

The Anatomy of Educational Philosophy:

Roots of Factionalism in American Education

*“What we think with
when we think about something
makes all the difference.”*

Neil J Flinders

2014

“I am convinced that people living today can learn more about true education by studying the life and teachings of Joseph Smith than they can by studying all the books on education they might find in any library available to them.”

Neil J Flinders

“Joseph Smith articulated a pattern of religious and educational order, beliefs, principles, and ordinances against which all other religious and educational orders, beliefs, principles, and ordinances can be evaluated.”

The Most Critical Element in the Study of Education is Context

It is Context that defines

- **What and Who we are**
- **Where we came from**
- **What our destiny can be**

Where Context is Corrupt or Uncertain, Confusion Will Prevail

- **At Home**
- **At Work**
- **At Play**
- **In Education**

Four Paths to Understanding Education

Study the:

Context	(Why)
Content	(What)
Process	(Methods)
Structure	(Order/Sequence)

Early American Education Had a Moral Context

(Involved Precepts of God)
(Judeo/Christian)

Ten Commandments
Biblical Proverbs
Sermon on the Mount

Modern American Education Adopted an Ethical Context

(Limited to Precepts of Men)
(Social Relativism)

What the Culture Accepts
What the Group Wants
What Individual Desires

Public Professional Education Literature Essentially Ignores Context

Context is Academically and Politically Toxic

Research and Policy Focus is on **Content, Process, and Structure**

This is critical because:

**Context influences and often determines
Content, Process, and Structure**

Preface to this Presentation

Two basic questions drive most educational research and history:

1. **What** are children taught and what do they learn when they go to school?

This question addresses **content, structure, and process**.

2. **How** do these three elements function?

This question seeks explanations for nearly everything else related to educational research and history.

Why is current American Education so Controversial?

Between 1880 and 1920 the world view of Academia changed.

Walter Lippmann, a prominent commentator of the 20th century in his book *A Preface to Morals* concluded:

“The acids of modernity dissolved the ancestral order”

Another writer proclaimed:

“Our cathedrals of learning have largely become citadels of secularism”

Between 1880 and 1920 there was a monumental shift.

Academia embraced the
Secular Hypothesis:

**“The more we learn about the secular
the less need there is for the spiritual.”**

This is what I learned:

- From 20 years of being a University professor—teaching/researching
- Participating in a philosophy society—serving a term as its president
- Associating with many professors from various institutions
- Writing numerous professional papers
- Making presentations at different locations e.g.

Universities in California: USC, Berkeley, Cal Tech, San Diego, Santa Cruz, Mexicali; Fordham University (New York); Duke (North Carolina); Arizona, Arizona State; Calgary (Canada); Brigham Young University

It became very obvious to me:

**“What we think with
when we think about something
makes all the difference.”**

Non-Technical Operational Definitions

What is Philosophy?

Philosophy is Collecting and Clustering Assumptions

What are Factions?

Factions are Followers of the Various Clusters

An Example Related to Education

Boyd K. Packer made this statement in an address about children in 1986.

“True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior.”

He expanded the premise for his audience by adding:

“The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior.

Preoccupation with unworthy behavior can lead to unworthy behavior. That is why we stress so forcefully the study of the doctrines of the gospel.”

• • •

DOCTRINE is an ancient idea.

Doctrine affects everyone's life.

This is central to my remarks today.

The Example Can be Expanded

One can also say:

“False doctrine, embraced, changes attitudes and behavior”

Consider Current Illustrations in the News

For example:

Terrorist Behaviors
Criminal Activities
Government Corruption
Political Correctness

Primary Characteristics of True and False Doctrine

True (Legitimate) Doctrine Tends To:

Promote Life
Protect Life
Preserve Life

False (Counterfeit) Doctrine Tends To:

Reject True Doctrine
Replace True Doctrine
Eliminate True Doctrine

The Key Factor is Personal Agency

Doctrine of the Two Ways

Historically it is fundamental and simple:

- Ancient Greeks spoke of the **mantic vs. sophic** views
- Judaism referred to the **vertical vs. horizontal** traditions
- Modern society speaks of the **supernatural vs. the natural**
- Academics now discuss humanity as **modern vs. post-modern**

The Great Debate:

Is there a personal God or not?

**Are humans physical and spiritual
or only physical organisms?**

Conflicts exist on both sides of these core issues.

