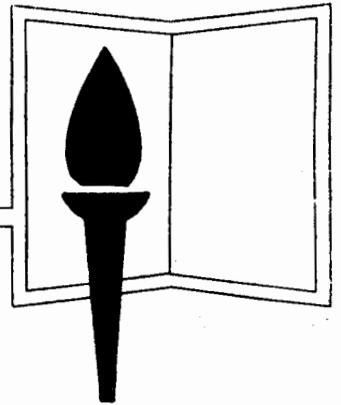


Education Update

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REAGAN REVOLUTION STALLED IN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Many who supported Terrel Bell as Secretary of Education because they wished to support the choice of the man they voted for, Ronald Reagan, have become disillusioned with Bell's performance. In the early months of the Administration, conservatives were guardedly optimistic that the selection of a career educator to preside over the Department which Reagan had promised to abolish represented, in one sense, the "best of both worlds." The appointment of Bell cheered the education community for it would have one of its own to look out for its concerns in an administration it viewed as hostile to its interests. At the same time, parents were hopeful because he was known, during his tenure as U.S. Education Commissioner, to have spoken in defense of the right of parents not to have their own values attacked in the public schools.

The notes sounded by Secretary-designate Bell at the time of his confirmation hearings were reassuring to parents who asked themselves, "for whom will Bell toil?" With apparently strong conviction, Bell assured the senators that there would be a "fundamental change" in federal policy directions and that there was no role for the federal government in the support of controversial psychosocial education programs.

In the early months of his tenure, Bell was frequently critical of education policies that had resulted in lowered educational standards. In a "bellwether" speech to school administrators, he urged "flabby" school systems to shape up. His pursuit of this theme was reported as poorly received by the education community and one trade journal featured an article asking, "Will the Real Terrel Bell Stand Up."

As the months went by, the guarded optimism of conservatives asking the same question gradually gave way to the uneasy awareness that Bell was carrying water on both shoulders. A major sign of this was Bell's strange persistence in doggedly pursuing the foundation proposal—which has no viable support from any quarter—as the vehicle to replace the Department. This year, in his visits to Capitol Hill to "defend" the President's proposed budget reductions, the water Bell was carrying on both shoulders proved to be too much for him. It was widely reported in the media

that Secretary Bell had conceded to the President's opponents in Congress that the budget cuts he was "defending" would harm the "quality of education" for children in the public schools.

Moreover, Bell appears to be moving forward with a far-reaching technology initiative which calls for "federal leadership" in a "partnership" with the private sector and the education community for the major development of computer based software curriculum. This latest development comes as a bombshell to those who thought the Reagan Administration was committed to private sector and local school initiative for curriculum development.

Education Interest Groups Mobilize to Defeat Reagan Agenda

What has intensified the deepening conflict between Secretary Bell's commitment as a member of the Reagan team and his lifelong association with the education establishment? Probably the most important factor is the overwhelming pressure he must feel from the newly united and organized education interest groups. In this matter of "preserving the federal role" education interest groups understand themselves to be in a crucial battle for preservation of their own power and influence.

Education Week, February 2, 1982, reported that the "slumbering giant" of education lobby groups under the umbrella of the Committee for Full Funding of Education Programs had grown "fat and happy" from their successes with the Carter Administration and were caught off guard in the fight over President Reagan's first year proposals for block grants and budget reductions. Now, they have revived their political network of 80 education interest groups to prevent any further erosion of their interests.

If the education groups were lacking in unity on the creation of the Department and other issues before, the threat they perceive from a conservative administration has helped them to forge a strong, militant and united lobbying force. Albert Shanker, head of the American Federation of Teach-

ers, was no longer the gadfly of education politics when he sounded the note of unity for survival at a recent convention of school administrators: "The 1980's are the most difficult and dangerous period American education has ever faced," he said. Citing the specters of deep education budget cuts, tuition tax credits and more block grants, Shanker said it was important for everyone connected with the public schools to realize their common goal. He said education interest groups must avoid scuffles over education block grants which he termed a "demonic plot designed to get us to fight each other when we should be fighting Washington."

