

## Questions on 'Whole Language' Presented to Hannibal School Board

1. Is whole language a theory, or an experimentally documented method of instruction?
2. What avenues of inquiry were followed in researching whole language before its implementation here, and were opposing viewpoints sought?
3. What empirical data has been gathered comparing the success rate of whole language to established teaching methods? What are the results?
4. Dr. Jeanne Chall, professor in the Harvard University Graduate School of Education, calls the move towards whole language "shocking," and says there has been little research to document the method's success in this country. Is she right?
5. Whole language instructors here say phonics and the basic language skills are being taught. How?
6. How do schools such as Pettibone and Oakwood, where the whole language approach has been widely implemented, stack up to the other elementary schools?
7. How do teachers evaluate whole language here? Would the board be willing to do a confidential survey of their views?
8. Are parents here generally satisfied with their children's progress in whole language classrooms? Could a similar confidential survey of parents be made?
9. Considering the move of whole language away from formal textbook instruction, can we be assured that the \$80,000 to \$100,000 budgeted for a new reading textbook series will be money well spent? Will the textbooks be used?
10. Whole language represents a teaching approach dramatically dissimilar to sequential skills instruction. How does the school district plan to reconcile the differing approaches within the school system?
11. Is the school board willing to study the use of the whole language approach in our schools and make an objective evaluation?

Can MMAT scores be made available for a comparison?

## 'Whole Language' Under Attack

The whole language method of teaching reading has burst into controversy in Hannibal, Missouri. The controversial method has been fully implemented in two of six elementary schools, and in several others to a lesser extent.

Many parents are concerned that their children in those schools are not learning reading skills such as phonics. Some parents assert that their first grade children are simply memorizing their first books instead of learning to read them. Parents of fourth graders complain that their children fail to have the spelling, grammar and sentence-structure skills they expect at that level.

On December 20, one parent, Susan Denkler, presented the Hannibal School Board with a list of eleven questions pertaining to the whole language system. At a special open forum on January 9 called specifically to discuss the

whole language method, she again requested answers to her questions. According to Mrs. Denkler, she was promised by a spokesman for the school board, both on television and at the beginning of the January 9 meeting, that at least some of the answers would be provided that evening.

The meeting adjourned, however, without any answers being given to the questions. According to Mrs. Denkler, "What parents locally are saying is that, if whole language truly is what the school system says it is, they should be able to prove it with test scores. However, they have denied us access to the Missouri Mastery Achievement Test results that would give us that documentation. Pursuing our legal options to obtain those test scores may be our next move. This is new ground for us, so we're taking this step by step."

## Seminar Trains Schools How To Combat Parents

A seminar called "Free To Learn... Free To Teach... Free to Think" was sponsored by the Washington State Superintendent of Public Instruction in Bellevue (near Seattle) on November 17, 1989. The purpose of the seminar was to train school district teams on how to counterattack against parents who try to assert parental rights in the public schools. The invitational letter described the meeting's goal as how to "manage" a "challenge," and it promised to provide resources to help school districts meet this challenge.

The use of taxpayers' money to finance the seminar was criticized by a parents' group called Citizens United for a Better Education. The group accused the seminar of violating the rights of parents and of excluding diverse opinions. The state superintendent's office acknowledged that some money for the event came from a Title IV Desegregation Assistance Grant and some from the Washington state branch of the National Education Association.

On the day of the seminar, two mothers, along with about ten members of the media and the public, were initially barred from the meeting. The *Journal American* protested,

saying that such exclusion violated the state's Open Meetings Act, and all were eventually allowed inside. The two mothers, however, were excluded from some later sessions, allegedly because of "lack of space," as were many others who tried to attend.

### The Text Used in the Seminar

"What's Left After the Right? A Resource Manual For Educators" was the text for the seminar. The 196-page manual was written by Dr. Janet L. Jones for the Washington Education Association with funding from the National Education Association.

The manual asserted that, during the past decade, challenges to public school curricula have increased at an "alarming" rate. The manual was designed to provide information about the "Far Right" and to provide educational personnel with assistance in dealing with the tactics of those whom the authors labeled "educational censors."

Under a heading called "Nuances," the manual states that the text uses the following terms interchangeably: "Ultra-conservative, Far Right, Religious Right, Righteous Right, New Right, Radical Right." This was followed by a

## North Dakota Voters Defeat Sex Education

North Dakota voters dealt a surprise and stunning defeat to a "Comprehensive Health Education Act" in a special election on December 5. The Act would have mandated comprehensive health courses for all public school students in the state from Kindergarten through grade 12, including urging the use of condoms to prevent AIDS.

