

School Suicide Courses Promote Suicide And So Do TV Suicide Movies, Studies Show

'Empathy Belly' Shocks Students

Students in Urbana, Illinois are learning about the discomforts of pregnancy through a controversial new device called the Empathy Belly. It is a 33-pound costume which simulates the weight of pregnancy.

The outfit is shaped like the torso of a pregnant woman and is designed to teach girls and boys what pregnancy feels like. The Empathy Belly also contains an auxiliary device to force pressure on the wearer's bladder to simulate the way a pregnant woman feels.

Students at Urbana Middle School watched and giggled as teacher Ron Sebestik wore the Empathy Belly for a school presentation to try

to discourage teens from getting pregnant. Parents were not notified about the assembly.

Debbie Stebel, an Urbana parent, said that she thought the Empathy Belly presentation was "inappropriate" but "typical" of the philosophy of most schools.

"I was very offended that they would bring an Empathy Belly to Urbana Middle School," she said, "and especially to have a man wear it."

The Empathy Belly costs \$600 and is sold in medical supply stores. It has been featured on the *Donahue* show, with host Phil Donahue wearing the device.



Photo: Champaign-Urbana News Gazette

Two separate new studies have concluded that suicide curricula in the schools and made-for-television movies about teen suicide do more harm than good. Classroom courses for high schoolers and TV movies for the public have been presented during the last five years as "suicide-prevention" programs, supposedly designed to help combat the high rate of suicides among teenagers.

But the two unrelated studies now indicate that these efforts are harmful, not helpful. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people age 15 to 24.

According to a Columbia University study reported in the December 26 *Journal of the American Medical Association*, researchers found that the classroom courses were "ineffective" in altering deviant attitudes, and even produced "evidence of unwanted effects." The teenagers continued to believe that suicide was a possible solution to their problems and that they would be less likely to seek help.

The study found that the courses stir up suicidal feelings when teenagers discuss the topic openly. The research disclosed that those who had attempted suicide knew kids who were upset by the course. Those exposed to the school suicide programs were significantly more likely to indicate that "talking about suicide makes some kids more likely to try to kill themselves."

The researchers concluded that, "There is a need to reevaluate such programs to determine their efficacy and safety." The results are seen as a "cause for concern."

The Columbia University team was headed by David Shaffer, director of the division of child and adolescent psychiatry at the medical school. It studied the impact of suicide-prevention programs on the attitudes of students in the 9th and 10th grades who had taken a suicide course in a public school.

Suicide courses have become something of a fad in the last five years, and some states have even mandated that they be taught in the public schools. The suicide and "death and dying" counselor with the subject by 10 hours training lead discussions in a classroom setting. The courses are based on the unproved concepts that suicide is caused by typical teenage stresses

and that all teenagers share a potential vulnerability to suicide.

But most students are *not* at risk for suicide and it is unwise to expose them to classroom discussions about suicide. The Columbia researchers concluded that, because of the negative reactions to the suicide courses and the evidence of "imitative or stimulatory effect on suicidal behavior" among adolescents, "the practice of addressing such programs to unselected audiences should be viewed with caution."

Asked to comment on the study, a psychiatrist who is an authority on suicides but is not connected with the Columbia University project, Dr. Jan Fawcett, chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at Rush Presbyterian-St. Luke's Hospital in Chicago, said: "You can't just get kids not to commit suicide by just educating them about the program and telling them where to get help. It's not an intellectual exercise. There's more to it than that."

Dr. Fawcett said that suicide needs to be deromanticized. "Kids are very suggestible. They see reports about suicide on television and may begin to see suicide as a way to end their troubles or make their parents feel bad."

TV Movies About Suicide

Movies about teenage suicide which purport to caution young people against it may actually have the opposite effect, according to a new report. This is the first systematic analysis of the content of media portrayals of teen suicide.

Dr. Daniel Castellanos, a psychiatrist at the University of Miami formerly with Columbia University Department of Child Psychology, announced preliminary findings of an analysis completed by himself and other researchers at Columbia about media images of teen suicide. With a grant from the American Suicide Foundation, the researchers studied four made-for-television movies about teen suicide. The movies, *Surviving*, *Silence of the Heart*, *Hear Me Cry*, and *Desperate Exit* all originally aired on television in 1985 and 1986 and were aimed at teenage audiences.

