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DestroyingEliminating Public EducationSchooling As We Know It [Today]

by [Kevin Carey](#) on [November 11, 2010](#)

in [Uncategorized](#)

Neal Mccluskey [responds](#) to yesterday's [post](#) about abolishing the U.S. Department of Education. First, he's right to say that my use of the phrase "Crazy Town" constitutes a cheap shot. Just because Sharron Angle lives in Crazy Town doesn't mean everyone else with overlapping beliefs lives there too. I shouldn't have implied otherwise.

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The rest of Neal's post is less persuasive. For example:

First, there's the usual attack that Cato-types are nutty fringers who want to destroy "public education." As I have (obviously ineffectually) [tried to explain to Carey before](#), I am not against public *education*, in which government ensures that everyone can access education. I am against public *schooling*, in which government runs the schools. This gets directly to the bedrock question of how best to operate education in a free society, as well as make schooling work [primarily for parents and kids](#). And contrary to the connotation of phrases like "destroying public education as we know it," government run schooling with a huge federal presence [has hardly been the standard](#) for most of American history.

Note that Neal begins by truncating the phrase "destroying public education as we know it" to just "destroy public education." There's a difference. It's true that a totally voucherized education system, which Cato explicitly supports, would arguably still be "public" since it would be publicly-funded. But I don't think anyone would argue—or at least, I didn't think anyone would argue—that a wholesale transition from a system in which "the government runs the schools" to a system in which the government doesn't run the schools constitutes anything other than destroying public education as we know it. Would it sound nicer if I said "transition from" or something? What's the difference?

Neal then shifts the standard to "government run schooling with a huge federal presence." Government run schooling has existed since at least the mid-19th century. Whether the federal presence today is "huge" when the feds still only contribute pennies to the K-12 dollar is highly debatable. But whatever—how about "complete elimination of public schooling as we know it today." Can we agree on that?

In general, there's a "Who? Me?" vibe running throughout Neal's post, which he actually illustrates quite well with a picture of Zinedine Zidane [head-butting](#) Marco Materazzi in the 2006 World Cup. I take it I'm supposed to be Zidane and Neal is the Italian guy. Okay, recall what happened: Materazzi made an

unwholesome comment about a female member of Zidane's family and then, following the butt, dived to the turf pretending to writhe in pain, leading to Zidane's expulsion from the game at a crucial moment. A shrewd tactical move, perhaps, but not something that will cover Materazzi in glory.

I enjoy the intellectual jousting with Cato and think libertarianism is a perspective that's worth consideration. But I also think Cato's main purpose in life is to push extremely radical and harmful ideas—like the complete elimination of public schooling as we know it today—inside the borders of respectable public discourse by pursuing a kind of cerebral, we're-all-just-debating-here approach to discussion. Perhaps that makes me part of the problem.

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RG [November 12, 2010 at 12:24 am](#)

Now you're being a wee bit condescending and dismissive of McCluskey's argument. You're also missing his point and are instead spending time fussing over his vocabulary instead of focusing on the content of his post.

And how exactly are Cato's ideas "radical" and "harmful"? Is it because they're so different from what you're used to that they frighten you? Yes, Mr. Carey, that does make you part of the problem.

When we have high school graduates, who are theoretically prepared for college, who can't make change without the help of a calculator, can't write a coherent sentence, and must take remedial courses to make up for these shortcomings before truly beginning their college careers, public education has obviously failed.

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