The Comprehensive Health Education Act was passed by the North Dakota Legislature in 1989. Under North Dakota law, it could be "referred" to the voters in a referendum if petitions with sufficient signatures were filed with the state. Opponents of the law needed 13,055 signatures, and they filed 15,255 on July 27, setting the stage for the December 5 special election.

Numerous large statewide organizations endorsed the Comprehensive Health Education Act and urged a yes vote on the referendum. The leader was a special medical/health coalition called Tobacco Free North Dakota, which included Blue Cross/Blue Shield, the March of Dimes, the Cancer Society, the Heart Association, and many doctors' and nurses' associations. They worked largely under the guise of stopping smoking and providing good dental care. Tobacco Free North Dakota put out the brochure advocating a yes vote.

Others in the coalition supporting Comprehensive Health Education were the North Dakota Conference of Churches, which include two Roman Catholic dioceses and most mainline Protestant churches, all the state education and health departments, the National Women's Political Caucus, and the Governor and his wife.

Opposition to the Act was led by an ad hoc grassroots group calling itself the Citizens' Committee for Awareness in Education. Its principal means of spreading its message was a small flier, made on a home computer, which



set forth objections to teaching a sequential course for 13 years that "consists of behavior modification, values clarification, desensitization to the homosexual movement and promotion of condoms for 'safer sex.'"

The group also argued that the Act would diminish local control and force local schools to adopt the program in accordance with "rules written by the Superintendent of Public Instruction," or risk a cut-off of school funds. The Citizens' group asserted that, under the Act, the local school would be required to teach the "definition of sexual intercourse at the grade 4 level."

The Citizens' group spent approximately \$4,000 on radio and television ads, and members participated in public forums and debates all over the state.

It was considered a major upset when the Comprehensive Health Education Act was defeated by 60% to 40%. Several tax increases, most of which were to benefit the public schools, were defeated in the same election.

Voters were surprised after the first of the year when, despite the emphatic vote in the referendum, the State Health and Education Departments mailed out the guidelines for the Comprehensive Health course to all public schools anyway. Reportedly, the State Attorney General has been swamped with calls about this apparent flouting of the voters' wishes.

### What's Left After the Right?

A Resource Manual for Educators

chart identifying the major issues that divide conservative and liberals in the public school context.

The manual identifies the following as particular targets of the Right: (1) *Choices* (the N.E.A. nuclear war curriculum), (2) *Impressions* (a whole-language reading series), (3) *Tactics* (a "thinking skills" curriculum), (4) sex education, (5) global studies, (6) drug-alcohol courses, (7) celebrations of "pagan holidays" such as Halloween, and (8) deep thinking, holistic health, visual imagery, centering, astrology, biofeedback, and medication.

The manual identifies what it calls "Friends

of Public Education." These include the American Library Association, the American Association of School Administrators, American Civil Liberties Union, Americans for Religious Liberty, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Council of Chief State School Officers, Freedom to Read Foundation, National Coalition Against Censorship, National Council for Social Studies, National Education Association, National School Boards Association, and People for the American Way.

### A "Values Dichotomy"

The manual provides a "values dichotomy," inviting participants to identify where they stand philosophically. They are asked to place themselves on a scale between opposite points of view, such as "School libraries should contain rich, diverse and controversial materials" vs. "School libraries should contain only wholesome, positive and non-controversial materials," and "School nurses should provide contraceptives to students who request them" vs. "School nurses should not provide contraceptives to students."

See Seminar, page 2

## EDUCATION BRIEFS

The U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments on January 9 in the case *Mergens v. Westside Community Schools*, which poses the question of whether public high school students have a constitutional right to meet for voluntary prayer and Bible study in after-school clubs. Considered to be one of the most important religious freedom cases of the last decade, the decision will affect nearly 14 million students. The case started in 1985 when Bridget Mergens and her friends were denied permission to form a Bible Club at their Omaha, NE high school. Represented by the National Legal Foundation, they alleged violations of their constitutional rights of free speech, assembly, and religion. They lost in the District Court but won in the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Illinois public schools will be required to teach students about the Nazi Holocaust, starting this year under a new state law. All public school students statewide will be taught one "unit" starting January 1. The bill allows local school districts to determine the curriculum. The Chicago Public Schools say they are already complying with the law, since lessons about the Holocaust are included in required world and American history classes, according to a spokesman.