In the movies, "Teenagers who succeeded at killing themselves were portrayed as stronger, more likable people than those who attempted suicide but lived," said Castellanos in a presentation to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in Chicago. "In one movie, the boy who killed himself was the football quarterback, was rich, had a girlfriend and his own car. But another boy who attempted suicide and survived was portrayed as a nerd, a loner, someone without friends."

The researchers found eight specific features of these movies that could be considered "dangerous" because they either "glamorize, simplify, or otherwise distort the true picture of suicide":

- They show detailed descriptions of how to commit suicide.
- Those who commit suicide are often shown as attractive, engaging, and popular, placing them in the position of adolescent role models.
- The programs eliminate or ignore the harmful consequences of suicide attempts, i.e., disfigurement, paralysis, or brain damage.
- Oversimplified or trivial events such as a low exam grade are shown as triggers to suicide.

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800 Parents Protest Sex Ed Curriculum

A parent information night in a Minneapolis suburb attracted 800 parents to protest the use of a controversial sex education curriculum.

The *Human Sexuality: Values and Choices* curriculum has been used in the Anoka-Hennepin School District, located just outside of Minneapolis, for the past four years. The schools also annually give a two-day lesson about AIDS.

Parents object to the program because they say the material covered is far too explicit for children. They also feel that the sex education programs are taught in a "how-to" manner, without regard to morality.

Katie Bowers, a parent who opposes the *Values and Choices* curriculum and the AIDS education taught in the school district, said that

the AIDS information "deals with anal sex and oral-genital sex" and that it is "inappropriate for school kids." She said that the *Values and Choices* program's "main message about homosexuality is to give homosexuals equal rights without any mention of the dangers of homosexual behavior, like AIDS."

She said that she opposed the teaching of birth control methods, especially in the 8th grade, because it "sends a conflicting message by promoting birth control" to all students. Mrs. Bowers also said that parents are angry that the classes are taught in a coed environment; she said that sex education programs should be taught in single-sex classes.

Parents also object to a videotape used in the school's sex education curriculum which shows

a live birth. They feel that the film is too graphic for adolescents and may unduly frighten them about childbirth.

Barb Anderson, a former teacher at Coon Rapids High School and parent, criticized the AIDS information given in the town's high school as promoting "deviant behavior," especially since the program refuses to condemn homosexuality or bisexuality and instead speaks of them in neutral terms. She charged that the explicit description of sexual acts, especially the "graphic descriptions of anal and oral sodomy," hurts children and "becomes for young minds academically sanctioned pornography."

The District has agreed to open up its curriculum committee to two new members. ■

EDUCATION
BRIEFS

The New Jersey Network for Family Life Education recently held a controversial conference on "Family Life Education: New Jersey Directions for the 1990s." Dr. Robert L. Johnson, Director of Adolescent Medicine at the University of Medicine and Dentistry, urged participants to examine their "adult bias" against teenage sex. He said that sexual activity is a "normative and enjoyable" part of adolescence, according to the Quarterly Newsletter of the Public Education Institute.

Several high school newspapers in St. Louis, Missouri have published an advertisement for Planned Parenthood. According to Betty Bilgere, the organization's executive director, eight of the 80 area high schools agreed to publish the ad. The ad invites students to phone Planned Parenthood and says in part, "It's not enough to 'just say no.' Say KNOW. Know what you're doing. Know the facts. If you don't know, find out. It's OK to ask questions. Call us." Most schools rejected the ad as too controversial.

School officials in Bastrop, Texas have ordered an eight-year-old boy to attend class in solitary confinement after the boy refused to cut his 7-inch ponytail. Zachariah Tountate is not allowed to attend classes with other children until he gets rid of the ponytail; the school bars hair longer than the collar on boys. He is required to sit all day in a 10-ft. by 13-ft. isolation room called an "alternative education setting." The child's parents say that they won't order their son to cut his hair because they feel he needs to make his own decisions.

