



The Phyllis Schlafly Report



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Death Education in the Classroom

Atlantic Monthly has opened the lid on one of the nasty little secrets of public school education that has been effectively hidden from parents for some five to ten years. Called "death education," it's one of the trendy topics taught by teachers in classroom time that used to be spent on academic subjects such as multiplication tables, fractions, and diagramming sentences.

Death education means experimenting on children's psyches with discussions, assignments, questionnaires, games, crafts, and field trips about death and dying, violence and burial. Death has joined sex, drugs, incest, stress, transcendental meditation, suicide and other psychological subjects that have invaded the classroom without parental knowledge or consent.

In death education, students are usually asked to write their own obituaries, epitaphs, and wills. Sometimes, they are asked to write their own suicide notes or to decide how they would prefer to die.

Some of the more morbid examples of lesson plans, as reported by the generally liberal *Atlantic Monthly*, include telling students to write their epitaphs on construction paper cut in the shape of a tombstone, to plan their own funerals, to choose pallbearers and decide corpse disposal, to decide how they want to look in their coffins, to report a pretended "suicide" to the teenager's parents, and to make their own coffins. Field trips include visiting the embalming room of a funeral parlor and a crematorium, viewing an embalming, touching a corpse, and sitting in a coffin to see how it feels.

Hundreds or thousands of teachers (no one knows how many) who have attended one workshop on death education are now experimenting on ten-year-olds in the public school classroom. No one knows how widespread is this psychological experimentation since death education can range all the way from a full semester course to a few sessions in a health, literature, or gifted and talented curriculum.

An article in *The School Counselor* in 1977 argued the case for death education like this: "Education can initiate change. . . . Death education will play as important a part in changing attitudes toward death as sex education played in changing attitudes toward sex information and wider acceptance of various sexual practices."

What are the attitudes the death education advocates want

to change? What are the various death practices for which they seek "wider acceptance"? The answers to those questions are not clear, but a reading of the materials gives clues.

The advocates of death education appear to be obsessed with the notion that the earth is overpopulated. Once this premise is accepted, then allowing or encouraging people to choose options for various death practices (suicide, euthanasia, or abortion) becomes acceptable.

In trying to change the way children view death, the death educationists lead many pupils to believe that death is something to look forward to, that they have a "right to die," and that death is just escaping the body into perhaps a happier or better environment. Death education makes it easy for pupils to be swept up into the current trendy belief in reincarnation, which in turn tends to make suicide sometimes an attractive option.

Some of the techniques closely resemble hypnosis. In a "simulation mind game" developed at the University of Kentucky, the teacher in a dim candlelit room guides the pupils through a sort of seance in which they are told that they "will experience death and at that moment you will see yourself rise to the ceiling of this room . . . [and be] content in your new state."

We are indebted to *Atlantic Monthly* for correctly identifying not only the purpose of death education, but how it fits into the entire public school experience today.

Changing students' attitudes toward death, says the *Atlantic Monthly*, "reflects a view of education in which the molding of a student's attitudes may be as important as, or even take precedence over, the development of his mind. It implicitly expects teachers to serve as psychologists for the children in their classrooms."

This corroborates the National Education Association report entitled *Education for the 70s* which stated: "Schools will become clinics whose purpose is to provide individualized, psycho-social treatment for the student, and teachers must become psycho-social therapists."

The trouble is that teachers are merely unlicensed psychologists using public school children as guinea pigs for experiments and fads that offend religion, family privacy, and common sense.

ABC-TV Discovers Death Ed

While death education has for years been a bone of contention between parents and schools at the local level, it was recently discovered for the first time by network television. On ABC-TV's World News Tonight of March 30, 1988, Sam Donaldson himself introduced the segment, saying, "It may come as a surprise to many parents" to learn that many schools have incorporated a course in death and dying into their school curriculum. ABC said that this "unlikely" course can be either required or elective, and can be incorporated into many different subjects from Health to Sociology.

Showing morbid visuals, ABC stated that this classroom course often includes student visits to cemeteries, funeral homes, embalming labs, and crematoriums.

Death education has no set curriculum. It can be whatever the teacher chooses to incorporate into this subject. The ABC segment showed Robert Stevenson, a trained death educator, who endorses the courses as a way to help students understand loss and grief.

ABC admitted that many other teachers are allowed to tackle this "delicate" subject without any special training. Parents opposed to death courses argue that death is a private matter and that classroom discussion "takes the dignity out of it."