"Cheaters in Schools May Not Be Students, But Their Teachers" was a page 1 headline in the *Wall Street Journal* on November 2. The news article described the sad case of a popular teacher at Greenville High School in South Carolina, Nancy Yeargin, who admitted she had given the questions and answers to her students two days before the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills was given to ninth graders. She was fired and prosecuted under a South Carolina law that makes it a crime to breach test security; she pleaded guilty and paid a \$500 fine. Evidence of widespread cheating has surfaced in several states in the last year, and sales of test-coaching booklets are booming. Observers say there is "incredible" pressure on schools systems and teachers to raise test scores. A 50-state study released in September 1989 by an Albuquerque, NM research group called Friends for Education concluded that "outright cheating by American educators" is "common" because teachers "teach the test," as Mrs. Yeargin did, although most are never caught.

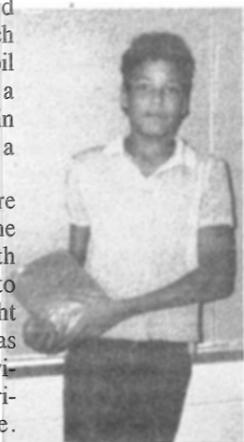
*Illiteracy: An Incurable Disease or Education Malpractice?* is the title of a 15-page booklet published by the U.S. Senate Republican Policy Committee. It is an excellent explanation of why we have a literacy problem and of the contrast between superior and inferior methods of teaching reading. It is available from Senator William Armstrong, chairman, Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510.

*Education Reporter* (ISSN 0887-0608) is published monthly by Eagle Forum Education & Legal Defense Fund with editorial offices at Box 618, Alton, Illinois 62002, (618) 462-5415. The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the persons quoted and should not be attributed to Eagle Forum Education & Legal Defense Fund. Annual subscription \$25. Back issues available @ \$2. Second Class postage paid at Alton, Illinois.

# 'Flour Sack Babies' Teach Sex Ed to 8th Graders

All 127 eighth grade students, both boys and girls, at Urbana Middle School in Urbana, Illinois, were required to carry around a "flour sack baby" for the week and a half after Thanksgiving as part of the "parenting" curriculum in the Home Economics class. The school issued a five-pound sack of flour to each pupil, which the pupil could dress up like a baby or just keep in the sack and draw a face on it.

The students were instructed to carry the flour sack baby with them at all times, to every class for eight school days, as well as to all weekend activities including the Friday night dance.



Students were told they would not get credit for the Home Economics course (which is a required course) if they did not participate fully in the flour sack baby project.

The teacher, Mrs. Janine Duncan, sent home a letter to parents which she requested be signed to indicate their "awareness" of the project. The letter was definitely not a permission form. The rather lengthy letter warned of the danger and burden of teenage pregnancies and implied that they could be reduced or limited by this "parenting simulation" and by teaching "conception control."

Since the Christmas holidays, the Home Economics class has been engaged in class discussions of students' feelings and family relationships. In one class, the teacher publicly asked each student, "How do you feel about your body?" Half way through the polling, one overweight girl responded by saying, "I don't have to answer that question." The teacher insisted that the pupil respond because "this is a



required course and a required question."

When the girl still refused to answer, the teacher commented, "It's obvious how she feels about her body." The girl was later found weeping because she thought she had been humiliated in front of the entire class.

The Home Economics teacher has told several parents who complained about particulars of the curriculum that "Home Economics is no longer what you think it is." In the current semester, only two days were devoted to cooking and none at all to sewing. ■

## Seminar Trains Schools *continued from page 1*

One section of the manual is devoted to teaching school personnel how to counteract what the manual calls "fallacious argument techniques used by the Righteous Right." The manual gives the following as what it calls a typical example of fallacious argument used by the Right: "All teachers are secular humanists. All secular humanists are communists. Therefore, all teachers are communists." No incident is cited of a conservative ever using this argument.

The manual presents several examples of what it calls a "typical Righteous Right fallacious argument." One reads as follows: "Public school teachers teach values clarification. This is all part of the secular humanist program. They are a teaching moral system diametrically opposed to the moral system of the Judeo-Christian traditions. Because of that, Christian children attending a secular humanist public school come home with values conflicting with those they get at home. It can be a serious problem." The manual urges the teacher to become "a fallacy expert" and counterattack against the above.

The manual gives what it calls "Helpful Tips" for dealing with various scenarios to confront the Right. These include: make parents present all their complaints in writing, make them define secular humanism, make them track the source of any federal funding the district is using, have school personnel give the school's interpretation of the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment, invoke as many statutes and district policies as possible, and threaten the parents with lawsuits for any criticism they may direct at the school.