The important feature to remember about the enormous power of the education establishment is its sheer size; education is the largest "industry" in the United States. Assess the strength of the Washington-based lobby operations with computer linkages to the education interests in each Congressional District and you have a lobbying operation unmatched by any other interest group coalition. One indicator of the enormous power to influence Congress wielded by this coalition was the fact that the 21 freshman Republicans who were pressured to write to President Reagan urging him not to cut the education budget included Rep. John LeBoutillier (R-NY), conservative leader and author of *Harvard Hates America*.

The education lobby knows it is locked into a mighty battle with the public on whose back it has ridden for many years. The American public has carried the burden of the education establishment that has set goals, counted, categorized and processed students according to federal and state mandates. It has become clear that the real issue of the "federal role" translates into the critical support that role provides to the education establishment to continue to do what it is doing very badly.

The profession that has used so much of our human capital for the purpose of "changing society" and "modifying student behavior" is itself unable to deal well with critical self-examination. In the field of medicine, if we had a proportionately large number of patients dying following medical treatment, we would rightly conclude that there was something amiss with the medical practitioners. In education, the patterns of public authority and responsibility have become so hopelessly complex and diffuse that in the current maze the public, individually or collectively, can never hope to hold the professional educators responsible for their poorly educated children.

The response of the education lobby to the "triple whammy" of widespread media attention to their failures, the election of 1980, and the economic crisis represents a masterpiece in the art of "crisis management" for self-preservation. The lobbyists at the Committee for Full Funding in Education are singing a new song to the Congress. As one of them stated, "the new theme for the 80's is productivity—how to foster students' ability to function in a technological work force."

Testifying before Congress against the Administration's budget reductions, NEA President Willard McGuire said "the short-term savings mean long-term costs in terms of productivity and national security."

Bell's Ambiguous Response

This militant, unified and intense energy concentrated now on "preserving the federal role" looms large as we look upon the deepening ambiguity of Terrel Bell's policies as Secretary of Education. Secretary Bell is a man with two opposing loyalties: the education community from which he springs and the Reagan team on which he has agreed to serve. His style is not to strike a middle course but rather to walk down both paths simultaneously, a difficult feat for most, but one which Secretary Bell, a lifelong educator, seems to perform brilliantly and amiably.

His remarkable ability to carry water on both shoulders is vividly illustrated by his response at the March 29th meeting with the Chief State School Officers of the fifty states. In response to a complaint that the Reagan Administration was failing to be an "advocate" for education at the national level; Secretary Bell replied:

"I've wanted to be careful that I not be out front expounding Ted Bell's philosophy of education, and therefore not representing as a member of the Cabinet, the point of view of this Administration."

Bell's rhetoric, so it would seem, is supposed to qualify him for Reagan team membership. In another sense, however, he seems to be reassuring the educators that his role is really that of a "caretaker" for the present "furniture" in the federal "house" of education.

Bell's caretaker role explains the otherwise inexplicable, doomed efforts to bring forth a foundation as a means of abolishing the department. From the beginning it was clear that the President's goal could not be realized because of the strategic power of congressional committee chairmen deeply opposed to the department's abolition. It was also understood that conservatives would not expend valuable political capital on a proposal they did not view as an authentic abolition. To no one's surprise, Bell failed to persuade the education community to support him. It appears to be conceded by all parties that the foundation proposal is dead for this session. Renewed, and hopefully more genuine, efforts to abolish the department must await a further political shift in Congress after the 1982 elections.

The lesson from this episode, however, is to ponder the precious time spent on a largely doomed enterprise when the real business at hand of reducing the federal role in education through transformation of existing programs and budget reductions was within the realm of the possible. Yet it was reported that Bell was so enamored of the foundation proposal that at one point he threatened to resign if the White House did not accept it. Why a proposal that could not possibly pass should be that important is a mystery. But it is no mystery that the foundation proposal engaged precious man hours that could have otherwise been expended on setting different priorities with lower budget levels and examining all existing grant programs to eliminate those not contributing to higher standards in education.

