



The Phyllis Schlafly Report



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Beware of the Phonics Conspiracy

When Hillary Rodham Clinton charged that Bill Clinton's impeachment was caused by a "vast right-wing conspiracy," she displayed the typical paranoia of liberals. It's not just Watergate and Iran-Contra that nurture their faith in plots; liberals think conspiracies against them are lurking behind every bend in the road.

This attitude is not just acquired by reading fundraisers from People for the American Way (who live in perpetual fear of parental "censorship" over their children's books and videos). The existence of vast right-wing conspiracies is actually being taught in the teachers colleges.

A "reentry woman" (that's the jargon to describe a woman who enters college after having been in the real world for some years) sent me a textbook currently used in a state university in New York to teach aspiring teachers how to teach Whole Language to elementary school students. Whole Language means teaching children to guess at words from the pictures or the context, to skip over words the child doesn't know, and to substitute words that seem to fit.

The textbook includes a chapter warning teachers against a "Far Right" conspiracy of "laypersons" to teach phonics (sounding out the syllables of the English language). The textbook identifies yours truly as a co-conspirator, along with the Heritage Foundation, the highly-advertised *Hooked on Phonics*, Norma and Mel Gabler, Dr. Robert Simonds, scholar Sam Blumenfeld, Robert W. Sweet of the National Right to Read Foundation, Pat Robertson, the Reverend Jerry Falwell, and U.S. Senators Orrin Hatch and Jesse Helms.

If this were merely the wild-eyed rantings of some leftwing activist, it wouldn't be worth a comment. But all this is from an actual teachers-college textbook, *Reading Process and Practice, From Socio-Psycholinguistics to Whole Language* by Constance Weaver (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994).

The textbook warns that the "Far Right" urges that children be taught "a lot of phonics" and even phonics "first, before giving children the opportunity to read real literature — or even sentences!" Italics, capitalization

and exclamation points emphasize these ominous accusations.

The textbook author is shocked, shocked that children might be taught to sound out words before they are given whole sentences. The truth is that thrusting complete sentences or books on children before they are taught to sound out words is equivalent to putting children on a football or a tennis team before they are taught how to play the game.

Next, the textbook probes into the motive of the Far Right in advocating phonics, dismissing the thought that it could possibly be anything so sincere as wanting all children to be good readers. We now see the paranoia of the conspiracy-minded leftwingers in full flower.

According to this textbook used to teach teachers, the "hidden agenda" of phonics-advocating Far Righters is "to promote a religious agenda." They supposedly advocate phonics so that children will get all the words "right" and thereby be able to read *all* the words in the Bible instead of guessing at some of them.

According to this textbook, teaching intensive phonics is a Far Right plot to keep children "from reading or thinking for themselves." It appears not to have occurred to the textbook author that, if children are such good readers that they can read all those big words in the Bible, they will have the ability to read the classics of Western civilization, too.

Undeterred by common sense, the textbook plows ahead with its fantasy about a Far Right plot. The book alleges that another, even more devious, motive of Far Right phonics advocates is to promote "docility and obedience on the part of the lower classes," and thereby "maintain the socioeconomic status quo" and preserve "socioeconomic stratification."

The textbook proudly includes an illustration of the work of a first grader taught by the Whole Language method: "1. RAET MY NAM. 2. RAET THE DAET." The other words are even more unintelligible.

The fact is that nothing, nothing at all, has done more to prevent the "lower classes" from rising above their "socioeconomic stratification" than the failure to teach

them how to read. Illiteracy is the systemic disease of the unemployed, the welfare class, and the prison population, all those pathetic thousands of Americans who, despite having attended public schools, are unable to "write my name" or "write the date."

On August 1, a three-line headline in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* screamed: "A third of our secondary school students are behind in their reading. What should the region's citizens do?"

My answer is, scrap the failed method called Whole Language, and instead teach children how to read by the proven phonics method so they will be able to realize the American dream. But the schools aren't going to do that because their teachers are brainwashed into believing that phonics is a Far Right religious and political conspiracy. How sad.