The manual describes in detail all kinds of parental complaints, including complaints about homosexuals teaching in the classroom, foul language in library books for the primary grades, parents removing displays of witches from the classroom, the drama club performing a play with foul language and immoral behavior, the presentation of scholars to request a balanced treatment of creation, and the use of visualization methods in the Talented and Gifted programs.

### Challenge Parents' Credibility

School personnel are urged to "Challenge the credibility of the attacking group" and "avoid giving legitimacy to Far Right charges or their sources." Teachers are instructed to network with "other individuals and groups that have something to lose by the encroach-

ment of the Far Right philosophy" such as libraries, mainline religions, local radio and television, some women's groups, academic organizations, and labor unions.

The manual provides sample questions for interviewing a candidate for the school board which are designed to get the candidate on record as subservient to the school establishment and hostile to critics. A typical question is: "How would you respond to a parent who wants the district to limit access to or remove books from the library?"

The manual reprints the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA), a federal law (sometimes known as the Hatch Amendment) whose regulations were promulgated in 1984. This is followed by what the manual calls the "Stretch" letter, a form letter written in 1984 by the Maryland Coalition of Concerned Parents on Privacy Rights in Public Schools and designed for parents to send to public schools to assert their rights as parents under the PPRA and the First Amendment to the Constitution. The manual labels it a "stretch" letter because it allegedly "stretches" the intent of the PPRA. The manual then gives a form letter which schools can use to respond, accusing parents of having "incorrect information." This form letter asserts that the parent has no recourse unless the parent can prove that the questioned program is funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

In addition to the manual, participants in the seminar were provided with a complete copy of the 1989 report issued by People for the American Way on so-called "censorship" attempts by parents and taxpayers in public schools. (reported in the *Education Reporter*, October 1989.)

### Political Action Workbook

The seminar speaker who aroused the most controversy was Joanne Beard, who is the author of a 51-page Political Action Workbook called "If You Don't, They Will." It gives detailed instructions on how school personnel can organize to defeat parents' rights over what is taught to their children, as well as citizens' opposition to tax increases for public schools.

This workbook advises school personnel to network with the local ministerial association (described as "VERY useful"), the Women's Political Caucus, People for the American Way, and the PTAs. Use of Republican Party is accompanied by the caveat "careful here."

The workbook advises the school personnel

to keep secret as long as possible the formation of a Political Action Committee (PAC) and the involvement of any particular member in the PAC. The workbook describes how to set up a non-profit corporation as a front group to "lend legitimacy" to the effort.

The workbook details how to build a Voter ID list in order to get out the vote for school board members and other candidates. The manual urges starting a supportive voter ID list by using the state's National Education Association list. The workbook urges teachers to use their classrooms for politics: "Ask Association leaders to have teachers form a list of the parents in their room identified as potentially supportive. Make sure they include addresses and phone numbers."

The workbook tells school personnel to start a "quote file" on the candidates they hope to unseat, and/or on the statements from "the groups you hope to outsmart." The building of this secret file on critics of the public school system is described in the workshop as "wonderfully satisfying."

The immense detail of this political action handbook is indicated by this instruction to participants: "Whenever appearing at official functions, such as board meetings, wear conservative, authoritative dress. This should not be underestimated in value."

The "Free to Learn... Free to Teach... Free to Think" seminar was endorsed by the Washington Library Media Association, the Washington Association of School Administrators, the Anti-Defamation League: Pacific NY Regional Office, and the Washington State Council for the Social Studies.

Since the seminar, Citizens United for a Better Education has unsuccessfully called for an investigation of the use of taxpayer funds for this seminar and also for the release to the public of the materials used at the seminar. ■

**Sex Education: How to Respond**, a 16-page booklet of advice for parents on how to deal with the schools when they start a sex or "family living" course, is available at \$1.50 per copy from the Education Reporter, Box 618, Alton, Illinois 62002. The booklet is a "how to" for parents — how to evaluate sex course curricula, and how to answer the objections made by the schools when parents raise questions.