The Case of the Curious Budget Defense

In negotiations with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) last fall, Secretary Bell had initially recommended

a \$13.1 billion budget for the Department in fiscal year 1983. Bell revealed that he had fended off an OMB proposal to set the Department allocation as low as \$8.17 billion. Conceding that the \$10 billion budget finally agreed upon was "harsh and austere," Bell said it was the best he could accomplish.

The February 21, 1982 (Shrewsbury, N.J.) *Sunday Register* captures the flavor of Bell's "water on both shoulders" approach. Bell is quoted as "expressing concern about the cut-backs" but he made it clear that he was a "Reagan team player." "He had wanted a bigger slice of the pie for education but knew he could not get it."

At the February House Budget Committee hearing, Rep. Paul Simon (D-Ill.) asked Bell: "Do you know of any precedent in history where any nation has said we're going to build with this kind of a cut in education?" Bell responded: "I realize its not going to be without pain, but the cuts have to be made to avoid the horrendous deficit we now have."

Bell's emphasis was on the work it took just to get the education figure as high as it is. When Rep. Leon Panetta (D-Calif.) said he was "tired" of Bell referring to the "pain" of the cuts, Bell responded: "The struggle to get the appropriation to ten billion in the administration was not one in which we accepted the initial proposals of OMB. But after the decisions are made, we feel we have a responsibility to defend that."

Later Bell was credited by members of the House Appropriations committee with being a "good soldier" for the Administration. Bell reiterated that Reagan's admittedly "harsh and austere" budget will turn the economy around. To the House Labor committee Bell admitted that "when you reduce funding, you sacrifice as far as quality is concerned." Bell also said, "The Title I program has been a successful program...we have been successful over the years since 1965 in the education of disadvantaged children." Nevertheless, as a good soldier for the Reagan team, Bell said he would "stand by the budget before you today."

A related insight into Bell's style was revealed in the January 26 *Education Week*, which reported on a conference of bilingual educators at which Rep. Paul Simon spoke. Simon told the discouraged educators at that time that they had at least one friend in a key spot in the Reagan Administration—the Secretary of Education. Terrel Bell, he declared, "Is a true believer and supporter of our cause. If it hadn't been for Ted Bell, there might not have been a dime in the budget for bilingual ed."

It is reported that the political and career people under Bell were instructed to follow a similar pattern in their budget testimony on the Hill. They were instructed to stand by the President's proposals but to present no significant rationale or justification for the proposed reductions. In short, when the legislators asked the Administration's representatives how they could justify any further cuts, the response they received was that as members of the Reagan team they were standing by the figures they were presenting.

Since that time, those congressional committees dealing with education have called for either increases or for keeping appropriations level to this year. The battle of the education budget for FY 1983 which begins October 1 is far from over. Congress is only beginning its long and compli-

cated budget process and there will be many opportunities ahead for changes. Certainly the Republican controlled Senate will have an opportunity to pass on the budget levels recommended by the Democrat controlled House.

It can be expected that education interests will continue to fiercely oppose any education budget reductions on the grounds that such reductions represent a danger to the "economy" and to "national security." It is to be hoped, however, that spokesmen for the Administration will be able to do more than agonize over the "pain" of the reductions and to "stand by" them in making their case to Congress.

At the very least, dubious programs such as the National Diffusion Network and the Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education (FIPSE) should have been closely scrutinized to determine whether such programs are indeed appropriate activities for the federal government.

The Technology Initiative

One of the priorities established by Secretary Bell for the Education Department is his "technology initiative." Bell may have already approved a far-reaching technology initiative report prepared by career bureaucrats for support of research, development and dissemination of computer based educational software curricula for the schools. The Secretary's technology initiative, a four-year \$16 million program, includes components already planned for FY 1982 which are moving forward in the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI).

There is every indication that for the educationist trend-setters, the "computer age in education" will be to the 80's what "humanizing education" was to the 70's. The January 1982 *Phi Delta Kappan's* special issue on the computer age in education featured an article by Department of Education career bureaucrat Arthur E. Melmed who argued that the federal government must be involved in software development. Melmed is also chairman of the OERI Technology Planning Group which developed the report that outlines the Secretary's technology initiative.

