



The Phyllis Schlafly Report

VOL. 13, NO. 6, SECTION 1

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JANUARY, 1980

Education Problems and Remedies

If there ever was a man entitled to say "I told you so," it is Rudolf Flesch, author of a best-selling book 25 years ago called *Why Johnny Can't Read*, which presented a depressing picture of the faulty methods used to teach reading in most schools. He showed that the then-popular method, called look-and-say (or whole word or sight reading), was a cheat on the child because it failed to teach him to read.

Flesch's words fell largely on deaf ears. Three out of four schools still stick to the discredited look-and-say methods. The result, as discovered by Opinion Research Corporation, the respected survey firm of Princeton, N.J., is that 21 percent of adults over age 18 can't read a want ad, a job application form, a label on a medicine bottle, or a safety sign at their place of work.

Look-and-say pretends that letters, sounds and syllables don't exist, and it starts the first-grader memorizing a few whole words over and over again until he builds up a limited sight vocabulary. Phonics-first, the method advocated by Flesch, is a system of studying the mechanics of reading by learning the building blocks of words: the 26 letters of the alphabet, the 44 sounds of the English language, and the syllables.

Just compare the achievement of the two methods and you will see the difference. At the end of the first grade, the look-and-say child can recognize 349 words; at the end of the second grade 1,094; at the end of the third grade 1,216; and at the end of the fourth grade 1,554.

With phonics, by the end of one semester of the first grade, the child can read his entire speaking vocabulary and need seldom be taught another word. By the end of the fourth grade, his reading vocabulary should be 20,000 words.

The idiocy of look-and-say has now been confessed by one of the leading publishers of look-and-say readers in an eighth grade teachers' manual which gives "remedial reading" instruction exercises on how to teach eighth graders to read. Here is how the word "brake" is to be taught.

"Context: 'The car began to roll down the hill. Thinking quickly, Sally jumped into the car and put her foot on the *brake*.' Questions: 'How do you know the word is not *pedal*? How do you know the word is not *broom*?' "

So now it's official. The leading look-and-say publishers admit that millions of junior high school stu-

dents, who were taught by look-and-say, can't distinguish the words *brake*, *pedal*, and *broom*. It would serve no useful purpose to identify the publisher from whom the examples in this column are taken, because all the look-and-say publishers are just as bad.

Many look-and-say schools have been confronted by parents whose consciousness has been raised by Flesch's book, or by the pro-phonics work of the Reading Reform Foundation of Scottsdale, Arizona, or by other phonics advocates. Many schools respond with phony-phonics instead of real phonics (phonics-first).

Here are some of the slippery semantics used by those who want parents to think their children are being taught phonics when they are not: phonetic analysis, reading for meaning, meaning emphasis, analytic phonics, intrinsic phonics, and gradual phonics. The dead-end learning sequence used in phony phonics is: (1) learning the shape of the word, (2) using context or pictures as a clue to word recognition, (3) using stories which repeat the same tiresome words over and over again.

Another technique of phony-phonics is consonant substitution: borrowing a consonant from the beginning or end of another known word to make a new word. Thus, if a child has memorized the words *bat* and *run*, and the teacher wants to introduce *bun*, the child is told "it starts like *bat*, but ends like *run*, so it must be *bun*."

Phonics-first, on the other hand, teaches all the consonant and vowel sounds immediately, then synthesizes sounds into words, and teaches the child to get meaning from the sequence and structure of these sounds before whole words are taught. Phonics-first teaches the child to pronounce the sounds of unfamiliar words in the normal order from left to right.

Test your own child. If your Johnny or Mary can't read the newspaper by the middle of the first grade, he is probably getting look-and-say or phony-phonics rather than phonics-first. In that case, start your own remedial program.

The Literacy Hoax

When a high school student reads "Solomon" as "salami," or "hurricane" as "hammer," something is basically wrong. The error is even more dramatic when a student reads "clergyman" as "groceryman," "pony" as "horse," or "vacation" as "holiday."