# FOCUS: AFT President Answers Questions

*An important speech by Al Shanker, longtime president of the American Federation of Teachers, the nation's second largest teachers union, was published in the December 1989 issue of the Education Reporter. The address was given in Denver, Colorado, to a conference of teachers and school administrators sponsored by the Gates Foundation, September 20-23, 1989. Published below is a slightly condensed transcript of the question and answer period which followed the speech.*

**Q:** I want to start with what you said about trouble at the top: that 80 percent of our best kids can't write a coherent paragraph, that the overall majority of American kids wouldn't be able to get into colleges in other countries. You say that, and yet the public is very pleased, if you go by the Gallup poll. This year, the number went up to almost 50 percent who gave the schools an A or a B. You say things are awful, but the public says, A or B. How do you explain that?

**A:** We saw the same thing on recent international tests that were given in mathematics and science. The top country that came out was South Korea, and then there was a big gap, then there were Canadian provinces and various European countries, and another big gap, then the U.S. We were down at the bottom, tied with Ireland once and with French students in Ontario. Yet when they asked the Korean students whether they think they are good at mathematics and science, they answered no. The Americans thought they did the best of all, even though they were at the bottom. The fact is, colleges are taking these kids. **They're all going to college, so essentially we are kidding ourselves. What we've done is constantly lower standards and make people feel good about their lack of achievement, and we're not comparing ourselves on any real standard.** We're just saying if my kid gets into college, my kid must be doing all right. So, we are just complacent. We're not really knowledgeable. We don't have any standards out there that translate into real things. All we have are scores that say 67 percent of our kids read above average. What does that mean? Or, you got X on SATs. What does that mean? What we need is a standard that says, here is the percentage of our kids who are able to write a decent letter. That's what we ought to have out there for parents. This is the percentage of kids who are able to do two-step problems. We do almost none of that.

**We are kidding ourselves. Kids in college are getting their elementary and high school education and calling it a B.A. degree.**

**Q:** You make it sound almost like a giant conspiracy. We have these tests that educators use, the same tests year after year, so 67 percent score above average and nobody ever asks the significant question.

**A:** No, I don't think it is a conspiracy, but I think the effect is horrible. Americans are in love with objectivity. It is easy to score an objective test where we have multiple choice questions. It is much more difficult to objectively score an essay. You can get into arguments about it. It is also more time consuming to score an essay. Take college admissions. I think we softened on college admissions for very good reasons. All colleges around the world had unreasonably crazy standards, which kept most people out and only a few people came in. Should we have softened them to some extent? The answer is yes. To the degree that they are now softened? No, we have huge numbers of kids in colleges and universities who are basically getting their elementary and high school education and calling it a Bachelor of Arts degree. By the way, the fact that every kid in America can get into college acts as a disincentive to work hard in school. In Europe and these other countries, parents are telling their kids, the same as my parents told me: Al, if you don't do better you're not going to be able to get into college. **No American parent can say that to his kid because the kids know that there are some colleges that will take anybody and give him a B.A.**

**Q:** You said that nobody is doing anything. Yet we've had six-and-a-half years of education reform. Are you just dismissing it out of hand?

**A:** I think the best answer to that came from a vice president of IBM. He was in charge of all their internal educational programs, and when asked about these traditional reforms that had taken place over the last six years he said, "If I were in charge of an IBM factory and 30 percent of the computers fell off the assembly line before they ever reached the end and we couldn't find them anywhere, and 95 percent of the computers that did reach the end of the assembly line didn't work most of the time, about the last thing in the world I'd be talking about is a longer work year with our plant."

**Q:** But education reform — is it energy badly spent?

**A:** I think it has not been very well spent. What it has done is this. For kids who were able to take tougher courses and meet higher standards, telling them that they could no longer take soft electives, that will result in having them take tougher courses and learning more.

**Q:** For those top kids?

**A:** It will do something for maybe the top 25 percent and get them to work a little harder and that's good. It may have some negative effects on the other side. To the extent we tell the kids at the bottom that, unless you reach the following standards, you can't graduate, we're telling them there is nothing there for continuing their education. But essentially these are mechanical reforms. I happen to favor most of them. I don't think schools ought to be a place of recreation. I think we ought to take the life of mind seriously. There is not enough time to do what we have to do. I like most of the reforms, but most of the reforms say, let's go back to the good old days. Most of the reforms are quasi James Madison High School. Let's go back to four years of English, two years of this, etc. Were those good schools? Sure, I went to them; look, here I am — marvelous education. But how many kids graduated high school in 1940 — 20 percent graduated in 1940. So, if all you're going to do is raise standards and do things in exactly the same old way, you are going to go back to what you had before. You are going to push more and more kids out of

school. The problem is not just to raise standards and, therefore, get a lot of kids to fail, and most of them will if you just raise standards. The problem is to figure out for the first time in human history what are the different ways of reaching different kinds of kids, and I don't mean black, white, brown. I mean three different kids who can be brothers and sisters but who all learn in different ways and at different rates. We now have the understanding, we have the technology. We have all these things. Business is doing it. Business is getting away from a factory system, which was very effective for quite a while. They find out they can actually make better products by having workers work in teams and participate in helping to design the plant and the quality of the product. We will learn from business. That's how we got these schools. We copied them from factories.

