

Anon.

A Fable

Uniform Standards for Eagles and Eels

A fable related to curriculum and evaluation

One often hears of the need for redirecting the educational program to meet the manifold needs, interests, and aptitudes of the children and youth whom we wish to serve and satisfy the desires of the public which pays so well for the service. It has been said that we need "a broad, cultural, definitive, esthetic, finite, general" education for all – equally good for all. In some school circles a little fable is circulated that's supposed to have a moral relating to all this. Here is the fable. You figure out the moral.

Once upon a time the animals had a school. The program strongly emphasized the "Four Fundamentals," so the curriculum consisted of running, flying, climbing, and swimming. The animal public insisted upon equal treatment of all the little animals, so all took the same subjects. They had to be well versed in all of the fundamentals!

The Duck was excellent in swimming, better in fact than his teacher – despite Pope's injunction to "Let such teach others who themselves excel." But he made only passing marks in flying, and he was very poor in running. Because his achievement was so low in that subject – far below the norm for the grade – he was made to stay in after school to practice running. To do the extra drill on running, the Duck had to drop out of the swimming class. The drill on running was kept up until his web feet were badly worn and he was only average in swimming. But, since "average" is acceptable and respectable, nobody worried about it except Duck. After all, swimming had been his chief interest in life!

Rabbit started at the top of the class in running, but she had a nervous breakdown and had to drop out of school on account of so much make-up work in swimming. They didn't have a waterproof workbook, and she swam so slowly that it kept dragging her down. It gave her "workbookphobia".

Squirrel led the class in climbing until she developed an anxiety state over flying. Her flying teacher made her begin each flying lesson from the ground and she had to fly upward, while her natural inclination was to fly from the treetop down. She soon developed a serious frustration, got "charley horses" from overstrain at the take-off, and began getting "Cs" in climbing and "Ds" in running.

Eagle was considered a problem pupil and was disciplined severely. In the climbing class, he beat all the other pupils to the top of the tree, but he insisted on using his own way to get there – he simply wouldn't conform to the procedure approved by the course of study, explained in the textbook, and drilled in the workbook! Eagle stubbornly used his wings instead of his feet.

At the end of the session, an abnormal eel who could swim exceedingly well, and who could also run, climb, and fly a little, had the highest average and no absolute "Fs". Such a record automatically made Eel the valedictorian. The committee on honors voted Eel should be graduated "With Distinction" because he was so well rounded.

The Prairie Dogs kept their children out of school and fought the tax levy because the administration wouldn't add digging and burrowing to the curriculum. They apprenticed their children to a badger and later joined the ground hogs and gophers in starting a successful high-tuition private school with more snob appeal.