

SB619

As a certified Reading Specialist who has taught over 32 years in classrooms at all levels, mostly in the inner city of Los Angeles, beginning in 1969 and ending my career, teaching the ESL class with the Even Start Family Literacy Program for Spanish-speaking parents with young children enrolled in Barton Hill Elementary School in San Pedro, California, I strongly support SB619 and believe that the Private Right of Action is important to include as an enforcement mechanism and that Opt-In approach offers users the best protection of their right to privacy. While computers changed my life as teacher for the better, allowing me to produce my own educational materials to use to advance the literacy skills of under-performing high school students, I have observed during a limited time subbing in elementary and middle schools served by the High Desert ESD, I have witnessed the negative affect they have had on classroom instruction, stealing agency from teachers and students in the interest of advancing an agenda to raise summative test scores to secure federal funding. I fear that as schools continue to go down the easy path of purchasing software for the computer pads replacing textbooks and prescribed instruction taking on the role of teachers, whose status has been reduced to serving as educational aides for IT programs, students may lose the capacity to use the World-Wide Web to explore topics in depth. Since Sputnik and the space race led to accelerated education programs, dispensing with progressive educators using Thomas Dewey's problem-solving inductive approach to sort out the ambiguities inherent in all art forms where brainstorming allows students to draw upon their own resources, seeking help from teachers when puzzled by artistic devises discovered by those creating art in all its forms. When Sputnik launched us into the Space Race, those funding education asked why we should be using questions to discover answers when teachers already knew the answers! Wouldn't the deductive approach be better, presenting students with situations where conditions call for an appropriate response, a response already agreed upon by educational institutions seeking those who could answer questions quickly. The College Board could use standardized testing to create a level playing field where all students, despite their different backgrounds, could have an equal chance to prove themselves a trust-worthy investment of those institutions of higher learning with limited resources to offer them space in which to advance themselves further.

All of this disregards the importance of personal agency in learning and teaching, where humans, as free spirits borne into history, a material world full of tripwires—hidden in genes, cultural-economic conflict, untested presumptions—guided by intention to map out the world they now have, which serves as their curriculum, seeking trust in themselves and in others to negotiate their movement through that world, according to their stages of social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development, to engage in understanding themselves, others, and the world around them. We learn from our mistakes. They prompt us to discover what we need to know to move ahead. But, that world, slow to change, changes faster than our understanding, demanding of us a predictive homeostasis in our own evolution in order to survive—which brings us to this point of crisis, where danger and opportunity meet, when we must decide whether IT serves us or we serve IT and those who profit from it, as various forms of kleptocracy, like a cancer suck life from societies struggling to survive.

With this as prologue, I would like to advance a theological-political argument supporting SB619, which some might find off-the-wall, and others might find strangely compelling. Back in the late 1970's, when the political upheaval of the Vietnam War was settling and the struggle for equal rights challenged each person's identity as being a social construct, I participated in a couple of weekend Enlightenment Therapy sessions organized by my therapist, where, over three days, people worked in dyads, dealing with the question: "Who am I?" As an English teacher later working with a dialogical approach to grammar, where words, clusters, phrases, and clauses were color-coded according to what questions they answered, I discovered that in a sentence like "John became captain of the team," "John" is "who" and "captain" is "what"; whereas, in "The captain was John," "captain" identifies who is being talked about. But, in these dyads, when prompted by the request, "Gregg, tell me who you are," everything I said addressed "what" I was, not "who." After three full days engaged in a process of emptying what appeared to be the garbage of our lives before others in hopes of finding a diamond, I realized I hadn't a clue as to essence, the "who" manifested as "what" I appeared to be. Some, however, did experience "enlightenment," an experience described by different religions in different terms meaning the same thing. And, to my surprise, I experienced the same, the following day when confessing to a confidant how I had betrayed her and asking for her forgiveness. Let me describe that experience in that it revealed something to me that I believe you all have experienced and what is threatened by computer programs capturing our metadata to be sold on the open market. In a deep paroxysm of crying, eyes closed, a force of energy was released within me, surging up and down and throughout my entire body, purging me as I saw myself falling down the chasm of my life unable to hold on as events of betrayal of others appeared as I dropped without landing, realizing that God wasn't a "what" but a "who," a personality, not a complete abstraction, with what might be called a sense of irony, we have all experienced. This is the point I am trying to make through sharing with you a personal account I normally don't share with others because it can be experienced as off-putting. We are rescued from ourselves by serendipitous events, so that, when we feel like we are "hot shit," we find out we are "just shit." This is more than causal in the sense of what goes around comes around to bite us in the butt. There is a CO-incidence of events we label co-Incidence, where we find we are just ourselves, nothing more and nothing less. I cannot explain how these events come when they do to hold up a mirror before us so we can see ourselves more clearly. I see that this "god" part that lives in the essence of who we are appears in everyone, no matter how mixed in with lies we all tell ourselves, sometimes appears without our understanding their import. In this way, things that suddenly appear to us as accidental seem full of purpose. In presenting this theological argument, I am not arguing that "God" exists. I am saying is that something beyond Newtonian cause-and-effect happening in our world that causes us to wonder and sometimes to be in awe of what forces might lie beyond our understanding.

This is what is threatened by IT programs capturing our metadata to be sold for profit to others to create algorithms to be purchased by those wanting to draw our attention to products, services, or information, false or true, instead of allowing us to give our attention to what serves our intentions in getting through the days of our lives. It is a contamination devoutly not to be wished upon anyone. Yet, schools are using public funds to purchase software that does exactly

that, supposedly in the interest of producing more highly refined software to be sold as an upgrade to what has already been purchased. These nostrums are being sold like snake-oil remedies appearing in an unregulated market after the Civil War before germs were discovered that led to cures that actually work. Students and teachers learn from their mistakes. That is what true assessment is about. I am not sure that the same can be said of bureaucrats, administrators, and school boards.