One teacher was shown arguing that, since some parents don't talk about death at home, it is the schools' responsibility to do it. No evidence was presented that there is either a need for death education or any public demand for the schools to take on this added responsibility.

ABC interviewed a teenage girl named Julie who had been given a classroom death course and taken on a field trip to a local crematorium shortly after her father had died. Crying, she told how the funeral director got into the crematorium and picked some bones out of the ashes, and how traumatic it was to picture her father in there.

Another teenage girl said, after much prodding, that the course helped her to cope with her grandmother's death. The girl appeared as emotionally distraught as Julie.

ABC quoted critics as saying that schoolchildren are too young and too vulnerable for these courses, and that some of them get nightmares. A school board member in Virginia said that these courses cast the teacher in the role of "playing therapist in class" and that teachers are not trained to handle the depression and confusion that the courses cause.

ABC reported that some parents believe that death and dying classes could cause children to decide to commit suicide and showed one father asserting that classroom discussions caused his own son's suicide. The boy's mother said that the course disrupted the family's basic values and their belief in eternal life because the schools teach that "anything goes."

To ABC's final question, "Should students be facing death in the classroom at all?", most parents would answer no. However, most parents don't realize that schools for years have been experimenting with death classes.

Last year, two high school seniors who had been taking the same "death and dying" class committed suicide within a week of each other. Both students, who attended O'Hara High School in Kansas City, died from carbon monoxide poisoning

while sitting in a car parked in their family garage. According to a Scripps Howard wire report, the man who found the body of one of the students told police that the young man had been depressed by the class and by the other student's suicide six days earlier.

Similarly, a death and dying unit given in a Chicago Health class included a talk by a local funeral home representative. Three months later, one student attended services at that funeral home for a close friend killed in an accident.

The student committed suicide shortly thereafter. His mother said, "I knew my son and his friends were traumatized from the death of their friend, but at that time I had no idea that they had just been taught, in the name of Health, the morbid details of embalming the body."

She said, "I am not looking for someone to blame. My son is dead and blame won't change the fact. At the same time, I did not give the public school system my permission to teach my son about death, dying and suicide."

Depressing Classroom Surveys

One of the things that parents complain most about in the public schools today is the surveys that are so frequently given to students, usually without parental knowledge or consent. These questionnaires are very offensive, both because they take up so much valuable time that should be used for academic skills and subjects, and because they are grossly privacy-invading.

Many of these surveys ask the child to reveal all sorts of things that are private family concerns and are none of the school's business. Many surveys involve death and depression. Other surveys are psychologically manipulative.

In Oriskany, New York, pupils were asked to answer the following depressing questions in a required "Health" class. "You just read that a 19-year-old boy was in a car accident that left him completely paralyzed with some degree of brain damage. Would you: (a) Refrain from giving him medication that may save his life? (b) Keep him alive as long as vital signs are normal and/or stable? (c) Ask him if he would like to live or die? (d) Tell him of the consequences and then ask him what the doctors should do? (e) Let him die?"

Here is another morbid question inflicted on Oriskany schoolchildren. "You and your spouse just had your first child. The doctor has informed you that your baby is Mongoloid and also has a small hole in her heart. With several expensive operations and much treatment, she may eventually be saved but will need constant care. What would you do? (a) Allow her to die? (b) Refuse to allow the operation and medication and take what comes? (c) Use any means possible to keep her alive but, if she lives, place her in an institution? (d) Use any means to keep her alive, and if she lives, keep her? (e) Tell the doctors it is up to them?"

The child is also asked to rate a list of statements as "very acceptable, acceptable, unsure, unacceptable, not acceptable at all." This deathly list includes "Being killed in an auto accident . . . dying slowly . . . dying of cancer . . . choosing how you will die . . . living but unable to function . . . being very sick and close to death but not being told."

Here are some nose questions from a "Family Life" survey

given to schoolchildren in Baldwinsville, New York. "Does your parent have any of the following? Alcoholism, drug dependency, mental illness, physical disability, chronic illness, institutionalization." "Has there been a death in your family? Mother, father, brother, sister?" "Have you ever been pregnant? Had a baby? Had an abortion?" "Do you consider yourself a heterosexual? a homosexual?"

In a "Stress Mess" survey in Irvine, California, elementary schoolchildren were given a list of stressful situations and asked to put the letter "S" by the things that would cause stress. Here are some of the stress samples.

