

How to Educate a Citizen

*The Power of Shared Knowledge to
Unify a Nation*



E. D. Hirsch, Jr.

HOW TO EDUCATE A CITIZEN. Copyright © 2020 by E. D. Hirsch, Jr. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, address HarperCollins Publishers, 195 Broadway, New York, NY 10007.

HarperCollins books may be purchased for educational, business, or sales promotional use. For information, please email the Special Markets Department at SPsales@harpercollins.com.

FIRST EDITION

Designed by Kyle O'Brien

Charts by Nick Springer/Springer Cartographics LLC

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for.

ISBN 978-0-06-300192-3

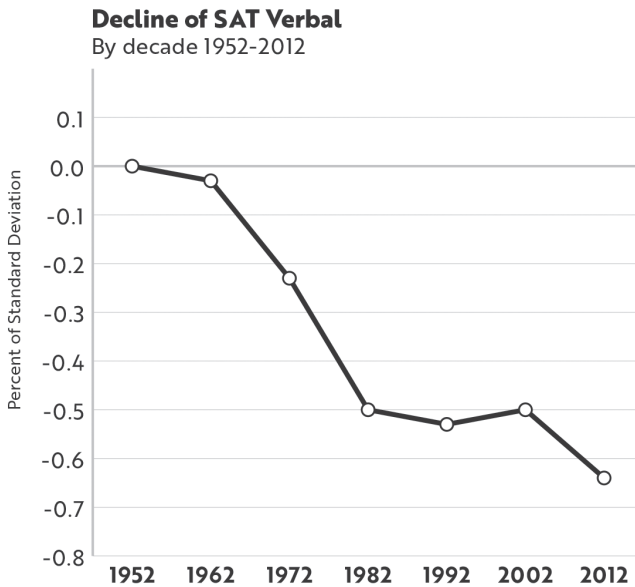
20 21 22 23 24 LSC 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CHAPTER 1

When Our Schools Abandoned Commonality, We Became a Nation at Risk

The Drop in Reading Scores

Here's a picture of the multidecade decline of our recent verbal SAT scores from 1952 to 2012:



You can see from the graph that the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 was followed by a momentary pause in verbal decline—an improvement apparently induced by the report itself. The pause was then followed by a further decline. The 2018 verbal score was *below* that of 2012!

CHAPTER 6

The Lessons of Educational Failure and Success around the World

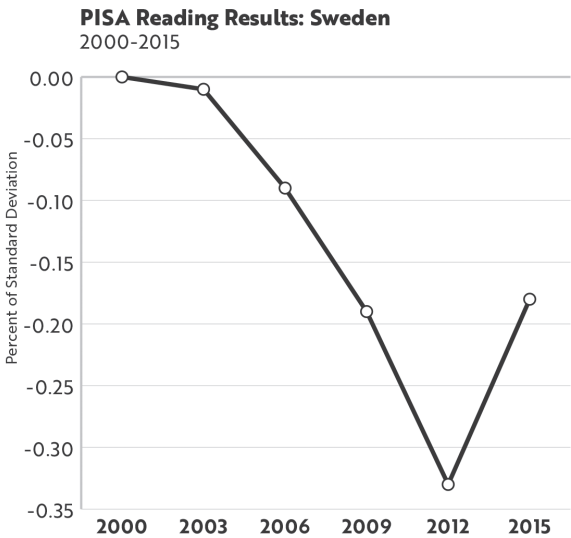
Germany and “PISA Schock”

Following this PISA *Schock*, the soul searching began, and the Länder (political divisions similar to US states) began to cooperate with one another. Before, each Land had issued its own vague standards. Now all of them decided to cooperate. Germany instituted what was in effect a shared-knowledge national curriculum in each grade of elementary school. After instituting this change, here is the pattern of their reading scores:



