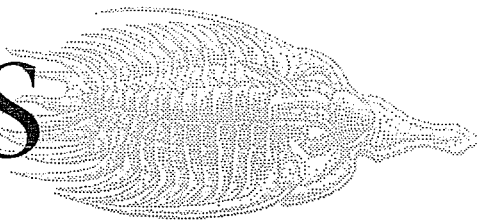


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New Creationist Textbook On the Way (Again)

Nick Matzke

A document recently received by NCSE outlines the Discovery Institute's upcoming plans for its so-called teach the controversy strategy. In 2007, the Discovery Institute plans to release a "supplemental textbook" entitled *Explore Evolution*. According to the document, the textbook and auxiliary materials will teach the students the Discovery Institute's talking points against evolution. These talking points will evidently include the standard list of long-refuted creationist claims promoted by the Discovery Institute, including the inadequacy of the fossil record, biological complexity as a challenge to evolutionary theory, the inexplicability of the Cambrian Explosion, and other common creationist tropes. Students will be taught these talking points via the supplemental textbook and associated slide shows, study guides, and videos, and will be tested on the talking points in Discovery Institute-prepared "quiz questions".

The book is discussed in a handout received by NCSE Supporter Keith Miller at the 2006 annual meeting of the American Scientific Affiliation, which was held from July 28-31, 2006, at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The ASA is an association of scientists who are evangelical Christians, and although some members of the ASA are "intelligent design" or young-earth creationists, the ASA is not an anti-evolutionist organization, and many ASA members see no necessary conflict between evolution and evangelical Christianity. Miller received the handout while attending a talk by

Discovery Institute Senior Fellow Michael Newton Keas. The talk was entitled, "Teach the Controversy over Darwinism: Sample Curricular Modules" (Keas 2006).

Keas runs the Master of Arts Program in Science and Religion at Biola University (the name "Biola" derives from the university's previous name, the Bible Institute of Los Angeles). The Biola program is the only one in the United States offering a graduate degree in "intelligent design". According to Keas's abstract for his ASA talk, "[s]ince 1999 I have worked with Discovery Institute to develop AP and college biological origins curriculum. Some of this curriculum will be published in 2006." The one-page handout, entitled "Teaching Evolutionary Biology in Public High Schools and Colleges", lists a number of bullet points describing Keas's proposed curriculum modules and resources, including the *Explore Evolution* book.

THE HISTORY

News of the *Explore Evolution* project is particularly interesting when the general history of anti-evolution strategies is taken into consideration. Directly following the 1968 *Epperson* ruling overturning bans on evolution, Henry Morris and others at the Creation Research Society constructed the "equal time" approach for teaching "scientific creationism" in public schools as an allegedly secular scientific view (Numbers 1992). Their first major foray in this direction was the textbook *Biology: A Search for Order in Complexity* (Moore and Slusher 1974; see Thwaites 1980). This book was the subject of a number of disputes in the 1970s regarding its use in public schools. However, in 1977 the book was ruled unconstitutional for use in public schools in a strongly worded decision, *Hendern v Campbell*, from a state

court in Indiana (Matzke 2006). *Hendren* was soon obscured when the issue moved to the federal courts in the 1980s.

In the 1987 *Edwards v Aguillard* case, the US Supreme Court ruled that teaching "creation science" in public schools was unconstitutional because it was a specific religious view disguised as science, rather than actually science. In the wake of the *Edwards* ruling, creationists relabeled their view "intelligent design" — a term they first systematically employed in the supplementary high school textbook *Of Pandas and People* (Davis and Kenyon 1989; see also Scott 1989).

Wielding *Pandas*, the newly named "design proponents" asserted that their view was scientific, not religious, and pushed for it to be included in biology classrooms in public schools. Again, there were fights over the use of the textbook for years before it hit the courts (see the NCSE *Pandas* resources page for a history and analysis: <<http://www.ncseweb.org/article.asp?category=21>>). As everyone now knows, the 2005 *Kitzmiller v Dover* case revealed that *Pandas* began as an explicitly creationist textbook and only switched to "design" terminology after the *Edwards* ruling. These facts helped produce the decisive ruling in *Kitzmiller* that "intelligent design" was not science, but instead creationism relabeled.

