



## Episode 1,477: Teacher Pulls Back Curtain on Government Schools

Guest: Larry Ludlow

**WOODS:** Everybody, Tom Woods here. I'm joined today by Larry Ludlow — Larry, is it okay, if I mention — and if it's not, I'll go back and re-record this whole thing — that you're a member of my Supporting Listeners group? Is that okay? Is that something you want the public to know?

**LUDLOW:** That's fine. I'm a proud member.

**WOODS:** All right, that's good, because some people may want to stay anonymous when it comes to that [laughing]. But anyway, Larry's a member of the group, and the other day he posted an article in there that he'd had published — was it over at *American Thinker*?

**LUDLOW:** Yes.

**WOODS:** Okay, about his experiences as a public school teacher, and particularly his recent return to that line of work temporarily and what his observations tell us, because I feel certain that we can extrapolate from those observations to what's going on all over the place. But I'd like to start off, Larry, with a bit of your background about, you were apparently in education, you did a bunch of other things, then for some reason you got back into it. Can you just fill in those blanks for us?

**LUDLOW:** Yeah, I had taught in the Detroit public schools for a couple of years back in the early 1980s. I'm not like an education major; I had a real degree in medieval studies from the Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies and Center for Medieval Studies in Toronto, University of Toronto's grad school. But I took a certificate to teach secondary schools when I returned after my education. And I didn't care for it. It was violent. There were about 20 shootings in the Detroit public Schools the last year I was there and I think about 250 teacher muggings in the schools. Bad statistics. So I became a writer and manager of writing departments for the next 35 years.

And 2018 in October, being semi-retired — I do a little business still — a neighbor across the street, whose son is a student and whose daughter is a student at Grosse Pointe South High School in a suburb of Detroit, Michigan, they had lost a Latin teacher in kind of a little meltdown that the guy had. And they were midterm, and there aren't too many people that can teach Latin anymore, and so they wanted a replacement really fast. And so I went in for an interview on a Friday afternoon, and they had me teach a couple of test classes the following Monday to the first- and second-year Latin students. And I did that for three hours there. There were three courses for the two levels. And then they hired me by Wednesday, and I was already teaching either Thursday or Friday of that week. And they weren't paying

me at the time, because I didn't get on payroll till the next week, but I kind of didn't care, because I was just jumping in there to help out through instinct. I volunteer a lot in my neighborhood, so just trying to help out, was my first thought. And I didn't give a lot of due consideration to what it was like to be in a public school again.

**WOODS:** Now, you wrote this article for the *American Thinker* in which you shared some of your experiences and impressions. And then we discovered in the private group that you had a much longer version, and I said I'd like to look at the longer version and then we'll talk about it. So I'm going to think — maybe we have to talk to *American Thinker* about whether or not I have the right to publish your long piece. So I don't know.

**LUDLOW:** Yeah, the publisher, he's been queried and he courtesy copied me on other requests, and they don't care about that at all. They don't even care if you re-publish the one that was in *American Thinker*.

**WOODS:** Okay, so what I'll do is, let's say I'll do a redirect here. You'll be able to read the article at [TomWoods.com/Larry](http://TomWoods.com/Larry). That will take you to a post on my site where I'll put up the whole thing for people to read.

So let's dive into the sorts of things that you noticed. And the first of these things really was the attitude almost more of the parents than the students, but it's hard to know who's first and who's second there, with regard to effort that's expected of them, with regard to how easy it ought to be to get a good grade, with regard to, frankly, the importance of education. Let me put it this way: everybody in America feels obligated to say education is just so important, and when there's a ballot initiative, raising our taxes for education, well, we've got to go out and vote for it, because education is just so important. *We need our kids to be educated*. Over and over and over, like a religion. Over and over and over and over, they talk this way. And I don't believe it. I don't believe that they actually in their heart of hearts believe what they're saying. And you are about to give us evidence that they don't really believe it.

