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## Training Minds and Hearts: Principle-Centered Education Reform

**Steve Forbes**  
*Editor-in-Chief, Forbes*



**STEVE FORBES**, a two-time U.S. presidential candidate, is president and CEO of Forbes Inc., and editor-in-chief of *Forbes*, the world's foremost business magazine. He has long been an advocate of parental control of education and is also widely known as one of the most outspoken leaders of the tax reform movement. Former chairman of the Board for International Broadcasting and Empower America, Mr. Forbes received an honorary doctor of journalism degree in 1997 and the Adam Smith Award in 1999 from Hillsdale College. His book, *A New Birth of Freedom*, has just been released by Regnery Publishing.

*In this issue, Steve Forbes describes the role of traditional education in the free society and how it has been compromised by political correctness and statist control. He also explains how to bring about a new birth of educational freedom.*

*His remarks are based on a speech delivered at the February 1999 Shavano Institute for National Leadership seminar, "Education in America: Schools and Strategies that Work," in Atlanta, Georgia.*

**A**t the heart of the American experiment is the belief that no matter how ordinary we human beings may be, we are able to accomplish extraordinary deeds when we take responsibility for ourselves, our families, and our communities.

How do we learn to take responsibility? One vital way is through the education we receive as children and young adults. Education enables us not only to gain knowledge but also to develop sound character, to discover our God-given talents,

to lead honorable lives, to become truly good parents, neighbors, and citizens.

For several years I attended a boy's school—a politically incorrect form of education if there ever was one. The headmaster, Frank Ashburn, was fond of quoting the Bible verse, "The bond are free, and the free are bond." He told us that "bond" meant "bound" and that the message of the verse was this: When you develop discipline, you become a free person. If you don't develop it, you will suffer a blighted, narrow, and constricted life. He explained further,

You might say that a boy was free who never had to do any learning at all. But he would be free as an animal tied to a stake is free. He would be free in the sense that he would have more time on his hands, but he would be limited by his own experience and culture.

You cannot read or write without the bondage of having learned to read and write. You cannot play football without giving time and energy to practice.

**Also in this issue:**  
**Margaret Thatcher**  
**Former British Prime Minister**

Mr. Ashburn went on to tell us,

What is training? Training is preparing oneself to be able to do what one can't count on having to do. In a football game, training is the thing that keeps one's muscle from giving when the unexpected strain is applied, which means that little extra bit of wind when everyone's wind is gone. Training of the mind is that which enables one to handle not the problem that we have been over—most of us can do that—but the problem we have never met before. Training of the heart is that kind of conditioning that makes one steady when he is sick in fear, or bewildered by strangeness, or hurt and bruised in the mind.

He noted that there were four main fields of study that ought to comprise the core of any school curriculum. The first is communication, or literature; the second is the physical world, or science; the third is the social world, or history; and the fourth is the spiritual world, or religion and philosophy. In the end, these fields must merge into one unified body of knowledge. He concluded, "When this happens, we may say with confidence that a boy has experienced the essence of a liberal arts education. He is a free intellectual and spiritual being, free as only the bound are free—the bound who have benefited from knowledge, training, and discipline."

## A Noble Experiment

**IN THE** early part of this century, most of America's schools offered the kind of curriculum Mr. Ashburn was describing. Reflecting the highest values and aspirations of society, they were thus a great source of strength for the nation, reinforcing the moral lessons taught in the home, in local communities, and in the public square. In the latter part of this century, however, most schools have abandoned the traditional curriculum and are directly or indirectly undermining concepts of truth and morality as well as the authority of parents. They have given rise to a culture that bestselling novelist Mark Helprin describes as finding "virtue in every form of corruption and corruption in every form of virtue."