**Public education will not be around 5 years from now if we keep turning out lemons.**

**Q:** My question to you is: education is a social institution; how can it be expected to make changes from within when the society and the government which it serves have no clear direction?

**A:** I think that's why we got these changes from the outside. School boards and legislators are constantly being pushed by others — what are you going to do about this? Essentially, you then come up with the best ideas you can and put them in, which is what they've done. What I'm saying is that you need a much more fundamental rethinking, and you need to put the appropriate incentives in place for the people who are working in the system. They've got to come up with ideas which are very, very different. That is what American business is doing today. Look at General Motors the way it used to be and look at the Saturn plant which is now open and starting to produce. Look at the differences at Hewlett-Packard today as against an old-fashioned factory. Look at those changes out there. There is nobody out there who stops us from doing these things.

**Q:** But business is in a survival mode; they must make the changes in order to survive.

**A:** So do we. **Public education will not be around five years from now if we keep turning out the lemons we keep turning out.**

Don't think that General Motors was a big bureaucracy. They are now turning out more automobiles with 400,000 people than they turned out with 700,000 people a decade ago, and they are better cars. The problem is the old frog problem. Put a frog into a pot of water on a stove and light the fire. First the frog will say, gee this is wonderful cool water, I love it. Then as the water starts heating up, the frog will say, gee it's getting very comfortable here. Eventually the water will reach the boiling point and the frog will be boiled to death and you'll have frog soup. At any moment the frog could have jumped but he didn't, he got used to it very slowly. That's what is happening to us. What's happening to us is, you see Chelsea but that's far away, that's Massachusetts. You see Chicago, but that's far away. You see choice plans on the agenda of the President and the Govern-

ment, and you see a mass of 70 percent of the American people now saying that they favor some form of school choice. Well, that's tremendous criticism. That says I want my kid to be able to get out from under. You see 50 percent of the American people favoring public assistance to non-public schools. That's the water heating up. Some diseases are great; it hurts like mad, so you've got to do something about it. Other diseases just kind of creep up on you quietly and you get adjusted to this little thing and that little one until you're finished. I don't know what else to do. In another hour, I could go place by place, state by state, and show that the Chelseas and the Chicagos are not unique. It's coming to you; and if your teachers' union and your school board and your state board of education, if everyone here who believes in the future of public education doesn't take this seriously, you are going to find yourself with some radical solution. Believe me, no one in Chicago thought that this was going to happen to them.

**Q:** Is there in existence somewhere a set of measures for levels of English, for levels of math that already exist, that we can use as a guideline in this state for a starting point if we were to take a program like yours in hand. Secondly, is there in conjunction with that a way to help teachers improve their own abilities as teachers to help their students meet these levels also — kind of take the sting out of change, if you will?

**A:** The national assessment publishes these report cards so, if you look at the kinds of samples and questions they have used, they are pretty good. By the way, I am starting with a very narrow assessment program. I think these things are all very important, but in writing you can also measure the ability to express, to persuade, to engage in critical thinking, so I am not just talking about technical writing but I am talking about a whole bunch of things which are higher order and which are extremely important. Just look at what every other country does in the world. How do they decide that someone gets an A, B, or C on an essay exam?

**Teachers teach to the tests.**

**Q:** We used to have essay exams, then we moved away. Al mentioned our great faith in objectivity — the notion that standardized tests would somehow be more objective.

**A:** They are very objective, but you are measuring things that are hardly worth measuring. Teachers spend an awful lot of their time teaching to the tests that now exist. Two years ago, a dentist in West Virginia, discovered that the kids in West Virginia were above average. He was shocked because West Virginia doesn't spend much on education. So he started calling other state departments of education in Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas and Oklahoma. He found out they were above average, too. He then had his receptionist call every state ed department in the country, and he found out that a majority of kids in every single state in the country were above average in reading and math. Well, that's because average isn't what you think it means. The average is determined by taking a sample group of students before the test is ever marketed, and whatever the average that that group gets, that's the average. Then the same test is used for 8-12 years after that, and every year the kids in

# AFT President Answers Questions *continued from page 3*

almost all states get higher and higher averages, except in four states where they don't know which exam is going to be used. In those four states, the averages don't go up. That tells you what happens to these things.

