

Self-published scientist may have influenced education reform

Editor's note:

Kristin Kline, who normally writes the Grumpy Consumer column, spent the last two weeks investigating the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and its relationship with Dr. Robert Carkhuff and his work. This piece is a news piece and not part of Kline's Grumpy Consumer column.

By KRISTIN KLINE

Last week it was discovered the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction was placed on "mandatory oversight" by the U.S. Department of Education and an apparent self-published social scientist was given a sole-source contract to possibly implement invalidated scientific learning processes in the state's curriculum.

The Washington state education reform movement was first introduced in 1998, when newly elected state Superintendent Terry Bergeson implemented a new 21st century thinking system called "The New 3Rs: Skills for the 21st Century" based on the conceptual framework of longtime colleague and social scientist Dr. Robert Carkhuff.

Carkhuff was paid more than \$1 million by Washington state through grants managed by Bergeson. He developed a series of books called "Possibilities Schools," which teach educators how to implement his teachings in curriculum.

In his books, including "The New Science of Possibilities," Carkhuff explains "The New 3Rs (reasoning, relating and representing) are a revolutionary educational design to bring 'possibilities schooling' to students. The 3Rs are described as moving the school curriculum to a 'S-P-R generative processing,' creating 'Invaluable human capital' and 'Armies of commercializers.'"

The *Tribune* contacted Carkhuff through his Web site as no phone number was available and at press time received no answer. The *Tribune* was hoping to have Carkhuff explain the philosophies of his educational framework.

In his book the "New Science of Possibilities," Carkhuff appears to explain different levels of human processing, calling "human attenuators" as "physically sick and under-resourced," who among other things, "cannot think individually because it has no information to process." He also writes these individuals have "no souls."

In a book Carkhuff co-wrote titled "The Freedom Doctrine," he mentions "Ethnic Think Tank" studies conducted by assistant superintendent Andrew Griffin as a model proving his "possibilities schools theories."

In those studies, Griffin used black infants in the rural South to prove blacks fail to gain high IQs if they are left alone to be raised by their black parents and subculture. Carkhuff uses this case study to show black children raised without outside intervention live in what Carkhuff terms a "retarded culture."

Spanaway resident Nancy Vernon, who has read his books, believes Carkhuff is discounting special needs students. Vernon, who is a stay-at-home-mom and educational advocate, has been researching Carkhuff's

work for several years. In 2001, Vernon helped expose the ethics violation of former assistant superintendent of special populations B.J. Wise.

The mother of a son who is deaf and visually impaired, Vernon began researching government documents because she felt there wasn't enough money spent on educating children with disabilities. The answers she found led her to question the amount spent on education in Washington and the curriculum itself.

She found herself sitting on the floor reading documents at the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) when she came upon the Carkhuff contracts and books.

"I was frightened when I read them," Vernon said.

Vernon has since requested dozens of public documents on Carkhuff contracts and books, and believes there is something disturbing and strange about Carkhuff's work and his relationship with some OSPI staff members.

"I will respect anyone's right to their own religious beliefs," Vernon said, "but it is wrong to implement them in the public schools."

Vernon cites as one example a passage from a book Carkhuff co-wrote titled "The New Science of Possibilities." He states, "God is the great Montessori teacher; he co-processes only with those of us who use his most precious gift — the intellect." Invoices show Bergeson ordered 500 copies of this book, which were distributed to educators in this state and others.

Vernon maintains a Web site in which she has posted dozens of public documents and passages from the "Possibilities" books series. She also posted excerpts from a book Shirley McCune co-wrote titled "The Light Shall Set You Free," in which she channels a spirit named Kuthumi and talks about being admitted to a fifth dimension.

McCune is the OSPI's federal liaison of learning and teaching.

Kim Schmanke, Bergeson's spokeswoman, said she knows Carkhuff's work is controversial. She said Vernon is trying to discredit the superintendent's office. Schmanke said Carkhuff came highly recommended and had many professional references. She said he was highly thought of and respected in his profession.

In a letter to the state Office of Financial Management from Bergeson's office in 1998, Carkhuff is described as an author of more than 100 books, nationally known for his ability to develop effective programs and is cited as one of the 100 most important social scientists of all time since his work has significantly defined the fields of counseling, organizational development and social policy.

Those claims are under scrutiny.

Carkhuff wrote in one of his books he published in the '70s he was kicked out of medical school for training orderlies to administer his psychological training practices.

Schmanke said she was sure a background and reference check had been done before the state retained Carkhuff's professional services but was unsure of the details or where the documents were. Despite several attempts to reach her by phone, Bergeson was unavailable for com-

ment.

