

The Underground GRAMMARIAN

Volume Three, Number One January 1979

Happy New Year

MANY have written to say that *The Underground Grammarian* is perfect in every respect save one—no sports column. All too true. Now to the rescue comes J. Mitchell Morse, an old friend (“The Sin of Clumsiness,” 1:9) and widely known grammarian. His, and our, first ever sports column appears on the sports page of this issue, along with “Teratology,” naturally. We have printed it prettily, just in case you’d like to tape it up in your locker.

□ Fred G. Burke, NJ Commissioner of Education, can be found at 225 W. State St., Trenton, NJ 08625. When you’ve read this month’s issue, send him your views, and send us a copy. The writer of the best letter will win one complete set *The Underground Grammarian*. All runners-up will be sent elegant, hand-printed “Support your local Grammarian” posters.

□ Please, everybody, stop writing to Grammarians, Inc. They are spending hours and hours answering mail when they should be earning fat and well-deserved fees from high-ranking barbarians. Students interested in a summer internship with Grammarians, Inc. should write to *us*.

DEd on Arrival

FROM Columbia Teachers College, a lady has written to instruct us that growing illiteracy is not to be blamed on the educators. She is a candidate for a doctorate in education, so she should know. It is to be blamed, rather, on “curriculum changes instituted during the late 1960’s . . . focused upon affective rather than cognitive education.”

Columbia Teachers College, sad to say, is not accredited by *The Underground Grammarian*. It’s a pity, because this lady has all the makings of a real DEd. Her amnesia alone should earn her the

rank of *professional* of education. Furthermore, although she misspells only one word, she does think that the subjunctive is a “case,” and she speaks with easy grace of “effective in-class interaction.” She carefully specifies that by a “classroom setting” she means an “actual classroom setting.” She even recites the comfortable creed which asserts that the “academically accomplished” seldom prove good teachers, an article of faith essential to the mental health of *professionals* of education.

It’s not her fault that she wandered into an unaccredited school. Let all men know, therefore, that we here and now pronounce her DEd, *horraris causa*. Let her go forth and teach other would-be DEds that it was not the *professionals* who brought us the follies of affective education; it was the angry gods.

Life Skills and Facet Depth in Trenton

THIS MONTH we give our readers their own minimum competence test. Take your time, for if you can answer this question cleverly enough, you’ll prove yourself competent to serve as Commissioner of Education in New Jersey, a post that should soon be empty. If the best you can manage is a *correct* answer, you’d better give up all hope of an exciting and lucrative career in educational administration.

First, read this passage:

The Committee acknowledges that life skills are essential tools needed for successful social, economic, and political survival. Skill areas are made up of sequences or hierarchies of skills, the fundamental ones of which are necessarily learned at the earliest stages of development.

Now, choose carefully:

- This passage was written by
- a housewife from Teaneck.
 - a member of Herd B.
 - a *professional* of education.
 - a hierarchy of essential tools in their earliest stage of development.
 - a member of the Fifth Category.

The correct answer, of course, is c), although a strong case can be made for d). Members of Herd B and the Fifth Category do some pretty terrible things, but nothing this bad. If you were wily enough to lay the rap on a housewife from Teaneck, then you are either the Commissioner of Education or a splendid candidate for the job.

That babble is from a lively little volume snappily titled: *Minimum Basic Skills Program: Minimum Basic Skills Advisory Committee's Final Report*, of which Burke asserts: "The report itself was written by those same lay people." Burke, as you have probably forgotten, *is* the Commissioner for just now. If you believe his assertion, you're a little short on life skills. Any time you read that things essential are also needed, either an arrogant presumption of your ignorance or a shocking revelation of the writer's, you know that you are following the spoor of Herd A. No ordinary citizen would accost his fellow lay people with melancholy tidings of areas made up of sequences or hierarchies. To perpetrate such an outrage takes nothing less than an unmitigated *professional* of education.

Since the rest of that passage is too long to quote, you'll just have to take it from us that this "Life Skills [!] Recommendation" never names so much as one lousy little life skill. A call to the Department of Education elicited, after a pause, the tentative suggestion that, uh, well, maybe a life skill was something, like balancing a checkbook. Yeah. You would think that arithmetic would suffice for that life skill, but recent test scores around the state suggest that the schools aren't very good at teaching arithmetic. It is hard, and just the teensiest bit *elitist*, wouldn't you say? So they take some poor, black kid in Newark, a kid who's never had two dimes at once and never will on the strength of *that* education, and they can't seem to teach him arithmetic, but they do have this real neat plan to teach him to balance his checkbook.

Enough. You're still being tested. Here's a piece from the companion volume, *Status of Minimum Standards Remedial Programs in New Jersey: Final Report of Minimum Basic Skills-Advisory Committee* [hyphen original]:

The Minimum Basic Skills Advisory Committee does not suggest that this report explores in depth all facets of the remedial

educational problems in our state. The Committee does feel, though, that this report is a representative assessment that contains enough information to enforce feelings that serious problems do exist in New Jersey's remedial education program—and that unless extraordinary measures are employed promptly we will see general conditions worsen—and may well see our larger urban districts fall to virtually irretrievable depths.

