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Dumbing Down and Developing Diversity

Dumbing Down Tests

Tests, standards and accountability are the watchwords for public school education reform. Such good words! Can they do the job?

Unfortunately, the testing system has been corrupted. Under the 1997 revision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the school must give "appropriate accommodations" on every test to all "children with disabilities." Accommodation means that the child can be given assistance by someone who can read the test questions to him, explain to him what was read, and even write the answers for him. An 8th grade reading test is ridiculous if the student can't read it himself.

In the settlement of a lawsuit this month, Oregon pledged to "broaden the current list of allowable accommodations" and allow learning disabled students to use spell-check software on their writing tests. (*Wall Street Journal*, 2-1-01) Educators predict that this settlement will become a blueprint for other states to follow.

Allowing the schools or the states to assist learning disabled students, or even exclude them entirely, provides an open door to finagling the test results, and the states have figured out how to work this racket. Since schools receive additional federal money for every child labeled learning disabled, there is a financial incentive to increase the numbers.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported (Feb. 13, 2001) that the number of students who get extra time to complete the SAT because of a claimed learning disability has soared 50%, and the big increase is among students from wealthy private and suburban public schools. They are upper-income students who have learned how to "game" the system.

The high stakes involved in test results virtually mandate that teachers will be required to "teach to the test." Teaching to the test means teaching only the small percentage of material that will actually be covered on the test. Traditional teaching, on the other hand, involves presenting a considerable quantity of information to the students and then testing their knowledge by asking questions on items randomly selected from the total material. When test-taking takes priority over learning,

a narrower body of knowledge is taught.

Teaching to the test contains built-in incentives to fraud since teachers' salaries, bonuses and jobs, the school's funding and even its existence, and the student's chance to go to college or get a job, are already being tied to performance on these "high-stakes tests." Some teachers have already been put through workshops conducted by state bureaucrats to train them in which items to focus on so their students will perform well.

Tests are now called assessments, which is a semantic clue to the large element of subjectivity that has invaded the questions and the scoring. The most commonly understood meaning of the word assessment is the tax-collector's assessment of our property, and we all know how subjective that can be.

Some of the questions have no right or wrong answers and are scored by temporary workers rewarded for speed. More and more tests are burdened with the liberal/feminist dogmas called Political Correctness.

One Michigan test required students to write an argument for or against sending women into military combat. That topic will inevitably be scored on attitudes and values rather than on composition, grammar or spelling.

One National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test contains three questions that ascribe unworthy motives to the white settlers who came to America, three questions that measure the student's support of radical environmentalism, and a question instructing students to write a letter to their U.S. Senators telling them which government programs the student wants funded.

Nationally, tests are planned to be given only in reading and math. English, science and history will be given short shrift or even omitted, since tests will be all that matters in evaluating teachers and schools.

Dumbing Down Standards

When it comes to the standards to which assessments are tied, have we so quickly forgotten the uproar about the federally funded National History Standards of 1995 which omitted or downgraded some of America's greatest

achievers and used obscure and third-rate figures to teach diversity revisionism? Those standards were so anti-American they were denounced by the U.S. Senate in a vote of 99 to 1. (*Phyllis Schlafly Report*, March 1995)

Have we so quickly forgotten the national math standards, which were denounced by 200 prestigious mathematicians, including four Nobel Laureates, because they failed to teach basic skills? Their criticisms were published in a full-page ad in the *Washington Post* (11-18-99), but that had no effect on the U.S. Department of Education's determination to induce schools to adopt fuzzy math curricula. (*Phyllis Schlafly Report*, April 2000, p. 3)

A stated goal of the school reformers is to "narrow the achievement gap." But the gap can be closed by bringing top and bottom together, not necessarily by raising the bottom to a higher level of achievement.

Then there is the announced goal called accountability, a word that cries out to be followed by a preposition and an object. Accountability has no meaning unless one is accountable to someone or something. Federal bureaucrats, plus those who still subscribe to the unpopular Goals 2000/School-to-Work paradigm, want to make the schools accountable to the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor. But what parents want is accountability to parents and local school boards, not to a federal or state agency.

