young people to the profession. Motivated, success-oriented students are not interested in a career that does not afford them a decent living. It a shame that we have teachers, in **this** county - **not** the **rural** South - whose children qualify for free or reduced lunches. Could you, with good conscience, urge your child to consider the field of education? One of the sayings this country holds dear is, "You get what you pay for." If you pay next to nothing for it, don't be surprised when it breaks.

It is difficult to understand the brouhaha surrounding the use of metal detectors in the schools. Society makes this necessary. Weapons equal power and authority. It is easy for children to obtain handguns. Therefore, students bring guns to school for attention and respect. Given this somewhat awkward syllogism, why are we to assume that schools are failures if security devices are installed? As a parent I would feel better knowing that the school system was making an effort to protect my child. As a teacher, it would comfort me to not have to worry about the next stranger or unhappy teen who happens to be having a bad day. Airports, banks, federal buildings, and government offices all are protected in some way. Are they failures as well? It is not the 1950's and Wally and the "Beave" don't live in Kansas anymore.

I would be curious to know how Reese would identify "punks" with guns. Are we to assume that it's the kid with tattoos, piercings and spiked hair? That's foolish and irresponsible. It's often the quiet, unassuming individual who responds most violently by gunning down his classmates and teachers. It's the ones that cause people to shake their heads and say, "He was so quiet. He was never a problem. I don't understand."

What will happen if Reese's solution is adopted - if students are kicked out of school for "parents to support at their own expense"? How will society cope with higher crime rates? Increased welfare rolls? Unskilled workers? How will the disenfranchised, in turn, support their children? Let's look to Great Britain, another failed empire. Students leave school at sixteen if their test scores are unacceptable. The majority of England' s young people are on the dole with no prospects and not much hope for a better future. The resulting apathy and ennui don't serve the good of the country and there is a corresponding decline in creativity and output. Doesn't this suggest that Reese's solution becomes the problem when we look at the big picture?

Would a better idea be smaller classes? We don't need studies to prove what we know to be true. In which classes do the fewest discipline problems occur? In which classes are students most successful academically? In what classroom environments do students work best? In which classes does the teacher have the most control and energy to deal with problems? How many more students could be reached (including those problem children that Reese so easily dismisses) if classes weren't overcrowded?

Reese suggests that wealthy students are not "sluts and punks," and that only those who can afford it deserve a quality education. He asserts that "MOST" parents are "bad" but fails to say why. Are we to assume it is because they do not have upper bracket incomes; that money and possessions ensure better parenting skills and morals? This is not fair, but it is elitist!

Mr. Reese, you are wrong when you say "the good must preserve and protect the good." The good MUST preserve and protect everybody. To walk away, as you advise, is the height of irresponsibility and shows a callous disregard for the principles held dear by this country. Perhaps it is you, and those who think like you, who need an education.

**Argumentative Structure and Definitions**

**Composing an argument is a little like preparing a debate. You should approach the subject carefully defining it from the opposition's perspective. Sometimes it's at this level (definition), that the real controversy is revealed.**

The next step is to offer reasoning and evidence which supports your "side» of the issue. Good evidence can take a variety of forms, but fallacious reasoning is equally abundant. (Analogy, authority and example are all good evidence. Begging the question, either-or reasoning, and non sequitur are common fallacies in argument.) In this stage of the argument, your job is to make clear how and why you arrived at your position. The reader should be able to follow your logic readily and should be able to trust your evidence.

The next step involves covering your opponent's objections. In any argument, two or more positions may exist. Rather than discount your opposition's point of view (since this merely alienates; it does not win arguments), you should make a reasonable effort to deal with the major points of conflict and demonstrate where his argument fails.

Lastly, your argument should offer a solution to the issue's problem(s). No reader likes to read an argument that complains but does not offer alternatives.

**Argument Outline**

1. State premise or thesis; define issue(s)

a. provide details about the nature of the issue

b. articulate how your definition differs from the opposition; analyze their argument carefully

c. define by denotation, connotation, example, and/ or cause and effect

2. Offer reasoning and evidence

a. provide readers with logic that led you to your conclusion

b. offer supporting evidence (comparison, analogy, authority, quotation, statistics, etc.)

c. check your.reasoning and evidence for fallacies

3. Cover the opposition's objectives to your position

4. Offer a solution or alternative

By following this outline, you can create reasonable, well-founded argument. Remember, careful analysis of your opponent's argument is the starting point for success. You can also analyze the merits of two arguments and decide which is better using this outline.

**Helpful Definitions**

**Analogy**: a comparison to a directly parallel case. When a writer uses an analogy, he argues that a claim reasonable for one case is reasonable for an analogous case.

**Authority:** support that draws on recognized experts or persons with highly relevant experience Example: arguing by example is considered reliable if examples are factual as well as relevant.

**Begging the question**: often called circular reasoning, begging the question occurs when the believability of the evidence depends on the believability of the claim. Ex: "The reason George is so smart is because he is very intelligent."

**Either/Or reasoning:** an argument or issue of two polar opposites ignoring any alternatives. Ex: “Either we abolish cars or the environment is doomed."

**Non sequitur:** Latin for "it does not follow,” when one statement isn't logically connected to another.

**Denotation:** dictionary meaning

**Connotation:** implied meaning rather than the literal or dictionary meaning

**Cause and effect**: one thing results from another

**Straw man**: when a writer argues against a claim that nobody actually holds or is universally considered weak; setting up a straw man diverts attention from the real issues.

**Red herring:** when a writer raises an irrelevant issue to draw attention away from the real issue

**Post hoc, ergo propter hoc:** Latin.for "After this, therefore because of this;" -implies that because one thing follows another, the first caused the second, but sequence is not the cause; also known as circular reasoning. Ex. "He went to the store to buy shoes, and therefore, the house burned down."

**Logic:** to be logically acceptable, support must be appropriate to the claim, believable and consistent.

**Generalization:** asserts that a claim applies to all instances instead of some Ex. "Only motivated athletes become champions."

**Emotional appeal:** appeals to an audience's emotions to excite and involve them in argument

**Backing**: support or evidence for a claim in an argument

**Ad hominem:** Latin for "against the man;" a personal attack rather than attacking the arguments Ex. “John Smith, can't tell us anything about the faithfulness of dogs because he has no faith at all in anything."

**Creating a false dilemma:** presenting a choice that does not include all possibilities Ex. "People hate politics because politicians often lie.”

**Describing with emotionally charged terminology:** vocabulary carrying strong connotative meaning, either positive or negative; often takes the form of name calling (ad hominem) Ex. "Senator Jones is a commie, pinko, bleeding heart liberal who hates his mother, babies, apple pie, and the American way."