Such mistakes as these are the pitiful result of the child's having been taught to read by the so-called progressive method of teaching reading which is variously called "look-say," "whole word," "sight word," or "Dick and Jane." Correction; that's not a method of teaching reading; it's just a device of teaching children to memorize a limited number of words by their association with pictures.

The nonsense and the deceit of the look-say method was first exposed by Rudolf Flesch in his 1955 best seller called *Why Johnny Can't Read*. Despite the fact that both the theory and the practice of look-say have been totally discredited, like Ol' Man River it just keeps rolling along.

Recent research shows that 75 percent of public school children are taught by the look-say method, which means that tens of thousands of first graders every year are deliberately handicapped by being denied the right to read. The other 25 percent of first graders in public schools have the good fortune to be taught to read by the phonics method, in which they learn to hear, read, and write the separate vowel and consonant sounds which make up the English language.

The crippling of pupils by the curse of look-say has resulted in what was accurately labeled "the literacy hoax" by Paul Copperman when he testified in 1979 before the Eagleton Subcommittee on Education, Arts and Humanities. He charged that it is a hoax to deceive school children and their parents by inflating the average report-card grade from C to B at the same time that academic skills have drastically declined.

Copperman says that "every generation of Americans has surpassed its parents in education, in literacy, and in economic attainment except the present one. For the first time in American history, the educational skills of one generation will not even approach those of their parents."

Copperman leveled most of his criticism at high schools. His survey shows that the average high school student today takes 25 percent less English, 35 percent less world history, 35 percent less government and civics, 30 percent less geography, and 20 percent less science and mathematics than students a generation ago.

Today's student is assigned less than half the homework and his textbooks have been rewritten for a reading level two years lower than the grade he is in. Traditional and rigorous courses have been replaced by educational entertainment.

Unfortunately, when confronted with a problem that affects large numbers of people, many react by saying, let's appropriate more government money or set up a new task force to study it. The federal government is not only not the solution to the literacy hoax, it is part of the problem.

Copperman urges the passage of a tuition tax credit bill not merely to assist the survival of private and religious schools (which are doing a better job in teaching academic skills) but to provide competition for public schools. In the American system, competition is the miracle factor which produces better consumer products at lower costs.

Is it really important that all Americans learn to read? It takes a 7th grade reading level to hold a job as a cook, an 8th grade level to function as a mechanic, and a 9th or 10th grade level to hold a job as a supply clerk. But 10 to 20 percent of this year's high school graduates cannot function at any of these levels, and the perfor-

mance of 30 to 40 percent will be so marginal that they may not be able to hold those jobs.

The real problem begins in the first grade. High school students will never be able to read the textbooks their parents read at the same level if they haven't mastered first-grade phonics -- the key to all learning.

Another "F" For U.S. Schools

Can it be statistically proven that the more the federal government spends on education, the worse is the product our schools turn out? Maybe not; but the burden to prove that this is NOT so is on the advocates of federal spending because the rise in federal spending on education correlates exactly with the decline in educational skills school children possess.

Scholastic Aptitude Tests (S.A.T.) scores of high school seniors fell again in 1979, continuing their trend downward that began two decades ago (when the federal government started its aid to education programs). So Congress and President Carter immediately opted for a bigger and more costly educational bureaucracy called the Department of Education.

The same issue of the *Washington Post* which carried the news of the final Congressional passage of the bill to create the new Department of Education, with an annual budget of \$14 billion, also included an editorial citing dreary examples of illiterate teachers, including one tenth grade teacher in a District high school who misspelled "civille right" on the blackboard. None of the 18,000 federal employees to be hired by the Department of Education will teach one teacher or child to read or spell, any more than any of the 20,000 employees of the Department of Energy have produced one barrel of oil or one kilowatt of energy.