(You will not be tested on those bizarre, floating hyphens; we can't figure them out either. They're clearly hyphens, not dashes, and they're not substitutes for commas, for commas also appear in the text. In Burke's defense of this document, we learn that "the use of commas" is "simply, [a matter of] stylistic preferences," so he probably presumed them some sort of innovative stylistic preferences. However, the ubiquitous hyphens are usually found, like those seen above, where no punctuation is needed. We have to guess that the writer just didn't know whether or not to punctuate at those places. The housewife from Teaneck could have told him, but *professionals* don't consult housewives. His pals, however, must have been equally at a loss. Punctuation is a *cognitive* skill of little interest to *professionals*. They're interested in *affective* punctuation, what Burke would call "stylistic preferences." They apparently decided to do what educationists always do when they find themselves over their heads in the deep, unfamiliar waters of cognition: Innovate! The nifty thing about innovating is that nobody else can figure out just what the hell you're up to either.)

Now reread that passage carefully and answer these questions:

1. In just how much depth can we explore a facet?
2. Why is it ever so much more *professional* to employ measures than to do things?
3. If a virtually irretrievable depth were in fact to be retrieved—not impossible, since it's only *virtually* irretrievable—would we then have a deep enough depth to explore a facet in?

Publius called one of these reports "sloppy, flabby, and imprecise." That's a reasonable

enough judgment, but Burke pronounced it “untrue and detrimental to our efforts in this area.” Detrimental? Well, a little bit; but Publius shows promise, and next time he may be more effective.

While Burke is pointing way over there at all the laymen, the Communications and Life Skills Committee people* are congratulating themselves for being “experts in both the communication skills and life skills areas.” Their “in-residence expertise” was so great, indeed, that “the Committee did little outside data-gathering; rather, it spent its time in deliberation.” (Boyoboy! Those people are going to be mad when they find out that Burke has called them a pack of laymen!) Here’s some of the fruit of their expert deliberation:

It is necessary that schools and school districts emphasize the importance of imparting to students the skills and attitudes which are the underpinnings of a comfortable, confident, successful producer of all forms of written matter, including prose, poetry, and practical narrative and descriptive and interrogatory writing (e.g., letters, applications, requests for information, reports, etc.)

The housewife from Teaneck wanted them to say that the schools should teach writing, but *professionals* don’t think like that. They must expose the producer’s underpinnings. They have to play the expert by elaborating “all forms of written matter” into a silly and gratuitous list, as though condescending to feeble-minded readers who wouldn’t be able to think up any examples for themselves.† They have even contrived “interrogatory” writing, to be distinguished, no doubt, from declaratory writing and exclamatory writing, both of which they would surely have named as well had their expertise stretched that

* Two Glassborovians, Dolores Harris and Evelyn Slobodzian, are known to have been parties to this business. Please put to them any further questions you may have about life skills.

† The interminable elaboration of the obvious by means of the specious distinction is not a “stylistic preference” among educationists. It is rather an involuntary twitch, the outward sign of an inward disorder. That elaboration is precisely what makes the “study” of “education” possible—and profitable.

far. Inanely, they specify that it is “to students” that the important imparting is to be done. No sane teacher of composition would give this illiterate gabble a passing grade, but it satisfied a pack of *professionals* unto whom we have given our children as hostages.

We do not mean to be detrimental to the Commissioner’s “efforts in this area.” We intend to be destructive. *Ex nihilo, nihil*, and those who brought us into this disorder will never lead us out of it.

New Jerseyans, go to Teaneck! Find that housewife! Bring her in triumph to Trenton. Acclaim her Commissioner of Education. Of the false commissioner make at least a true prophet. Let there be “lay people.” Some of *them* will prove to be educated.

Teratology

The following is an explanatory addendum to a document that purports to describe post-tenure review policy at the Oregon Institute of Technology, Klamath Falls, OR 97601:

TERMINOLOGY CONSTRUCTION AND INTERPRETATION

Words used in the singular include the plural, and words used in the plural include the singular; the word “shall” is mandatory and the word “may” is permissive; the masculine includes the feminine and the neuter; words used in the present tense include the future and the future tense includes the present.

New Jersey must put up with not only a Commissioner of Education but even a Governor, a certain Byrne. Some innocent school-children sent him, at his request, some ideas for the new license plates. Here’s one paragraph from his answer to the young learners:

New Jersey has undergone many major favorable changes and now has new life in a once average image. The new license plates will add to this quality in a subtle but no less important manner.

It’s too bad, of course, that this was exhibited to impressionable children, but it does suggest a solution to one of the problems confronting the minimum competence people. Let them give the

writing test first to the Governor; if he can pass it, they'll know that it's easy enough to give to the school-children.

What I dislike about football coaches is their elitism. If you're a good player, they won't let you join the team. They don't care about your creativity. I think that's undemocratic. As long as your holistic intention is creative, I don't think they ought to count fumbles or missed tackles or superficial mistakes like that. I think the snobs who coach athletic teams ought to be required to take courses in education. Then they'd learn that what matters is a holistic approach with understanding and appreciation, not subskills and winning.

(The words of J. Mitchell Morse, Grammarian and Sportswriter.)

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The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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The Idea of Expressing Feelings In New Mexico

IT HAD to happen. Last month we granted the world's first DEd, *horraris causa*, and now everybody wants one. Two new candidates present themselves, and they are not some silly educationists but *bona fide* associate professors of English out at what they call Eastern New Mexico University.