Example of Applied Doctrines

Two Approaches to Education: Conflicting Patterns of Authority and Control

Joseph Smith	Common Core
An Individual Function [Revealed Agency]	A State (Government Controlled) Function
A Family Obligation [Parental Duties]	A Local Obligation [Finance by Taxation]
A Church Responsibility [Basic Curriculum]	An Administrator/Teacher Responsibility
A State Interest [Nauvoo Charter]	An Individual or family Interest
	A Teacher Union Concern [Protect School Personnel Benefits]

What is Personal Agency?

1. The **inherent capacity** and the **responsibility** to choose between **alternatives**—the power to make choices and create—in the sense of organizing existing elements for some purpose. This capacity is limited by:
 - a. amount of **truth** (knowledge) possessed, and
 - b. amount of **light** (understanding what the consequences will be, when a truth, a choice, is acted upon).
2. The **realm** in which a person is free (able) to make choices.

Freedom and *Liberty* originate and operate in this realm.

Freedom is inherent in the human soul; freedom is an extension of life.

Liberty refers to how people treat each other; liberty is what people bestow upon or steal from one another.

Why is agency important?

Personal Agency is the foundation of Agency Education.

Agency education is where personal character is nurtured.

How Should a Person be Viewed?

Historical Options

Humans as Agents (Biblical and some Primitive Theologies)

Human life is eternal—a higher power creates and governs.

Humans are dynamic and dualistic—physical and spiritual.

Humans as Objects (Mathematical Philosophy)

Human life is thought; it is mathematical; the self is substance.

Knowledge comes from logical reasoning.

Reality is measurable, quantifiable, observable and finite

Personal life is temporary; it ends with death.

Humans as Organisms (Organicism as a Philosophy)

Humans are organic, dialectic, synthetic, biologic.

Physical forces account for all living things.

Human life is to be understood and acted upon—environmentally and/or genetically.

No personal life after death.

Now Lets Zero in on American Education

My View:

**Current American Education
is Now Largely Shaped by
“Custodialism”**

What is Custodialism?

If you Google “Custodialism”

Most Articles are: Related to Psychiatry and Mental Health and some applications to Education.

The Issues:

Question: Should patients be allowed to decide how they are treated and/or warehoused?

Custodial Pattern: Empower the staff; limit the patient's right to decide.

Humanist Pattern: Maximize the patient's and the staff's right to participate and decide regarding therapy.

There are other alternatives to “Custodial” or “Humanist” approaches to Education.

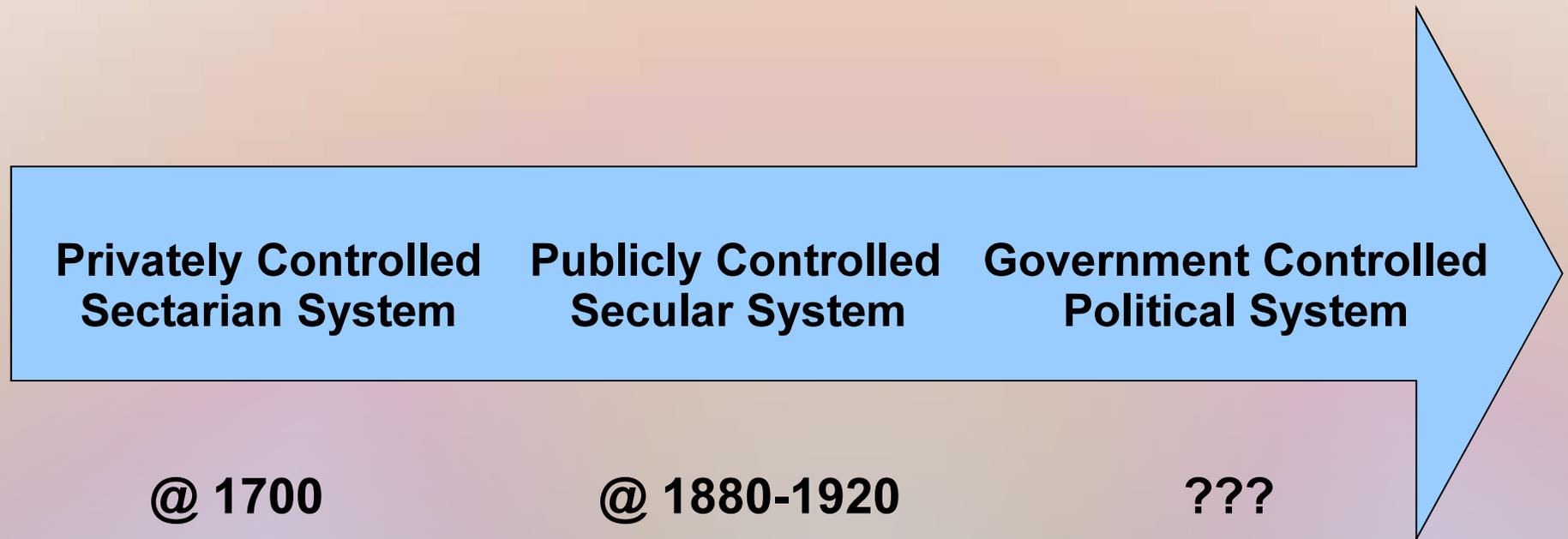
The Evolving Story in American Education