The average S.A.T. verbal score this year fell two points to 427. This is a drop in verbal S.A.T. scores from 463 in 1969 and from 477 in 1959, a 50 point drop in 20 years. Originally, 500 was supposed to be average.

The increasing numbers of minority students taking the test could account for some of the drop before 1970, but not since. A 1977 College Board study tried to blame the drop on a variety of nonacademic causes including the Vietnam War and Watergate. That's scraping the bottom of the barrel of excuses to explain the dramatic failure to teach reading and writing; those skills should be learned in elementary schools.

The Ford Foundation concluded in a recent study that federal programs of the 1960s aimed at wiping out illiteracy have failed. It said that 64 million Americans may lack the reading and writing abilities needed for today's technologies, and in nine states more than half the adults have not completed high school.

S.A.T. math scores have dropped from 493 in 1969 to 467 today. The National Assessment of Educational Progress corroborated this with a report that math skills have declined in the past five years among students age 9, 13, and 17.

Even if students learn the computations, they cannot apply them to everyday problems. You can confirm this yourself by observing the difficulty young people have making change at a cash register. No doubt this is why so many stores have installed machines which do all the subtraction for the cashiers.

Even before the S.A.T. scores provided a report card on the schools, danger signs were showing up. In the early 1960s, Vice Admiral H.G. Rickover's books and Congressional testimony provided extensive unfavorable comparisons between our schools and those

of the Swiss and the British.

He deplored the way that "the generous desire of the American people to educate all children has foundered on an impoverished logic in whose eyes everything is equal," and has resulted in reducing education down to the lowest level. He recommended instead that our educational policy "give every child the maximum education he is capable of absorbing." That's still good advice.

Academic Freedom Victory

Academic freedom and educational diversity won a great victory when the U.S. Senate voted in the fall of 1979 to block the Internal Revenue Service from implementing its proposed regulation threatening the tax-deductible status of thousands of private and religious schools. It was also a victory for the time-honored principle that the law assumes we are innocent until proven guilty.

One of the big social phenomena of the past few years is the nationwide boom in private elementary and secondary schools. Once a luxury for the rich, private schools have become one of the growing "service industries" on which middle-class families are eagerly spending their shrinking dollars. The tuition cost at the 20,000 private schools ranges from \$300 to \$6,000 per pupil per year.

The decline in the American birth rate is closing more and more public schools every year, but private schools are opening at an even faster rate. About three million children attend private religious-directed schools and another two million attend private non-sectarian schools.

The advocates of the egalitarian, government-controlled society have become almost hysterical at the threat this poses to the preferential monopoly status long held by the tax-supported public school system. Obviously, it is easier to mold the thinking and the attitudes of the next generation if all or nearly all children are in the public school system.

Children who transfer to private schools escape the federal court dictates that the public schools may teach secular humanism but may not ask God's blessing, that they may teach evolution but may not teach creation, that they may have Communist or Socialist teachers but may not require a Pledge of Allegiance to the U.S. flag, and that they must have racial quotas and busing but may not allow parents to select neighborhood schools.

Private school pupils also escape the trendy experimentalists who teach permissive sexuality, anti-family lifestyles and situation ethics rather than self-discipline and a moral code of behavior. Private schools, for the most part, escape the atmosphere of drugs, alcohol, destruction and theft of property, and violence which exists in so many urban schools. Unlike public schools, private schools feel free to fire incompetent teachers and expel delinquent students.

Alarmed at the migration of children into private schools, the advocates of the public-school monopoly hit back. The Internal Revenue Service announced on August 22, 1978, that it would deny tax exemption to any private or religious school unless it complied with a new IRS regulation which was unauthorized by the law, cost prohibitive to the schools' financial integrity, and destructive to the schools' academic and religious independence.

The regulation would have required racial quotas

for pupils, faculty, and trustees, even at the expense of ejecting tuition-paying children who are members of the church running the school and replacing them with non-paying children who were not members of the church. The price for non-compliance would be denial of tax-exempt status and of the right to receive tax-deductible contributions.