Court Bans Bizarre Curriculum

Parents have won a remarkable victory over the psychological abuse of children that takes place in public school classrooms. It isn't the court decision that's so remarkable; it's the evidence of what was actually going on inside the schools.

A federal district judge in White Plains, New York, ruled May 21 that the Bedford Central School District must stop requiring schoolchildren to create paper images of a Hindu god, to make toothpick-and-yarn "worry dolls" to ward off anxiety, and to take part in Earth Day worship services. Third graders had been required to make clay and construction paper cutouts of the elephant-headed Hindu god, Ganesha.

Judge Charles Brieant ordered the school district to (1) "prevent school sponsorship of worship of the Earth" and North American Indian animism or nature worship, (2) "remove the worry dolls from the school system" and "refrain from suggesting that [such] tangibles have supernatural powers," (3) prohibit "any direction to a student to make a likeness or graven image of a god or religious symbol," and (4) "direct the adoption of a published policy containing clear instructions [about religion] to teachers and others."

The school was engaging in what the judge called "truly bizarre" Earth Day celebrations. He said that these events "take on [many] of the attributes of the ceremonies of worship by organized religions."

According to the parents who filed the lawsuit, "students and senior citizens, who have also become part of earth worship services, sit in concentric circles around a giant inflated globe placed atop a bamboo tripod. The elderly people form the inside circle, symbolizing that they are closer to the earth and will return to it to nourish it."

A chorus of tom-tom drums plays throughout the ceremony, while teachers and school officials read speeches. The ceremony pretends that the earth is deified, and students are urged to "do something to make Mother Earth smile."

Evidence submitted in this case included an audiotape (Exhibit 62) entitled "Listening to Nature," which intersperses prayers and invocations sonorously uttered along with background sounds of forest and ocean. The plaintiff parents particularly objected to the fact that the tape, which they characterized as "nature worship and guided imagery," was played in science classes.

The accompanying book contains this creed: "This is what we believe. The Mother of us all is the Earth. The Father is the Sun. The Grandfather is the Creator who bathed us with his mind and gave life to all things. The Brother is the beasts and trees. The Sister is that with wings."

(The school must have failed to clear this gender stereotyping with the feminist in charge of Political Correctness.)

During one Earth Day ceremony, a school official told the assembly that there are "too many people on the earth and we need to do something about it." Another Earth Day activity involved having the children mark tombstones with the names of extinct birds and animals.

Page 65 of the book instructs children that, when they need to cut down a tree or remove a plant from their garden, they should pray to Mother Earth. The children are supposed to "ask your permission, your consent for this killing."

The attorney representing the school district complained that "the judge went further than any court in the country in directing the behavior of an individual school district." It surely sounds as though this school district needs some adult supervision.

The school district is expected to appeal the decision in this case, *Altman et al. v. Bedford Central School District*. If it does, the parents should appeal the failure of the court to throw out the offensive classroom activities involved in the use of the card game called "Magic: The Gathering."

It was this card game that alerted the plaintiffs to contest the peculiar classroom activities. They objected to the "Magic" card game because it is steeped in satanic imagery, signs, and rituals such as human sacrifice and the casting of spells.

The object of the game is to accumulate "mana," which is "power that comes from the earth." The plaintiffs contend that the card game "initiates children into satanism using perversion of actual Bible verses."

One card, depicting a man about to be sacrificed with a knife about to plunge into his heart, carries this strange message: "Sacrifice one of your creatures to add to your mana pool a number of black mana equal to that creature's casting cost." Another card shows a terrified woman with a hand holding her head down and a huge knife at her throat.

The parents charged that the card game is part of a New Age curriculum that includes yoga lessons, cult worship, and religious activities. "The cards represent a billion dollar industry," attorney Mary Ann DiBari said,

"and our children are paying the price with indoctrination in the occult."

Where are the ACLU and the separation-of-church-and-state activists when we need them? Even as we speak, People for the American Way is probably writing up this case for its annual survey of alleged "censorship" and "book burning" by "narrow-minded, right-wing fundamentalist" parents.