But to me, it's that I look at the parents themselves who are squawking about education, and not one of them is ever reading a significant book. I mean, yeah, I know. I'm not saying that statement is true with apodictic certainty, as Mises would say. There obviously are exceptions. But generally, people are reading some trashy novel that they got at the airport bookstore. I mean, here they are with the internet and resources like you wouldn't believe. None of them are using it to read Kant. None of them — None. None of them are thinking, I really need to know more about the classical philosophers or something like that. That would never occur to them. So I don't buy it. I don't buy it. I think they're saying it because they believe that they're expected to say it. I don't think in these people's lives, education matters really at all, except in terms of getting a piece of paper with some letters on it that will help their kids advance so that they can brag about them. I'm sorry, but that's just been my experience. Now, I'm not necessarily asking you to endorse that, but I am asking you to say something about what you said in your piece about your experiences with these people.

**LUDLOW:** Tom, I would endorse what you said completely. And not only do I endorse it, since I began talking about this issue, and I first broke this at the Midwest Peace and Liberty Coalition festival in Kalamazoo, Michigan, I think it was in June. And people come around from around the country to that kind of a camping event. And I sat on their stage and talked for an hour about this, and I was then interviewed for the *School Sucks* podcast by Brett

Veinotte. And he did a second follow-up interview on this. And when I was finished with those, I had a couple of teachers, one of them from Ann Arbor, Michigan, home of the University of Michigan, and another one from Chicago who were attending, and they just concurred with everything I said.

And since that in the various blogs and Instapundit blogs and Reddit blogs and on the *American Thinker* blog, where the comments have now hit over 200 comments aside from my own – because I tried to be active in acting as a steward to the comments and acknowledging them, so I put in another 40 or 50 of my own. But there were several teachers, all of whom said this is exactly what they've been seeing. And there's a temptation to say, well, Larry's just another old man, who like old men throughout history have seen a decline in standards, and we can see this in the works of Pliny as long ago as 2,000 years ago. But this is actually a real thing.

I taught in the Detroit public schools 35 years ago. It was no heaven at that time. I was in one school, Redford High School, teaching French and there was a shooting in another part of the school. I found out about it three or four hours later when I was leaving the school. They said, "Oh, yeah, somebody got shot in the other part of the building." You know, you'd find out this stuff a day or two later. I mean, it was that common. But those kids that I was teaching French to – again, this is not my main teaching area, French and Latin. I just happened to be pretty good at them, and then in Toronto, I passed my PhD Latin exam, which was mandatory to get your graduate degrees there. It's a world-famous school.

Anyway, so when I taught French in Detroit, I had an all-black population of students. All of those students were more motivated and better at their work and more diligent, by and large, than the population of students at Grosse Pointe South High School. And to give your listeners an idea of what Grosse Pointe South High School is like, they should remember that the community of Grosse Pointe was built in the late 1800s as a getaway to millionaires that lived in Detroit. And in the 1920s, during the boom, there was probably more wealth concentrated in the Detroit area than anywhere else in the world outside of New York City. There are about ten-plus square miles of individually designed homes in the five Grosse Pointes. So at the time, this was one of the wealthiest communities in the squirrel world. And architecturally, it is amazing. So it's still cheap, though, by United States standards, because the Detroit economy is defunct.

So we have probably one of the so-called better school districts in Michigan. This is not saying much, because public schools, as Bryan Caplan has shown in his *The Case against Education*, the level of knowledge is abysmal. It's laughable. And when I showed up in Grosse Pointe thinking that this relatively wealthy community would have just a total level above what I'd seen in Detroit 35 years ago, I was shocked at what I saw. The behavior of the students was very polite, so they've got a good handle on that. It's also very PC, and that even showed during my interview process. But in my courses, the distribution of grades and work was what you call – I think it's bimodal. You had several top performers, and the rest were at the bottom of the scale. A lot of Ds and Es and several Bs and As. There were very few of the students in the middle. It's like a bell curve turned upside down. This is very strange.