Dumbing Down Science

Liberals have long realized that, if they can win the battle over what is taught in schools, they will win elections. While they claim to believe in free speech, they usually have little tolerance for alternate points of view in the schools.

In 1999, a popularly-elected Kansas Board of Education changed its science teaching standards to allow students to make factual scientific criticisms of evolution. This created a national uproar in intellectual circles and the media and, in November 2000, the pro-evolution forces elected a majority pledged to teach evolution. On February 14, 2001, the new board voted to impose stricter evolution requirements. The new 2001 standards were posted at www.ksde.org alongside the 1999 standards.

The 2001 standards contain provisions to prohibit scientific evaluation and debate about evolution. This means dumbing down science in order to promote evolution. For example, the 1999 standards mandated that "no evidence or analysis of evidence that contradicts a current science theory should be censored." The 2001 standards deleted this requirement.

The 2001 standards encourage teachers to evade tough questions from students about the validity of evolution theories. Instead of addressing the students' questions, "the teacher should explain why the question is outside the domain of natural science."

The 2001 standards remove an educational geology experiment and replace it with "Toilet Paper Earth History." Students are instructed to "Plot the major

events (last ice age, beginning of Paleozoic Era, etc.) of earth history on a roll of toilet paper. Each sheet of toilet paper = 100 million years."

It gets worse. The 1999 standards taught the significance of an important scientific concept called "falsification," which is crucial to understanding what science is all about. As recognized by the U.S. Supreme Court in its 1993 *Daubert* decision, an idea is in the realm of science if it has the potential of being "falsified" by an experiment. For example, the idea that sunsets are beautiful is not scientific unless some procedure is contemplated to determine whether or not sunsets really are beautiful. On the other hand, a theory that the sun rises in the east is falsifiable because it could be disproved by the sun rising once in the west.

Evolution can encounter difficulties with the falsification test. Much of what is taught as evolution in the schools is not falsifiable at all and thus cannot truly be called science.

The 1999 Kansas standards stated: "Learn about falsification. Example: What would we accept as proof that the theory that all cars are black is wrong? . . . Answer: One car of any color but black and only one time. . . . No matter how much evidence seems to support a theory, it only takes one proof that it is false to show it to be false."

The 2001 Kansas Board eliminated the falsification test and substituted the following: "Share interpretations that differ from currently held explanations on topics such as global warming and dietary claims. Evaluate the validity of results and accuracy of stated conclusions."

Repeated problems with the theory of evolution have required its advocates to redefine evolution to mean merely "change." One biology textbook defines evolution as "the totality of all changes that have occurred in organisms from the beginnings of life on earth to the present day." That definition is so vacuous that it is both meaningless and incapable of the falsification test. Another textbook definition of evolution uses fancier language but is similarly empty: "any genotypic and resulting phenotypic change in organisms from generation to generation."

Once students accept such hollow definitions of evolution, it becomes easier to get them to accept more controversial notions. The hypothesis that all living organisms on earth are descended from one primordial ooze can become an exam question.

The 2001 standards pretentiously claim that evolution not only explains all life, it also explains all non-life. It defines biological evolution as "a scientific theory that accounts for present day similarity and diversity among living organisms and changes in non-living entities over time."

Under the 2001 standards, Kansas teachers will not be able to respond to serious questions asked by students who have read *Icons of Evolution* by the eminent biologist Dr. Jonathan Wells. This new book exposes the fraud and fakery in the most common examples and

illustrations used to support the theory of evolution in high school and college textbooks.

If you are baffled as to why the liberals pursue the dogmatic teaching of evolution, a clue might be found in the recent election. Of the 13 states that allow dissent over evolution, George W. Bush won all but one and, of the 10 states that impose the strictest pro-evolution requirements, Al Gore won all but three. States that have been imposing stricter pro-evolution requirements are quickly moving to the left politically. The traditionally conservative states of North Carolina, Indiana, Michigan and Missouri, which have been aggressively pushing evolution, recently elected liberal Senators.

