

Should Intelligent Design Be Included in Today's Public School Curriculums?

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Kevin C. Costley, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education
Arkansas Tech University
kcostley@atu.edu

Pam Killins, MS Ed.
Graduate Student
Science Teacher – Hector, Arkansas Public Schools
pamkillins@hector.k12.us

Dr. Kevin C. Costley is a full-time faculty member of Arkansas Tech University; Russellville, Arkansas. His areas of expertise are in curriculum development, diversity, developmental psychology, social & historical factors of education, developmentally appropriate practice, assessment, evaluating research, training mentors for novice teachers and music/piano pedagogy. Costley is a nationally acclaimed major/exclusive writer of children's piano literature with the FJH Music Company of Fort Lauderdale, Florida with over 200 published piano works distributed nationally and internationally.

Pam Killins is a seventh and eighth grade veteran teacher at Hector, Arkansas public schools. She received a Bachelor of Science in Biological Sciences from Arkansas Tech University in 1983, Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education from Arkansas Tech University in 1992 and Master of Education in Middle School Social Studies in 2010.

Introduction

Science is a core part of the classroom curriculum along with math, language arts, reading, social studies and history. Contrary to common popular belief, when science is taught as an engaging subject, students enjoy science and find it interesting and fun. Science then can become one of those non-dreaded subjects of the day for both teachers and students alike.

The controversial concept of evolution makes up only a small part of the science curriculum stated in Arkansas. During the past few years, the curriculum topic of “Intelligent Design” has caught the attention of many science teachers in the public schools. The Intelligent Design Movement has been successful in attracting the attention of the general public (Gregg, 2007).

According to Johnson (2006), Intelligent Design is the belief that the origin and complexities of life can be attributed only to the action of a supernatural intelligence; the origin of life cannot be ascribed to natural causes or material mechanisms, such as those described by evolutionary science. Tison (1999) defines “Intelligent Design” as a theory of biological origins and development. The whole concept of Intelligent Design originated in 2001 by Andrew Johnson (Gross, (2004). The chief proponents of Intelligent Design today are Christian fundamentalists and their conservative political organizations (Johnson, 2006).

Evolution is a hot topic of discussion in many Arkansas middle school and high school classrooms today because the subject is included in the Arkansas Department of Education’s Curriculum Frameworks. The frameworks are required content (topics) for all subjects. Evolution is one of those required topics under the subject of *science*. The first framework is to compare the theory of evolution to the characteristics of a scientific

theory. The second framework is to identify basic ideas related to biological evolution: (a) diversity of species; (b) variations within species; (c) adaptations; (d) natural selection; and (e) extinction of a species. The third framework has to do with teachers' explaining the concept of fossil record providing evidence of life forms appearance, diversification, and extinction. The last framework is to explain the process of natural selection.

All of the preceding frameworks lean heavily on the ideas and conclusions of Charles Darwin's research. Darwin is notably known for his famous works, *The Origin of Species*. Few books about the beginnings of life have had greater impact and caused more controversy than Darwin's book. The central idea of Darwin's book is: all living organisms have resulted from a long process of natural selection. Darwin strongly believed that reproduction always produces more offspring than the environment can support. He found that those animals that have best adapted to their environment(s) are the ones that will survive and breed, passing on their dominant survival characteristics.

Overall, Darwin's theory classifies together three essential elements: (1) random variation in organisms, (2) the struggle for existence and, (3) the principle of divergence—to create a coherent theory that makes sense for biology (Patent, 2001). Today, Charles Darwin's ideas are considered a cornerstone for modern science (Hopkinson, 2005).

With this being said, this leads the writers of this article to the alternate theory/belief of "Intelligent Design." It is believed the Arkansas Frameworks should incorporate more than just one view of evolution. Intelligent Design should be included in the frameworks, too.