Following recent defeats for the "intelligent design" movement in the *Kitzmiller v Dover* case, in a February 2006 vote of the Ohio Board of Education, and in the August 2006 Republican primary election in Kansas, many observers have wondered what the next step would be for attempts to sneak creationism into the public schools. In response to questions from the media, NCSE staff have predicted that creationists would continue to move toward their so-

Nick Matzke is NCSE's Public Information Project Director. He was the key NCSE staff member on the scene in *Kitzmiller v Dover* for the duration of the proceedings and the main liaison between NCSE and the legal team.

called critical analysis of evolution strategy, in which long-refuted creationist arguments are claimed to be valid scientific challenges to evolution under the rhetoric of "critical thinking" and "teach the controversy". By not using the terms "creationism" or "intelligent design", creationists hope to teach their views in the public schools while avoiding constitutional challenges from the courts (Matzke and Gross 2006).

THE FUTURE

This background may explain why history appears to be repeating itself (again!) with the announcement of yet another "supplementary textbook". As before, the recently failed strategy (this time, "intelligent design" rather than "creation science") is being denied — according to Keas's handout, *Explore Evolution* will focus on "critical analysis" and allegedly "does not teach about ID". The title also mimics mainstream educational materials: there are numerous instances of legitimate museums, courses, websites, textbook chapters, and lesson plans that use some variant of the phrase "explore evolution".

Despite the "not ID" denial in Keas's conference handout, the abstract simply uncritically repeats the same old tired ID creationism talking points about the Cambrian Explosion:

One way to motivate students to study science and to think critically is to examine case studies of scientific controversy. Through case studies, students will gain insight into the standard scientific procedure of inferring the best explanation from among multiple competing hypotheses. ...

In today's climate of public educational policy, this would mean, at a minimum, teaching not just the strengths of Darwin's theory, but also the evidence that challenges it. For example, any complete theory of biological origins must examine fossil evidence. The fossils of the "Cambrian explosion" show virtually all the basic forms of animal life appearing suddenly without clear precursors.

These sorts of claims have been

endlessly rebutted, most recently in Kevin Padian's dissection of *Pandas's* Cambrian arguments during his *Kitzmiller* testimony (available on-line, complete with the slides Padian used, at <http://www.sciohost.org/ncse/kvd/Padian/Padian_transcript.html>), but the creationists seem undeterred. Keas's handout shows that *Explore Evolution* will be more of the same in other areas as well. According to point #2 of the handout:

2. *Explore Evolution* (supplemental textbook forthcoming in early 2007)

a. Evaluates the main arguments for and against neo-Darwinism (does not teach about ID)

i. Common descent (fossil succession, homologies, embryology, & biogeography)

ii. Creative power of mutation and natural selection (mechanisms of evolution)

iii. Recent challenges to neo-Darwinism: Molecular machines (irreducibly complex?)

b. When used with a basal biology textbook, this supplemental curriculum provides an effective way to fairly teach the strengths and weaknesses of Neo-Darwinian evolution.

Longtime *Pandas* watchers may be having flashbacks at this point, but there's more!

c. Our curriculum primarily consists of a colorful 130-page book and a series of PDF slide shows (PC or Mac) that contain the book's main talking points and illustrations (plus additional images). We also include student study guides, sample lesson plans, quiz questions, and other auxiliary materials that may be printed and photocopied.

All in all, this looks like the long-rumored Discovery Institute "intelligent design" curriculum. After the Discovery Institute began moving away from ID and toward "critical analysis", the curriculum probably moved with it. From what the above material shows, the *Explore Evolution* curriculum closely matches the 2005 Kansas Science Standards and the most recent ver-

sion may have originally been aimed directly at that market.

With the recent defeats in Kansas and Ohio, no states have official policies that are highly friendly to the DI's "critical analysis" curriculum. However, creationists are continually pushing "critical analysis" language in states, and have succeeded in getting a "critical analysis" line in the South Carolina science standards. NCSE members should remain alert for bogus "critical analysis" policies as well as for creationist attempts to exploit these policies to get reworked creationist materials, such as *Explore Evolution*, into the public schools.

[Readers can now view some of the *Explore Evolution* materials on-line at <<http://www.explore-evolution.com/index.php>>.]

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