The Consequences of Sex Education

The *Washington Post* shook up its readers on July 9 with a front-page news story about sex practices in an affluent Virginia middle school. The school principal notified the parents that 13- and 14-year-olds were getting together for sexual activity in local parks, in one another's homes, and even inside the school and on the school bus.

What the kids were doing isn't fit to be described here, but you can figure it out from the comment of one of the girls. "What's the big deal?" she said, "President Clinton did it."

Is this Bill Clinton's legacy? Has he become a role-model for young teen immorality? And has he coarsened our culture so much that we have to talk about it?

There are many surprising nuggets in this front-page story. For starters, the *Post* admitted that this "news" was a year old. Why did it take a year to find its way into print?

Other shockers in the *Post* story include the age of the children (13 and 14), the fact that they were A and B students from upper-income homes, their totally casual attitude toward sex among classmates, their lack of shame at being caught, their exhibitionism about sex, and the way the girls pursued the boys to "hook up."

It's clear from the *Post's* interviews with the students that these youngsters have bought into the notion that the only sex that is wrong is the kind that produces a live baby. Indeed, that is the sex-ed message taught in most public schools and advocated by SIECUS (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States) and Planned Parenthood.

For example, in the September/October 1988 *SIECUS Report*, SIECUS president Debra Haffner's article, called "Safe Sex and Teens," includes this instruction. "We should teach teens about oral sex and mutual masturbation in order to help them delay the onset of sexual intercourse and its resulting consequences."

SIECUS guidelines for sex education in schools include the following. Beginning at age 5, teaching that masturbation feels good; starting at age 9, teaching there are many ways to give and receive sexual pleasure without having intercourse; at age 12, more on the joys of masturbation alone or with a partner, as an alternative to intercourse; and at age 16, common sexual behaviors including use of pornography, bathing/showering together, and oral, vaginal or anal intercourse.

On CNN's *Crossfire* on May 8, 1997, Ms. Haffner summed up SIECUS's philosophy like this. "The average age of marriage is between 25 and 27 now. It is completely unrealistic . . . to say to young people, you need 13, 14 years of sexual unemployment." "Unemployment"? Another shocker in the *Washington Post* news story was that some middle school students were soliciting for "oral sex as a way to make money."

When SIECUS celebrated its 35th anniversary earlier this year, it invited visitors to its website to vote for ten out of a list of 100 persons whom SIECUS believes have "brought about a positive change in the way America thinks and talks about sexuality issues." The top ten were Judy Blume, Mary Calderone (SIECUS co-founder), Ellen DeGeneres, Joycelyn Elders, Hugh Hefner, Anita Hill, Magic Johnson, Madonna, Gloria Steinem, and Ruth Westheimer.

That list makes the "educational" bias of SIECUS's materials obvious. No wonder SIECUS is such a fierce opponent of abstinence-until-marriage courses in the schools.

Planned Parenthood has an active website specifically for youngsters (www.teenwire.com), which contains a lot of provocative sex chatter that teens can use as "how to" information. The website creatively redefines such words as sex, virginity and abstinence, and encourages teens to engage in "outercourse."

The public schools have given us 25 years of SIECUS/Planned Parenthood-style "comprehensive education about sexuality." The results are rampant immorality, illegitimacy, abortions, venereal diseases, infertility, and teenage emotional trauma that often follows them through their entire life.

Now we find that half of all infants born to girls younger than age 18 are fathered by adult men. There's an ugly word for that: statutory rape.

Why isn't this crime prosecuted? Pregnancy in underage unmarried girls is obvious evidence of possible sexual abuse. The possibility of that crime should be routinely investigated every time a pregnant adolescent girl comes into a clinic.

Medical professionals are obligated under law to report suspected sexual abuse of minors, with the precise legal requirements varying by state. Almost every state imposes prison or fines on those who intentionally fail to report, and these mandatory reporting laws usually supersede the privilege of confidential patient-physician communications. Yet, these laws are routinely ignored. Surveys indicate that youth service providers are ambivalent about reporting relationships between young teen girls and their adult boyfriends.