Phi Delta Kappan's lead article, "The Silicon Age and Education" was authored by an old reliable weathervane of educational trends, Harold G. Shane, Professor of Education at Indiana University. Shane is now fascinated by the potential for education represented by the silicon chip. In the style so characteristic of education theorists, he introduces his article with a quote from Queen Victoria that "change must be accepted...when it can no longer be resisted."

However, in 1969, in *Today's Education*, the journal of the National Education Association, Shane was predicting a different "change" for America's public school children. In his landmark piece, "Forecast for the 70's" Shane tipped off the parents as to the direction leading education theorists across the nation were taking the public schools. Prescriptions for school practices, culled from the dominant education literature at that time, included the following:

The basic role of the teacher will change noticeably...ten years hence it will be more accurate to term the teacher a learning clinician—this title is intended to convey the idea that schools are becoming clinics whose purpose is to provide individualized psycho-social treat-

ment to the student—thus increasing his value both to himself and to society.

Shane also predicted in 1969 that “ten years from now our faculty” will include “culture analysts,” “media specialists,” who evaluate hardware and software, “information input specialists,” “curriculum input specialists,” who from day to day make necessary corrections and additions to memory bank tapes on which individualized instructional materials are stored, “bio-chemical therapists-pharmacists,” “early childhood specialists,” “developmental specialists” and “community contact personnel.” All of these specialists, Shane argues, will be needed as the educationists not only adapt to the world of tomorrow but “create” the world of tomorrow.

Tragically for a generation of poorly educated students, the concept of the school as a psycho-social clinic for changing the student’s behavior and changing society, widely promoted by federal initiatives and education bureaucrats, has utterly failed. Educators with character, dedication and competence have become demoralized; many have retired or gone into other fields. However, the education “experts” are still with us. Their new theme song is that the federal role in education is necessary for “national security” and “productivity” and for the “human capital” the schools are “developing” to enable the United States to compete in world markets.

A recent Roper Poll confirms that 83 percent of the respondents do not believe that education should be a federal function. A January poll by Sindlinger and Company sponsored by the Heritage Foundation found that only 14.3 percent of the people believe that education programs should belong in the hands of the federal government; only 13.17 percent expressed confidence in federal government efficiency. The education lobby argues that federal support is necessary to sustain *their* priorities as the “solutions” to the education crisis precipitated in no small measure because of the disordered educational priorities of the past decade. For all their talk about “humanizing” education, too many educators in powerful positions do not themselves comprehend the nature or value of an authentic broad liberal arts education. At the same time they are bereft of a solid background in mathematics or science.

They are paid by the public to “facilitate” the process of education and their problem today is that the public is beginning to question their enormous tax investment in that endeavor. Why, then, should they be trusted when they call for a massive leap into the computer age—a leap in which the federal government is to play the key role. The critical question is whether such a momentous step is appropriate in the Reagan Administration.

According to the OERI Technology Planning Group report, the federal government must take a leadership role in the development of computer based software because the private sector can not be expected to take the “risk” of privately funded development. The “critical shortage” of computer software curriculum will not be “relieved” in the absence of federal “pump priming.”

The rationale of the involvement of the Department of Education is that “barriers” exist for the “present development” of the “full potential” for the new technology in edu-

cation. The main “barrier” according to the report, is a “shortage of courseware and educational software of all kinds,” development of which the federal government must support to “enable schools to realize the benefit of their investment” in technological hardware. The report finds there is an absence of “adequate” basic and applied research to “ensure the steady improvement” in the “quality of presently available courseware.” Federal support will insure the “development of the basis of new knowledge needed for steady improvement in the quality of educational software.” The terms educational software and courseware mean the actual computer based curriculum through which the students will be processed.

The report reveals that the present state of the art of computer based educational software curriculum is limited primarily to drill in mathematics. Only federal leadership can “make up” for the “shortage” of “quality” computer based courseware.

The report states that “a comment often heard among experts is that most of the stuff out there is junk.” The report does not address the crucial question of why involvement of federal bureaucrats in the development of computer software will “ensure the development of quality software” as opposed to producing more “junk” software.

