

# Ten Observations Regarding American Education

Neil J Flinders

Agency Based Education (ABE) Conference November 22, 2014

- 1. Every society is created and sustained or destroyed by education.
- 2. There are three distinct *contexts* in which schooling occurs: *spiritual*, *moral*, and *secular*. The *spiritual* may involve ordinances; the *moral* envelops intent and action; the *secular* is relative only to the time, place and people involved—it is simply *ethics*.
- 3. Three thousand years of schooling history attest to this fact: the family is the center of moral education—more than this it is the home that is obedient to its God or Gods. Families can be helped or hindered by the forms of schooling that surround them.
- 4. American culture changed its intellectual foundations from the *sacred* to the *secular* between 1880 and 1920. Academia embraced the *secular hypothesis*—which is '*the more we learn about the secular the less need there is for the spiritual.*' This shift altered our civil society and public education. The legal and social order changed significantly.
- 5. Backed by evolving legal support, American public schools are now essentially *secular*—*not moral* and *not spiritual*. Traditional moral imperatives have been replaced by relative values and policies. *Precepts of men* have displaced *precepts of God*. America's public schooling is now hostage to a variety of secular ideologies.
- 6. Administrative agendas in the public schools are dominated by direct or indirect budgetary line items. Non-budgetary aims related to *character development* and *personal values* seldom appear on regular public school meeting agendas.
- 7. Philosophically, *Custodialism* and *Factionalism* now drive the primary controlling influences in public education. Various Unions and Accreditation Associations are major forces that shape this infrastructure of contemporary public schooling.
- 8. There are four elements of education: *context*, *content*, *process*, and *structure*. Nearly all contemporary educational research focuses on *content*, *process* (method), and *structure* (when to do what). Educational *context* is now a toxic topic; it is seldom considered and is culturally contentious—'don't rock the boat.'
- 9. When *context* is ignored or changed, *ends* and *means* become confused; in public education *means* have become *ends* and former *ends* are now blurred, lost or deemed irrelevant. For example, focusing on teaching a child to read *in order that . . .* is different than just teaching a child to read.
- 10. American schooling began and developed as a Judeo/Christian *moral* enterprise. It was constitutionally valid. Moral schooling is important because where there is no *true morality* there can be no *true spirituality*—there will be only a variety of *counterfeits*.