When the District of Columbia School Board voted 8-3 on Nov. 30 to fire its superintendent, 400 protestors rushed the podium, hurled debris at board members, destroyed portraits of board members, vandalized the office, and struck one board member in the head with a water pitcher, requiring stitches. An audit revealed that school officials had asked for a 20% budget increase based on false figures which concealed a sharp drop in enrollment. In July the board offered the superintendent more than \$200,000 to quit, but he refused.

According to data compiled from the U.S. Department of Education, 8th graders spend an average of 21.7 hours a week watching TV, 5.6 hours on homework, and only 1.8 hours on outside reading. The study also showed that more girls spend time on reading than boys and that Asians spend 6.7 hours a week on homework, more time than any other ethnic group. The statistics come from a new report, *A Profile of the American Eighth-Grader*, available at \$9 from the U.S. Government Printing office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

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Liberal Think Tank Publishes Ideas On Keeping Families Strong

A liberal policy group has issued a report on children which adopts some policies that conservatives have been promoting for years. The Progressive Policy Institute (PPI) urges raising the dependent child's exemption from its present \$2,000 to at least \$6,000 and suggests that government policies should encourage stable families rather than trying to substitute for them.

The report was written by Dr. Elaine Ciulla Kamarck, a veteran of the Democratic National Committee and three Democratic presidential campaigns; Dr. William A. Galston, who served as Issues Director in the Mondale for President campaign; Dr. Margaret Beyer, an expert consultant in child welfare, mental health, and class action litigation; and Dr. Robert J. Shapiro, economic policy director of the Dukakis-Bentsen campaign.

In *Putting Children First: A Progressive Family Policy for the 1990s*, the PPI states that "Public programs cannot fully substitute for healthy families and should not try. Instead, government should work to stabilize families and enhance their child-rearing capacity."

The report suggests that the two-parent family is by far the most stable unit in which to raise a child, and it criticizes the moral relativism of today's society. *Putting Children First* states that there is "simply no substitute for moral education that effectively conveys values" the

way the family does. The report asserts that "stable families are the most effective teachers of the values needed for a healthy liberal democratic community," and that the role for the public schools is to reinforce — not replace — the family.

"It is no exaggeration to say that a stable, two-parent family is an American child's best protection against poverty," the study notes. It also claims that coming from a broken home has more of an effect on predisposition to commit crimes than either race or poverty.

Putting Children First states that the best students in schools usually come from traditional families where values are stressed. However, instead of having the schools take the place of the family, the report suggests that the government should "look for ways to create stable families, not substitute families."

The Progressive Policy Institute suggests "six elements of a progressive family policy":

- Restore the children's exemption. The writers of the report propose raising the dependent exemption from \$2,000 to \$6,000 to \$7,500 per child. They also suggest changing the tax filing status for single parent families and lowering the payroll tax and note that the tax burden will be about 25 percent for most families today, compared with 23 percent in 1970 and only 16 percent in 1960.

- Create a non-poverty working wage. PPI

suggests doing this by "expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit and tying it to the number of dependents in the home." The report asserts that "this would be a vastly more efficient way of moving families out of poverty than would another increase in the minimum wage, since 85 percent of minimum-wage workers live in non-poor households."

- Reform divorce laws. The PPI states that "changes in divorce laws are necessary to put children first. We also seek to toughen and federalize laws on child support payments." The organization admits that no-fault divorce laws have failed women and children and have only been "a sensible and important reform for married couples without children."

- Promote parental responsibility. PPI favors laws which "underscore parents' obligations to ensure the health, education, and good behavior of their children," such as laws which punish parents whose children are involved in gangs or which provide penalties against parents whose children miss excessive amounts of school. They also favor "compulsory treatment for pregnant women who use drugs."

- Make the workplace "family friendly." The organization supports family leave policies, flextime, child care services at the office, and parental leave legislation. PPI also supports "making home based employment possible for those employees whose jobs lend themselves to such arrangements."

- Develop alternatives to foster care. The Progressive Policy Institute supports "early prevention strategies that target troubled families before children must be removed from their homes."

