

More on Norrie Everitt

An obituary of Professor Norrie Everitt was published in the November 2011 issue of the *Notices*. With this letter I want to add to the description of Professor Everitt's work as an editor of influential texts in differential operator theory and also point out an important but perhaps little-known detail about his generosity.

Professor Everitt was the editor of the English translations of two Russian texts on differential operator theory, one by M. A. Naimark (*Linear Differential Operators*) and another by N. I. Akhieser and I. M. Glazman (*Theory of Linear Operators in Hilbert Space*). The latter, which was not mentioned in the obituary, was published in two volumes by Pitman Advanced Publishing Program in 1981 and appeared posthumously for the authors. Professor Everitt dedicated the edition to the memory of both authors.

Professor Everitt was a member of the AMS for fifty-one years. He repeatedly donated funds to the AMS in memory of my late husband, I. M. Glazman, designating the gifts for support of young mathematicians. Professor Everitt made the last in this series of gifts in February 2011.

—Polina Naiman
New Haven, Connecticut
pe1ya009@yahoo.com

(Received March 9, 2012)

Home Schooling Rethought

In "Mathematics and home schooling" (April 2012 *Notices*), Acker, Gray, Jalali, and Pascal make the case for state-mandated education, reviewing its history and concluding that the state has the responsibility for education and the legal power necessary to carry out that responsibility. We must be careful, though, for what we wish; the authors neglected to consider the effects of various groups wielding that power over time.

Consider seventeenth-century Massachusetts, the first example

by the authors of state-mandated education. Let's not forget that Massachusetts also had a state religion (denomination) at the time; it is my understanding that the public education offered was thoroughly infused with the theology of their state denomination, a state of affairs that we would all find unacceptable today. This occurred because, when the state has the power to mandate, those with control of the state can wield that power as they choose.

Abuses of the power of state-mandated education did not end with the adoption of the Constitution. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries public schools in the United States dispensed a generic Protestant education (termed "nonsectarian" at the time), a situation wholly unfair to Catholics, secularists, and other non-Protestants. The Catholics responded to this problem with their own system of schools. Secularists, however, eventually took a different approach, and by the middle of the twentieth century were able to take control of public education. As a result, the Protestants who previously were in favor of the state enforcing a common education and creating a common religious culture by doing so found themselves on the outside looking in. They responded in the same manner as the Catholics of the previous century, forming their own schools, and many eventually helped revive the home school movement.

Now surely we are not so naïve as to think that those currently in power will always, from now until the end of time, remain in power. When, in the course of time, the current secularists find themselves replaced by the next group, what will they then think of state-mandated education? To many parents from a wide variety of political and religious perspectives, educating their children in their deeply held values is more important than maximizing their children's mathematical, scientific, or literary abilities. We may disagree, but who

are we to tell those parents that they are wrong? Just how arrogant are we? At issue is who makes such decisions, and when the state has the power, whoever is in control—and it won't always be you—makes those decisions.

Perhaps it is time for us to realize that if we wish to live together happily in a pluralistic, multicultural society, then we must resist the temptation to impose our own ways of thinking on other people's children through the power of the government, no matter how right our ideas might be and no matter how important to society is our cause.

—Bryan Dawson
Union University
bdawson@uu.edu

(Received March 17, 2012)

More on Home Schooling

The April 2012 issue of the *Notices* carried the article "Mathematics and home schooling", by me and three co-authors, Kathleen Acker, Behzad Jalali, and Matthew Pascal. As several correspondents have pointed out, there are many successful products of home schooling. The time and effort on the part of the homeschooling parents to give their children individualized lessons has much to do with academic achievement. And there is ample evidence that in general parents' involvement in their children's education can be beneficial whether they are schooled in the home or in public or private schools. The difficulty comes in balancing the rights of the children and the rights of the parents in a situation in which there is little regulation and no systematic evaluation. Of course, producing students well-educated in mathematics is also a societal concern.

We regret that the citation listed in our paper on page 518, second column, under the heading of Gender Equity, as (Dwyer 1994) was not correct. The correct citation is (Yuracko 2008); it is listed as Kimberly Yuracko, "Education off the

grid: Constitutional constraints on homeschooling”, *California Law Review* **96** (2008), 123–180 in the reference section.