"Your bike got a flat tire on the way to school." "Mom is fighting with Dad." "The playground supervisor blamed you for a fight another kid started."

If the child didn't admit to having stress in any of these situations, the child was told to "Write your own example of a stress for you." Any child who was not in a "stress mess" before taking the survey, would surely be in one afterwards!

In a survey that purported to teach "Critical Thinking Skills" in Twin Lakes, Indiana, children were asked to respond to dozens of statements by checking "strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, strongly disagree." Here are some of the statements which involve leading the children to make critical decisions in areas of ethics and parental concern.

"I can trace my own attitude change to confrontations with problems and conflicts in myself." "When parents differ with their high school-age children, they should let them form their own opinions." "In choosing a term paper topic, I would use a topic the teacher suggested in order to be sure I have what the teacher wants." "When asked to remove controversial books, the librarian should stress the constitutional rights to freedom of speech, press, and free thought."

Why aren't the schools teaching the basics and fundamental knowledge instead of doing psychological probing on our children?

Strange Courses in New Mexico

A resolution passed by the New Mexico State Legislature is making waves in the public schools of that state, with school administrators resisting what they consider an interference with their authority. Any outsider reading the resolution would think, of course, the schools should obey this rule, but why in the world did the legislature feel a need to pass it?

New Mexico Senate Memorial 45 reads as follows: "Whereas, the utilization of mind-altering techniques for public school students is highly objectionable; and whereas, the teaching of or counseling by certain psychological techniques in New Mexico's public schools should be entirely eliminated; and whereas, these psychological methodologies can involve such techniques as Transcendental Meditation, altered states of consciousness or the occult;

"Now, therefore, be it resolved by the Senate of the State of New Mexico that the teaching of or counseling by certain mind-altering psychological techniques be entirely eliminated in New Mexico public schools." Other paragraphs require appropriate notification, the issuing of guidelines, and reports to the legislature.

It would seem self-evident that the same First Amendment

that prohibits prayer in the public schools should, without any further legislation or litigation, also prohibit practices of various eastern religions and of the anti-religious or occult. But parents all over the country have discovered that many public schools have gone heavily into the practice of teaching the exercises and the language of such beliefs under the guise of "counseling."

This is not guidance counseling of individual children who have problems or a demonstrated need. We are talking about courses given indiscriminately to an entire class, a practice that should be described as group therapy by unlicensed, amateur psychologists.

The New Mexico story started when a first grade boy at Sierra Vista Elementary School in Albuquerque came home and told his mother that he was hearing frightening stories. Upon investigation, Mrs. Susan Gurule discovered that first graders were taken out of the classroom every other week, sent to the school counselor's office, made to lie down on the floor, and told stories.

This treatment was part of the DUSO program (*Developing Understanding of Self & Others* published by American Guidance Service, St. Paul, MN). After listening to the DUSO tapes, Mrs. Gurule learned that the program contains 42 guided fantasy exercises, subliminal messages, and techniques commonly associated with so-called "New Age" practices.

Mrs. Gurule's discussions with the school got nowhere. The first grade teacher said she didn't even know what was going on in the counseling sessions to which her pupils were sent.

A member of the New Mexico State Legislature also has a child whom the school had subjected to the DUSO program. After meetings with school personnel were unsatisfactory, State Senator Joe Carraro sponsored and successfully guided Senate Memorial 45 to passage.

The New Mexico experience is not an isolated one. Transcendental Meditation is often brought into public schools in "stress" courses for the early elementary grades, and even in spelling!

An entire chapter in a spelling course used in a fourth grade Pennsylvania public school teaches the children to spell words associated with TM, as it is called.

The workbook prepares the schoolchildren for their spelling lesson on TM by having them study this passage: "Several years ago a teacher from India brought the secret of TM, or Transcendental Meditation, to North America. His name is Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. He teaches how to meditate and relax your mind. . . . Twenty minutes of TM can be as helpful to you as several hours of sleep! . . . TM has taken North America by storm. . . . Every day, more and more people are turning on to TM."

Several years ago, some New Jersey parents of public school students who were taught TM took this issue to court. In the 1978 decision of *Malnak v. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi*, the Federal District Court found that TM is religious in nature and that the teaching of its techniques in New Jersey public schools violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

But that hasn't stopped the schools that are entranced with using psychological practices on unsuspecting children. Parents should be on guard against such classroom abuses.

