



The Phyllis Schlafly Report

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What Schools Teach and Don't Teach

The Teacher Who Couldn't Read

Can you imagine going through life not able to read? Can you imagine how illiteracy would put you in a sort of isolation booth, all alone, separated from everyone else by an invisible wall?

That was the predicament of John Corcoran, whose incredible life story has just been published in a new book called *The Teacher Who Couldn't Read*. "Being an illiterate," he said, "is like belonging to another culture."

He was a graduate of a university with a bachelor's degree in education and business administration, and he completed over 90 additional graduate hours in education, economics and sociology at four major universities. Counting both his years as a student and as a professional teacher, he attended school for 35 years. But he did not read any textbook or write the answer to any essay question. People close to him detected that he had some difficulty reading, but apparently none suspected that he was totally illiterate.

Corcoran can't explain why he did not learn to read. "I missed out in the early grades," he said, and it was a life of deception after that. He didn't learn how to sound out syllables and words from the letters printed on the page — because nobody taught him.

The teachers assumed that he was dumb, as in stupid, and put him in the "dummy row" in class. As he grew up, survival in school depended on developing a charade of deception. It was the only game he knew. How did he pass from grade to grade? "It was because no one took it upon himself or herself to teach me." So every year, he became more resourceful in disguising what he thought was a permanent defect, beyond his control.

By the time he entered college on an athletic scholarship, he was a pro at his masquerade, always living on the edge of anxiety, fearful that someone would pull off the mask and expose the illusion of literacy he created by carrying a newspaper or a book

as a prop. After graduation, he became a high school teacher. He would identify the brightest student in the class, and would depend on him or her to read whatever was essential.

One day in 1986, when he was 48 years old, Corcoran walked into an adult literacy center and confessed that he wanted to learn how to read. Fortunately, he found a patient, kind tutor who taught him how. The words on the page began to make sense. For the first time, he experienced the excitement and accomplishment of reading!

It was another emotional step when the tutor convinced him that he should go public with his experience in an effort to help others and to expose the cruel way he had been treated by all the schools he had attended. Since then, he has found so many others whom the schools treated the same way. Official surveys show that about 90 million adults, 42 percent of our adult population, are either illiterate or semi-literate.

Corcoran was fortunate that he came from a supportive, two-parent, traditional-values family, so that his frustration at being unable to read erupted in basketball and occasional playground fistfights instead of in criminally anti-social behavior (which is what happens to so many illiterates).

Corcoran believes it is wrong to hang ugly labels on children such as "learning disabled." He says the problem is a teaching disability, not a learning disability. He also objects to the phrase "slow learner." Corcoran wasn't slow with numbers at all. His teachers subjected him to other accusatory labels, too: immature, not motivated, won't respond to class work, doesn't work hard enough. They convinced him that he would always be different from everyone else.

Hanging derogatory labels on children has become big business in the public schools. The public schools get much more money if a child is labeled as having some defect. Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV), chairman

of the Senate Appropriations Committee, recently criticized the Supplemental Security Income program for making payments to children who had been coached to fail tests or misbehave in school in order to fake behavior disorders. The criteria for deciding whether a child is "disabled" include such nebulous and subjective factors as inappropriate or bizarre behavior, attention deficit disorder, isolation, and withdrawal.

The whole explanation of what the school system did to John Corcoran was laid out in Rudolf Flesch's great 1955 book *Why Johnny Can't Read*, and then reiterated in his second book 30 years later, *Why Johnny Still Can't Read*. It's the failure to teach first-graders how to decode the English language with systematic phonics. The public schools never learn from their mistakes. At least 85 percent of public schools still use word-guessing methods such as "Whole Language" instead of systematic phonics, and millions of children face the fate that befell John Corcoran.

If children are going to learn to read, parents will have to teach them.

Fortunately, there is now a system available that makes it easy for parents to do this: *First Reader* by Phyllis Schlafly. Attractively printed and reasonably priced, it is the tool that can make America a nation in which every family teaches its own children to read (as we once were before public schools were invented). Order from First Reader System, P.O. Box 495, Alton, Illinois 62002, (800) 700-5228, \$79.95 plus shipping.

Schools Don't Teach How to Write

It's official now. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has issued its 1992 "Writing Report Card" based on extensive surveys of students who were asked to complete a variety of tasks requiring persuasive, informative, and narrative writing, and guess what? Students can't write.

NAEP tested a representative national sample of 30,000 students in grades 4, 8 and 12 and discovered that even the best students find it hard to write persuasively, using arguments and evidence. Only three percent of students at any grade level were able to write an "elaborated" response in an assignment called "persuasive-writing."

Education spokesmen described the results as "disappointing." They are worse than that; the results are a tragedy.

The comments were layered with the usual excuse that children watch too much television. Probably they do, but that's not why they can't write. Nobody ever expected television to teach kids how to write.