The Progressive Policy Institute believes that liberals and conservatives are both right and wrong on the family. "Most liberals talk about the economic pressures on families and neglect family values," the report states, while "most conservatives talk about values and neglect the economics." Instead, the PPI calls for a "progressive child-centered family policy that both acknowledges new realities and affirms enduring values."

Will the ACLU Grinch Steal Christmas?

The Seventh Federal Circuit Court of Appeals is expected to rule soon in a dispute over a Christmas display in the Ottawa, Illinois town park. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed charges against Ottawa for allowing religious art to be displayed on city property. *Doe v. Small* pits the concept of separation of church and state against the rights to free speech and expression.

The disputed display consists of several paintings showing the life of Jesus Christ. It has been shown at a public park in Ottawa for several decades. The city has never funded the project; it has only allowed it to be exhibited on public property.

Currently, the Ottawa Jaycees fund the project, which includes this disclaimer on a sign near the art: "This display has been erected and maintained solely by the Ottawa Jaycees, a private organization, without the use of public funds."

The art was displayed for years without protest until 1987, when Richard Rohrer, an atheist, asked the ACLU for help in suing the city to remove the Christmas display, saying that he found it "extremely offensive." However, Rohrer moved from the city before the suit was decided. In the meantime, the ACLU found an anonymous plaintiff referred to as "Jane Doe" to take his place. Just before Christmas 1989, a federal judge forced the Jaycees to remove the paintings, after which the defendants appealed the case.

Bob Skolrood, Executive Director of the National Legal Foundation, the lawyer for the defendants, said he believes that "this case should be called 'How the ACLU Stole Christmas.'" He asserts that forcing the display out of the park is a violation of free speech. "Jesus Christ is the reason for the Christmas



season, not an objectionable footnote in history," he commented. "It makes no sense for our courts to rule that flag burning is a constitutional form of free speech, and then censor religious speech from the public square."

Skolrood claims it is hypocritical for the ACLU to "cry 'censorship' when the obscenities of Robert Mapplethorpe or 2 Live Crew come under fire," yet they are "trying to censor religious art."

He noted that the ACLU has supported the government funding of artists who depict Christ as a drug addict or immerse a crucifix in urine, yet "sincere religious expression is labelled unconstitutional and banished from the public square."

If the case is decided in favor of the defendants, the repercussions could affect the use of Nativity scenes on public property all over the country.

Ottawa, Illinois was the place of another hard-fought debate many years ago; it was the site of the first Lincoln-Douglas debate in 1858.

Suicide *Continued from page 1*

- Although most real teen suicide victims are chronically troubled and unhappy, television does not usually show this.

- Television portrays suicide as a means of becoming famous or "getting even."

- Effective treatments are not shown; instead they discuss ineffectual and unconvincing remedies such as "reaching out and touching."

- The emphasis on blaming others for the teen's suicide may foster undeserved guilt in surviving family members and friends of those who kill themselves.

A team of 30 experts in adolescent suicide rated the contents of a dozen films for this report.

Castellanos said that the films could be dangerous for some teenagers who "have distorted notions" and believe that suicide "is a rational solution to something like being angry." Some movies presented suicide in so much detail that they became "how to" episodes.

Castellanos said that the researchers thought teen suicide should be addressed, but "it's just a matter of how," although he and the researchers "hadn't yet formulated specific ideas" on how suicide should be portrayed. The complete report on the media's portrayal of teen suicides will be released in early 1991.

FOCUS: The Academy's New Ayatollahs

by John Leo



Linda Chavez, a former Reagan administration official, was invited to give the commencement address last spring at the University of Northern Colorado. Working for Reagan is hardly a plus at most colleges, but school officials thought that inviting a successful female Hispanic would go down well with the "cultural diversity" movement on campus. No such luck. Chavez's views on two key issues were entirely too diverse for much of the student body: She opposes affirmative action and thinks Hispanic immigrants should learn English as quickly as possible.

These are politically incorrect views on campus, so after howls from students, Chavez was disinvented. As so often happens in such deviations from college ideology, the responsible deviant — in this case, the college president — had to grovel a good deal about the huge mistake of inviting a speaker with whom everyone on campus did not already agree. He apologized for appearing "grossly insensitive" and said it was "obviously wrong" to think that Chavez was a proper role model for Hispanic women.