Indoctrinating Children With Fear

Another wave of pathetic letters is starting to flow from schoolchildren who can't spell or write grammatically but who are terribly worried about nuclear war. These are the result of courses, books, or films thrust on pupils by public school personnel who use their authority to impose their political agenda on minor children in the classroom.

Here are some letters from 10-to-12-year-old Chicago-area children whose public schools required them to read and discuss a nuclear horror tale called *Warday*, written by Whitley Strieber and James Kunetka. "I know there will be a war because everybody is so scared they lie to each other." "Do you think there is any way a Warday won't happen? I don't want it to because I haven't gotten past 14 yet." "It is going to be the end of the world. Do you really think anyone will make it? If they do, will they want to? I pray I am lucky and die."

Commentary magazine calls this kind of nuclear war education "gratuitous sadism" and "the most serious abuse of children." The magazine warns parents that children are becoming "hostage to these curricula."

Educator Chester E. Finn, Jr., of the U.S. Department of Education, opposes this use of class time to pursue particular policy agendas. He criticizes "the displacement of learning and cognitive growth by political activity, and the corruption of childhood's simple truths and pleasures by the confusions and anxieties of the adult world."

Those who are trying to burden children with fears of nuclear war in order to guide them into pacifist politics have developed a half dozen classroom curricula. These courses use a biased selection of facts and psychological techniques.

Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR), an outfit headquartered in Cambridge, Mass., brags that it "has almost single-handedly brought the discussion of peace and the nuclear arms race into schools . . . not just liberal eastern schools, but public schools in traditional communities of the south and midwest." ESR boasts that it was responsible for the nuclear education resolutions passed by various school boards in California and Maryland, which mandated courses "throughout entire school systems."

ESR explained its strategy in a fund-raising letter: "A parent or school board member gets information from a local ESR chapter or the national office. Then a presentation on nuclear education is requested for consideration by the school board. Finally, the school board recommends that the schools, administrators and teachers make nuclear age education part of the curriculum."

The ESR letter stated bluntly that its goal is "an informed and active citizenry similar to that envisioned by the American philosopher and educator John Dewey." The activism which John Dewey called for was that "the school should consciously be partners in the construction of a changed society." In other words, nuclear war courses are designed as instruments of social change.

ESR launched its own text called *Perspectives*, designed for all grades, Kindergarten through Grade 12. It's not a course in history or science or even current events. It is training for pacifism in general and for opposition to U.S. defense policies in particular.

Perspectives teaches the students about "peacemakers" who supposedly can be ranked on a scale of desirability. The lowest category, Peacekeeper, includes such necessary evils as police, judges, military personnel engaged in peacekeeping activities, and "politicians who advocate peace through strength." Higher up on the value scale are Negotiators, Social Activists, Visionaries, and Peace-Builders. Singled out for favorable treatment are Martin Luther King, Jr., Joan Baez, Woodie Guthrie, and Bernadette Devlin.

The schoolchildren are taught that "competitive, win/lose notions of power" are bad, and that to "think globally" is good. Social action "in harmony with global and planetary concerns" is held up as ideal. Repression is characterized as Chile under Pinochet. No mention is made that Soviet regimes might be considered repressive.

In *Educating for Disaster*, Thomas B. Smith dissected and exposed the various nuclear war curricula now in use in public schools. *Choices*, published with the imprimatur of the National Education Association and taught in some 2,000 classrooms, uses psychological techniques to persuade schoolchildren that defense is bad and disarmament is good.

Choices imparts shock and fear by graphic depictions of the results of nuclear war. It teaches pupils that America is the bad guy for having used atomic bombs on Japan, that negotiation and compromise are to be preferred over confrontation and competition, that the United States spends too much money on national defense, that the United States and the U.S.S.R. are equal threats to mankind, and that students are better able to deal with the nuclear threat than adults.

Other nuclear war curricula include *Crossroads* and *Decision Making in a Nuclear Age*. No matter what the title, the objectives and methods are the same; they all create and fan students' fears about nuclear war by imposing on them detailed descriptions of human suffering from nuclear weapons.

When Jimmy Carter said in his famous debate with Ronald Reagan in the 1980 presidential campaign that his 13-year-old daughter Amy was worried about "proliferation," the voters laughed him to scorn. People who have children know that normal 13-year-olds are not thinking about proliferation, or even about nuclear weapons at all, unless some adult has deliberately fomented those fears. That's what the nuclear war courses are designed to do.

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