Laid-back folk. Arlene Zekowski, Stanley Berne. Hate apostrophes. Rules. Arbitrary. Down sentences! Up feelings expressing! Up Zekowski! Up Berne! Right on!

Or, if you prefer, On right! "We're professors of English," says Berne. (Hm. Shouldn't that be "Were professors of English"?) "We are concerned with the idea of expressing feelings. Arbitrary rules of grammar prohibit that." (Cmon, be patient. Sure he talks that tired old grammar, but only because he has to get to we elitists.) Hes wright. No, thats not expressing feelings. He rite! Wordsworth feeling-expressing fouled-up by verb-subject agreement. Shakespeare shot down—Donne undone by nonrestrictive clauses. Whitman comatose from commas.

Zekowski: "Grammar is elitism. I wish to destroy what is dead, lifeless and snobbish." Hows that for boring from within? "Arbitrary sentence structure is logical," she complains, "but the brain isn't logical. [How true!] You don't think in sentences. You think in terms of patterns and images. It's random association." And further: "Many advertisements don't use sentences or grammar. They use words to create images." (Exactly *how* they use the words she doesn't say. Could be they sprinklem here and there, collage-wise. Cool. Just think. If *Das Kapital* had been done like that, we wouldn't have all this damn trouble now. There's nothing more dangerous than a bunch of logical sentences, but what would you expect from an elitist like Marx?)

If there's one thing we love around here, it's the classing of icons, and we support the idea of expressing feelings 1,000%. That's *exactly* what we should be teaching these kids. For one thing, it's a cinch, like playing tennis with the net down, as Frost put it. Another: if we let them in on the secrets of logical sentences and coherent discourse, the ignorant little bastards will go on to take away some of our cushiest jobs, perhaps even as associate professors of English, and that will be the end of lifeless elitism as we know it.

However, while we applaud Zekowski and Berne for their cunning subterfuge, and while we admit that it *is* the first duty of a DEd to cook up schemes for job security, we cannot give them their degrees just yet. Their plan sounds good off paper, but when they write their grammarless English, we read: "Once upon a time ago. But now nevermore." Cute and expressive of feeling,

sure, but clogged up with grammar. Maybe next year.

Vox inhumana, mens insana

WE now have the “Summary of Work in Progress on the Final Report of the Glassboro Self-Study Project.” It is 21 single-spaced pages of jargon, inanity, and even pusilanimity. A detailed analysis would fill a fat book and cause convulsions, so we can only finger a fragment here and there. Nevertheless, you paid for it, and you should read it. Write for your copy to Wilhemina Perry, Glassboro State College, Glassboro, NJ 08028.* Pick your favorite passage and send your commentary thereon to Mark Chamberlain, President, with a copy to us.

The document begins with typical inanity in asserting that its concoctors have “actively participated in a comprehensive Self-Study.” Actively. That’s to assure the taxpayer that we’re not just lying around letting that comprehensive self-study happen. We’re *doing* it. Well, not exactly. We’re “participating in” it, as though it were some independent entity with which we had fallen in—actively.

In such diffuse phrasing there is a shifty quality more distasteful than the ignorance that mismatches subjects and verbs. People who write like that come to think like that, or maybe it’s the other way around.

Although the prose was obviously written by many hands, that first sentence foretells the nature of most of what follows—evasive and oblique. Where the doers of deeds aren’t hidden in

* In just the last few weeks, we have taken on lots of new readers. They are here reminded that this is not a *suggestion*. We expect them to *do* it.

Those who write and think in educationist babble do so confident that it will never be seen outside of the club. They object to exposure by saying that dirty linen shouldn’t be laundered in public, admitting that the linen *is* dirty but omitting that the public paid for it. When you write for your copy, you’ll see how reluctant they are to display unnatural acts to civilians and taxpayers, but be persistent. If we can force them to write clearly, they will suffer at least occasional moments of lucidity and realize that they would serve society better as sellers of wind-up toys. Help them to find themselves. Write today.

passives, they lurk in the shrubbery of verbiage. Where people disagree, we read that “there appears to be a lack of agreement relative to. . .” Instead of advocating, someone prefers to say that “it seems plausible to advocate. . .” *Plausible?* Instead of saying that faculty and administrators see little of each other, not at all a bad thing, another writer tells us that “contact frequently does not take place between” them. In another remarkably clumsy sentence, we read that “the self-study process included assessing whether the College’s performance in maintaining quality matches its promise to strive toward excellence.” Excellence.

As the hart panteth after the water-brook, so pant these *professionals* after excellence. Panting after the non-cognitive aspects and parameters of interpersonal relation enhancement, they must murmur: “It seems plausible to advocate that contact should take place between us, unless there appears to be a lack of agreement relative to participating in the process.” To which the reply must be, in the phrases of this document: “Although a multi-purpose thrust is a problematic area that does not appear to be conducive to time efficiency and outcomes quality on an on-going basis, it might appear desirable to operationalize goals and to pinpoint a locus of responsibility for an uppermost and pleasant identification non-aligned directly with a viable relationship.” And there’s no lack of interfacing.

