

Lurpofactsomosis: Reinvigorating American Education—or How You, Too, Can Write Best Sellers and Become an Education Guru in Your Time

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, “it means just what I chose it to mean—nothing less, and nothing more.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

—Lewis Carroll

Introduction

To anyone who has carefully examined the matter, it is clear that educational power and influence—and their accompanying blandishments—are not easily gained through mere service to children or school. Neither is such service necessary. Nor does the scholarly path lead one far toward fame and fortune. Rather, even the apparently low-yield terrain of education can be mined efficiently by those with a knack for neologism—“creators of ideas.” Psychologists have practiced this technique for years, although most (?) have tried to tie their inventions down with some formulation of testable criteria.

Educators tend to complain that the innovations which inspire board and governmental expenditures from year to year turn out to be little more than old wine in new bottles. The successful educational neologist realizes that one need not waste even the time and effort to procure old wine: an empty bottle will sell, if sold right. And the consultancy checks can be cashed

long before anyone expects any substantive results to manifest themselves.

The least well-kept secret in the ed biz—excuse me, education profession—is that there is almost always money for a clever “innovation,” and there are seldom funds for a critical evaluation of it. Examples abound. A large Eastern university spends \$8 million on Training Teachers of Teachers (TTT—you can almost tap your toe to it) and when the time comes for summative evaluation, all involved—in the words of a site director—“fold their tents and steal away into the night.” But \$8 million is chump change, hardly worth the effort to keep track of—except to teachers who must dip into their own pockets to buy supplies for their students.

If one is clever about it, one can promote an idea, say, “Education as a Subversive Activity,” and then years later step over the wreckage, beat one’s breast, and atone by professing one’s Original Sin, declaring that education is “really” a conservative activity. This reaps far wider recognition than even a well-researched dissertation on, say, salacity (“Salacity, n. sal-a-'ci-di-ty, measure of student interest in high school sex education manuals”)—a litmus test, one might say.

The process is straightforward. The reader, having survived as an educator long enough to have developed the professionally necessary rhetoristicism (“rhetoristicism, n. inurement to

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or forbearance of educo-, politico-, and/or psychobabble”), may wish to review the steps below and test them out for herself or himself.

These steps are:

- a. Create the neologism.
- b. Assert the causal relation to the desired goals.
- c. Forestall criticism of the causal relation.
- d. Reiterate the causal relation.
- e. Rework the neologism, if necessary, and generate supportive concepts.

Let’s look at each of these in turn.

Create the Neologism

I offer as an example:

“Lurpofactsomosis, n. ler-po-fac-'tso-mi-sis (Attic Gk., fr. Pre-Macedonian?), process by which everything dismaying, annoying, and pitiable about public schools is eradicated and everything wonderful, marvelous, productive, or esteem-building is brought into being.”

Note the following characteristics:

- a. it sounds like a foreign word;
- b. it is hard to pronounce;
- c. it has a waltz cadence when pronounced: “LUR-po-fac-TSO (as in “hot”)-mo-sis 1-2-3, 1-2-3”;
- d. it promises everything to everyone.

The last point, d., is clearly its strongest. But we will discuss that below.

Now, about Lurpofactsomosis’s “foreignness.” This can work both ways. In some communities that would make it unattractive. But ask yourself, “Where is the money?” (i.e., grants, stipends, etc.)—clearly with persons who admire the academic, in trapping if not in travail. The etymology is not obvious, but suggestive of ancient Greek—overlooking the “fact” segment. This is an important point. Too clear an etymology, if wrong, will provoke ridicule rather than elicit eleemosynary extravagance.

A case in point is that of *andragogy*, a neologism by which forms of adult education are marketed. Theorists of adult education constructed the term on the assumption that the etymology of “pedagogy” meant “the instruction of children” and that “andros” in Greek meant “adult.” In fact, “pedagogy” meant “the leading of

children,” as by the pedagogue, a slave who accompanied them to school, and “andros” meant “husband” as in today’s “polyandry”: the practice of taking several husbands. Consequent to this confusion is the disdain that greets the quite-reasonable concern that adult learners may have special needs. (For similar reasons, for the program presented here I rejected *lycanthropobagy*, which any late-night-movie watcher might have found laughable.)

So far as pronunciation is concerned, with some practice, one can learn to roll “Lurpofactsomosis” trippingly from the tongue. Such fluency is usually interpreted, even (or especially) in academia, think tanks, and foundations, as expertise.