I started asking around, and I quickly learned not only from several teachers, but from several students, and they still talk to me now because I live on a corner in this city. And people talk to me because I'm always working outside in the garden, and I have student painters who've attended these schools. I have been told by at least ten people separately: oh, yeah, the

Latin classes at South, those are slack class, and they put people in there just to dump them in so they can pass a language requirement and move on to college. And many people proudly point out on the Facebook pages for the Grosse Pointes that the University of Michigan automatically grants entrance to students who are graduates of the Grosse Pointe school district. This isn't saying much for UofM either, where McKinnon is the law professor who's got this legal theory that your race and class can determine your guilt or innocence in a trial. This is a total batch of crazy politics there.

Anyway, so you see the level of misperception. People here believe that, and the school propounds this. When I was being interviewed, they of course showed me around this building, and it's gorgeous. It's 100 years old. The campus is lovely. It has slate roofs on this building, copper gutters and downspouts. It has limestone window frames and blocks all through the entrances and the corner accents. They tried to feature it in the movie *Grosse Pointe Blank*, but they didn't get permission because it's about a graduate who could do nothing but commit crimes. But they have a library, a former library there, if you look up Cleminson Hall, that has marble columns and two floors of books. It's now used as an auditorium. The kitchen and the dining room are like Hogwarts in the movie, or if you've been to the University of Toronto, like Hart House, which is another beautiful hall. These are very beautiful facilities. There's stone everywhere. So you get the picture.

But it's like the gospel where Christ says, on the outside, you're all dressed up, but inside you have dead man's bones. And it is. It's a bunch of pearl-clutching, PC students with moms policing the PC dogma, and they want their kids to get that piece of paper and go on to the next place to get a piece of paper to bring in the money. It's a superficial system. They expect the piece of paper, and the pressure is on to give them those grades. And I had a constant battle with this kind of thing.

**WOODS:** Your experience was that the students you dealt with, obviously with exceptions, you do point out – you try to be as fair as you can in this piece, that there were some perfectly good students. But it was shocking how low their skill level was just in a variety of areas.

I mean, for seven years, I taught undergraduates, and once I got tenure, I used to assign a book by Thomas Sowell. Now, Thomas Sowell's a smart guy, but he writes his books for the general public. He's not writing them for other academics exclusively. He's writing them for the public. He publishes with a trade publisher. It's pitched to the general public. His books sold very well. And these kids could not understand what his thesis was. They could not – I was shocked. I thought, this is really going to open their minds about the way the world works. No, it's not, because they have no idea how to read a book, a simple book, by Thomas – it was Thomas Sowell's book *Civil Rights: Rhetoric or Reality*. And his point was: we've absorbed a lot of things that we think are true that are not true about civil rights, discrimination, poverty, income differences, education differences. And to the contrary, most of them thought he was saying racism is bad. Well, yeah, I mean, I'm sure he does think racism is bad, but that has nothing to do with this book. But they would look at a book like that, and all they could come up with – because I'm sure half of them didn't even try – was just some thing, some moral commonplace like racism is bad. Well, okay, what was his analysis? What was his argument? How is it different from what you hear from your peers all the time? They haven't got the slightest idea.

So you're dealing with that, but you're also dealing with parents, who, as you say, they want the kids to get good grades, and you say to them: but they don't do anything. Your student does not do anything. And did the parents say, "All right, well, listen, I'll light a bit of a fire under him, and we'll see what happens?"

**LUDLOW:** Yes, I'll give you —

**WOODS:** Oh, and by the way, let me jump in and tell people we've changed your audio input source, so if you sound different, that's the explanation. I'm sorry. Go ahead.

**LUDLOW:** Yeah, I can relate two incidents directly addressing this. One of them, I had a boy in my class, he lives on a street that is lined with incredible mansions. It's just a couple of blocks away. And this boy, very quiet, but he rarely seems to be paying attention. He seemed to be more paying attention to the kids around him. He rarely turned in any homework. His test scores were abysmal, and he had a hard time following in class. And the listeners won't know this, but I don't move on to a topic in my class if I haven't explained it in a number of ways. And I had been noticing that they didn't understand grammar at all, these high school kids. And I understand that. I really was not big on that myself as a young student, in either junior high or high school. I taught it to myself afterward. So I understood the lack of interest, but I gave opportunities to make up for grades so they could just pass it. But this boy did nothing in the class.