The rejection of Chavez was clearly *politically correct*, or P.C. for short, the wry new term for the narrow orthodoxy now ascendant on American campuses large and small. Student groups have always tended toward generational groupthink, but the new orthodoxy is unusual. Its purity is guarded by faculty who rebelled as students in the '60s.

Affirmative action, busing, gay rights,

women's studies, the PLO, animal rights, bilingualism, the self-segregation of blacks on campus, and censorship in the pursuit of tolerance are all politically correct. The following are all non-P.C.: the SAT, doubts about abortion, Catholics, wearing fur, any emphasis on standards or excellence, and any suggestion that gender and ethnicity might not be the most overwhelmingly important issues of the modern era.

P.C. controversies are currently popping up all around us. At New York University School of Law, students refused to debate a moot-court case involving a hypothetical divorced lesbian mother trying to win custody of her child, because arguing the con side would be hurtful to gays. (P.C. law cases have only one side.)

At the University of Texas, a writing class was assigned to critique a collection of ideological P.C. essays, leading one professor to comment, "You cannot tell me that students will not inevitably be graded on politically correct thinking in these classes."

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scientist James David Barber, a liberal Democrat and former board chairman of Amnesty International. Stanley Fish, chairman of the Duke English department, reacted in typical fashion for a P.C. ayatollah, denouncing the NAS as "racist, sexist, and homophobic" and suggesting that NAS members were too politically biased to serve on university committees dealing with promotion and tenure.

P.C.-ness now functions on campus as a militant religion, determined to sniff out heresy and ban the speech of potential heretics, liberals and conservatives alike. One primary mission of the new ayatollahs is to see that the issue of affirmative action is not debated on campus. This smoldering issue — pitting claims of racial justice against traditional standards of academic qualification — is probably the No. 1 topic in private conversation on many campuses, but it cannot be discussed openly because political correctness forbids it.

Teachers who bring it up are harassed as racist, and student editors who print doubts on the issue are relieved of duties or suspended. Sometimes, when minorities complain, a "multicultural editor" or an ombudsman (i.e., a representative of the P.C. clergy) is immediately added to the newspaper. Sometimes, the newspaper is defunded or shut down.

The logic of political correctness leads directly to silencing the unconverted. The P.C. campus speech codes, which prohibit racially and sexually intimidating speech, produce a good deal of intimidation themselves. They help intimidate non-P.C. students and professors and punish deviations.

Under the University of Michigan's speech code, since struck down by a federal court, a student was brought up on charges for writing a limerick about the supposed homosexual acts of a famous sports star. A mediator had him write an essay for the school paper, headlined "Learned My Lesson," and, like any backsliding student at the University of Beijing, he underwent some attitudinal readjustment — in this case, participation in gay rap sessions.

At Harvard Law School, a yearlong flap erupted when visiting Prof. Ian MacNeil quoted Lord Byron, "And whispering, 'I will ne'er consent,' — consented," which the Harvard Women's Law Association angrily denounced as a sexist insult.

At Michigan, the revered demographer Reynolds Farley ran into trouble by reading a passage from Malcolm X's autobiography in which the author described himself as a pimp and a thief. He was so harassed that he dropped the course. Some teachers say P.C.-ers deliberately bait them, hoping for an irritated reply that will lead to insensitivity charges.

P.C.-ers favor the Orwellian language of freedom, tolerance, and diversity. But the reality is a good deal different. "The promoters of cultural diversity tell us that theirs is an ideology of inclusion," Linda Chavez wrote after her banning. "But the politics of cultural diversity as they are practiced on campus today have very little to do with inclusion or diversity." And she's right.

John Leo is a columnist for U.S. News and World Report. Reprinted by permission from U.S. News and World Report.

FOCUS: Condoms Send Wrong Message



by Joan Beck

Whatever his intentions, the message New York City Schools Chancellor Joseph Fernandez is proposing to give students in the city's 120 high schools is clear: It is OK to have sex.

