

points of view

One political 'hunch' that panned out

THE BEST research, they say, confirms what you already suspected was true.

Both Govs. G. Mennen Williams (1949-60) and William G. Milliken (1969-82) dealt with Legislatures dominated by the other party. But Democratic Williams was widely regarded to have had a tough time while Republican Milliken was able to win agreements.

A scholar has produced some numbers to back up that conventional hunch. David W. Winder earned a doctorate in political science in 1982 from Michigan State University. He wrote about Williams and Milliken in "Divided Government in Michigan" in the November/December issue of Michigan History magazine.

"WHILE WILLIAMS experienced frustration in dealing with the state

Legislature, Milliken enjoyed a reasonable amount of success," Winder wrote, citing these figures:

In 1958 and 1960, Williams saw 10.7 percent and 17.2 percent of the bills he supported become law.

In 1982 and 1980, Milliken saw 32.3 percent and 41.3 percent of the bills he supported become law.

Other tables show much the same thing — Milliken had much stronger support from opposition Democrats than Williams had from Republicans.

WHY DID Milliken have such a significantly better batting average?

• Style — Winder finds Williams had a "disinclination to compromise." Milliken "built coalitions with natural political opponents."

• Personality — Williams adopted an "adversarial relationship"



Tim Richard

with the other party. Milliken was Mr. Nice Guy.

• Experience — Milliken had been a community college trustee and state senator, earning enough respect among his colleagues to become Senate majority floor leader. Williams had held only appointive positions.

• The times — When Williams was governor, there were no "moderate" Republicans in a Senate dom-

inated by Clyde Geerlings and Elmer Porter, and only a handful of "young Turk" GOP rebels in the House. By the 1960s, Milliken was a chief among a potent band of moderates who took over the Senate reins. Moreover, Williams had White House aspirations, so the Grand Old Party took a particular joy in tripping him up.

MY OWN impression is that Winder plays down the personality factor. Sassy Williams, a gregarious man socially, would speak in ethnic groups in their native tongues and call square dances. But in talking about lawmakers, he had the bad habit of using terms like "pitifully inadequate" and the bad timing of using such belittling terms a day or two after UAW president Walter Reuther used them.

Republicans would accuse the governor of being Reuther's puppet. Loyal Democrats, of course, vehemently denied it, but there was an abundance of Williams rhetoric to support the GOP interpretation.

Williams achieved his greatest influence through liberal appointments to regulatory boards and the judiciary, Winder said.

Milliken, on the other hand, was able to deal face-to-face with his chief Democratic rival, Detroit Mayor Coleman Young.

Milliken also cut deals with the "Quadrant" — the Republican and Democratic leaders of both the House and Senate. (I called it the "Billy-Bob Club" — the principals were Bill Milliken, Sen. Bill Faust, Rep. Bill Bryant, Sen. Bob VanderLaan and House Speaker Bobby Crim.)

AS RONALD Reagan, who had never been a legislator or congressman before reaching the White House, heads into the sunset, lots of Washington pundits are suggesting George Bush will have better dealings with Congress.

Not only does Bush have a less confrontational style, but he has served in Congress, has presided over the Senate and has had broader geographic exposure to America than the Western-oriented Reagan. Based on the lessons of the Williams and Milliken years in Michigan, I would guess the pundits will be right about Bush.

Tim Richard, political writer and columnist, is the Oakland County editor of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

Attitudes need changing in quest for excellence

THE EASY answer — a troubling legacy of the 1960s.

This growing dependency on the simple solution, the no-hassle society could very well be turning us into second-class world citizens. And it all starts right here at home, in middle-class suburban America.

For the last couple of months your local newspaper staff has been investigating the growing problem of illiteracy in the schools. After much discussion, we felt that narrowing the investigation to one discipline would best highlight the situation.

It did. And no matter how you interpret the results, one thing is for sure. We — the students, the teachers, the parents — are stepping away from the challenge of tomorrow.

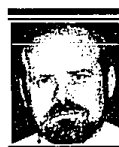
A recent article in the Wall Street Journal highlighted a University of Michigan class that teaches students how to take risks in order to succeed.

Imagine that.

COLLEGE students, the generation that is supposed to bring innovation into our society, have to be taught how to take entrepreneurial risk.

But we shouldn't be surprised. We are rapidly becoming a society that would rather play it safe than risk losing what we have.

And that attitude certainly has seeped into the classroom.



Steve Barnaby

The science scores on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program for fourth, seventh and 10th graders are at best marginal, no matter which school district you're talking about. Certainly, some districts' students did better than others.

But all districts achieved less than desirable scores.

Tenth-grade students in affluent districts such as Birmingham and Bloomfield Hills scored only 52 percent. As scores are kept, this means that only 52 percent of students who took the test answered correctly three-quarters of the concepts.

That's pitiful. But upon further examination, we find that's about as well as you're going to get out of 10th graders these days.

Farmington students scored only 38 percent.

WAYNE County students fared even worse. Livonia 10th graders hit

a high of 32.4 percent. While Westland bottomed out at 14.7 percent.

But none of us, no matter which classroom our children hang their coats in, should gloat. All the scores are terrible.

One feature of our science articles was the blame one expert or another was putting on another for the abysmal situation. Another feature was the apologists who said the scores really didn't mean anything, anyway.

In truth, these science scores reflect an attitude that says it's all right to be less-than-the-best, that being less competitive means a safer existence. If we're mediocre, the rest of the world will leave us alone. After all, no one wants to bother with mediocrity.

Perhaps this is a left-over attitude that haunts us from the trauma of the 1960s. Then we wanted to strive for a better world. We wanted to do it all. Many thought that ideal to be corrupt when they found out that accomplishing it meant risking a life-style and sometimes a life.

Changing the curricula would help some, money may help a little, but changing students' attitudes about our role in the world is what will change those scores the most.

Steve Barnaby is managing editor of the 12 Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

Are some teachers too generous with grades?

Q: Dr. Doyle, in one of your articles you referred to the generosity error or a teacher giving out high grades because he is just a generous person. My child is a very slow learner or "remedial student" and probably would fail many courses if he had teachers who didn't take his innate ability into consideration.

A: I have had several inquiries in regard to a previous article where I addressed an issue of a teacher who used the "generosity error" in grading: who liked kids and tended to grade higher than may have been warranted.

However, there is nothing inherently wrong with a teacher who has very slow remedial students or students in a special education resource room grading the children based on ability vs. achievement to encourage them to continue striving for success.

Indeed, in my earlier teaching years prior to special education, I taught a class that had learning disabled children in a remedial math class setting.



Doc Doyle

... teachers deal with different ability levels in our mass education system; all our students are not going to be brain surgeons.

At that time, I had one parent who would ground the child for two months if he didn't receive a C. There was some indication that physical abuse may have been involved, although never proven. I taught the child and retaught and re-

tested him until he earned a C, rather than fail the child.

It must be remembered, teachers deal with different ability levels in our mass education system; all our students are not going to be brain surgeons.

Teachers must be granted some judgment in working with and grading slower children. If a child of low ability is working and achieving above his innate ability, a decent grade can be a healthy, nurturing, success experience.

Dr. Kurt Lewin, the late noted social psychologist, said that structuring success for a child breeds further success and allows the teacher to then raise the expectation level for the child.

Dr. James Doyle is an associate superintendent in the Troy School District. The answers provided here are the opinions of Doyle and not the Troy School District. Questions for this column should be sent to Doc Doyle c/o the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

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