His mother called me up one day, and demanded that I raise his grade. And she said he'd been getting a B or something previously. And I told her, I said, "Your son doesn't turn in any homework. I ask the kids to participate in class, because it brings them into the process. He's kind of a zombie at that point. His grades on the test were just abysmal." But she wanted to bargain with me repeatedly because of what he had done before. And I told her that I understood that one of the teachers before me literally was unable to teach the students. He actually had a PhD in Latin, my predecessor, and he simply could not cover the material with them. I don't know if it was his fault or the students', because I never met the man. And there was a previous Latin teacher to him who had resigned. So I didn't know the situation totally at the beginning, because I discovered all of these things later.

Then I had another student, in contrast. This was a female student who was one of the top performers in the classes that I had. I would say she was probably one of the top five. She was great. And her mother wrote me an email and said, "Mr. Ludlow was unprofessional." Her daughter was a vegan, and so she was scandalized when I brought in a 13th-century vellum manuscript in it and touched her hand. It was from, you know, a baby cow's skin. And I kind of thought that was hilarious, because how many teachers bring that in? But she was a very good student, but her parents requested a conference with me and the vice principal. So I come in there. They never addressed the so-called unprofessional behavior. And I don't know if it was that or the fact that I would tell kids: hey, if you need me off class hours, I can usually be found at Atwater in the Park pub or at the library. Apparently, you're not supposed to admit that you drink or something, I don't know.

But the parents come in there. The mother was a school teacher, and the father was just quiet. And their complaint wasn't about the parchment manuscript. It wasn't about mentioning that I can be available at this microbrew. It was that my grades might be too hard and that the daughter has homework. And if the students want to understand what a language class is like, there are very few classes at university or secondary level that require the

constant attention that a foreign language does. You either get it or you don't, and it's obvious when you don't, because the words just aren't there. So the objective is, you work on it a little bit every day, and you progressively master more and more components of the language.

Well, this girl, even though she was a top performer, she had had a teacher the previous this year who was one of the slack graders. She was accustomed to that regimen, and her parents were only concerned that I expected something more out of the kids than they were accustomed to. And this was actually a concerned parent. Her daughter eventually did very well. I would have given her an A. Yes, she was PC and wrapped too tight, but she was a great student. But even the best student was shocked that they actually had to deliver. And the student bucked up and did it, as did all of the good students. So that gives you a little flavor of how that goes. But again, many teachers would come up to me in the halls and in the library when they found out later on that I was going to resign, and they just gave me these secrets, one after another.

**WOODS:** Let's go on to the area where I think people expect to hear some horror stories, and that is the political aspect of things; that is, the political views that are imposed on the kids or the preconceptions that the students have or their resistance to new facts or unapproved facts or anything along those sorts of lines. You share a bunch of examples of these. Give us a few.

**LUDLOW:** Yeah, the PC nature of the school was apparent to me even during my interview. Here I am, sitting in a room with two vice principals, the head of the language department, the other Latin teacher and Italian teacher and a Spanish teacher and I think a French teacher. And we're just relaxing, and I happen to actually have known the author of the textbook that they use in their systems. And one of the questions they asked me is: how would you encourage a student that's failing to understand the language? And I went through several scenarios of how you can approach this, by actually moving about the room to show the difference, say, between a direct object and an indirect object. I'm not going to go into the weeds for the listeners, but there are ways you can do this and draw diagrams. And I'm pretty good at this.

But at the end of it, I thought I'd lighten it up with a little bit of a joke. And I said, "Well, if all else fails, I can always just tell them, 'Look, if the Italians can master Latin at one point, so can you.'" Now, this is a totally innocent ethnic joke. We're talking to adults here, all of whom were my age or younger. There's clearly no ethnic slurs intended. It's too lighten it up. And I could see all of the faces stifling a chuckle. They wanted to laugh, but then their eyes went over to the vice principal, who was just puckering his little lips, and in his quiet voice said, "Well, you know we can't have any of that kind of talk in our classes." And I just looked at him said, "Fine. If that's the way things go here, I'll just have to avoid much of a sense of humor here, given that." So I hope your listeners understand the level of policing that goes on.