Evidence Supporting “Intelligent Design”

In 2005, the s Kansas State Board of Education approved several science standards aligned with teaching Intelligent Design (Brumfield, 2005). In response to Kansas’ approval, twenty states have fought for their rights to teach Intelligent Design in science classes, including Michigan and New York (Sharpes & Peramas, 2006). In addition, President George Bush stated that students should be told about the *different theories* of evolution so that they can decide for themselves how human beings evolved (Anonymous, 2006). Soon after making President Bush made his endorsement, two more states (Georgia, and Pennsylvania) demanded that Intelligent Design be introduced into the American curriculum and classrooms (Ruse, 2006). Shortly following the state of Kansas, Georgia, and Pennsylvania’s advocacy for this type of curriculum, senate majority leader Bill Frist, a Republican, also announced publicly that he endorsed the teaching of Intelligent Design in public schools (Lurquin & Stone, 2007). Former Vice President, Al Gore also added that schools should be free to teach Intelligent Design as well. On this issue, the state of Arkansas has still not today followed the initial lead of the state of Kansas.

To the amazement of school teachers and curriculum experts, the great-great grandson of Charles Darwin, Matthew Chapman, advocated that the teaching of Creationism (Intelligent Design) should be a mandatory part of every child’s science education (Chapman, 2007).

According to a 2005 poll by the Pew Research Center, 42 percent of Americans hold strict creationist views that “living things have existed in their *present form* since the beginning of time compared to 48 percent who believe that humans “evolved over

time” (Shermer,2006). The Pew Research Center also revealed that 64 percent said they were open to the idea of teaching creationism in addition to evolution in public schools. A similar poll conducted by CBS Broadcasting (2004) reported that nearly two-thirds of all Americans surveyed favored teaching creationism together with evolution in schools (Sharpes & Peramas, 2006).

In a class discussion during a graduate curriculum class in a central Arkansas university, one middle school science teacher stated the following: “My position to teach Intelligent Design in my classroom is the right thing to do. Students should be exposed to all points of view. Then they have the right to believe what they want to believe. Yet, keep in mind, I also teach the traditional Darwinian approach, which is in line with the Arkansas Curriculum Frameworks. Secondly, I am covering the frameworks that currently cover Darwin’s theory of evolution. Yet, I strongly believe students need to be taught there are many theories, ideas, and laws in the science content area and the reasons for these theories. Creationism should be in the Arkansas curriculum and be presented to students. Just teaching Darwinism is one-sided and not what true academia encompasses.”

It is possible that many science teachers are afraid to take a stand that promotes teaching Creationism in the schools. Most teachers avoid mentioning Creationism because the subject is not addressed in the Arkansas Curriculum Frameworks. Some teachers are afraid of losing their jobs. Thus, students are never exposed to another view other than Darwin’s views. Admittedly, Darwin’s research did give the world a better understanding of how the world began and evolved through many centuries. Many informed, knowledgeable teachers and parents would agree that the *survival of the*

fittest principle is true. Few people doubt Darwin's records on fossils and other artifacts showing evolution of the environment and surrounding world. Darwin's detailed records show clear documentation of the evolving world. He launched a new and profound understanding of biology and science that has served future generations (Shemer, 2006).

People who read Darwin's writings come to the conclusion that Darwin was not an atheist, as commonly believed. He wrote in a letter (Fullick, 2001), "In my most extreme fluctuations, I have never been an atheist in the sense of denying the existence of God." Not commonly known, his great-great grandson from England, Matthew Chapman lived in America to escape the pressures of his legacy. Writings say he enjoyed attending lectures about Intelligent Design. Often agreed on, Darwin did make a valuable contribution to research and knowledge; yet unfortunately, for a more well-rounded educational experience, Darwinism and his view of evolution continues to be the only view taught in Arkansas public schools.

Intelligent design is important to education for several reasons. First, it is a new approach to teaching a framework. Teachers should always be looking for new ideas. Presently, the popularity of Intelligent Design is on the rise as a major movement in the United States, generally, and specifically, the science curriculum. It is presently under the scrutiny of the world's best known rhetoricians of science (Woodward, 2003). Secondly, Intelligent Design can propel the classroom teachers in teaching controversial subjects that make students think on higher levels of thought. Controversy teaches students 1) how to evaluate the truth, 2) how to focus on the topic including more than one viewpoint, 3) to search for some kind of common ground, 4) to define issues and

points of disagreement, 5) to develop criteria for standards of reference, and; 6) to explain at least two sides of the issue (Woodward, 2003).

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