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**Letting the PC slip show**

By **Mona Charen**  
 Friday, October 13, 2006  
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You've probably never heard of Teachers College, but it has profoundly affected your life and is now affecting your children's lives. TC is the graduate school of [education](#) at Columbia University and laboratory of most of the "reforms" that have corroded K-12 education over the past 50 years. New math, whole language, open classrooms, outcome-based education -- you name the fad and it probably originated in Morningside Heights in New York.

Teachers College is the most influential graduate education program in the country, and like so many leading schools, it is probably irredeemably PC. Still, Columbia University professes to uphold free inquiry and open-mindedness, so it was heartening to see a watchdog group zing the school for its ideological rigidity.

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) got hold of TC's new "Conceptual Framework" for its students. You might ask: Why does a [graduate school](#) need a "conceptual framework"? Isn't the point to train teachers to teach? (Actually, some skeptics think teachers colleges themselves are unnecessary, but let that pass.) Well, perhaps someone in the publicity department is being paid by the word at TC, because the Conceptual Framework is the length of a novella. Most of it is the usual boilerplate and reads like this:

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Nurses, teachers and firefighters protest against California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger outside the NBC studios of 'The Tonight Show with Jay Leno' in Burbank, California October 11, 2006. Schwarzenegger, who is running for re-election, was a guest on the talk show. REUTERS/Fred Prouser (UNITED STATES)

"We are an inquiry-based and practice-oriented community. We and our students and graduates challenge assumptions and complacency and embrace a stance of inquiry toward the interrelated roles of learner, teacher, and leader in P-12 schools."

Okay, but then there is this: "We see teaching as an ethical and political act. We see teachers . . . as participants in a larger struggle for social justice. . . . Schools and society are interconnected. Social inequalities are often produced and perpetuated through systematic discrimination and justified by societal ideology of merit, social mobility, and individual responsibility . . ."

And it gets worse: "Traditionally organized schools help to reproduce social inequalities while giving the illusion that such inequalities are natural and fair. Schools purport to offer unlimited possibilities for social advancement but they simultaneously maintain structures that severely limit the probability of advancement for those at the bottom of the social scale. Research has shown that the majority of teachers in the United States are European American and middle class and that many of these teachers do not see the invisible yet profound social forces at work that bring about inequality among different cultural groups in society and in schools."

You know, I actually agree that some of our school systems limit social mobility by failing to provide a quality education to poor and minority students. But I think the teachers unions and resistance to school choice are a big part of the problem. Somehow, I don't think that point of view is considered legitimate at TC. Isn't it shameful to heap scorn on teachers because they are "European American" and "middle class"? What if someone pointed out that most inner city teachers are African American



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and Hispanic? Is that legitimate criticism according to Teachers College?

Further, Columbia now maintains that "merit, social mobility, and individual responsibility" are mere "ideologies" used to justify discrimination. On the contrary, these are the steps on the ladder for those at the bottom. A kid who excels in school, no matter what his background, can expect to thrive in America. All too often it is the PC crowd who eschew high standards for kids from poor neighborhoods. It is they, not "the system," who constrict the life prospects for those kids.

Students at TC, according to the Conceptual Framework, are required to endorse the view that "To change the system and make schools and societies more equitable, educators must recognize ways in which taken-for-granted notions regarding the legitimacy of the social order are flawed, see change agency as a moral imperative, and have skills to act as agents of change."

The president of Teachers College penned a platitudinous response to FIRE, arguing that they really, truly are committed to academic freedom, and that quotes had been taken out of context. I've read the context -- they weren't.

Elsewhere on the Columbia campus last week, a screaming mob of students rushed the stage and shouted down a speaker invited by the College Republicans (a representative of the Minutemen). Video of the melee is available on the Columbia Spectator website. Columbia's President Lee Bollinger has sent letters to some of the students involved suggesting they *might* have violated the university's rules and *might* have to meet with the senior vice provost.

And so the commitment to free inquiry slides downhill.

*Mona Charen is a syndicated columnist, political analyst and author of [Do-Gooders: How Liberals Hurt Those They Claim to Help](#).*

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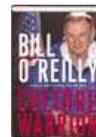
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