

Should “Intelligent Design” be Taught in Schools?

Intelligent design (ID) is an argument for the existence of a creator of life on Earth, often interpreted as a God. Proponents of ID, mostly members of the Discovery Institute, claim that ID is a scientific alternative to the field of evolutionary biology. However, the scientific community is unified in its rejection of ID as science. The National Center for Science Education lists on its website statements from several major earth and life science societies including the U.S. National Academy of Sciences condemning consideration of ID in science education.

Independent of the faulty claims and logic of ID proponents (addressed in “Common Misconceptions about Evolution”), ID simply is not science and therefore has no place in any science classroom. Science is defined as: “principles and procedures for the systematic pursuit of knowledge involving the recognition and formulation of a problem, the collection of data through observation and experiment, and the formulation and testing of hypotheses” (Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary). ID does not generate any hypotheses that can be tested through experiments, nor does it attempt to provide any evidence to support its claims. It does not stimulate the pursuit of any knowledge about how the world works. Rather, ID suggests that when we do not know how something works, we simply attribute it to a higher power. If we consider this approach as science and teach this to our children, we are not preparing our nation for any progress in the scientific fields.

The controversy surrounding teaching of evolution and ID was recently highlighted in the news. In 2005, a public school district in Dover, Pennsylvania was sued for requiring the presentation of ID as an alternative to evolution as an explanation of the origin of life. The court decided against this policy, which violated the First Amendment to the United States Constitution (commonly interpreted as the separation of church and state). In his ruling against the teaching of ID in schools, John E. Jones III stated, “...ID is not science. We find that ID fails on three different levels, any one of which is sufficient to preclude a determination that ID is science. They are: (1) ID violates the centuries-old ground rules of science by invoking and permitting supernatural causation; (2) the argument of irreducible complexity, central to ID, employs the same flawed and illogical contrived dualism that doomed creation science in the 1980s; and (3) ID’s negative attacks on evolution have been refuted by the scientific community.”

If intelligent design is to be taught in schools, it should be in religion, philosophy, or politics courses alongside other religious viewpoints, but not in a science course. Allowing students to opt out of learning the scientific method and evolution – the foundation of all biological sciences – would cheat them of the minimal standards in science education. Also inexcusable, presenting intelligent design as a legitimate alternative to the study of evolutionary biology would be a complete denial of the consensus of the international scientific community.

To learn more about the recent attempts to protect evolution education, or to become involved, visit: <http://www.natcensci.org>