How is it that those who stridently boast that they, and often they alone in academe, are “humanistic” and “values-oriented” can think and write in language that is inhuman and vile? To put their thoughts and words into the context of ordinary human experience is to show them, not merely foolish and pompous but foul. Theirs is not “mistaken” English. They can spell and (often) punctuate correctly. Most of their verbs agree with their subjects. Their failures are not mechanical; they are intellectual and moral. Where are the human beings and human values to which they claim such noble dedication? Why are the subjects of their thoughts and clauses so regularly words like “it” and “process” and “contact”? Why do they routinely say not that a thing *is* but that it appears to be or is seen as being? There is nothing more human than clear language, language in which man speaks his mind

and admits—indeed, *affirms*—that the mind and the words are *his*.

That’s why it takes some courage to write well and why bad writing so often flows from the defensive manoeuvres of poltroonery. If we speak clearly the thoughts of muddied minds, we reveal that we are fools. The muddier the mind, the more it needs the shield of murky language. Happily, however, only the most skillful can manage the distortions of defensive prose without giving themselves away. The makers of this document are just hackers, and we need only one word to see through *their* silly game.

The word *view* appears 15 times, usually as an intransitive verb. It’s no “arbitrary rule” of grammar that some verbs require objects; it is a fact of the language. The transitive nature of the verb *view* is essential to its meaning. Recent Bulgarian immigrants might be forgiven for uncertainty in this matter, but not the *professionals* of education.

Of course, an intransitive *view* won’t work in English syntax, so these baffled scribblers are driven to devise some bizarre and inconsistent structures:

The academic deans view . . . that there has been a clear lack of direction. . . [Yeah. A clear lack *is* easier to view than an obscure lack, so even a dean should be able to view it.]

Some faculty view there is an implicit priority given to teacher education.

The steering committee views as problematic that commuters are left out of the mainstream.

It’s not hard to see how they got into this mess. We have ridiculed educationists for saying not that a turkey is a turkey but that a turkey may be perceived as being a turkey. They don’t understand exactly why the first is better, but they suspect it might have to do with the word “perceived.” So that’s out. (The formerly ubiquitous word appears but once in the summary; somebody nodded.) So how to replace it? How about *see*? No, that won’t do. Civilians and taxpayers *see*; we’re *professionals*. (Sure enough, when we *are* told that someone “saw the school as a teachers college,” we’re hearing about taxpayers and civilians.) So there it was: View haloo!

Inadvertently, these people have let slip a clue to truth. The citizens *see* the mess in the schools; the educationists *view* as problematic that the goals of remediation enhancement be perceived as being operationalized.

(If you laugh at people who talk like that, imagine how they laugh at *you* on payday.)

What they’ll do now that we’ve obstructed their *view*, who can say? Maybe we can help them. They would, of course, reject *look* for the reason that drove them to reject *see*, but how about *behold*? If you stick it in for *view* in the quotations above, it doesn’t change the quality of their English at all. Furthermore, it is a word at once both lofty and weighty. Just think what dignity it would lend their pious preachments of human values.

There are human values. They are implicit in human deeds. Out of what values, then, do such persons automatically choose to evade the implication of responsible human agency in the elemental structure of our language—the naming of the doer and his deed? What value is revealed when they name the simple in tortured circumlocutions and pass over the complex in simplistic jargon—their endless babble of areas, aspects, and thrusts? What does it mean that they habitually shrink from the simplest forms of the verb *to be*?

There certainly are values crouching in the cellars of such deeds, but they are certainly not the values of humanism. These writers might perhaps be excused from knowing that, because the enthusiasts of non-cognition are little likely to seek out mere facts about the nature and history of human thought, but by the same token they might also be debarred from pretending to the practice of humanism at the expense of the public and to the detriment of the young.

Just now, the American people are not permitted to choose between the welfare of the pseudo-humanists and the education of children. The day will come.

Teratology

The Gmuca Letter has been passing from hand to hand, samizdat-fashion, through the grammatical underground. The author takes his pay in public money for his services to the Opportunities

Industrialization Center of Jacksonville, Florida, 127 East Duval St., in that city. We cannot give you the zip code, which does not appear on the letterhead, but we *can* give you this intriguing little slogan, which does appear on the letterhead: “We Help Ourselves.”

Dear Mr. Gmuca:

This letter has been afforded to you predicated upon rectification and clarification of any erroneous conception(s) that may have been acquired during the course of your deciphering the correspondence that was dispatched to you from our organization, JOIC/YACC residential operation on Sept. 28, 1978.

Needless to say, the JOIC organization has just recently procured another “arm” to its comprehensive operation, the YACC residential program; meaning that, we are somewhat novices in respect to all of the legal functions of the YACC program. And at the current duration of the inauguration of our new YACC residential program; we may be found guilty of making a few mistakes inadvertently. Nevertheless, in accordance to the correspondence you received from us in retrospect to September 28, 1978, we, very veraciously, did not have any intentions of trying to carry out the obligations of DOL (Department of Labor) in conjunction with the FSES (Florida State Employment Service) throughout the State of Florida. We were only trying very diligently to acquire as much publicity and solicitation as possible in order for us to be in a position to collect as many referrals as possible prior to the initial opening of our camp.

So, in closing, we would like for you to do or to deliberate upon doing the subsequent things for us.

1) Please eliminate and extenuate Mr. Larry Walker, a proxy from the Office of Manpower Planning, Tallahassee, Florida from all anticipated implications of the correspondence you received from us on September 28, 1978. Notwithstanding, he did not advocate or initiate an advice for such correspondence to be disseminated throughout the State of Florida.