But when it came to the classroom, some of the funniest things that happened — I've already related the bit about my bringing in this 13th-century manuscript and the outrage that someone who is a vegan would touch something that was once a baby cow, never mind that they're never going to see one again or handle one.

The anti-Trump derangement syndrome was totally widespread among the teachers and I don't know how many of the students, because I never talked about politics to the kids. I just made it my watchword. I had found out subsequently that the principal of the school, on the day after Trump won the election, actually had an announcement to quell any tears and wretched feelings and soothe the souls of the students, apologizing for the election. This is what goes on at that school.

In 2018, the shooting in the Lakeland [Florida] school, I forget, the Marjory Stoneman School, that really was such a hullabaloo, the kids marched out of school after that in that day of rage. And this was before they found out that the FBI hadn't acted on tips about the shooter; or that the school security was hiding; or that the Broward County public schools, where the Parkland, Florida shootings occurred, that the school had a policy of allowing violent students in so that it wouldn't single out minorities; further, that they tried to cover it up when the policy was revealed and they sued a newspaper. So this is a whole cover-up thing.

Another thing: when I talked about slavery in these Latin classes, just etymology comes into play, you talk about terms like fascism or the etymology of the word "slave," which is linked to the word "Slav," which indicates the widespread white slavery in the ancient and medieval world. And the students were just stunned that it wasn't only something that happened in America to African-Americans. And they thought that the Americans were the only ones who practiced it. There was head shaking when I pointed this out. They had never heard this before. They'd never heard that it was in the West that slavery was first made illegal or that it even could be resolved without a civil war.

I am a kind of an expert on early printing. These are books from the 15th century, beginning with Gutenberg's press in 1454 and 1455. This invention of printing really was the internet of its day, and our internet puts a Gutenberg press in everybody's lap or really on their cell phone. And so the day before Thanksgiving, I thought I would give kind of a break and a relief, and I brought in some incunable samples, 15th-century print samples versus manuscripts. And I had a nice slideshow. I've given this presentation at libraries across the United States, and I've lectured at the Newberry Library in Chicago, where they have a huge manuscript and incunable collection.

So we're done with this, and I discuss the impact of this printing press in the mid 1400s and how literacy zoomed from like 30% in 17th century, in the 1600s, all the way to 85% in this country before public schools became the law of the land. I had children that could not believe that you could have such an increase in literacy simply as a result of the lowering price of printed material and learning material and the growth of libraries and shared learning. One of the boys whose mother was a teacher in the public school couldn't believe what I was saying, and he just couldn't help himself and he says, "This can't be true. This can't be true." So you've got a really emotional attachment to the idea that public schools are the national religion.

And, I don't know, Tom, did you want me to get into the gender dysphoria issue?

**WOODS:** If you want to, because I rather suspect it's in every single school and with only one point of view allowed on the subject.

**LUDLOW:** Yeah, it's particularly hilarious when you are dealing with a foreign language, because Latin is a highly inflected language. All of the words have a gender. They're either

masculine nouns, feminine nouns, or they're neuter. So the reasons for this, some of them are psychological, some of them are just tradition, but the point is, it's a fact. And so the word endings change the final letters to reflect what gender they are and their use in a sentence, say, the subject, the direct object, indirect object, all of these things. And the verb ends change based on the number of people, and the nouns also change their endings for the number of people.

So within two days of my starting, a first request I get from one of the school counselors is that one of my students would like to be addressed by plural pronouns, such as "their" and "they." I'm talking to one person. And we're not talking about royalty here, who deserves the royal we, which is itself another form of craziness. And we're not talking about somebody who's got multiple personality disorder. We're not talking to a flock of birds. We're talking to a single person, who is somehow identifying as a male or female. I'm not going to give the gender of the person – wait, we're talking about a kid here. And I don't know if he or she wanted to be more than one person at a time.