Look at how history is currently taught in the average public high school. America is portrayed as a nation with a sordid, shameful past. Its heroes—men and women with all the imperfections of human nature who were trying to better themselves or to do better for others—come off as terrible hypocrites. Cynicism about our heritage is

so deeply ingrained these days that students are no longer taught to memorize the immortal words of Abraham Lincoln, "Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

Yet as one observer says, these words were once "universally regarded not only as the classical model of the noblest kind of oratory but also as one of the most moving expressions of the democratic spirit ever uttered." And it was the sentiment behind these words that set the United States on an unparalleled course toward genuine freedom, equality, and prosperity. In the name of freedom, our pioneers pursued westward expansion all the way to the Pacific. In the name of equality, our reformers fought for the abolition of slavery and equal rights for women and minorities. In the name of prosperity, our entrepreneurs created new inventions, jobs, industries, and wealth. Together, all these real-life heroes turned America into a major world power.

Teachers ought to be reminding students of such accomplishments, and they ought to point out how far America has come in just two centuries—a blink of an eye as far as history is concerned. The thirteen fledgling states that formed the early republic were weak, disorganized, and hostile toward one another. Most of the U.S. population, which totaled only four million, was poor by modern standards, living on isolated farms or in small villages. The economy was in ruins after years of war, and the central government was both ineffective and bankrupt.

So how did we become a great nation? The conventional liberal view is that we did so by oppressive, exploitative, and imperialist means. This view ignores the striking fact that we succeeded because our civil order was based on what George Washington called the "twin pillars" of faith and morality as well as on a deep distrust of statism. The drafters of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution wisely recognized the imperfections of human nature and the corruption that inevitably results from concentrations of political power. So they devised a limited government with divided powers. They wanted to constrain the worst in us and liberate, as Lincoln later put it, "the better angels of our nature."

They knew that the state can't mandate virtue and enterprise. But time and time again, experience has proved that virtue and enterprise *will* result when individuals are taught moral principles and when they are free to put those principles into action. People from all races and all cultures

are drawn to America for this reason. Immigrants risk everything in order to come to this country, often with nothing but the clothes on their backs. Those who are sworn enemies lay down their arms, set aside their grievances, and live side by side here. Their children play together and attend school together.

What is the glue that keeps so many different individuals bound together? It is not a common ancestry, a single religion, a privileged aristocracy, a rigid caste system, or the force of arms. It is a shared set of ideas about liberty, rights, responsibilities, equality, and the rule of law. It is a shared desire to get ahead and in the words of Lincoln, "improve one's lot in life." It is a shared sense of optimism that people can solve their own problems and overcome great obstacles without having to resort to force or to create a huge bureaucracy. Finally, it is a shared spirit of generosity and charity that makes the Golden Rule a fundamental part of the American creed.

## A New Era

**EDUCATORS SHOULD** teach students about *this* America, the America that inspires wonder and awe. They don't have to ignore our nation's faults or pretend that its leaders were plaster saints. In the classroom, there ought to be plenty of opportunity to criticize, sound off, and even debunk—as long as it is done constructively.

The time is ripe for them to take this approach, no matter how reluctant they are to do so. America has already crossed the threshold of what promises to be the most extraordinary era in all of human existence. For the first time in five thousand years of recorded history, there is only one superpower. Even the Roman Empire at the height of its imperial grandeur did not have the global influence that America enjoys today. Whether the politicians and intellectuals of other nations admit it or not, their citizens are looking to America as the model for the 21st century.

It comes down to this: If we get it right, the rest of the world has a chance to get it right. If we get it wrong, the rest of the world is in deep trouble. This may sound like arrogance speaking, but in truth it is humility—the sort of humility that comes from bearing a heavy burden of responsibility. It is not easily assumed, and once assumed, it cannot be laid aside.