**Q:** I wonder if you'd clarify something about the process for change that you described, as schools differentiate themselves and professionals determine what it is that they can do to meet the needs of their students. You seem to almost imply that parents and the community, the business community, etc., were outsiders in that process and didn't belong. I wonder if you could clarify whether or not you feel that way and, if not, what appropriate way those parties could be involved in that process?

## Objective tests measure things that are hardly worth measuring.

**A:** Well, my feeling is that the schools that would win in my competition are those schools that would respect children and figure out what develops positive self-image and gets kids to work hard. I would imagine it would be those schools that would figure out they are too big now and they ought to break down to more smaller and more humane units. I would guess that it would be those schools. You see, I think that as long as the teacher is standing in front of a class and lecturing, there is no place for a parent in the school or any volunteer, because anybody who walks into my class while I am lecturing—at best, it could be disturbing the class; at worst, you might be a witness. So I don't want you there.

On the other hand, if you have a classroom that looks a lot more like a Boy Scout troop where three kids are reading something, and two others are working on a computer terminal, and a few others are doing something else and they are all doing very important and high level work on their own and in different ways, then I can use all the parents and all the community volunteers. I would welcome them in and make them part of the school. I don't want to tell people that. I just want to say: look, here's what we are going to measure, and here's what you get if you win, and here's what you get if you lose. I think that in five years you'd find out that those faculties that found out how to really involve students and parents and community would be the winners. I have enough faith in that so that I don't have to tell them from above that's part of the law. I'm not going to tell them what books to use. I'm not going to tell them not to lecture. I'm not going to tell them anything. That is their business. They are going to be the winners and losers.

By the way, right now, research tells you that almost nothing works. You know why? Because they say, well, if you reduce class size nothing happens. Of course, because usually the teacher gives exactly the same lesson to the smaller class as to the larger one. If a kid can't sit still five hours and listen in a class of 30, the same kid won't be able to sit still and listen in a class of 25. We haven't made changes significant enough to be able to measure anything. I believe that successful schools will do all those things, and that after a while that will compel all the others to adopt exactly the same practices.

**Q:** There are some models of this. South Carolina has state-wide legislation that essentially categorizes schools into one of four different divisions, four leagues based on the socio-economic status of the student body. It is just a one year competition. It is not just standardized tests; it is also on student attendance and teacher attendance. At the end of the year, cash money goes to the winning schools. It doesn't go to the teachers, it goes to the school. But they have been doing that for a couple of years, so you can learn something from that. There is also another fascinating reward/incentive deal—a question about the involvement of the students. Students have a wonderful opportunity to screw things up, to deprive their teachers of that 50 grand or 20 grand.

**A:** That happened in California. There was a top school district in the state, and all of a sudden last June it came out lowest in the state test scores. When the faculty asked them what happened, the kids said: look, we asked you to help us prepare ourselves for our SATs; we're interested in getting into top-notch colleges. You didn't help us with our SATs, you spent all the time practicing on this exam which would make *you* look good; so we were terrific, we went in there and we got every one of them wrong.

## Not 1/100th of 1% of people in education believe we are in trouble in education.

**Q:** Now how do we presume to move in this direction of essays when, based on my experience of the two-line to eight-line essays which I have been receiving for years from my kids' teachers commenting on whatever they were doing, I daresay many of them were in your 80 percent. How can it happen?

**A:** If you try to teach these essays in 2.5 million self-contained classrooms, there are going to be losers—just as if you try to teach math in all those classes where all teachers don't teach math. You've got to move over to a system where there is a board-certified teacher who is the head of a team, and then you're going to have to have regularly licensed teachers, some of whom are strong in these things and some are not; and then you're going to need a greater use of interns and residents, that is, develop a teacher training program for half of their college time. In hospitals under the supervision of a doctor, interns and residents do quite a lot.

**I think you cannot function in your schools without bringing in well-educated volunteers from the outside in the near future.** I think you've got to move away from the self-contained classroom so that you can answer this question of how can you guarantee that every student will have contact with a teacher who can write a good essay, who knows mathematics, and who is able to do these things. You can't do it now. By the way, there is no point in firing all the ones you've got now; you've got nobody lined up to take their jobs. The ones who are lined up are the ones who were rejected because they weren't as good as the ones who are there now. You've got the same problem a businessman does. Don't dump on them because they've got other opportuni-

ties; they'll go. Do the best you can to develop them. By my scheme, the other teachers in the school, those who do know it, will start putting pressure on these to start shaping up because they need more people like that.