The report details the specific measures that will be taken under the technology initiative. These include “a program of lighthouse school demonstrations” in pilot schools; an information clearinghouse and exchange to “assist education authorities and practitioners in planning and implementing local education technology activities”; and grants for basic and applied research.

The rationale in the report for federal involvement is that the private sector cannot do it without “federal leadership.” The report states that this conclusion was formed through “consultation with representatives of the private sector” which “reveals the strong possibility that this level of investment will not be sustained in the absence of federal leadership and the development of a firm school market.”

“Planned for FY 82 is an experimental solicitation of proposals from consortia of education agencies and schools, and firms from the education technology school serving industry for the development of educational software to specifications determined by the schools.” Financing of this development is to be “shared” equally by the schools, the private firms and the federal government. This “sharing” mechanism is designed to gain “a maximum leverage” from the limited funds available, “reduce the risk” to the private developer and “keep the federal government at arms length from influencing school curriculum.”

Based on the “success” of the experimental solicitation in FY 82, the program element for the funding of the “consortia” for the development of educational software will be \$1.5 million, \$2 million, and \$1 million in FY 83, 84, and 85 respectively.

The report says the “federal government is the only remaining source of funds” to develop the basic and applied research that is “necessary” because what is in use in the schools now “does not reveal the potential of the new education technology.” The report argues that federal support is

justified based on a "well established principle of public sector support for basic and applied research in areas such as education, health, and agriculture where broad societal benefits are involved."

The whole point is that the public, as reflected in the 1980 election and in public opinion polls, appears to be questioning whether career federal bureaucrats, based on previous performance, really are the most qualified to determine who should receive tax dollars to produce "broad societal benefits."

According to the report, "the principal new element introduced by the new education technology... is its potential for individualization which derives from its capacity for "interaction with the student learner."

At this point we find the amazing statement: "Tested and proven paradigms (models) for individualization such as drill-and-practice and question-and-answer that are the present basis of courseware development by school publishers have demonstrated their effectiveness, especially in elementary arithmetic skills, and their limitations." Elsewhere, the report has told us that according to experts, "most of what is out there is junk."

The report is looking for research in cognitive science for "new paradigms, more powerful and with other domains of effectiveness in curriculum areas such as reading, writing, mathematics and the sciences, that remain undeveloped and untested in the absence of an investment budget."

The paradigms depend on the "interactive capacity of the computer program to gather data on student responses which provide the basis in principle for constructing a model of the student's domain of knowledge; followed by a 'teaching' program that can be devised to build on what the student knows and assist the student in filling in the gaps in his knowledge." In short, what is envisioned is a programmed sequence of input, feedback and output which codifies the nature of the education enterprise.

The report describes the "lighthouse" pilot demonstrations to develop, test and "validate" effective paradigms for "learning" in the sciences, reading and language arts." Consortia will be developed with participants to be chosen by federal bureaucrats, consisting of "research universities" and "pilot schools." School publishers and other private courseware developers can be provided, at no cost to the government, "observer status" to these federally contrived "consortia" to "encourage" rapid transfer of new knowledge and techniques to the private sector."

The mind boggles. The "new knowledge and techniques" are now *in the private sector*. The thrust of this new technology proposal is to bring the federal bureaucrats into the act; they will in turn decide which institutions are "worthy" to participate in their "consortia."

Secretary Bell could save the taxpayers precious dollars by abandoning this plan and instead urging local school boards to take the initiative as he has, in effect, often urged in the past. Why not encourage every school board in the land to come up with its own plan for bringing their own local schools into the computer age? Many of them can begin to work with private sector computer based companies toward the common goal of helping youngsters to become pro-

ductive citizens; new priorities can be established to solve the critical shortage of science and mathematics teachers.

Bills have been introduced in the House and Senate that would give federal tax breaks to computer manufacturers who donate equipment to elementary and secondary schools. Why not extend the donation to include the expertise from the private sector to the local schools as well?