The right to scientific dissent is closely related to the right to political dissent. When states abolish rights of students to criticize evolution, suppression of political dissent becomes easier.

Teaching Diversity

Two controversial California state laws, enacted last year by a one-vote margin and effective on New Year's Day 2001, mandate "diversity" teaching at all grade levels in order to promote tolerance of diverse sexual orientation.

AB 1785 requires the California Board of Education to revise state guidelines about curriculum and teacher training to include "human relations education, with the aim of fostering an appreciation of the diversity of California's population and discouraging the development of discriminatory attitudes and practices." The law covers kindergarten through grade 12 and provides supplemental resources to assure that this teaching includes immigrant children. The law also requires schools to collect data on so-called "hate crimes" and report them to the state Department of Education, which will share the data with the state Department of Justice. "Evidence of hostility" includes even telephone calls and mail.

AB 1931 allows school children to be taken on field trips to "participate in educational programs focused on fostering ethnic sensitivity, overcoming racism and prejudice, and countering hatred and intolerance." These terms are not defined and there is no limit on how "tolerance" could be interpreted. This law appropriates \$2 million for "tolerance" field trips in order to address "intolerance," "hatred," and "prejudice." Another \$150,000 is granted to an undisclosed "tolerance" organization to provide training programs for school personnel.

Nobody is fooled about the real meaning and goals of these laws. It was widely reported and admitted that AB 1785 will promote the acceptance of homosexuality and bisexuality by shaping the attitudes of schoolchildren and empowering gay organizations to go into the schools, and that AB 1931 will fund subjective programs that can easily be used by gay groups to teach children to approve of behavior that many parents consider objectionable.

These laws caused an uproar among parents. A coalition called the California Student Exemption Project has launched a major drive to help parents remove their children from such teaching. The Project is distributing an easy-to-use Student Exemption form addressed to school board members, superintendents, principals and teachers. (*Education Reporter*, Feb. 2001)

The comprehensive form states that it is a legal notice, pursuant to federal and state laws, telling the school "not to teach, instruct, advise, counsel, discuss, test, question, examine, survey or in any way provide information data or images to my child(ren)" concerning sex education, pupil's or their parents' personal beliefs or practices in sex and religion, sexually transmitted diseases, gender identity, sexual orientation, homosexuality issues, or "any alternatives to monogamous heterosexual marriage," without the parent's express written permission on an incident-by-incident basis. The form further advises the school that this exemption form extends to classroom instruction, displays, assignments, discussions, printed and electronic materials, field trips, assemblies, theatrical performances in school, and extracurricular school activities.

The exemption form is carefully written to comply with and implement California state law. Section 51240 of the California Education Code provides a specific option for families with religious convictions about sexuality issues, including "personal moral convictions." Section 51554 requires schools to give parents "written notification" of instruction on "sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS, human sexuality or family life that is delivered by an outside organization or guest speakers."

The Coalition distributing the Student Exemption form includes the Pacific Justice Institute, the Campaign for California Families, Life Legal Defense Foundation, the Pro-Family Law Center, and the U.S. Justice Foundation (a private group). The Student Exemption form is specific to California. Its sponsors hope that it can become a model tool for parents nationwide since gay pressure groups are moving rapidly to put their agenda in all public schools.

Teaching Explicit Sex

The persistent advocates of contraceptive-style sex education have become more and more resourceful in using taxpayer funds to impose their casual-sex attitudes and explicit-sex instruction on other people's children. All 50 states and at least 34 national organizations receive federal funds from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) for the purpose of developing and implementing "Comprehensive School Health [Sex] Education" programs.

The CDC-funded "Programs-That-Work" uses role-playing as an integral part of the curriculum, with girls required to role-play to convince boys to wear condoms, girls discussing AIDS concerns in a lesbian relationship, and a boy and girl discussing "safer sex with multiple partners." Programs-That-Work encourages students to brainstorm ways to "eroticize condom use with a part-

ner." They are told, "Do something positive and fun. Go to the store together. Buy lots of different brands and colors. Plan a special day when you can experiment."