(2) Please condone us for any mistake we may have committed inadvertently. However, what happened was not intentional, but in lieu we were only trying to get our program off the ground and

simultaneously receive an adequate number of applications from the ES offices.

(3) As being constituents of the State of Florida, we sincerely look forward to collaborating with you throughout the year, and we certainly do want to be as cooperative as possible.

Your time expended and consideration extended have been most appreciative in your reading this letter. Consequently, if we can be of any assistance to you at any time, please feel free to contact us.

Respectfully,

Robert L. Reynolds, Camp Director

The In Basket

You have obviously misconstrued the quoted portion of S of MSRP in NJ: FR of M BS-AC. You failed to realize that the passage deals with alternate education of the on-the-job, manipulative variety, to wit: plumbing. Your confusion is attributable to a misprint. The word should be *faucets*, not *facets*. If you plumb the depths of the faucets you won't need extraordinary measures (*e. g.* Drano); the large urban district that went down the drain might be retrievable—virtually at least. Jessica Davidson, New Fairfield, CT

Of course! We just don't know how to read that stuff. For *facet* read *faucet* throughout. *Aspect*, of course, should be *aspic*, and *interaction* is surely a misprint for in *traction*. *Competency* must be *company tent C*. All of a sudden these *professionals* of education are starting to make sense.

Now that you know the system, you can test your competence with the following. It comes, not exactly from the horse's *mouth*, to be sure, but from the National Institute of Education, so it must be the real poop:

“Competency based education [is] a databased, adaptive, performance-oriented set of integrated processes that facilitate, measure, record and certify within the context of flexible time parameters the demonstration of known, explicitly stated and agreed upon learning outcomes that reflect successful functioning in life roles.”

The Underground
GRAMMARIAN

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The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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Enough of this Love-making

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only.

THE people whose words and thoughts we examine in this journal are not much troubled by what we say. A momentary embarrassment brings no reduction in pay; no academic career has ever been blighted by an inability to think and write clearly and correctly. On the contrary, the highest ranks (and salaries) normally go to those in whom the power of word and thought is most meager, since word and thought are the parents of deed, and only the piddlingest of deeds are required of those who administer in the schools.

The colleagues of our victims prudently refrain from laughing out loud in their presence. It's a form of insurance. We, of course, dream of the day when deans and vice chancellors, perhaps even learning "facilitators and curriculum coordinators, will be welcomed to faculty meetings with titters and giggles. That may take a while. In the meantime, it's up to you to laugh in their faces. It's up to you, as taxpayers and parents, not only to titter and giggle at their puerile errors but even to rant and rave at their pompous inanities. At the least, you can tell them that you know what they're doing. That makes them nervous.

It is a responsibility of the press to expose public things to public scrutiny. That's what *The*

Underground Grammarian does. The writers whose inanities and barbarisms we expose and examine are people paid out of the public purse for the work of their minds and the words of their mouths. Most of them will claim, and quite without irony, for they take themselves very seriously, that they are fitted for their high callings by superior intellectual endowment and extraordinary academic accomplishment. We can, therefore, imagine no reason to be tolerant even of their small errors, to say nothing of their outrages of good sense and conventional decency.

If you chuckle at their ineptitude and do nothing more, they have the victory. If you fume decorously in the privacy of your study, folly and ignorance will flourish untroubled and unmitigated, and you will eventually get what you will deserve, a nation of mindless rabble incapable of judgment and easily ruled by the illogical notions and faddish devisings of self-appointed social engineers. In that day, we will understand Orwell. Where knowledge and reason fail, the pigs will lurch and waddle on their hind legs, and the other beasts will gawk in admiration and envy.

When we give you names and addresses, use them. Say what you please, but say it. These garblers of thought and language fear only one thing—an informed and irate public.

The faithful, industrious horse of moderation was carted off in the knacker's wagon. Now is the time for the tiger of wrath.

Sticht in the Eye Again

THE first thing you must learn, if you want to become a *professional* of education and earn big money from the taxpayers, is how to dream up cunning definitions for things that need no defining. As dull and stupid as that may seem, we urge you to persevere in its practice, for it is also the *last* thing you will have to learn. Many a splendid career in education has been built on nothing more than that one little skill, endlessly elaborated.

Of course, if you want *formal* training as a *professional*, we can only suggest that you keep checking the ads in match-book covers, but, if you're reasonably bright and willing to practice, you might be able to master this lucrative

discipline/field/area in the privacy of your home. Here's how it works: If you persist in saying, for instance, that speaking is speaking, you can only be an unprofessional elitist. Your real *professional* says that speaking is "uttering in order to language." And what is uttering? Uttering is the "production of vocal sounds; i.e., sounds produced using the larynx and oral cavities."

Needless definitions are the natural breeding ground of silly neologisms. If you can come up with "to language," you can define *that* and sound even more *professional*. To language is "representation of conceptualizations by properly ordered sequences of signs; or the inverse process of understanding the conceptualizations underlying . . . sequences of signs produced by others." Now you trot out "auding," "listening to speech in order to language," provided, of course, that you have already defined listening as "selecting and attending to excitation in the auditory modality."