Mr. Fernandez has asked the New York City Board of Education to agree to make free condoms available to all 261,000 high school students, regardless of their age. Not in a school-based health clinic. Not in connection with sex education. Not just if they have a parent's permission. Simply, free condoms for the asking from male and female staff volunteers. The Board of Education is expected to give its approval next month.

What has persuaded Mr. Fernandez to take such a controversial step is concern about AIDS. New York City has the nation's highest rate of acquired immune deficiency syndrome cases among adolescents, and 20 percent of all teens in this country who have the deadly disease live in New York City.

But it is hard to jump from those facts, however worrisome, to giving out condoms

free in all the New York City high schools.

The number of cases of AIDS diagnosed among teens is still small compared with the national toll. Of the 154,917 cumulative cases of AIDS reported to the Centers for Disease Control by the end of October, only 604 were diagnosed among 13- to 19-year olds.

Not all those teens acquired the AIDS virus through sexual activity. Drug abusers who share needles now account for a substantial and growing percentage of AIDS cases. Does that mean Mr. Fernandez will next propose handing out clean, free needles in the schools?

What Mr. Fernandez should remember is that the lessons adults think they are teaching children are not necessarily the messages young people pick up. The chancellor may think he is warning students to be responsible about sex. But what the teens are most likely to hear is that the school says it is all right for high schoolers to have sex.

How can parents try to teach young teenagers moral values and counsel them against premature sexual activity for which they probably are not psychologically ready and which may have consequences for which they are unprepared? The school will be telling those adolescents it expects them to be having sex.

Mr. Fernandez tries to counter criticism about handing out condoms without counseling or sex education by saying, "People at any age have ready access to condoms at supermarkets and drugstores without the benefit of an educational or counseling component."

But since access to condoms is so easy at supermarkets and drugstores, why is it necessary for the schools to hand them out, too? Any teen who is reluctant to make a public purchase probably would be even less likely to ask for them at school.

There are other problems. Condoms are not

a totally sure protection against the AIDS virus, any more than they are 100 percent effective in preventing pregnancy. At best, they offer only safer sex, not safe sex — a distinction that is easily lost on adolescents. They also require responsible, unflinching use, a self-discipline that many young teen-agers seem unable to muster for a variety of reasons.

Little clear evidence exists that efforts to reduce teen-age pregnancies by encouraging the use of contraceptives have been successful on a large scale, even when they have involved much more sex education and counseling than New York City high schoolers get. Yet almost no efforts are being made — except by the parents and churches — to persuade teens that the only sure protection against pregnancy and sexually transmitted AIDS is abstinence.

Mr. Fernandez may be correct in assuming that sexual activity among teens of high school age is so pervasive that it justifies his condom plan. But it also is possible that expecting students to be sexually active will increase the number of them who are — and could even raise the incidence of adolescent pregnancy and AIDS.

Before New York City's Board of Education approves Mr. Fernandez's plan, it might pause to consider how poorly the New York schools — and most other big, urban systems — succeed in their traditional task. When the schools cannot even do a good job of teaching academics, it is grasping at straws to expect that they can be effective in reducing AIDS and teen pregnancies. The real problem is that we are reduced to grasping at straws.

Joan Beck is a columnist for the Chicago Tribune. ©Copyrighted, Chicago Tribune Company, all rights reserved, used with permission.

Committee Member Quits Over Condom Controversy

A member of the school district's Family Life Curriculum Advisory Committee in Williamson County, Tennessee has resigned in a dispute over the group's focus on teaching about birth control in the public schools to prevent AIDS.

In a letter sent to the county school board, Claire Bawcom resigned her advisory position because she felt that teaching children the "explicit use of a plastic form to show the proper method of applying a condom" and having "discussions on oral/anal sex" is "totally unnecessary, in poor taste and will send the children the message that it's OK for them to have sexual relationships."

Mrs. Bawcom pointed out that the way the Curriculum Advisory Committee is structured, available curricula will be examined only by those members who have been selected to write the curriculum. Other Advisory Committee members will not have the opportunity to examine curricula such as the abstinence-based programs *Sex Respect* or *Teen Aid*, and therefore would be able to react only to what the curriculum writers present.