But I said to the counselor in an email, I said, "First of all, if this is a sexual orientation, you're assuming that girls can only exhibit certain behaviors as girls and boys can only have certain behaviors as boys." We all know that, in general, there are a lot of characteristics that boys share more of than girls and so forth. But the point is, any individual woman or man is capable of pretty much exhibiting the same spectrum of behaviors, I mean, even though they're more clumped as a group. And I said, "So you're telling me that when this girl or boy does this or this, they're not acting like a boy or girl?" Heck, anyone who's ever known a tomboy or -girl or been married to one – my ex-wife was a tomboy when she was a little girl. She had a set of guns. These are all in the range of human behavior, and so they're imposing a stereotype even though they think they're being diverse.

Second thing, of course, we're in a foreign language class. These words have feminine, masculine, and neuter endings, and there are plurals and singulars. This just totally confuses the concept. And on top of it, this student never did a lick of work in the class, never turned in a single bit of homework, never scored beyond an E in a test, and never said a word in the class. This student had a serious psychological issue that may or may not have had anything to do with gender dysphoria; yet, I'm being asked to derail the learning process for something that may have been much deeper and is confusing and needs to be addressed in a different way. This was not met with happiness by that counselor, and it had no impact in my class, because I would always use the kid's names. I never would address the person third-hand. I didn't talk about people to other students.

So this is the kind of thing, because this is the new virtue signaling, that counselors want to know that they're on the cutting edge of a latest political fad. And gender dysphoria is very rare, and to be bringing it into the classroom with kids who are teenagers – they're trying out different personalities and different hobbies and different friends and different outfits to pretend that this isn't maybe just a temporary phase or a crowd-pleasing behavior, where the student is trying to show how trendy they are or get approval from adults. None of this was even considered. So I don't know if there's any other kind of issues that I brought up, but there were tons of them and they were all hilarious.

**WOODS:** What I want to wrap up with is this fundamental question. You're identifying quite a variety of different problems. Are these problems that could be solved through prudent reforms, or is there something about these problems that is intractable, or is there something



with the system that makes it immune to change? How do you look at this aspect of the question?

**LUDLOW:** This cannot be reformed as long as schools and the costs for schooling are controlled by the government institution and are funded to taxpayers without individual accountability or a real customer and a real seller. The reason being is everyone is paying for everything, and nobody's paying for anything, and you can't fire these teachers or administrators and get your money back. Even worse, the parents don't want to reform this. They've been inculcated in government schools themselves. And because the parents of the good students never complain, they're never heard from. Only the ones whose kids aren't performing complain, and so you get this grade inflation.

On the other hand, it's America's national religion, these government schools. Even if you give them 20 statistics, and my article is full of links to statistics and studies, all of the intelligent comments have come from conservative commentators and libertarians. All of the negative comments are simply name-calling and outrage and denial on the part of the progressives, most of whom run the school systems and dominate the funding process. They don't want to be reformed.

And the wealthier the school district, the worse it is, because the high-tax districts, the parents can't admit that they've been duped into paying for something that's a scam. So they have to defend it so that they don't have to face up to the fact that they've been duped. And so you get this Stockholm Syndrome, where if you talk about this, the first trigger is outrage. And the worst of the outrage class are these harpy moms that just descend like the birds in that Alfred Hitchcock movie, and they whip each other into a frenzy. They never talk about the facts. You can call up a million facts and demonstrate it in front of their eyes. You are the enemy. You said the unspeakable. It can't be reformed from the inside.

**WOODS:** Wow, well, I'm going to link to your original piece and to the lengthier piece at [TomWoods.com/1477](http://TomWoods.com/1477). If you want to just go directly to the piece itself, [TomWoods.com/Larry](http://TomWoods.com/Larry) is where to go. I would also mention to folks, if you're thinking about making the great escape from this system, well, you know I have a certain bias toward the Ron Paul Curriculum because I created 400 videos for it, so [RonPaulHomeschool.com](http://RonPaulHomeschool.com) is what you want to check out there. And also, I have a free eBook called *Education Without the State*, which you can pick up at [NoStateEducation.com](http://NoStateEducation.com). Larry, thanks so much for your time today.

**LUDLOW:** It was a pleasure, Tom.