It's hard to believe that one educationist could do all that (and lots more) out of his own head, so we're guessing that Tom Sticht of the National Institute of Education spent plenty of time consulting what they call "the literature," a compendium of the inanities of other educationists. Sticht has bunched much such stuff into "The Basic Skills: A Frame of Reference," a "background paper" written at the behest of U.S. Commissioner of Education Ernest L. Boyer.

Since you paid for the thing, Boyer will cheerfully send you a copy. (He's at 400 Maryland Ave. SW, Washington, DC 20202. Tell him we sent you.) When you read it, you'll be delighted to find that Sticht has selected and attended to excitation not only in the literacy modality but in the "oracy" and the "numeracy" modalities as well. You'll learn about the improvement of affiliations among linkages, and you'll meet the amazing BAPS [Basic Adaptive Processes] that go by the names of Hearing, Seeing, Motor Movement, and Cognitive. (Yes, he does think of Cognitive as a noun.)

If a man came to your door trying to peddle that kind of stuff, just how long would you aud his languaging before sneaking off to the telephone to call the wagon? If he told you that he had it in mind to do something or other to your children, something designed to affect their oracy, would it not seem good to you to provide him with a BAP

in the oral cavities? Academic questions, to be sure. In fact, you bought all of this stuff long, long ago, and, although you have paid and paid, you will never be done with paying. Long, long ago, you gave your children to the peddlers to do with as they pleased. Now that the children are more ignorant than ever, you turn, naturally, to government, which turns, naturally, back to the peddlers.

The Pavians, having given half their wealth to the Visigoths to defend their city against the Ostrogoths, and the remaining half to the Ostrogoths for like service against the Visigoths, found that they could no longer afford to live there, except, of course, as servants to the newly rich barbarians, all of whom turned out to be related.

A Hardy Perennial

WE like to refresh our spirits at least once a year with a visit to Stanley B. Yeldell, one of Glassboro's most interesting and original authors. He has the honor of being the first writer ever to be studied in this journal. In fact, if it weren't for Stanley B. Yeldell, there would be no *Underground Grammarian*. It was his memo of October 20, 1976, that gave us the idea. We like to think that it was some such thought our president had in mind when he recently granted tenure to Stanley B. Yeldell over the objections of the Faculty Senate Committee on Tenure and Recontracting. (They're a notorious passle of nitpickers, anyway. They'll hardly *ever* recommend more than about 96 percent of the candidates.)

That took courage, and we thank our president for it. Although he can't admit it, he supports our cause, and he knows how hard it is to find enough interesting rubbish to fill these pages month after month. One does not lightly send packing a writer good for at least a column a year, and certainly not at the capricious whim of a few envious colleagues, many of whom will never provide us with so much as a single paragraph.

Furthermore, that annual column costs the taxpayers, at current salary rates, a measly \$14,506. That's peanuts. Most of our writers cost more than twice that much. Even if he stays on

until retirement and gets the usual raises and promotions, Stanley B. Yeldell may still cost no more than a million dollars.

The last time we looked at his work, he was interested in “economical characteristics that have an impact emphasize such vice crimes of an organized nature; Gambling, Prostitution, Drug Traffic, Pornography, etc.” This year, he has narrowed his focus and developed further his theory of creative capitalization:

This course will examine the Legal Aspects of Prostitution and the problems that Law Enforcement Officials are having. Also, this course will examine the various types of prostitutes [hmm?] and the policy considerations that are articulated by Prosecutors. Moreover, the course will examine organized crime impact on Prostitution and whether the crime should be extinguished by the legislature.

We don’t know much about prostitution, or Prostitution either, but we know what we like. We do want to examine the problems the Law Enforcement Officials (LEO?) *are* having rather than those they’re *not* having. Also, we do prefer the Legal Aspects of Prostitution (LAP?) to all others. (Isn’t *aspect* a neat word? No one ever asks what, exactly, it means, and it’s such a refreshing alternative to *factor*.) Moreover, it’s good to see (feel?) another *impact*, although “crime impact” isn’t quite up to the standards of “emphasize impact.” Furthermore, although “examine” and “also examine” and “moreover examine” should, in this kind of prose, lead inevitably to “furthermore examine,” he did get three out of four.

And, in addition, let’s note that this is just the kind of course we need at Glassboro, where Basic Minimum Prostitution Competence is disgracefully low. There probably aren’t more than a handful of students who could *name* the various types, never mind *examine* them. Let’s hope that those short-sighted, meat-ax wielding meat-heads in the legislature don’t choose to extinguish *this* kind of course. We need all the life-skills we can get.

TWO VOLUMES AGO, we expressed certain unpopular views about those members of the academic community whose degrees seem to “have been earned by clerical labors rather than sustained, written scholarship,” saying:

These cut-rate professors are more informed than learned; they put faith in every trend without having explored the merit of any tradition; they know “findings,” not lore; they have “perceptions,” not understanding; they are “innovative,” not original; they are enthusiastic about the “relevant,” ignorant of the permanent. Their knowledge of the great history of thought is so scanty that when they have any ideas at all they imagine that they have discovered fire, and visit upon us plagues of novelties and gimmicks.