"Consequently," Mrs. Bawcom said, "their focus will be limited, and I do not think that this is in the children's best interest." Mrs. Bawcom said that, although "many of the members support contraceptive sex education," it sends children "a mixed message to teach them about contraceptives and abstinence. Especially with AIDS, the only guarantee is abstinence. Condoms are not foolproof; they do break."

Mrs. Bawcom added, "All of us have self-control. We're trying to teach our children to say no to drugs and alcohol. Why can't we teach them to say no to sex and to exercise restraint?"



Book of the Month



The New Age Masquerade by Eric Buehrer. Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1990.

Many people think of New Age as just a fad of aging hippies, with wearing crystals as the 1990s equivalent of dropping acid. Unfortunately, the New Age movement is popular not only with Shirley MacLaine and her fans. Many teachers use New Age practices in the classroom on unsuspecting children. *The New Age Masquerade* tells this story.

Education Reporter readers are familiar with much of the material covered in this book, especially about globalism, guided imagery, and visualization techniques in the classroom. Those who aren't aware of the use of New Age methods and techniques will learn a valuable lesson in what passes for "learning methods" today.

As Buehrer points out, New Age educators are able to insert their beliefs in schools by a combination of classroom deceit and parental ignorance. New Agers use fuzzy, feel-good terms such as "global interdependence and awareness," "values clarification," "multiculturalism," "human potential," and "enhancing self-esteem" in order to impose their values on others. New Agers know that it's hard to oppose activities which are supposed to increase self-esteem or teach about cultures of the world.

The book even gives an example of a confidential memo about globalism circulated to teachers in Seattle. Admitting that parents recognize and refuse to support globalism, the school personnel suggested renaming globalism with the "temporarily safe term" of "multicultural/international curriculum development."

The book details the extensive use of spirit guides, psychic phenomena, hypnosis, visualization and guided imagery in the classroom. Most parents are unaware of any of these techniques, partly due to teachers who tell their students to keep it secret and partly due to the way that "scientific" names of the programs keep parents confused.

As Buehrer writes, "To use schools as instruments for imposing such bizarre and dangerous religious thinking on unsuspecting children is absolutely unethical as well as illegal." He advises parents to scrutinize exactly what their children are learning by being "informed, organized, and active." He suggests that funding for global education be cut from the college level down in order to keep the New Age out of the schools.

This book, published in conjunction with Citizens for Excellence in Education, is an excellent resource guide for parents who are concerned about the use of the New Age in the schools.

NEH Chairman Calls Nation's Educational Methods 'Tyrannical'



Mrs. Lynne Cheney

A new report written by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) attacks current educational practices in the United States as methods that "violate good sense."

Tyrannical Machines, a 64-page report written by NEH chairman Lynne Cheney, sharply criticizes the methods used to train teachers and to educate students. The title comes from William James' assessment of the Ph.D. in 1904 and refers to the educational practices which "dominate American education and have contributed to its failures."

The pamphlet lambastes teachers' training courses at colleges as "more likely to confuse and mislead than enlighten." Much of the problem in education training is the textbooks, the report states, because "what is simple is made complicated." For example, "According to one textbook, there are *twelve* different steps involved in teaching" students how to use the index on the front page of a newspaper. "The way we prepare teachers may well keep bright people from entering the profession," the report concludes.

After prospective teachers receive their degrees and begin working, they are expected to participate in continual "in-service" training. The report states that these practices "seldom

provide valuable experience." It notes that "teachers use the phrase *in-service* in the passive ('we were in-serviced') — as though something rude and unpleasant had been done to them."

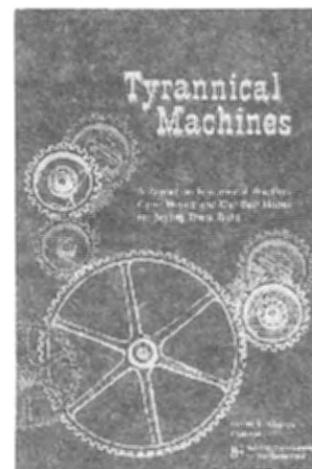
Tyrannical Machines suggests that states develop alternative methods of teacher certification such as is done in New Jersey, where more than 1,500 teachers have been hired through an alternative certification program. The report believes that this will bring greater diversity and quality to the teaching profession. The curriculum taken by education majors in college also needs to be overhauled, with more emphasis on taking courses about the subject matter which they will be teaching, and less emphasis on education theory.

