

## WinkWorld October 2003

Prairie Pedagogy, 3 short stories follow.

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**Rich Gibson** of San Diego State University shares the following story about education in rural America.

I was in a conference in central Nebraska. For some reason, the people at the university had confused me with someone important, and sent a SUV to my hotel to pick me up to take me to the, ah, podium.

The young man in a cowboy hat and boots driving the SUV opened the back door to escort me in. Not being able to handle that, I got in the front, shotgun. Very egalitarian, plus I could see what he was doing.

*"Where are you from?" I asked him.*

*"Ranch, about 200 miles north of here."*

*"Tell me about where you went to school," I continued.*

*"One room school house. About 25 kids, all ages and grades."*

*"Gad. Did that prepare you for college?" I asked the young cowboy.*

*"Yes, very well, really."*

*"Yikes. What kind of college is this?" I was thinking to myself and so I asked, "Well, ah, just how did they conduct school work near your farm?"*

*"Ranch," he told me bluntly.*

*"OK, ranch. How did they conduct this little school?" I continued undeterred.*

*"We just made sure everyone understood, and we moved along."*

Hubris, previously unnoticed, crushed.

Thanks , Rich.

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**Steve Krashen has a contribution for Prairie Pedagogy.**

Sent to the Costco Connection  
September 17, 2003

In response to the September debate, "Are standardized tests an accurate measure of learning?" (No: Alfie Kohn, Yes: Seppy Basili).

Seppy Basili wants to replace one problem with another that is far worse. Basili argues that standardized tests are necessary because of grade inflation. Everyone agrees that we need accurate and meaningful assessment of student progress and competence. Responsible critics such as Alfie Kohn are opposed to excessive and inappropriate assessment. Children in school today are overtested, and the standardized tests now in use measure the wrong things and drive curriculum and instruction in the wrong direction. **We won't make the cow fatter by weighing it more frequently.**

Stephen Krashen

Thanks, Steve.

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### **Wink, the Water Witch**

If you have never experienced a drought on the prairies, you cannot imagine how all-encompassing it is. The primacy of water for life is suddenly all too evident. Each day is spent trying to get cattle to the water or water to the cattle. A drought weighs on peoples' hearts daily; small towns economically dry up; young families move away; tax dollars evaporate; schools close. It is incredibly depressing to deal daily with dry dams and realize the looming ramifications. On our ranch this summer, even the well to the house dried up, and Wink had to haul water for daily use. Every bath and every cup of coffee had to be considered.

Dry dams demand desperate actions. In August Wink started to eye a dam 3 1/2 miles away on another ranch. This dam is unique because it is deep, and it has water. I have only ever heard this dam referred to as White Man's dam. I will save that story for another time.

Wink and two or three of the neighbors began to wonder what it would take to pipe some of that water to other dams in the area. On the prairies, we would refer to this as a hair-brained idea, as it was filled with possibilities and problems. For most of the last 6 weeks Wink has been working to turn this idea into action.

What does it take? So far, a lot of time, money, expertise, and continual frustrations.

First, 10's and 10's of phone calls to find pipe which they could buy, rent, or use. They found some in Nebraska, and rented a truck to bring up a load of 10, 8, and 6 inch aluminum pipe, each 30 or 40 feet in length. When the truck arrived, 3 men unloaded the pipe by hand. They rest of the pipe they found around the state from ranches, which had given up on irrigation.

Second, they had to find a pump big enough to pump this much water that far away. The first pump failed, and they found another. Even starting an old pump takes a lot of time and expertise.

Third, they needed an engine large enough to run the pump. They hooked the pump to a tractor engine. The tractor was not powerful enough. Right now, they are looking for a larger

tractor.

Fourth, they connected the pipe, which involves hauling each piece by hand across the prairies. A couple of days ago, they finally had the pipe connected to another neighbor's dam, and the tractor engine started the pump. The water came gushing through the pipe. One problem, the pipe was filled with holes.

Fifth, they had to patch the holes. Patching the holes, first, involves driving hours to buy the materials needed and then painstakingly patching each hole. They now are trying to fill one dam for a neighbor. They pumped 500 gallons a minute, which amazes me as even when our house well had water, it only ran 2 to 3 gallons a minute. Tomorrow they hope to move more pipe to a second neighbor's dam.

We are third on the list, and our dam is 3 1/2 mile from White Man's dam.

Time is of the essence, as they have to get the water to our dam before it turns cold. It already had been 30 degrees in the early morning, so each day the clock is ticking.

For our ranch, this is kind of a deal maker or breaker. As of today, 2 1/2 more miles of pipe have yet to be connected. In next month's WinkWorld, I hope I have a happy end to this story

The truth is that Wink cannot witch water, although one of our neighbors can. One problem: there is no water to witch even below the surface.