Custodialism: A Cradle or a Casket?

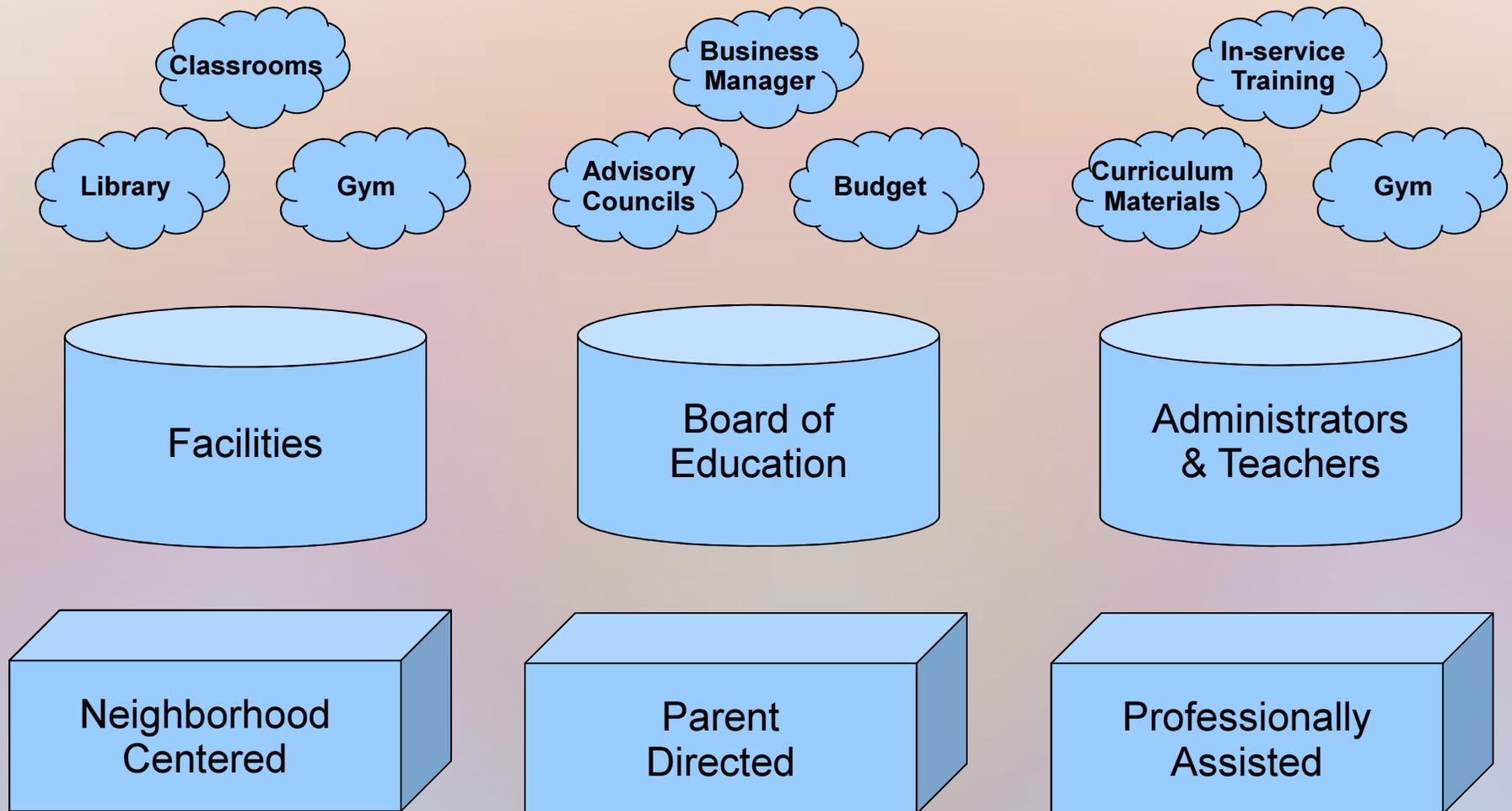
The Evolving Story: Emergence of Custodialism