The Education Department technology initiative, a federalized "development" project in which everyone is responsible and no one is responsible, is more bad medicine for very sick patients. The philosophical premise of the new technology initiative report is in so many ways reflective of the tragically flawed vision of many education policymakers. At national, regional, state and local levels, far too many individuals are earning a living as "facilitators" in the \$200 billion education industry. Federal funds and the "federal role" provide for them the indispensable "capacity building" for the conferencing, goal setting, counting, institution analysis for planned change, grantsmanship, testing, evaluation, and compliance with federal and state mandates that form the warp and woof of the education process in the United States.

Unquestionably, the revolutionary technological breakthroughs of the past decade represent a challenge and an opportunity of enormous proportions. Why can't our current technological and economic crisis become a springboard for people working together again in the communities where they live and work? That is, after all, what working for the common good is all about. It is also what the Reagan Revolution was supposed to be about.

end
scan



" 'Programs rapidly, inputs easily, communicates forcefully and relates well to peer group.' Splendid, son! You can always learn to read and write! "

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NEA'S "United Mind Workers" DECRY NEW RIGHT CONSPIRACY

There is hope for America's school children when a leading liberal journal such as *The New Republic* in its April 18, 1981, issue can say that "nearly every necessary step to high-quality American public education is being fought by, of all people, the nation's largest teachers' union. The NEA supports seniority systems that prevent principals from firing inept teachers. It has taken almost no interest in the declining national test scores, other than to question the validity of the tests. Rather than campaigning for better education, it has spent its time and money campaigning for political candidates, in hopes of accumulating power. Its monument is the Department of Education, a bureaucratic honeypot for educational special interests."

Indeed, the NEA and its affiliates are busier than ever these days. When they are not working to fill the coffers for their Political Action Committees to support candidates "friendly" to education interests, they have been busy holding training conferences on the "new right."

A recent Virginia Education Association conference highlighted the accomplishments of the NEA's high dollar public relations campaign targeted at the public which includes brochures saying, "We Want This to Be Your Child's Best Year in School" and "Education Deserves a Future" in addition

to radio and TV ads. The emphasis was completely focused on how many people were being reached by the union's public relations campaign as opposed to considering how many children in their care are being effectively taught. What a tragedy that the NEA's affiliates do not spend more time on raising the standards of their own profession so that they would not have to rely on superficial public relations gimmicks to refurbish their image.

Recently, alert parents in Oregon reported on a conference held by the Oregon Education Association entitled, "The New Right Radicals." The NEA is apparently having conferences similar to this in many states. Their working document for studying "the new right" is entitled, "Helping Teachers Teach All The Children." It includes pre- and post-testing for teachers on the personalities and activities of persons said to be in the new right. It's too bad the parents can't give the NEA activists pre- and post-testing on how well they can teach phonics, languages, history, math, science, literature, grammar, computer technology, philosophy or government.

Dan Cameron, Assistant Executive Director of the National Education Association divided up all of the different

(Continued on page 8)

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TEACHING VALUES IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS: WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

What consensus is there in our pluralistic and religiously diverse communities for the teaching of values in the public schools? Who is to decide what values will be taught? How are the first amendment rights of believers and non-believers protected when values are taught in public institutions?

Many parents and concerned educators have registered strong objections to the teaching of values through curriculum programs and strategies based on the values clarification techniques of Sidney Simon, et al., and the moral development theory of Harvard's Lawrence Kohlberg and his disciples. Many of the objections center on the relativist philosophical framework of these programs. Moreover, the practical effect of court decisions, when combined with the philosophical biases of policy making educators, has been to banish God from the public classroom as an authoritative source of definitive or worthwhile values. God's authority or "role" in such matters is commonly introduced as an "option" or "alternative" in which "some people" in our society happen to believe because of their sociological and psychological characteristics.

The pattern of federal influence in this area is illustrated by a course based on Kohlberg's theories called Ethical Issues in Decision Making. This course was developed in a Scarsdale, New York, high school with funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title IV-C. In December 1980 this course was judged by the federal bureaucrats on the Department of Education's Joint Dissemination Review Panel as "exemplary" and therefore worthy of adoption by other school districts across the nation.