We do expect public schools to teach children how to write. My writing training started in the 4th grade of a St. Louis public school, where a wonderful teacher

expected each student to turn in a new original composition every morning, which she corrected and evaluated.

I don't know why anyone should be surprised at today's results. Eighth grade teachers admit that the majority of students spend less than one hour a week of school time on developing writing proficiency. In addition, NAEP discovered that 52 percent of 8th graders and 37 percent of 12th graders reported never or hardly ever being given a writing assignment of three or more pages.

But that's not the worst of it. When schools do give writing assignments, all too frequently they teach children to write badly.

The principal writing experience most public students have is an exercise called "journal writing." It has become a staple of public schooling over the past ten years, usually in English classes, but often in other classes, too.

Whatever the real purpose of journal writing, in practice it teaches children to write badly. Journal writing affirmatively teaches the child not only to disregard, but to disdain, every element of good writing, including putting thoughts in an orderly sequence, marshalling facts to support a proposition, vocabulary, grammar, syntax, spelling, punctuation, penmanship, and even just making sense.

If you doubt that schools can be this bad, seek out some journal-writing instructions. For example, a 12-page "Student Guide to Writing a Journal" used in the 8th grade advises students: "Don't worry too much about style or correctness . . . regular sentence structure, punctuation, logical sequences and so forth." The teacher will not "criticize or even evaluate your writing."

The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin published an article by one enthusiastic teacher of journal-writing. Here's how she described her mission: "No matter how poorly a student spells or how poorly a sentence is structured, a student can still make high marks on journal writing." Her rationale was that the higher grades make poor students "feel successful."

To replace the teaching of writing skills with the promotion of unearned self-esteem is a cheat on the students. To allow, even encourage, the repetition of writing mistakes, while pretending that mistakes don't matter, is the direct opposite of what education should be.

Spelling is a lost art. The appalling inability of college graduates, as well as high school graduates, to spell is obvious to anyone who cares to look at their written work. Some schools actually encourage children to misspell words by telling them to write words any way they seem to sound. When parents protest, they are told: don't worry, the children will learn the correct spelling later. That's not true. Bad

habits learned when you are young are very difficult to shake. It's a terrible mistake to teach children bad habits (of spelling or anything else), and then expect them to self-correct later.

No wonder the SAT scores have been dropping steadily and dramatically for 20 years. The education establishment has an answer for that: just raise the scores by 100 points. They don't call this cheating; they call it "recentering."

Beginning next year, a 430 SAT score on the verbal section will suddenly become a 510. Of course, the students won't be any smarter, but they will feel good about their higher scores and the public will be further anesthetized about the declining value of a public school diploma.

The inability of young people to write is an even better index of the failure of the public schools than the now widely recognized high rate of illiteracy. Whereas reading may be considered a passive skill, writing is an active skill that forces you to formulate your own thoughts, organize them in a coherent way, and put them on paper in a form that communicates a message to others. That's precisely what most young people cannot do.

If you can't write well, you can't think well. And if you can't think well, look out, someone else will do your thinking for you.

Surprise Results of Sex Education

Liberal research has just achieved an astounding breakthrough! An establishment publication has just reported that sex education, as it is typically taught in public schools all over the United States, does not have any measurable impact on teenagers' decisions to engage in or to postpone sexual activity!

This is the conclusion of a lengthy investigative article in the prestigious *Atlantic Monthly*. It was written by Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, a vice president of the New York City-based Institute for American Values and author of the 1993 article entitled "Dan Quayle Was Right" (which set forth the remarkable liberal discovery of the fact that having illegitimate children is a bad idea).

Sex education started coming into public schools about 30 years ago, and became progressively more explicit until many courses include actual demonstrations of how to use contraceptives and pornographic videos to explain the facts of life to minor children. This dramatic change in public school curriculum and practices took place without any public debate as to whether it was good or bad for children, and without any public debate as to whether or not parents approved of this change. More often, it happened without even the knowledge of the parents.

When parents discovered what was going on and protested, they were uniformly told that sex education

was essential in order to combat teenage pregnancies. But there never was a shred of research to prove that sex education reduced teenage pregnancies or was beneficial to students.

The *Atlantic* article states that, over the last ten years, 17 states have adopted mandates to teach children in grades Kindergarten through 12th grade what is euphemistically called "comprehensive sex education." This is based on the assumption that "once teenagers acquire a formal body of sex knowledge and skills, along with proper contraceptive technology, they will be able to govern their own sexual behavior responsibly." "Responsibly" means engaging in sexual activity without resulting in a live baby.

The *Atlantic* article asserts that comprehensive sex education "flunks the reality test." Reality tells us that sexual activity among unmarried teenagers is far more prevalent, and at a far younger age, than before sex education came into the lives of public school children. In 1970, five percent of 15-year-old girls and 32 percent of 17-year-old girls reported having had sex. In 1988, the figures had increased to 26 percent of 15-year-olds and 51 percent of 17-year-olds.