Period	Purposes Why should Johnny and Mary go to school?
1650-1750	A. Eternal Salvation (So they can read the bible) B. Establishing a Free Nation (So they can vote)
1750-1850	A. Establishing a Free Nation B. Cultivating Patriotism and Citizenship
1850-1950	A. Cultivating Patriotism and Citizenship B. Career Training for Industry (shift rural to urban)
1950-1980	A. Career Training for Industry B. Custodialism (Schools Consolidate)
1980-2000	A. Custodialism (Caretakers) B. Factionalism
2000-Future	A. Factionalism B. ??????????????

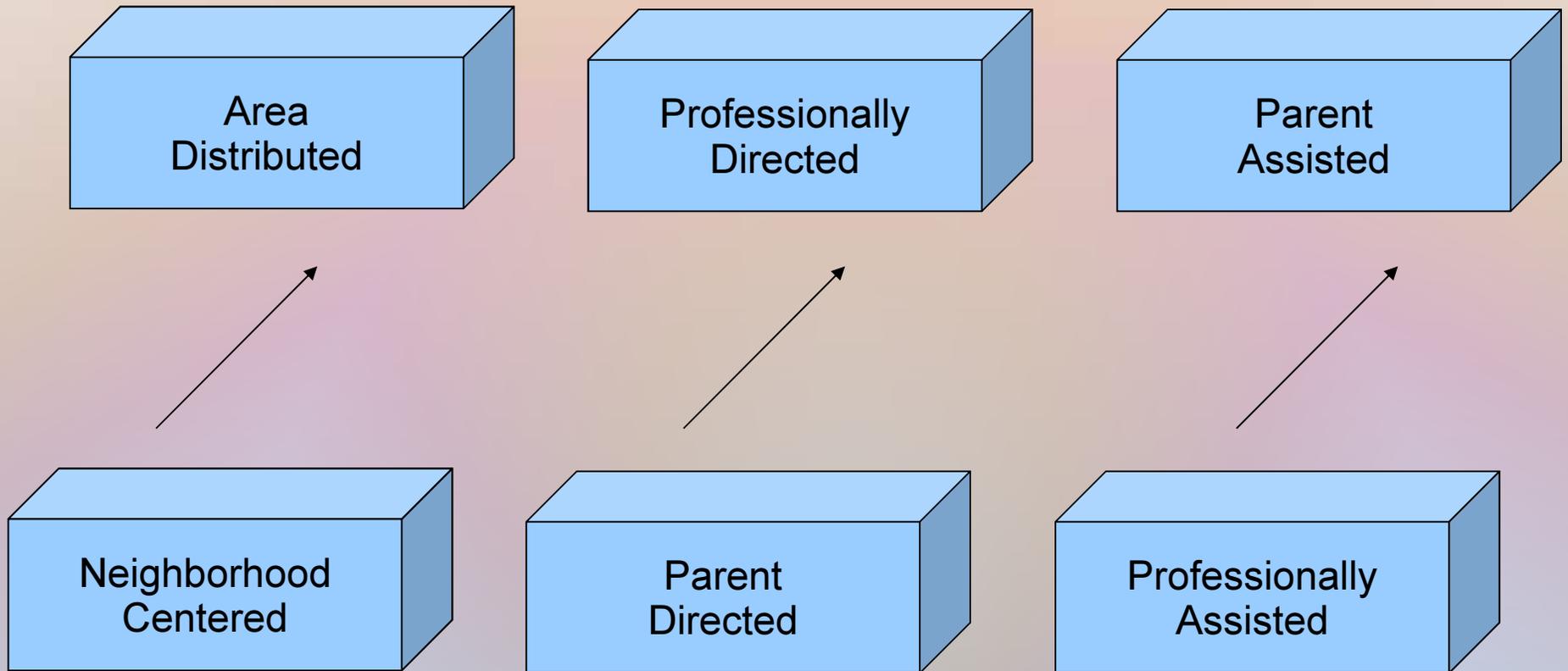
Changing Systems of American Education



Bedrock of the Public School System



Shifting Foundations



Custodialism: A Cradle or a Casket for American Education?