True. Some people just love an innovation, *any* innovation, and they love especially any gimmick that might pry some money out of our pockets.* Hoping to pry a small benefit from their frenzy for fads, we will occasionally print Curiosity Corner, a sampler of quaint educational notions from other times. These ideas will be old enough that the *professionals* of education, never having heard of them, will think them innovations. They will knock each other down in the rush to write proposals for grants. Since the grant-givers are themselves retreaded *professionals* of education, they’ll give; and some of our tax money may well be diverted in a good cause.

This month’s Curiosity Corner comes from the works of Minnie L. Smith, a teacher, long dead. Earth, lie lightly.

Curiosity Corner

An elementary knowledge of Latin will make you secure in your use of English and will ensure you against many common slips and errors. Furthermore, you will receive a training in accuracy, application, memory, and reasoning

* At Glassboro, people *boast* of their achievements as redistributors of the public wealth. Next month, we’ll take a look at the thought and language to be found in some of their successful proposals—about \$1,670,000 worth just now.

which will help you to think straight in school and in later life.

Teratology

LaFayette Parker is Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at Winston-Salem State University, Winston-Salem, NC 27102. On January 18, 1979, fearing that faculty might goof off during the first week of the new term while the students were still shopping around for easier courses, he sent out an admonishing memo. No timid equivocator, he said right out, by jing, that “there is some truth in the notion that good teaching strategies influence learning.” Wow. With like forthrightness and vigor, he explained *why* the teachers should teach their classes even before the students had finished shopping:

If those who are not present learn from those who are present that excellent teaching strategies and organization and meaningfulness in helping students learn that which they must in order to achieve, they will be encouraged to, deal seriously with the situation.

A copy of that memo went upstairs to the Chancellor, Douglas Covington. Was he, do you think, encouraged to deal seriously with *that* situation?

People do strange things in New Mexico. It must be something in the water. Last month we had Berne and Zekowski, dynamic duo of feelings-expressing. Now we have an unnamed, successful candidate for a Ph. D. (!) in the College of Education at New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM 88003, where the granters of such weird degrees (in *guidance*, no less) are untroubled by dissertations that sound like this:

From these studies and concepts it seems to this researcher a short extrapolation to the prediction of transpersonal innovations from self-actualization traits defined by the Personal Orientation Inventory.

We will think up a handsome reward for the grammar guerrilla who can find a name and address for “this researcher.” We’d like to give him one of *our* adorable little degrees.

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**Neither can his mind be thought to be in tune,
whose words do jarre,
nor his reason In frame,
whose sentence is posterous.**

The Underground GRAMMARIAN

Volume Three, Number Four April 1979

The Porseffors of Eglinsh

PITY the Porseffors of Eglinsh, bearing through throngs of foes, of labourers and shop-boys, the chalice of sweet speech, language pure and undefiled. Dumb as old medallions, but not mute, they hear, in a place of disaffection, a grating roar of new men, other minds, hailing the only emperor, the emperor of ice cream. Ambiguities of seven sorts they understand, but from inservice aspects of remediation, shrink. Objective their correlative may be, and their fallacy pathetic, but parameters of inputs, outcomes, data-based transpersonal perceptions, they eschew. By rabble ringed, they stand and wait, bravely singing as they shine, but with so dull a cheer, their glittering thoughts struck out at ev’ry line. You should have it so good.

So here's how they sing: "The latter poet, in his own final phase, already burdened by an imaginative solitude that is almost a solipsism, holds his own poem so open again to the precursor's work that at first we might believe the wheel has come full circle, and that we are back in the latter poet's flooded apprenticeship, before his strength began to assert itself in the revisionary ratios. But the poem is now *held* open to the precursor, where once it *was* open, and the uncanny effect is that the new poem's achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as though the latter poet himself had written the precursor's characteristic work."

Of course. "And," out of the revisionary ratios of a bailed-out apprenticeship, another self-precursing poet explains, "everyone will say, as you walk your mystic way, 'If this young man expresses himself in terms too deep for *me*, why what a very singularly deep young man this deep young man must be!'"

That turgid, pretentious prose, however, is not the work of a deep young man. It is the work of a mentor of deep young men. He is a distinguished scholar and Porseffor of Eglinsh at Yale University, a school in Connecticut. (We'd tell you his name if we could, of course, but the reader who sent in this example did not provide it. We have no way to discover it, either, since all members of our staff are forbidden to read *PMLA*, to say nothing of the insightful, trenchant, and seminal volumes of literary ruminations produced with no base thoughts of profit by the university presses. Let'm publish *and* perish, is what we say around here.)

Imagine, if you can, the contempt such a Porseffor must feel for a misplaced modifier. Conjure up his long exhalation as he averts his gaze, but delicately, from failure of agreement between subject and verb. Hear him pronounce, so subtly, the quotation marks by virtue of which he can say "feedback" with impunity.

We have said of the *Professionals* of Education that their language is inhuman and so all the more reprehensible in those who boast of their "humanistic" values. The inhuman language of the Porseffors of Eglinsh, loftily proud of their selfless devotion to the "humanities," is no less reprehensible. From the least intellectual inmates of Academe, we hear about catalytical non-

disciplines facilitating us to move through a meta-transition. From the campus aristocrats we hear about imaginative solitude, probably to be distinguished from some imaginable imaginary solitude or perhaps from an imagined solitude—or both. Where the *Professional* twists our minds by centering his studies around, the Porseffor assaults our reason with an almost solipsism, no more understandable than an almost pregnancy. (Sure sounds neat, though, don't it?) He further asks us to accept—by faith alone, obviously, for nothing else would suffice—his oh-so-sensitive distinction between the poem now *held* open and the same poem when it merely *was* open. And, in the center of this pretentious mess, we find a shabby banality in that wheel coming full circle, just the kind of cheap cliché we might expect of the erstwhile wrestling coach who has taken a few courses at the local teacher academy and worked his way up to the rank of guidance counsellor.