When are parents going to start keeping track of where their children are at all times? And demanding that classroom sex ed teach abstinence-until-marriage as the expected behavior instead of "comprehensive" immorality? And insisting that the laws against sexual abuse of minors and statutory rape be enforced?

Parents Are Winning Victories

Over the past decades of declining public school excellence and increasing public school crime, many parents have chosen the expensive option of transferring to private schools or the time-consuming option of homeschooling. Many more have remained in public schools, where they face a constant battle against inferior curricula that fail to teach the basics but indoctrinate children in beliefs and attitudes that the parents find contrary to their faith and values.

Despite public school hostility to parental supervision, parents are beginning to win some battles against the entrenched establishment. We can report a variety of remarkable victories.

◆ Illinois Governor George Ryan signed a law on July 16 that prohibits the public schools from forcing students to participate in School-to-Work. The new law forbids the public school system from requiring any student to meet occupational standards for grade level promotion or graduation unless that student is voluntarily enrolled in a job training program.

School-to-Work is a highly controversial program designed to "restructure" the public schools into job training centers instead of educational institutions teaching traditional academics. It originated with a federal law of that name signed by President Clinton in 1994.

The purpose of School-to-Work was best described by Rep. Henry Hyde (R-IL) as a plan "to train schoolchildren to be entry level workers for the national and global business community, with minimum academic requirements." It's also a plan to route school funding and authority from the federal government to bureaucrats and businessmen appointed by governors, thereby bypassing elected state legislatures and school boards.

Most parents expect more from the schools than training in work skills for minimum-wage jobs. They expect an academic education to enable their children to aspire to be all they can be.

◆ The Kansas State Board of Education voted on August 11 to remove the dogmatic teaching of Darwinian macro-evolution from public school science tests.

Contrary to widespread publicity accorded this Kansas action, no teacher will be prohibited from teaching evolution. Local schools and school boards can continue to make their own decisions in regard to teaching hypotheses about evolution, which are all too often presented in a way that is offensive to students of religious faith.

◆ Debra Gaudette of East Hartford, Connecticut, has triumphed in her five-year effort to see the results of her daughter's Connecticut Mastery Test given in the sixth grade. The U.S. Department of Education issued a ruling on June 1 saying that the school establishment had violated Mrs. Gaudette's parental rights under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Mrs. Gaudette pursued her long and lonely battle in the face of refusal, stonewalling, and hostility from the

school establishment. Since the tests, which may be filled with leading, privacy-invading, and even ridiculous questions, play a large role in determining the child's future, she believes that she, as parent, is entitled to know which questions her child missed and how they were graded.

FERPA was her winning weapon. While it is an outrage that it took the Connecticut school system five years to obey the law, her victory is a win for all parents who want to know how their children answer test questions and what criteria the school uses to grade them.

◆ Abstinence education has suddenly become trendy rather than old-fashioned. The new Miss Wisconsin, Mary Louise Kurey, stood on an abstinence education platform throughout her beauty pageant competition, despite warnings from contest officials that this would handicap her chances.

At least 19 contestants in other state beauty pageants, including three young women competing for the title of Miss Illinois, also used abstinence education as their platform. Beautiful girls are standing in open defiance of the explicit sex education (with demonstrations of sex devices) that has been forced on public school children for the last 20 years under guidelines from three special-interest groups: the National Education Association, Planned Parenthood, and SIECUS.

◆ Student-initiated prayer in Alabama was upheld in a new U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decision overturning a portion of a 1997 ruling by U.S. District Judge Ira DeMent. Alabama Attorney General Bill Pryor called the ruling "a victory for all the children in the public schools of our state, that they do not surrender their constitutional rights when they attend a public school in Alabama."

Parents who dare to exercise their parental rights over their children in public schools are often called "right-wing, book-burning censors who are trying to impose their fundamentalist views on others." On the contrary, it's the public schools that have been doing the "imposing," and parents who have the courage to resist are starting to be successful.

Phyllis Schlafly is the author of a successful do-it-yourself program to teach children how to read by phonics: *First Reader* (available at \$79.95 + shipping at 1-800-700-5228).

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