Despite easy access to contraceptives, the percentage of births to unwed mothers continues to rise. It has already increased from 30 percent among teenagers in 1970 to nearly 70 percent in 1990. In some cities, 85 to 90 percent of all teenage births are to unwed mothers, and 25 percent of all babies born to teenagers are not their first children.

Why doesn't handing out condoms and contraceptives solve the problem? According to Whitehead's investigation, this just reflects "the same trend toward technocratic solutions and diminished adult responsibility."

New Jersey was one of the first states to adopt a mandate for comprehensive sex education and was the first state to require sex education for children in the primary grades. The state mandate was passed in the late 1970s.

The woman who helped to write and pass the state mandate, Susan Wilson, now runs a foundation-financed advocacy office which gives her a budget to crisscross the state attacking efforts to repeal the mandate. She argues that children should not be burdened with moral strictures and that sex classes should teach boys and girls from the first grade to talk casually about sex with one another without embarrassment.

Now, virtually every public school student in New Jersey receives 24 hours a year of comprehensive sex education. After teaching "sex literacy" in elementary schools, New Jersey middle schools plunge right into teaching about condoms, abortion, "protected sex," and what they call "noncoital sex" (necking, petting, massage and masturbation).

New Jersey sex educators operate on the ridiculous theory that encouraging children to engage in such practices will enable them to say no to intercourse.

So, what are the results! Surprise, surprise (to the liberals, that is), by 1980, 68 percent of teenage births were to unmarried mothers; by 1991, the figure had increased to 84 percent. Of course, responsible parents who protested New Jersey's giant experiment on children knew that would be the result. But then, what do parents know? The professional educators were in charge.

Most surveys show that teenagers are not asking schools to teach them about sex. The girls are pleading to be told how to say no without hurting the boys' feelings.

"Safe Sex" Isn't Safe After All

When sex education became a "basic" of public school curriculum in the 1970s, most courses tended to downplay or even ignore the danger from venereal disease, often discouraging any classroom discussion of VD because it might instill "fear" in teenagers.

After the AIDS scare hit in the 1980s, condoms became the centerpiece of all sex ed and AIDS curricula — the new icon of "safe sex" and "comprehensive" sex education. Avant-garde superintendents such as New York City's Joseph Fernandez passed out condoms to minors over the opposition of parents, and other schools trying to be trendy passed out condoms surreptitiously in what are euphemistically called "school-based clinics."

Now it turns out that "safe sex" isn't safe; it's high risk. "Free sex" isn't free; it's very costly. The *New York Times* let the cat out of the bag on the front page (April 1, 1993), so it must be true. Here are the awesome statistics: One out of five Americans suffers from a sexual disease. According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, 56 million people in the United States are infected with a sexually transmitted disease, and more than half of those sufferers have sexual diseases that are incurable.

This means that young women and men have a one out of five chance of getting a spouse (or significant other) who is infected. Those are pretty depressing odds. You wouldn't ride in an airplane if you had a one in five chance of crashing.

The odds for those of marriageable age are probably worse than one in five, after you discount the children and the senior citizens who don't belong to the promiscuous generation. Also, the one in five statistic doesn't include the figures for AIDS, an omission that was not explained in the report.

The experts have identified 55 different sexual diseases. The Guttmacher study lists the most common as Chlamydia, Trichomoniasis, Gonorrhea, H.P.V., Genital Herpes, Hepatitis B, and Syphilis. These are

not diseases that, like AIDS, are concentrated in certain high-risk groups. These sexual diseases infect the good-looking guy and gal next door, who probably don't think of themselves as promiscuous and indeed may have only one sexual partner at a time.

These sexual diseases are the plague of the smart set, the go-along teenagers, and the swinging young adults who have been practicing what is called "safe sex." Fifteen years ago, it was commonly thought that antibiotics had erased our worry about venereal diseases, but cases of syphilis have doubled in the last ten years and penicillin-resistant cases of gonorrhea are increasing.

The Guttmacher study also reveals the politically incorrect truth that sexual diseases are more devastating to women than to men. Why? Because they often cause infertility, and because sexual diseases can cause all sorts of complications during pregnancy, including miscarriage, stillbirth, premature delivery, and infection or major defects in the unborn child.

Just think of all the unhappy women involved in the Guttmacher estimate that up to 150,000 women every year become infertile as a result of a sexual disease. "If current trends continue," the report warns, "one-half of all women who were 15 in 1970 will have had P.I.D. [Pelvic Inflammatory Disease, which causes infertility] by the year 2000."

Since the mid-1980s, schoolchildren have been taught that condoms enable them to engage in "safe sex" without getting infected with the twin evils of AIDS and pregnancy. Nobody told them that there are 50 other sexual diseases that condoms won't save them from.

When are the public school sex education classes going to stop lying to children about "safe sex"? The only safe sex is chastity until marriage and fidelity afterwards. If we care about our children, they must be taught this truth.

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