For once, Congress heeded the message sent by hundreds of thousands of letters from targeted school children, parents and teachers. The House in July, 1979 adopted an amendment by Representatives Robert Dornan (R-Cal.), Larry McDonald (D-Ga.), and Philip Crane (R-Ill.) forbidding use of any appropriated funds to implement the August 22, 1978 regulation.

The Senate then adopted 47 to 43 another amendment by Senator Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) stating that no funds could be used to "carry out any rule, policy, procedure, guideline, regulation, standard or measure which would cause the loss of tax-exempt status to private, religious or church-operated schools . . . unless in effect prior to Aug. 22, 1978." Chalk up a big victory for the grassroots over the bureaucracy.

Connecticut Education Controversy

The customary refusal of the liberals to tolerate any dissent from their rigid orthodoxy reared its ugly head in the matter of the membership of the Connecticut State Board of Education. The liberal educationists refused to allow even one seat out of nine to be held by a woman who holds non-liberal views.

It all started when Connecticut Governor Ella T. Grasso sent her nominations for the nine-member State Board of Education to the Legislature for confirmation. The Governor apparently had decided that the Board, which had been consistently voting 9 to 0 on all issues for some time, needed one member who would bring a fresh approach and different ideas.

As one of the nine, Governor Grasso named Mrs. Eva Hudak, a very popular union woman who was recently elected president of her local, the northwestern judicial district of the Connecticut State Employees Association. She has held previous appointments to other boards from three earlier Connecticut Governors: Chester Bowles, Abraham Ribicoff, and John Dempsey.

But in the eyes of the liberal educationists, Mrs. Hudak had committed one unforgiveable sin. She had opposed sex education in the schools unless it were taught with morality. So the sex educationists and their allies unleashed a savage personal campaign to keep her off the State Board.

They were joined by the militant pro-abortionists who were eager to oppose Mrs. Hudak because she had been president of a chapter of Birthright, Inc. The attack took on anti-Catholic overtones, as Mrs. Hudak was publicly accused of being "too religious" and "a narrow-minded Catholic."

Mrs. Hudak is a self-educated woman, having had to stop her formal education during the depression to help support her ten brothers and sisters. The legislative prosecutors showed her no mercy. They publicly ridiculed her for not having read *The Scarlet Letter* and *An American Tragedy*, arrogantly implying that those two novels mark the dividing line between competence and incompetence.

Meanwhile, another of Governor Grasso's nominations to the State Board of Education was quickly approved even though she admitted in her testimony that

she opposes having the American Flag in the classrooms and opposes students' reciting the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

The notion has prevailed for so long that anyone who questions the value of sex education must be some kind of unenlightened crank that the entire topic receives hardly any critical scrutiny. Most parents would find of great interest a perceptive article called "Turning Children Into Sex Experts" by Jacqueline Kasun, published recently in the journal *The Public Interest*.

Mrs. Kasun describes her surprise when she discovered that sex education, as it is taught in the schools today, has little to do with biological facts, but is largely focused on attitudes and "values clarification." But whose attitudes and values? Certainly not traditional moral values or parents' attitudes. Even romantic love is debunked in most programs; any sex is acceptable so long as one is comfortable about it.

Mrs. Kasun's survey of sex education classes in public elementary and secondary schools shows that they teach an acceptance of extra-marital sex, homosexuality, and masturbation; and that these new attitudes are induced by such devices as classroom role-playing, drawings, discussions, pre-tests, post-tests, and by constantly requiring students to use the most extensive and explicit vocabulary of sex.

Shirley Foster Hartley, in her 1975 study on *Illegitimacy* (Univ. of Cal. Press), shows that in Sweden, the illegitimacy rate had been declining since 1956 when sex education was made compulsory. Then the trend changed. Swedish births out of wedlock now amount to 31 percent of all births, the highest rate in Europe, and two and a half times as high as in the U.S.