The Swedish Story

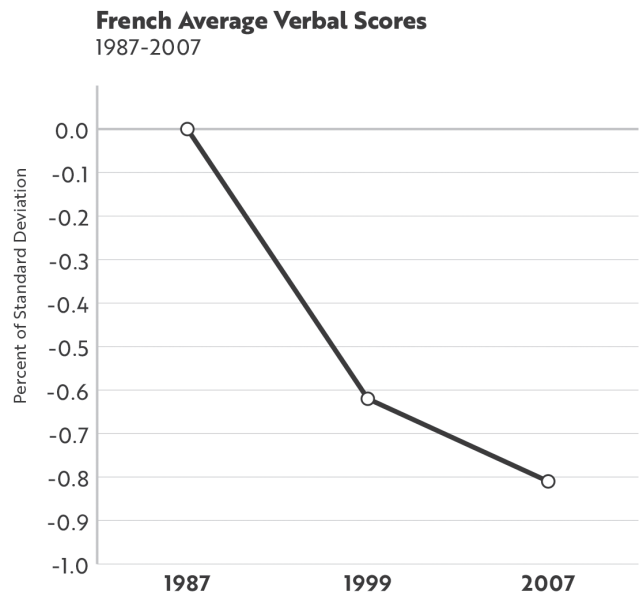
The Swedish story is equally informative in the other direction. Sweden changed from a shared-knowledge curriculum in its elementary schools to a constructivist orientation just when Germany was going the other way. In 2000, Sweden ranked ninth in reading for fifteen-year-olds. In 2012, it ranked twenty-seventh



Here’s What Happened to France When It Decided to Adopt Constructivist Ideas

When the French enthusiastically changed their schooling to the American style in the 1980s, they also experienced a similar precipitous decline shown here in percent of standard deviation: 80 percent in two decades! Thus, after

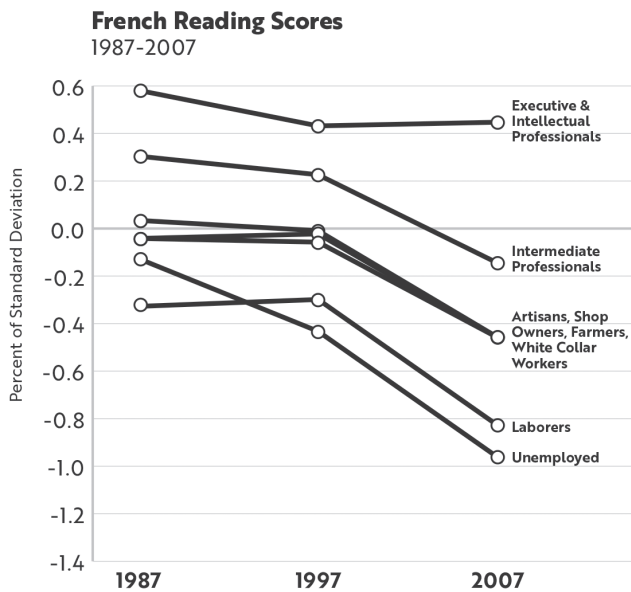
two decades, there was a decline in French verbal scores of a magnitude similar to the huge decline in American verbal scores over *four* decades—and from the same intellectual causes.



The achievement gap in France between rich and poor students then widened enormously. The following chart shows how different social classes were affected, a change that destroyed the formerly egalitarian nature of French education. Even the decline in reading among midlevel professionals was over a full standard deviation.

It is a paradox that the intellectual *Left* in both France and the United States has instigated educational “reforms” that

penalize the poor and favor the rich. Note too how much the overall gaps have widened between the top and bottom groups. This detailed sociological graph is a stunning sociological and moral indictment of our persisting in an incorrect educational theory.



But suppose the change in policy were to go the other way around than it did in France. Suppose the nation, using the same remarkable data gathering, had moved from an individualized, constructivist curriculum to a shared-knowledge curriculum such as France had in 1987. Suppose time ran backward in France. We'd get this picture:

Reversing the French (and American) Experience 2020-2037?