The manual instructs teachers that no student may be excused from the activities. Students are instructed to make agreements to maintain confidentiality about the sessions, *i.e.*, not tell their parents.

After outraged parents in Ohio read Programs-That-Work and discovered what "comprehensive" really means, they persuaded the Ohio House Education Committee last March to block the use of nearly \$1 million in CDC sex-education grants. It is highly unusual for a state to reject a federal grant.

CDC-style sex education caused a similar uproar in Illinois last July. Through the Illinois Board of Education, the CDC contracted with Illinois State University to pay \$120,000 to train 2,000 teachers to teach the curriculum called "Reducing the Risk," which is one of the CDC-funded Programs-That-Work. This curriculum includes explicit sex instruction, field trips to family planning clinics, and visits to drugstores (preferably with a partner) to compare brands, textures and colors of condoms.

One Illinois newspaper columnist commented, "I don't even want to know what they have to do to get an A in that class."

Drugging Children in School

Production of Ritalin increased by nearly 700% between 1990 and 1997, and usage increases every year in order to deal with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The pediatric guidelines for diagnosing ADHD are subjective; *e.g.*, often has difficulty awaiting turn, occasionally may do things compulsively, easily distracted from tasks, fails to give close attention to details, makes careless mistakes. With such non-scientific behavioral criteria, it's no wonder that extraordinary numbers of children are accused of having ADHD and three to four million U.S. schoolchildren are using the controversial stimulant.

One explanation for the boom in Ritalin usage use can be found in the 1990 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA mandates that "eligible children receive access to special education and/or related services." The old excuse of "my dog ate my homework" has been replaced by "I got an ADHD diagnosis." Since this labeling brings more money into the schools, it's not surprising that schools often pressure parents to get an ADHD diagnosis and put their child on Ritalin.

John Silber, Chancellor of Boston University, says that the "principal attraction of Ritalin is that it is a comparatively cheap way to get symptomatic relief. ... It is in fact a classic example of a cheap fix: low-cost, simple and purely superficial." It's so easy to use Ritalin to deal with behavioral and discipline problems, to get boys to sit down, shut up, and do what they're told.

Many high school shootings have been linked to prescribed mind-altering drugs. Oregon high school killer Kip Kinkel had been given Ritalin and Prozac, Columbine killer Eric Harris had taken another psychotropic drug, Georgia high school student T.J. Solomon had been on Ritalin prior to his alleged shooting spree, and Oklahoma middle school student Seth Trickey was on two drugs described to have psychotic effects when he allegedly shot at four students.

According to a study reported in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, about one percent of preschoolers aged 2 to 4 are using Ritalin or Ritalin-like drugs, and that percentage is increasing rapidly. Ritalin has not been approved by the FDA for use by children under age six. Many believe that a diagnosis of ADHD is nearly impossible to make in preschoolers because behaviors that are considered signs of the disorder in older children are normal behaviors for toddlers.

Matthew Smith began taking Ritalin at age six. In March 2000 at age 14, he was still on Ritalin when he suddenly collapsed while skateboarding and died that same evening. Oakland County (MI) Medical Examiner Ljubisa Dragovic determined the cause of death to be Ritalin. Matthew's "long-term exposure to stimulants" was the only explanation he could find. Pressure rained down on Dr. Dragovic to change his conclusion, but he held firm, saying: "I'm not telling people what to do with their children or patients. These are our findings. Take them or leave them."

A parent should agree to place a child on Ritalin only after an examination by the child's own physician (not the school's) and the parent is satisfied that there isn't some medical or behavioral or dietary problem that might better be treated in another way. Parents should be alert to the conflict of interest in allowing school employees to dictate treatment for their children.

Some educators are waking up to the overuse of Ritalin. In November 1999, the Colorado State School Board became the first to pass a resolution warning about the dangers of Ritalin. In November 2000, the Texas State Board of Education adopted a resolution expressing serious concern about the tremendous growth in the use of Ritalin and other psychiatric drugs on schoolchildren. The resolution urges local school boards to "use proven academic and/or management solutions to resolve behavior, attention and learning difficulties." (Full text in *Education Reporter*, January 2001.)

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