At the time of his confirmation hearing, Secretary Bell affirmed that there was no appropriate role for the federal

government in fostering such controversial values education programs and curricula. In view of these assurances, it was quite surprising that in a speech given before the conservative Freeman Institute in Salt Lake City on October 24, 1981, Bell had this to say about the possibilities for teaching values in the public schools:

There are ways in which moral and ethical education can occur. I know of schools where this is being done effectively and without disrespect to the child's basic home training and religious grounding. Where it is occurring, it is being done with great care and knowledge of parent constituencies. One way in which this is being done is through an Ethical Issues in Decision Making course in a New York school setting. Students take hypothetical cases based on life situations, literature, film, and the law, and go through a process—not unlike that for a legal brief—to develop a clear statement of the issue. Their position based on a presentation of the facts, and the pro and con reasons for that position. Parents are invited to attend in-service training sessions so they have a clear picture of what the program is trying to accomplish. Students are learning how to listen to another point of view; sometimes they've even learned that parents have a more convincing point of view on a particular subject or issue."

Secretary Bell, in the same speech, suggested that broadly shared moral and ethical values can also be taught through instruction in the Constitution and history courses. As we know, teaching values through these classical modes fell into disfavor during the period from 1965 to 1980 when the federal government was deeply involved in the educational marketplace of ideas.

The important essay reprinted below from the March 1980 *American School Board Journal* makes the case for the teaching of values through the classics, thereby minimizing the biases and ideologies of curriculum developers and implementers.

USE THE CLASSICS TO TEACH MORAL VALUES

By A. Graham Down
and Edwin J. DeLattre

It is a misguided notion that values courses or special units or exercises are the best ways for students to examine beliefs and convictions. Opportunities exist in each academic subject and in each classroom for examining values. As the Duchess said to Alice, "Everything's got a moral if only you can find it."

Most of us hold beliefs and convictions we wish to pass on to our children. Yet there is little agreement and, indeed, real perplexity about *how* these values should be taught.

In the aftermath of Watergate and Vietnam, schools have been deluged with packaged curriculum courses in moral education, character training, and values education. Lawrence Kohlberg, Harvard University psychologist and philosopher, is well known for his theory of the stages of moral development. In his classroom exercises, students face hypothetical moral dilemmas, such as whether an impoverished man whose wife is critically ill should steal an expensive but lifesaving drug. Sidney Simon's strategies for values clarification also are widely used in the classroom. In one of his exercises, students are asked to express opinions on a series of questions, many of them intrusively personal, such as: "Would you like to have different parents?" "Do you meditate?"

These examples make it apparent that many of the methods and materials used to teach moral education trespass on areas of student life that are not the business of schools, and often present dilemmas that are thoughtless or trivial. These packaged materials reduce moral life to countless episodes of decision and ignore the more complex fabric of human life and history that enables young people and adults to understand what it means to be a member of the human community and to accept personal responsibility. Some of the moral education courses are laden with indoctrination or prescription. Others, by stressing tolerance for others' values, are so insistently nonjudgmental that they stand in danger of leading "to a sterile relativism that only begs moral questions," says James Howard, a colleague at the Council for Basic Education. When equal weight is given to all possible alternative courses of action or thought, amorality, rather than morality, is very likely to result.

Education cannot and should not take place in a moral vacuum. Indeed, some kind of moral instruction might be needed now more than ever, because children today are exposed to the teaching of widely divergent values. Unlike previous generations, they do not learn consistent values in the home, school, community, and church. Moreover, morality—excellence of character and conscientiousness—is an appropriate concern of our schools because it is an achievement. As Walter Lippmann explained, traditions of civility are not carried in our genes. Rather, if individuals are to acquire civilized intelligence, they must see and understand what civilized intelligence is.

An appropriate way to examine values in the classroom is through the humanities. Books, films, plays, historical events, works of art, and even musical compositions are full of vivid examples of moral dilemmas and how human beings have responded to them. Why should students be offered pale curriculum packages when the liberal arts and sciences have such exciting possibilities for passing along cherished beliefs and convictions—more moving, more interesting, more realistic, and better explicated than any materials specifically intended for values education? A thoughtful review and analysis of historical, literary, and artistic works offer

depth rather than shallowness, "real" individuals, not artificial ones.