The new era may be discussed from many perspectives. Since I am primarily a businessman and a journalist, let me offer my perspective on the "Information Age," which is already changing the way we live

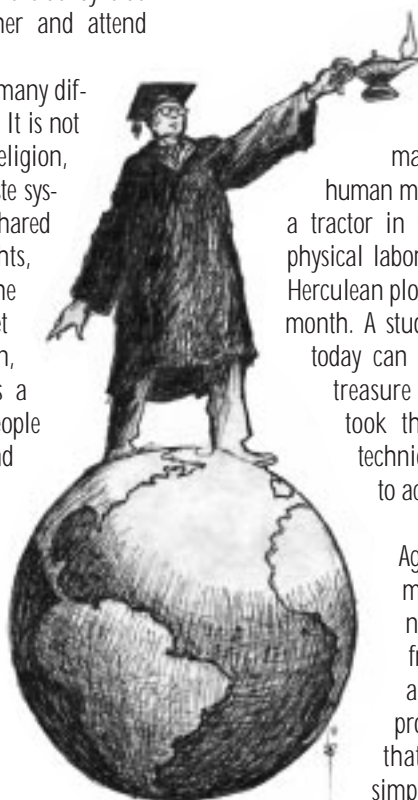
and the way we work. It is rightly represented by the microchip, which extends the reach of the human brain the way machines extend the use of human muscle. A farmer who bought a tractor in the 1920s could do more physical labor in a day than a hundred Herculean plowmen could have done in a month. A student who buys a computer today can access in mere minutes a treasure trove of knowledge that took thousands of scholars and technical experts whole lifetimes to accumulate.

Every day, the Information Age gives us more choices, more control, more opportunities. One of the virtues of a free society is that individuals can succeed when they provide a product or service that people find affordable, simple, and easy to use. A car buyer doesn't have to be an engi-

neer to learn how to drive. An airplane passenger doesn't need to know anything about aerodynamics to buy a flight ticket (or to sit on the runway for two hours waiting for the plane to take off—but that's another story).

How does this relate to education? In this new era, students don't have to know anything about electronics to use a calculator, which, by the way, costs a fraction of what it cost 30 years ago. (Once they would have had to shell out more than one thousand dollars. Now the packaging costs more than the gizmo itself.) And even if mathematics isn't their strong point, not to worry: They can easily perform computations that would have challenged Einstein.

Does this mean that they shouldn't bother to learn to add and subtract or to multiply and divide? Of course not. Technology is an invaluable tool for gaining knowledge, not an excuse for wallowing in ignorance. Look at the Internet, which has become a powerful force encouraging literacy and learning. It is because of computers, not despite them, that book sales are reaching the



highest levels in history. People of all ages, especially young people, are buying titles that they never knew existed. In school, students turned off by boring basic readers and the dreary “serious literature” that only a pedantic English professor could love are finding out from innovative businesses like amazon.com that reading can be pleasurable, stimulating, and rewarding. Technology, in effect, piques their intellectual curiosity.

The Internet quite literally puts the world at students’ fingertips. But do they under-

stand why that world exists, and where their place is in it? I have already suggested that schools aren’t doing a good job when it comes to teaching American history. But they are even worse when it comes to teaching the basics of economics. Even after the fall of communism, most teachers still teach that the profit motive is evil, that wealth is about hoards of material resources like land, armies, and gold, and that since wealth is limited, the rich can only get rich at the expense of the poor.

Fortunately, technology is teaching students the truth about economics: The way to make a profit is to care about others and to meet their wants and needs. Knowledge is power. Wealth comes from within, from human capital like imagination and innovation. And new wealth is created all the time in a free market.

The classic example is the case of the “natural resource” called oil. What is oil in and of itself? There’s nothing natural about it. It is sticky, gooey glop. In early Pennsylvania, oil actually depressed property values because, when it oozed to the surface, it killed crops and made livestock sick. Who needed the stuff? You couldn’t eat it. You couldn’t drink it. Then someone figured out a way to turn oil into fuel and thus into a brand new source of wealth.

At its best, learning is supposed to be about stirring the imagination and encouraging creativity. Teaching economics should, therefore, be about the very same things.

## The New Classroom

**INEVITABLY, THIS** new era will inspire a new kind of classroom. If you took a surgeon from 100 years ago and put him in a modern operating room, about all he would recognize would be the human body. Everything else would have changed. If you took a teacher from 100 years ago and put

him in a modern classroom, he would recognize just about everything. (True, the blackboards aren’t black anymore and the students may be a little less disciplined, but he would recognize them all the same.)

