

What is "*The Blob*"?

In *Prisoners of the Blob: Why most education experts are wrong about nearly everything*¹ Toby Young, FRSA, describes *The Blob*¹ - selectively paraphrased and also expanded below):



Figure 1. *Prisoners of The Blob* - by Toby Young.

The term *The Blob*, referring to the amoeba-like monster in the eponymous 1950's sci-fi movie, appears and re-appears in the UK and the US education debates, referring to the 'thought-world' of educational bureaucracies (from leaders of teaching unions and local authority officials to academics and researchers in university education departments). Classroom teachers are required to comply with *Blob* policies and, along with parents and students are the guinea pigs in their experiments.

The term was first used by William J. Bennett, the former US Education secretary who coined it to describe the "bloated education bureaucracy" of the 1980's. It is quite a fitting term because it illustrates the way in which the educational establishment / bureaucracy captures and consumes the education system, becoming progressively stronger. It also endeavours to make itself resistant to any form of attack. As the former UK Education Minister George Walden wrote in an article titled 'Reforming Education' for *The Telegraph* :

"Removing *The Blob* is like trying to disperse a fog with a hand grenade - after the flash and the explosion, the fog creeps back."

"Its members believe that skills like 'problem-solving' and 'critical thinking' are more important than subject knowledge; that education should be 'child-centred' rather than 'didactic' or 'teacher-led'; that 'group work' and 'independent learning' are superior to 'direct instruction'; that the way to spark interest from children in a subject is to make it 'relevant'; that 'rote-learning' and 'regurgitating facts' is bad, along with discipline, hierarchy, routine and anything else that involves treating the teacher as an authority figure." (p2). Any suggestion of a hierarchical relationship between teacher and student, such as the notion that teachers might actually know something that their pupils don't, is completely taboo. As you'd expect from a quasi-religious movement, *The Blob's* thoughtworld is full of faux-seductive rhyming mantras e.g. terms for dismissing the teaching of knowledge include 'drill and kill' and 'chalk and talk' (p6). The aim of a good teacher is to be a 'guide on the side' rather than a 'sage on the stage'.

To the mind of *The Blob* adherent, the job of the teacher – or rather 'learning facilitator' – is to furnish children with the 'skills and competencies' they'll need to get jobs in our fast-moving, global economy, as well as turning them into 'responsible citizens'. They're not supposed to learn anything in the boring, old-fashioned sense of the word, e.g. commit facts to memory. Rather, they should learn how to learn – or 'learn 2 learn' – slavishly copied by Ed. Qld. with its C2C Program. This involves 'cross-curricular work' in which 'learners' (never pupils) are taught about 'concepts' and 'themes' through a multiplicity of different 'lenses'. The ability to critically analyse the text is considered more important than understanding and knowing what the text states.

Their adherence to this ideology is so fanatical that they ignore the huge body of empirical evidence that shows that progressive teaching methods don't work. They also ignore the findings of cognitive scientists who have concluded that abilities like critical thinking and problem solving can only be taught alongside subject knowledge. They cannot be taught to children as stand-alone, abstract 'skills'. (Further detail provided below)

¹ [file://localhost/available free at http://www.civitas.org.uk/pdf/PrisonersofTheBlob.pdf](http://localhost/available%20free%20at%20http://www.civitas.org.uk/pdf/PrisonersofTheBlob.pdf)

For the most part, members of *The Blob* are well-intentioned people who share the same goals we do ... it's just that they are misguided – imprisoned by a 200-year-old, Romantic belief system (p 2-4). *The Blob* members are also characterised as a part of a self-interested and self-sustaining professional culture which only embraces like-minded individuals, having the same progressive educational philosophy and a vested interest in preserving their positions in the status quo. It could be described as not only present, but thriving in Australia and indeed in Queensland.

"In light of all the evidence about how ineffective progressive teaching methods are, you'd think they'd have been abandoned by now. But, no! Every time a progressive theory is discredited, it resurfaces under a new name and masquerades as an 'innovation'... One of the most striking characteristics of The Blob – both in the sci-fi film and in the educational sense is, like an amoeba undergoing cell division, its ability to self-replicate. For every educationalist that sees the light and recognises the importance of knowledge, another springs up in his place, spouting the same jargon or 'eduspeak' ..." (p 11)

Why Education Experts Resist Effective Practices, And What It Would Take to Make Education More Like Medicine² by Prof. Douglas Carnine of University of Oregon, describes **education as an immature profession.**

"In education, the judgments of 'experts' frequently appear to be unconstrained and sometimes altogether unaffected by objective research. Many of these experts are so captivated by romantic ideas about learning or so blinded by ideology that they have closed their minds to the results of rigorous experiments. Until education becomes the kind of profession that reveres evidence, we should not be surprised to find its experts dispensing unproven methods, endlessly flitting from one fad to another. The greatest victims of these fads are the very students who are most at risk."

When *Plato Qld* makes these criticisms of *The Blob*, we are not criticising secular, objective knowledge. We are exposing the many educational fads to which education stakeholders have been exposed at considerable cost over the past 40 years. This is related in much more detail in the article "TRACKING QUEENSLAND EDUCATION UNDER THE BLOB FOR THE PAST 40 YEARS". ***Peter – please hyperlink this title to the other document.***

² <http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/teach.profession.carnine.pdf>