It is exactly like what happens in other competitive industries where you get that pressure. You are going to move away from a self-contained classroom. You are going to move away from a system where every teacher is equal, paid equally or treated equally. You are going to move over to a system of differentiation, so you'll look a lot more like a law firm or a hospital or an engineering firm or a university. That way you can guarantee that every child will have some access to one or more people who are really terrific at these things.

**Q:** And you will end up with schools that kids will like a lot more. The thing the kids like in school are the things that are most unschool like. That is, they like the extracurricular activities, whether it is putting together the yearbook or playing on a team. That's when they work together, make decisions together, sink or swim together.

**A:** A school is most like an office because you are reading, you're writing, you're manipulating words and numbers. Now, ask yourself what an office would look like if it were organized like a school. If you work in an office and you wanted to organize it like a school, you would have a worker sitting at a desk with 20 other workers. You would say, you are never to talk to any other workers around you. You do your own work. Every 45 minutes, a bell would ring and you'd have every worker working in your office move to another office. They would be given totally different work to do. They would be told to shut up there, too, and not talk to anybody. And every 45 minutes in a different room, they would have a different boss to relate to. Nobody who works in an office has ever seen anything like this. You say, look, you can't change people's work every 45 minutes, some people are just getting the hang of it then. The smartest thing a person can do if he doesn't know what he is doing is to turn to the person next to him and say, hey, John, am I getting this right? In the real world asking the person next to you to help you is called common sense—in school it is called cheating. Why is a school organized this way? If you think of the student as an inanimate object moving down an assembly line, then the first period the students are in English where the English teacher is working away at them, and then the assembly line moves them to the math teacher. You see, as long as you think of students as being inanimate objects who are being taught by the teachers, and what they think or feel doesn't count, this business of moving them from period to period, semester to semester, year to year, is very confusing to the students, very dehumanizing. No other institution in the world is organized that way unless you are dealing with inanimate parts of things. There is no other institution in the world who treats human beings in this way. The people who discover this are going to be the people who are the winners.

**Q:** I've been watching you for a long time now, and I think you have grown over the years. You seem to me to be more frustrated and more pessimistic. Is that true?

**A:** Yes. I've always believed what I was doing. I'm very lucky. I've always had a job that I loved. I did believe that, if teachers got power and if we used that power politically and economically, we would raise salaries and reduce class size, and that would bring ideal

conditions and everything would be wonderful. I now realize that that can't happen, demographically and economically, and I also realize that, while we do need to attract and keep more people with salaries, we do need to deal with the question of how kids develop, relationships with people, that the most important thing that is missing here is ideas.

## We're going in little circles.

**Q:** You're pessimistic?

**A:** I'm very pessimistic. **I think we've got the same problem here that Gorbachev has in the Soviet Union. How do you get people who've been accustomed to behaving in a certain way to fundamentally change?** We think about his problem. He's got people who can buy meat twice a month if they line up at six o'clock in the morning. Now the answer would be to allow the farmers to charge anything they want for the meat. The price of meat would go up to 500 rubles a pound. There wouldn't be any lines at all, just the two or three people who had 500 rubles. But then the farmers would say, well, gee, if I can get all that money, I'm going to produce a lot more, and eventually there wouldn't be any lines and the price would go down. But meanwhile, when he does that, all the people who used to be on line and get it twice a month are going to make a revolution, saying now you can't even get meat twice a month. So how does he go from this system to that one? China has the same problem. How do you modernize the whole country and not open up the whole thing to criticism and democracy.

## An effective education system requires pain.

**Q:** To get where we have to go, do we have to go through pain and chaos and upheaval?

**A:** Tremendous amount of pain. We will not move to an effective system of education in this country without pain, and I mean pain for everyone in the system.

**Q:** Are we going in the right direction right now?

**A:** No, I think we are going in little circles right now. I do not think that 1/100th of one percent of the people in education in this country believe that we are really in trouble in education.

**Q:** So the first task then is to get people to believe that things are as bad as you say they are?

**A:** I think they've got to look at what others are doing. I think they've got to look at what we are doing. I think they've got to look and get away from these idiotic averages and take a look and ask themselves whether this country can survive and maintain a system of government and a standard of living, given the number of people we are producing who can think, read, write, calculate or do these other things which are the basis of both democracy and modern economy. ■