The report criticizes the textbooks used in most elementary and secondary schools as being "so dull that no one would read them voluntarily" and for avoiding "subjects of passion and drama," especially religion and democracy. Both textbook writers and textbook approval committees are blamed for this. One recommendation in the report is "to devise better criteria" in choosing textbooks that "actually require reviewers to read the books."

Instead of using the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) as a barometer of students' intelligence, *Tyrannical Machines* suggests that the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) offers "the best possibility for giving parents and policymakers a meaningful measure of educational progress" because the test is more of an "achievement test." The SAT, which is not content-based, only measures "aptitude."

Perhaps the most controversial proposal in the pamphlet is the emphasis on "healthy competition" in the educational system by recommending school choice. The report feels that this is necessary to "encourage schools to make needed improvements in all areas." It cites choice programs in East Harlem, New York and Cambridge, Massachusetts as examples of the effectiveness of choice in improving educational quality.

Cheney's report also examines colleges and universities, where more emphasis is put on



research than teaching. The report notes that because of this, graduate students do much of the teaching at most colleges, and highly-paid professors often teach only one or two classes a year. College courses often focus "on increasingly narrow topics" which interest teachers much more than students. Traditional classes on broad-based subjects are disappearing and we are graduating a generation that knows less and less about history, literature, mathematics and the sciences.

The schools can get away with this because students and parents often "evaluate colleges and universities on the basis of price tag, believing that the more expensive the university, the better," instead of examining what students actually learn at the institutions.

Cheney's report calls for an overhaul of higher education, with an emphasis on teaching instead of research and courses which emphasize what students need to know over what professors are interested in teaching. Parents and students "need to exercise *in an informed way* the choices available to them in higher education."

Tyrannical Humanities is available from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Washington, D.C. 20506.

New Education Chief: Alexander

President Bush named Lamar Alexander on December 17 as Secretary of Education, succeeding Lauro Cavazos who resigned abruptly. Alexander is a former two-term governor of Tennessee from the Howard Baker wing of the Republican Party, and more recently served as president of the University of Tennessee.

Alexander has been known for some time to be one of several governors who have made education their principal interest and were seeking the post. While Governor of Tennessee, Alexander introduced in major education reforms which brought him in conflict with the Tennessee branch of the National Education Association.

Alexander is known to be strong for choice in education, parental rights, and early childhood education. Former Secretary of Education William Bennett said, "It's a very good choice. He's earned a few battle ribbons. He had to face the power of the Tennessee Education Association in his efforts to improve schooling there." NEA President Keith Geiger commented, "We have worked with former Governor Alexander before and have not always seen eye to eye."

Ernest Boyer, head of the Carnegie Foun-



Lamar Alexander

dation for the Advancement of Teaching, said: "Every signal suggests that not only does [Alexander] have strong commitment but a realistic sense of what the priorities should be."

Former Secretary of Education Lauro Cavazos, a political moderate, was often criticized from both sides of the political spectrum. Perhaps the most controversial moment of his

tenure occurred when a group of Texas state legislators walked out on a speech he gave in the State Capitol last March after he said that money alone would not solve the state's educational crisis. Cavazos was also criticized by Hispanic activists when he said that it was important for children to learn English in order to succeed educationally. He was a late convert to the concept of choice in education.

Cavazos had been thought to be on his way out for some time. Insiders at the Department of Education say that Cavazos was asked to resign at a meeting with White House Chief of Staff John Sununu on December 11.

On learning of Cavazos' resignation, Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, commented, "Well, he didn't do very much. In fact he didn't do anything." He added, "While Cavazos is a nice guy, he just didn't have any notion as to how to connect with the federal Department of Education to make things happen. I'd rather have someone like Bill Bennett with whom I disagree — someone who has an intelligent point of view and can make a national debate on education issues. That's healthy."