But the illegitimacy rate in our country is still climbing, and so is sex education. It would seem that school boards would have an obligation to listen to opposing points of view.

The Pledge To The Flag

"The Pledge of Allegiance shall be recited each school day by pupils in elementary educational institutions supported or maintained in whole or in part by public funds." So reads the text of an Illinois law enacted by the Legislature in 1979.

In signing the law, Illinois Governor James R. Thompson acknowledged that it may be unconstitutional under a strict interpretation of existing Supreme Court decisions, but he said, "the time has come for a new judicial review." Indeed it has. The Governor was right on target when he said "too many young people -- and adults -- today have no respect for our country's flag simply because it has not been part of their teaching."

The frequent recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag began in 1892 as a patriotic exercise in commemoration of the 400th anniversary of Columbus' landing in North America. Recitation first became mandatory in New York in 1898 during the Spanish-American War. By the outbreak of World War II, the Pledge was generally and routinely required throughout the country because of state laws or school board regulations. The phrase "under God" was added in 1954.

The schoolroom recitation of the Pledge was upheld by the Supreme Court in *Minersville District v. Gobitis* (1940). The Court rejected the argument that the Pledge requirement violated the First Amendment, saying, "National unity is the basis of national sec-

urity" and school officials have "the right to select appropriate means for its attainment."

Only three years later, in the midst of World War II, *Gobitis* was overruled by the Supreme Court in *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette* (1943). The Court held that Jehovah's Witness children (whose creed prohibits the worship of "false idols") could not be expelled for nonparticipation in the Pledge ceremony.

But the Court did not base its decision on freedom of religion, instead using an extension of the First Amendment generally. The Court then proceeded to use *Barnette* as a springboard for other interferences with the ability of the public schools to promote patriotism and respect for the laws of God and America.

The Supreme Court held that students may not be expelled for wearing black armbands to protest U.S. policy toward Vietnam (*Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District*, 1969). The Court refused to review a Circuit Court decision holding that a school cannot expel a pupil for distributing material critical of school policies (*Scoville v. Board of Education of Joliet Township High School District*, 1970).

The Supreme Court refused to review a Circuit Court decision holding that it is unconstitutional to dismiss a teacher for refusing to recite the Pledge (*Russo v. Central School District No. 1*, 1972). Since all government employees must take an oath to support the Constitution, it does not seem unreasonable that the most important of all government employees, our teachers, should be required to affirm their loyalty to America.

Lower courts, taking their cue from the nation's highest court, have come up with even more imaginative interpretations of *Barnette*. A 1973 case involved a high school senior class president who refused to participate in the Pledge ceremony and was given the option of standing quietly or leaving the classroom. The Federal Circuit Court in *Goetz v. Ansell* held that even this is unconstitutional because "the excluded pupil loses caste with his fellows, and is liable to be regarded with aversion and subjected to reproach and insult."

Those who drafted the First Amendment never dreamed it could be used to forbid teachers to instruct their pupils when to stand up or sit down, or to restrain some students from exercising their free speech to "reproach" other students who refuse to affirm their loyalty to the United States.

It is time for the Supreme Court to review its flag salute decisions and to admit the wisdom of that great liberal Justice, Felix Frankfurter, who wrote in dissent in *Barnette*: "Of course patriotism cannot be enforced by the flag salute. But neither can the liberal spirit be enforced by judicial invalidation of illiberal legislation. Our constant preoccupation with the constitutionality of legislation rather than with its wisdom tends to the preoccupation of the American mind with a false value."

The Phyllis Schlafly Report

Box 618, Alton, Illinois 62002

ISSN0556-0152

Published monthly by Phyllis Schlafly, Fairmount, Alton, Illinois 62002.

Second Class Postage Paid at Alton, Illinois.

Subscription Price: For donors to the Eagle Trust Fund -- \$10 yearly (included in annual contribution). Extra copies available: 25 cents each; 6 copies \$1; 50 copies \$5; 100 copies \$8.