

Censorship is not education

By Julian Tomlinson - the Cairns Post, 30 June

"I began to wonder if the "humankind is killing the planet" mantra is part of the national curriculum - and it is"

THE arrival of the internet into common usage is changing the world – and some people aren't very happy about it.

Particularly those with left-leaning ideas about multiculturalism, global warming, the environment and general politics.

Before internet was widely available in people's homes, we really just had to take as given what we were told by politicians, lawyers, journalists, teachers and university lecturers.

You could have gone to the library and pored over encyclopedias and newspapers, but who'd be bothered?

And the people speaking were often well dressed, eloquent, full of "facts" and they were on TV.

What they were saying must have been unquestionably true.

From the cultural revolution in the 1960s, progressive thought has dominated discussions among the highest authorities to the family dinner table. Without easy access to credible alternate views, predictions of global catastrophes brought on by global cooling (and now global warming), famines due to overpopulation, and running out of oil were taken very seriously.

These bold predictions dominated the media because of their sensational nature, and the public couldn't get enough of it.

But none of those predictions – made so passionately and confidently by people we trusted because of their job titles – have come true.

Today, the doomsday predictions continue but more and more people are questioning their authenticity thanks to being able to easily access a whole world of information.

However, it appears some people don't want anti-doomsday views to be made available for public digestion.

James Cook University recently criticised one of its staff, Professor Peter Ridd, and threatened him with the sack because he had the gall to suggest photos claiming to show a decline in reef health could be misleading.

The uni said that asking such questions was not on and found him guilty of “failing to act in a collegial way and in the academic spirit of the institution”.

Another JCU professor who incurred his employer’s wrath for having a non-doomsday view was prominent climate-change sceptic Bob Carter around the year 2000. According to one website, the university denied him access because his “...views on climate change did not fit well within the school’s own teaching and research activities.”

Surely the whole basis of science is that theories are questioned and tested.

Being a sceptic is not a crime. But obviously not in some circles.

I recently had the great pleasure of judging a public speaking competition and heard speeches from kids aged between 10 and 16.

Of the 10 or so speakers, more than half spoke about the environment, and they made some quite startling and strident statements about the state of the planet and of humans’ place in it.

All of them agreed that climate change was definitely man-made, that the world was grossly overpopulated and that human activity is killing our Reef and environment.

As they were from different schools, I began to wonder if the “humankind is killing the planet” mantra is part of the National Curriculum – and it is. There are some mentions of naturally occurring climate influences, but the vast majority of topics are about humans’ negative impact on pretty much everything in the world.

As I listened, I thought that every one of these kids’ statements is regularly challenged by credible sources and in mainstream media, but obviously those views either aren’t allowed in the classroom or are not strongly encouraged.

If they are, none of the counter-arguments were mentioned in the speeches, which seems odd.

In the interests of healthy debate, a broad and deep world view, and informed decision making, people need access to all the information.

With the internet, we have that access and as a result, more and more topics that had enjoyed an unchallenged existence are not only being questioned, they are being rejected.

Teachers and lecturers surely have a duty to make their students aware of competing viewpoints and how to access them.

Only exposing people – particularly students – to “acceptable” views is denying them real education.

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