The resources available for teaching values through humanities are virtually unlimited. Children might be asked to prepare biographies of parents, statesmen, athletes, teachers; write stories about children and adults; investigate the arguments behind famous legal cases; develop accounts of the work of scientists, doctors, and factory workers. From this wealth of material, teachers should select assignments that lead students to think about themselves and others and that address specific concepts of moral life: responsibility, honesty, freedom, fairness, integrity, trust, love, friendship, respect, loyalty, justice, fidelity.

The materials used to teach these values and the degree to which each is emphasized will, of course, vary according to children's maturity. For example, younger children might learn responsibility better from serving as classroom helpers than from reading and discussing responsibility; older children's thoughts about the subject undoubtedly are more abstract and appropriate to classroom work.

Literature can be used to familiarize older students with moral issues. Example: *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* might be used to show the remarkable awareness of Anne Frank and also to teach lessons about brutality, bigotry, tyranny, perseverance, courage, and compassion. Bible stories (such as David's refusal to let Abishai kill Saul) and modern dramas (such as Robert Bolt's portrayal of Thomas More in *A Man for All Seasons*) illustrate how people take control of their lives by acting deliberately and thoughtfully. Learning to reflect upon one's actions and learning to think clearly are basic to accepting responsibility for one's self, but such skills are not acquired by accident; they must be taught by each generation to the next through example and explanation.

Other possibilities for teaching values through the humanities might include: *Huckleberry Finn*, for its example of trust, fidelity, and friendship; *The Scarlet Letter*, for an awareness of what it means to be vulnerable and to lose self-respect; Shakespeare's tragedies, for their struggles between good and evil; *Enemy of the People*, for its lesson that sincerity is a virtue, but that virtue doesn't always produce sound moral judgment. Family relations can be examined through the short stories of James Joyce and Flannery O'Connor. *The Red Badge of Courage* has much to say to young people about self-discovery and growth. Even the 2,000-year-old debate on might and right between the Athenians and the Melians (the "Melian dialogue," circa 416 B.C.) during the Peloponnesian War are relevant today. In music classes, the folk tales and songs of early America exemplify the moral aspirations of the colonists and pioneers. Broad questions of integrity are examined in *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens*.

Another approach to teaching values can be based on our country's historical documents: the Mayflower Compact, the U.S. Constitution, the Virginia Statute of Religious Liberty, the Declaration of Independence. Units of instruction can be included in the regular curriculum and ideals taught or reinforced through lesser writing. For example, *Little Toot*, *Pinocchio*, *The Ugly Duckling*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, or *Of Mice and Men* might be used to illustrate the principle that each individual has dignity and worth.

Undertaking moral education in this serious way, through the academic disciplines that are the natural domain of schools, does not come easily. Rather than providing conveniently packaged teacher guides, tape cassettes, and workbooks, the method I advocate would require a reexamination of resources from literature, history, and the arts with a view toward their application in teaching values. The rewards, however, are well worth the effort. Students will understand that the ideals of civilization are not separate from the rest of the curriculum.

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(Continued from page 6)

"radical groups" who are out to "destroy" the public schools. These groups include "fundamentalist fanatics," "beady-eyed bookburners," "neanderthals," "nuts" and "Johnny can't read types." Cameron suggested that Phyllis Schlafly taught her children to read at home because they were too dumb to learn to read in school. The attendees thought that was a very funny joke. The parents of youngsters who have not been taught to read because their teachers didn't know how to teach them to read would probably not find the joke as funny.

Cameron then went on to say that the increased political power of all of these groups has been advanced by the election of Ronald Reagan. Cameron said, "he is their champion. The catalyst of all these right wing forces is Ronald Reagan."

No doubt the education interest groups busy working to preserve the "federal role" are embarrassed by the leftist mindlessness of the NEA activists. Nevertheless they must tolerate it because the NEA provides the "grass roots" that gives clout to their Washington and state capitol lobby operations. Ironically, the NEA's own poll, as reported in the

November 23, 1981, *Education Daily*, found that 50.2 percent of the new members polled said they tend to be conservative; 20.1 percent said they are definitely conservative revealing the many independent minded teachers who have no choice but to be represented by the NEA.

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