“Custodialism is the philosophy that is left when one severs the spiritual root that nourishes personal morality. The stronger custodialism becomes the more subservient other agencies and institutions must be in order for it to survive.”

- NJF

The Nature of Educational Custodialism

“More and more institutional functions are preserved and embraced, little if anything is created, reduced, or discarded; power within the system increases, costs rise, productivity becomes a debate.”

For example:

**Extra Curricular
Co-Curricular
Curricular**

A Comparison with Legal Theory

CUSTODIAL EDUCATION

Extra Curricular

Co-Curricular

Curricular (mandates)

Creates, Implements, Judges

(Rewards/Punishes)

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW

Extra Legal

Supra Legal

Consolidated (absolute)

Legislates, Executes, Judges

(Rewards/Punishes)

Philip Hamburger, *Is Administrative Law Unlawful?*
(University of Chicago, 2014)

or see *Imprimis* (September 2014, vol 43, no. 9)

Educational Custodialism:

- **A natural product of materialism**
- **Requires support more than it renders service**
- **Fosters expanding control—restricts decentralization**
- **Is comfortable with bureaucracy—uneasy with liberty**
- **Demands authority in order to preserve, maintain, and protect**

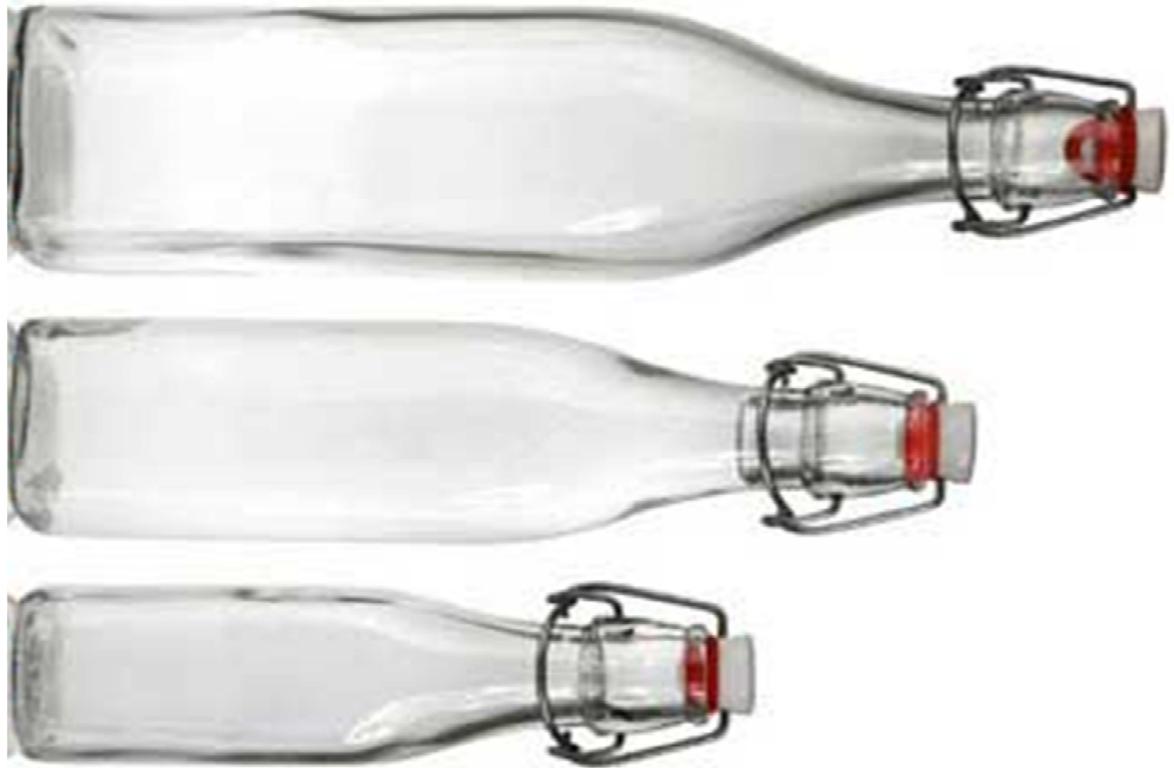
Why should we be talking about these ideas?

Context, Content, Structure, Process



Contexts for Modern Education

- University
- Secondary
- Elementary



Conclusion

- It is time to seriously evaluate **what people are thinking with, when they think about education.**
- It will make all the difference when this becomes the focus of the discussion.

Remember

Context does determine **Content, Process and Structure.**