Even the cadence “LUR-po-fac, TSO-mo-sis” serves to separate the anointed from the laity, who will more likely render it “LUR-po, FAC-tso, MO-sis.” The first pattern is more akin to British pronunciation. (Compare “Caribbean” pronounced “ka-RIB-be-an,” rather than the American “kar-i-BE-an”; or “Himalayas” pronounced “hi-MAL-yas,” rather than “him-a-LAY-as.”) This hint of Anglophilia will no doubt garner the term greater advocacy in Eastern, particularly Northeastern, universities and thus in Federal and state funding agencies with fraternity connections, e.g., Skull and Bones, etc.

Assert the Causal Relation to Desired Goals

Here, the balder the assertion, the better. You won’t have to prove anything. And a simple rhetorical device will render critics harmless in the eyes of most potential enthusiasts. (We’ll discuss that below.)

Make no mistake about it. Lurpofactsomosis will cure everything wrong with American education, and if supported—i.e., with additional funding administered by you know who—to its ultimate conclusion, bring the gleam to the alabaster cities of the New Jerusalem, from sea to shining sea.

Unlike those wonderful ideas of yesteryear (Performance Contracting, Site-Based Management, Charter Schools, Vouchers, Phonics, Standardized Testing, Whole Language, Open Classrooms, and the New Math, honorable ideas all had they not been suborned, stultified, and stymied by Teacher Union Fifth Columnists and Academic Educationists)—unlike those ideas, Lurpofactsomosis and Lurpofactsomotic Leadership will win the day. (Lurpofactsomotic Leadership! 1-2-3, 1-2-3, 1-2-3! Sounds great!)

We are enthusiastic about the promise of Lurpofactsomosis and welcome the testing that our program will reasonably be subjected to by the good people of our great democratic republic once Lurpofactsomosis has been put in place in every city, town, village, and hamlet across the country—for at least twelve years.

Forestall Criticism and Reiterate the Causal Relation

The resources of the English language are powerful, indeed. Use them!

One need not worry whether Lurpofactsomosis will have the promised effects. For what we are promising is this:

True Lurpofactsomosis, *genuine* Lurpofactsomosis, *authentic* Lurpofactsomosis, *unadulterated* Lurpofactsomosis, *real* Lurpofactsomosis, *dedicatedly*, *professionally executed* Lurpofactsomosis will not fail. You can bank on it. (We will.)

However, if something fails in our schools, then it is clearly not true, genuine, authentic, unadulterated, real, dedicatedly, professionally executed Lurpofactsomosis. Why?

Because Lurpofactsomosis works!

The way teachers are trained may have to be changed to permit Lurpofactsomosis to work. The American family may have to be strengthened and TV programming censored to permit Lurpofactsomosis to work. The values upon which this Great Nation was founded may have to be reawakened to permit Lurpofactsomosis to work.

Because Lurpofactsomosis works!

Rework the Neologism, If Necessary, and Generate Supportive Concepts

Because our basic concept, Lurpofactsomosis, has not been field tested—focus groups would do—I cannot demonstrate what a reworking would look like. But let me illustrate how to generate related concepts.

Make no mistake about it. Lurpofactsomosis will cure everything wrong with American education. . . .

- a. We can designate a person who promotes Lurpofactsomosis in a school as a *school lurpetrator*.
- b. Less formal colleagues can refer to him or her fondly as a *lurp*.
- c. We can identify a well-run classroom from the *lurping* sounds that emanate from it.
- d. Although the reference would probably be understood only in a Christian-school context, we can refer to those who resist our program as *Doubting Tsomosis*.
- e. A successful program outcome will be a *Lurpofact*, as will sound bites of information about Lurpofactsomosis. The ambiguity is actually promotionally helpful.

Putting Your Knowledge to Work

Before you set out developing your own program concept, spend some time reviewing the many, many programs offered in today's educational arenas. Examine how they each address the steps of program development. Remember that these steps are:

- a. Create the neologism.
- b. Assert the causal relation to the desired goals.
- c. Forestall criticism of the causal relation.
- d. Reiterate the causal relation.
- e. Rework the neologism, if necessary, and generate supportive concepts.

Such an analysis will give you a clearer picture about what is going on with educational reforms and a better sense of what they are worth. As to your own pursuit of program profits: before you begin, you might seriously consider breaking with tradition and consulting your conscience.