The old classroom is an invention of the Prussians. After the battering they took in the Napoleonic Wars in the late 18th and early 19th

centuries, they decided to create a classroom that would be specifically designed to instill discipline and obedience in students. They did not do this for any

noble reason but because they wanted to turn out more bureaucrats and soldiers. The word “kindergarten” may mean “garden for the children,” but in Prussia, kindergarten was more like boot camp. It removed children, especially young boys, from the “weak” influence of their mothers and taught them that they owed their primary allegiance to the state.

By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, liberal American educators and politicians were successfully leading the drive for public education based on the Prussian model. The model suited them perfectly because it put government and the “experts” in charge. It was the beginning of a slow, steady decline in the quality of education and of an assault from within the gates on the traditional values and curriculum that my old headmaster Frank Ashburn described.

But in the new era the Prussian model has been widely discredited. It has not produced well-trained or well-educated students, and it has not been consistent with the principles of the free society. Thanks to technology, students are learning more *outside* the old classroom than they are inside. And parents, fed up with the public school system’s failure to adapt, are at last demanding genuine educational choice.

That is why it is time to open the doors to a new era for our schools, because educational freedom is the next great civil rights battleground, and it is a battle we must win. How do we move forward? One immediate way is to take all the funds the Department of Education awards and turn them into block grants that cannot be released to states and local communities unless they are accompanied by this directive: Let parents choose schools that work—schools that are safe, clean, drug-free, disciplined, and academically challenging and that reinforce rather than undermine the moral and spiritual values that are being instilled at home.

Real school choice means public *and* private schools, charter schools *and* home schools *and* parochial schools, tuition tax credits *and* educational savings accounts *and* vouchers. A parent should not be forced to send a child to a lousy school. Just imagine if parents and teachers—not politicians and bureaucrats—ran our schools. With this new freedom, together with real accountability and competition, we could send a message to all schools: perform or perish. That would raise the standards and quality of all schools.

Another vital step is to encourage pastors, priests, and rabbis to open a new frontier of faith-based schools, especially in our inner cities. Already many religious leaders are turning Sunday School rooms into classrooms during the week. They are helping children to find faith in God and their place in the world. We should do everything we can to help in this effort because education is about more than just developing our intellects. It is about building the architecture of our souls.

## Relighting the Lamps of Freedom

**DESPITE MY** optimism about the new era we are entering, I don't wish to imply that reforming education will happen overnight or that it will be easy. It will be a long, difficult struggle punctuated by many failures and missteps along the way. But one of the primary purposes of education, as Frank Ashburn implied, is to help us cope with hardship and overcome failure.

I learned the same lesson from my grandfather, B.C. Forbes. He was forced to drop out after finishing grade school. But the education he did receive, steeped as it was in the precepts of Western civilization and the Bible, offered him a solid foundation that was to serve him well all his life.

Born in Scotland in 1880, B.C. came to America in 1904 with pockets that were empty and a heart that was full of ambition. After many hard years, he became a financial journalist for the Hearst newspaper chain, then the most powerful name in news. In 1917, he founded *Forbes*. The magazine was so popular by the late 1920s that the newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst offered several million dollars in cash for a controlling stake. In those days, that was a considerable fortune. But my

grandfather thought he had it made. He turned Hearst down flat. Then came the Great Depression. Four years later, *Forbes* was bankrupt. The only way B.C. kept the magazine going was to hire himself out to other publications as a free-lance writer and a syndicated columnist.

His dream seemed to have gone up in smoke. But he never gave up. He had faith in himself and in America, and that faith was eventually rewarded.

In the new era that has dawned in the 1990s,

we face a future just as bright and just as full of risk and uncertainty. We should approach it both hopefully and cautiously. The early 20th century seemed to augur well at first. There was great material progress.

The rule of law and democracy seemed to be spreading throughout the world. Even Russia, the most backward nation among the major powers, was making halting steps toward something resembling a constitutional monarchy. Russia also had the highest economic growth rates and was the world's biggest grain exporter.

