

I Copied This Letter From Myself

Written by BCPires
Friday, 08 May 2009 00:00 -

This was the letter I sent to media houses yesterday.
7 May 2009

The Editor

My colleague Kevin Baldeosingh quite responsibly brought to national attention the use by putative Integrity Commission Chair, Henry Charles, of arguments and language copied from (1) an op-ed piece in the New York Times of 9 December; and (2) a column by Darin Belousek published in the National Catholic Weekly on 30 March.

I invite citizens to locate on the Net and compare a column written by David Brooks in the New York Times on 7 May, 2006, called, "Marshmallows and Public Policy" with one titled, "The Marshmallow Test" published a week later in the Guardian under the byline of the good Henry Charles.

Brooks writes, "The Mischel experiments are worth noting because people in the policy world spend a lot of time thinking about how to improve education, how to reduce poverty, how to make the most of the nation's human capital. But when policy makers address these problems, they come up with structural remedies: reduce class sizes, create more charter schools, increase teacher pay, mandate universal day care, try vouchers".

A week later, Henry types, "The Mischel experiment is worthy of being recalled today because we spend a lot of time in the policy world, asking ourselves how to increase our human capital, whether this means improving our education system or reducing poverty. As a rule, structural remedies receive the lion's share of attention and endorsement—more schools, increase in teachers' salaries, wider job creation."

Brooks writes, "And yet the Mischel experiments, along with everyday experience, tell us that self-control is essential. Young people who can delay gratification can sit through sometimes boring classes to get a degree. They can perform rote tasks in order to, say, master a language. They can avoid drugs and alcohol. For people without self-control skills, however, school is a series of failed ordeals. No wonder they drop out. Life is a parade of foolish decisions: teen pregnancy, drugs, gambling, truancy and crime".

A week later, Henry types, "Common sense and everyday experience, however, tell us that for success in every sphere, self-control is essential. In every college or university, for instance, there are boring lecturers by the dozen. Students who learn to delay gratification can sit through tedium and discipline their attention for the sake of a good degree. They can do things by rote, when rote is what is called for, to learn a language, for instance, or master a new skill. For students lacking skills in self-control, on the other hand, life means flight into short-term distractions with negative long-term consequences: endless liming, drinking, smoking, drug-taking, and the rest".

Their last sentences, like the entire structure of their columns and all the arguments advanced, are almost identical.

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Brooks: "Walter Mischel tried to interest New York schools in programs based on his research. Needless to say, he found almost no takers."

Henry: "In terms of the wider import of Mischel's experiment, it is said that he tried to interest New York schools in programmes based on his research. He got almost no takers".

If once is mistake and twice, habit, would three times be standard operational procedure? What does this reveal about the integrity of Mr Charles? As with governments, do countries get Integrity Commissions they deserve?

Yours truly,
BC Pires
Barbados