—Mary Gray
American University
mgray@american.edu

(Received April 15, 2012)

Lack of Author/Referee Communication

I read with interest Michael Cowling’s article “*Scripta Manent*: The future of mathematical publishing” and in particular his comments about refereeing being a thankless task. I have been that referee reading various iterations of the same paper, submitted to different journals, seemingly with the author(s) barely reading my reports.

However, as an author I have also received acceptance reports which were two lines long. I have received rejections which were purely subjective with no actual corrections to the mathematics. In one case where, fortunately, a coauthor dealt with submission, on our third attempt the referee complained bitterly that we were ignoring his/her previous reports. However, the journals we had previously submitted to had failed to send us any feedback!

When I write a report, I am writing for both the author and the journal. However, I think in every case I have no real knowledge of what the author gets to see. The anecdotes above suggest that a lot of “editing” by the journal can occur. Furthermore, in all but a few cases, as a referee I never learn the ultimate outcome—was the paper accepted or not? Journals could do a lot more to facilitate communication between author and referee.

—Matthew Daws
School of Mathematics
University of Leeds, UK
matthew.daws@gmail.com

(Received March 26, 2012)

Sense-making Teaching

In his article, “A modest proposal” (*Notices*, February 2012), Alan Schoenfeld says that mathematics should be taught and learned as “an act of

sense-making”. As Schoenfeld makes painfully clear, the exact opposite often occurs in math classes, where many students actually learn to abandon common sense! While we can certainly express our shock and dismay about this phenomenon occurring in K-12 classrooms, we may need to look more closely at what is going on in our own college classrooms, especially our entry-level courses. How much sense-making is actually going on in these courses? Schoenfeld mentions that he was once assigned to teach pre-calculus, a “universally despised” low-level course. He discussed helping students understand why the arc length formula, $s=r\theta$, makes sense. I wonder how many pre-calculus instructors pause to help their students make sense of this formula. My guess is not many. First of all, most of us are driven to get through the syllabus, which typically boils down to a very long list of procedures to be learned—i.e., the “how-to” side of math, not the sense-making side. This goal often severely limits time for thinking, analyzing the source of formulas, or working through real problems.

A second obstacle to promoting sense-making is the difficulty of achieving this goal. Schoenfeld claims that “approaching instruction [as the sense-making endeavor] will make mathematics easier to learn.” In my experience, I have found teaching this way to be a major challenge (although often very rewarding!). First, helping students see concepts and problems in a way that makes sense to them, not just to me, is one of the perennial challenges of teaching. Second, for short-term purposes, memorizing is often easier than understanding. We professors may think that our students have to understand what they are doing in order to answer our questions, yet it turns out that many students are just memorizing without sense-making. (Just ask them.) I believe that if we want our college students to be making sense of the mathematics that we are teaching them, we ourselves have to “stop to think” (to use Schoenfeld’s words). We have to ask ourselves questions such as the following. What are the larger goals we have for our courses,

beyond such objectives as “applying Descartes’ rule of signs”? Why should mathematics be part of general education for all college students? What do we expect our non-STEM math students to know about mathematics and be able to do with mathematics after they graduate? How can we teach and assess our students in ways that more effectively promote sense-making? Yes, this is a major challenge. Yet I believe, along with Alan Schoenfeld, that “We owe our students no less.”

—Betsy Darken
Department of Mathematics
University of Tennessee at
Chattanooga
betsy-darken@utc.edu

(Received March 17, 2012)

Corrections

Michael G. Cowling, author of the article “The future of mathematical publishing” (*Notices*, April 2012 issue) was misidentified in the author footnote that accompanied the article. The footnote should have read: Michael G. Cowling is professor of pure mathematics at the University of New South Wales. His email address is m.cowling@unsw.edu.au.

The photo key (page 555, April 2012 *Notices*) for the montage of Joint Mathematics Meetings photos was incorrectly titled “2011 New Orleans, LA, Joint Mathematics Meetings Photo Key”. It should have read “2012 Boston, MA, Joint Mathematics Meetings Photo Key”.

The DOI (Document Object Identifier) for the *Doceamus* article (page 668, May 2012 *Notices*) was mistakenly listed as noti837. It should be noti836.

—Sandy Frost