Then came the senseless slaughter of World War I. Many people lost their lives—others lost their faith in man and in God. The Great Depression brought more tragedy as millions lost their livelihood. Meanwhile, socialism, communism, fascism, and Nazism set the stage for the carnage of World War II.

In one sense, we are living not in 1999 but in 1914—anything could happen. A man who sensed the magnitude of the impending disaster 85 years ago was Britain's Foreign Minister, Sir Edward Grey. He wrote, "The lamps are going out all over Europe, and we should not see them lit again in our lifetime."

If we fail to reform education, millions of children will be left behind. However, if we develop through education our strengths as a free and responsible people here at home, those lamps can be relit, not only in America but also throughout the world, not only for our generation but also for generations to come. ▲

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## The Challenge of Educating for 21st Century Citizenship

**Margaret Thatcher**  
Former Prime Minister  
Great Britain

### MARGARET THATCHER,

former Conservative member of Parliament, assumed the office of prime minister in 1979. When the Conservative Party subsequently won the elections of 1983 and 1987, she became the first prime minister in this century to win three consecutive elections. Her tenure was marked by privatization and deregulation of industry and reinvigoration of the British armed forces. After her 1990 resignation, she was elevated to the House of Lords.

She has received numerous awards and honorary degrees, including the Hillsdale College Freedom Leadership Award in 1994. A patron of numerous charities and her own foundation, she has written two best-selling autobiographies: *The Downing Street Years* (1993) and *The Path to Power* (1995).

*At the Atlanta Shavano seminar in February 1999, former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher spoke about the enduring truths education must provide to each generation. Here is an edited version of some of her remarks.*

**Y**ears ago, I had the opportunity to visit a Russian school that was participating in a British-Russian exchange program. I observed that the Soviet system of education did an excellent job of teaching science, mathematics, language, and literature. Indeed, if these were the only subjects taught, the pupils seemed to be receiving the best, most straightforward, and most traditional form of education.

But, of course, the Soviet system did not teach only these subjects. It taught many others tainted by communist indoctrination, deliberate falsehoods, and ruthless attacks on the West. It also intentionally refrained from teaching students about the concept of freedom and about freedom's spiritual and historical roots.

I was deeply disturbed. I had always felt that a good education, founded upon liberty and morality, is mankind's most valuable asset. This was the

The history of mankind reveals that progress is not preordained. So far, it is only free nations that have discovered the secret of continual advance.

kind of education I was fortunate enough to receive in the small town in which I lived. It was reinforced at home, too. My father left school at age 13, but he was very well read, and he constantly reminded me that education was the key to understanding. He read one excellent book a week. (I well remember, since I had to go to the library

and fetch it.) Moreover, his grocer's shop was not only a place where one bought staple goods but also a place where, on Friday and Saturday nights when the shop was open late, customers could find lively, informed debate on the most important questions of the day.

It was the mid-to-late 1930s. These were very dangerous times. Everyone was keenly aware that great decisions and great events lay ahead. Now, in the 1990s, as we face another momentous period in history, there seems to be less serious discussion about the fundamentals of liberty and morality. Ordinary citizens still gather to discuss important questions, but they are less well informed, less able to support their arguments. One reason is that they aren't being taught about liberty and morality in school. There are still many good schools run by good teachers and supported by many good parents and good communities, but for the last several decades the general systems of education in the United States and Great Britain have been floundering.

If educators—and citizens—are to find their way again, one of the first things they need to do is to reevaluate their basic positions on two issues that support the whole edifice of society: the issues of human nature and experience.

Let me start with human nature. Human nature, by definition, doesn't change. That isn't to minimize the effects of culture, circumstance, or individual differences. What is important to remember is that the basic instincts of the human being are constant. On one level, this is cause for optimism. No matter how complicated our domestic problems are, no matter how tense our relations with other nations are, we can be sure that, deep down, there is some spark of humanity, some urge to do what is right, to which we can always appeal.

On another level, this is cause for pessimism. There is an equally important and equally unchanging darker side of human nature. Without law, without the institutions of civil society, without



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