Carkhuff has had a long standing professional relationship with Bergeson, McCune and Griffin and has co-authored books with all three.

The *Tribune*, with assistance of a librarian at the Snohomish library, could find no record of Carkhuff cited in any peer or professional journals or books, outside of his self-published works, in at least the last two decades. Earlier works of Carkhuff are cited in psychology journals but are decades old.

The *Tribune* contacted OSPI and provided them with questions relating to this article and asked to provide any documentation of data or scientific evidence supporting Carkhuff's theories.

Specifically, the *Tribune* wanted to know how much of Carkhuff's work had been used to create the Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) and the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) because documentation shows Bergeson requested his help in these areas. As of press time no documentation had been provided by OSPI.

Professor Don Orlich, author of a soon to be released book titled "School Reform and the Great American Brain Robbery," analyzed areas of the WASL using criteria from developmental psychology and the Scales of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP).

Orlich has found areas of the GLEs, hence the WASL test, to be developmentally inappropriate and has won a national award from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development for a critical analysis he wrote on the fourth-grade WASL.

Orlich, professor emeritus of the Science Mathematics Engineering Education Center at Washington State University, has published more than 100 professional papers, co-authored more than 30 monographs and books, and is the senior co-author of "Teaching Strategies: A guide to Effective Teaching," published by Houghton Mifflin in 2004. His study was conducted independently from WSU.

"The WASL is a disaster," Orlich said.

He analyzed areas of the actual tests using published and long-accepted criteria that has stood the test of time, he said. He would like to see the Legislature commission an outside research organization to verify or refute his study.

Among some of Orlich's conclusions are the fifth grade science WASL exceeds the intellectual level of the majority of fifth graders, the seventh grade math WASL is in all reality a ninth grade test, and the seventh grade GLEs are almost identical in many cases to those of 10th grade.

When asked if he was familiar with Carkhuff's work, Orlich wrote in an e-mail response, "All I can say is that Robert Carkhuff is virtually unknown to anyone who is in educational psychology or psychology, period."

The first link the *Tribune* can find between Carkhuff and Bergeson dates to 1982 when she set out to prove his theories in her 1984 doctoral dissertation from the University of Washington.

A letter shows Carkhuff was contacted by Bergeson in 1994 when

she was the executive director of the Commission of Student Learning. She asked for his help in "pulling these foundation skills together in a powerful way" when she was in the process of establishing the Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs), which are the state's curriculum guidelines. They have since been re-labeled by the state as "Grade Level Expectations" (GLE).

The GLEs are the curriculum which guides the WASL tests. In contract No. CO-552-35, Bergeson originated the contract for the state to pay Carkhuff Institute \$2,495 for his services in helping develop the EALRs. The OSPI office has since destroyed the contract duties and responsibilities as it was past the six-year retention date.

Gov. Christine Gregoire was not immediately available for comment.

Bergeson, McCune and Griffin are currently the subjects of an ethics investigation by the state Attorney General's office. Vernon filed the complaint alleging "the three had conflicts of interest in managing, writing and paying for publications related to federal grants because all three have a longtime professional relationship," according to a 2004 Associated Press report. Vernon alleges the state later used grant money to purchase \$50,000 worth of Carkhuff books.

Schmanke said the ethics investigation was dropped. However, Janelle Guthrie, spokeswoman for the state Attorney General, confirmed the investigation is ongoing.

The *Tribune* also learned the federal government may be investigating the OSPI. When asked the status of this investigation, Jeff Sullivan, chief U.S. Attorney for the criminal division of the U.S. Department of Justice, said he had "no comment."

Per the No Child Left Behind Act implemented in 2001, states must administer reading and mathematics assessments in order to comply with the law.

The U.S. Department of Education recently conducted a peer review of the WASL. On June 22 Washington state was placed on "mandatory oversight" after the department determined the WASL has two fundamental components missing in its curriculum, including the technical quality, alignment and academic achievement standards in the state's alternate assessment for children with special needs.

Schmanke said the current status of the Washington standards and assessment is "approval pending." She said some of the work of the third-, fifth-, sixth- and eighth-grade tests were administered for the first time this spring. She said the state and federal timelines between analyzing scores and peer review "did not align."

Chad Colby, deputy press secretary for the U.S. Department of Education, said the guidelines have been in place since 2001 and other states began administering the third-, fifth-, sixth- and eighth-grade tests since last year or earlier in order to comply with the peer review. However, he said states are assessed on a state-by-state basis and Washington has 25 days to address how it will fix this problem.