Most of the barbarians who trouble these times can be easily identified by their native costumes—white belts, polyester double-knit leisure suits, sometimes even love beads. But the subtlest barbarian of all generally wears pure wool, a refined form of sheep's clothing. For pulling over eyes, wool has that polyester stuff beat all hollow.

A Communications Major Contemplates the Future

"I'm trying to experience many segments of the communications field while I'm in college. Then, I'll be better able to pinpoint what facet I'd like to pursue upon graduation."

Eric Smeac's Practice-related Information Domain

THERE is something or other called ERIC/SMEAC.* It is harbored by the Ohio State University at 1200 Chambers Road, Columbus,

* About ERIC we can't even guess. We do find this: "Clearinghouse for Science, Mathematics and Environmental Education." That's CSME. Maybe there really is an Eric Smeac, and this is just a part of his fiendish scheme to turn our brains into tapioca.

Ohio 43212. ERIC/SMEAC sends out, or emits, we might say, an impenetrable annual newsletter, of which we have the issue of December 1978. It suggests (but who can be sure?) that this outfit is in the business of telling teachers (here called “educators”) all about nifty new gimmicks and boldly innovative thrusts in the teaching of science and math and the pop pseudoscience, Environmental Education.[†] E/S is not at all ashamed to admit that it published *From Ought to Action in Environmental Education*.[‡] Nor does it seek to deny its interest in some things it calls “information products” or that “a major effort of the clearinghouse is the production of a variety of information analysis products.” The manufacturers of gadgets and kits and “packets of materials” love ERIC/SMEAC.*

All of that we learn from Robert W. Howe, but other hands that might better have rested idle have also found work in this sheet. One of them tells us all about “the challenge confronting schools and colleges created by emerging energy realities.” (Misplaced modifiers we can handle, but the thought of an emerging energy reality is just too scary. It could even be Godzilla.) The same hand calls teachers the “education clientele” and brings us word of “the development of adaption identification.” Next we hear of “the Center’s functional activities,” a nasty thought, which include “maintaining access to a core [that’s what it says: core] of personnel . . . so that programmatic aspects of the program thrust is appropriately coordinated.” Well, those who are busy with important stuff like the appropriate coordination of the programmatic aspects of a program thrust certainly can’t be bothered about trivia like appropriate coordination of plural subjects and plural verbs.

Worse is in store. This SMEACer speaks also of “new energy conservation supplemental

[†] Everyone has heard that those who can, do, and those who can’t, teach. The adage says nothing about those who can neither do *nor* teach. For them, lest they vanish utterly from the public payroll, we devise non-courses usually called “educations.”

[‡] This should be a dilly. It’ll cost you three bucks, but it might be the funniest book of the year.

* To those *professionals* of education who’ve heard tell of Newton, it’s a mystery how in hell that man learned all that Physics and Math Education without so much as a remote-control film-strip projector.

curriculum materials focusing on the interrelationship of Energy, Environment, and Engagement.” In educationistic prose, it is not a surprise when materials focus, but that stupendous noun pileup will call forth awe and envy in all *professionals* of education. That last bit, furthermore, is not entirely without wisdom, for many will surely testify to the curiously amiable interrelationship of energy, environment, and engagement, or something like it, at least.

At E/S they do things not when asked but “on a request basis.” They promote phases, and one of their activities has conjured an effort. They do even better when they write about some bureaucratic boondoggle called the National Education Practice File.

This “practice file” (their quotation marks) has “generated a variety of ‘ideas’ [*ditto*] within the practice-related information domain.” (They do love a domain.)* And how were these “ideas” generated? They “were generated through group and individual contact with a variety of educators.” Educators have principles, you know. They will never, for instance, do anything except as individuals or as groups. And they love contact, but again only with individuals or groups.

This *Newsletter* reports that one Patricia Blosser, a SMEACer, went before a regional meeting of the NSTA. (That could stand for National Science Teachers’ Association, but they probably wouldn’t use the apostrophe.) There she presented a paper on “reading as a survival skill.” We’d admire to have heard that. If the SMEACers know as much about reading as they do about writing, which seems inevitable, and if that paper was written no better than the rest of their stuff, reading it to an educated audience would have led to a demonstration of running like hell as a survival skill. The *Newsletter*, however, does not suggest that Blosser barely escaped with her life, and that tells us something about those science teachers.

Of course, we could have guessed it from the *Newsletter*. No one who cares about skill and accuracy could ever have written such shabby trash, and no one committed to disciplined

* *Domain* is one of the darlinest weasel-words of the *professionals*. It sounds so noble. They need it, as they need *area*, *field*, and *sphere*, because we all giggle when they claim to know something about a *subject*.

intelligence could bear to read it. That the SMEACers do write it, and that science teachers do bear it, should disabuse us of the quaint notion that our science teachers have been trained in science.

No more would the math teachers seem to have been trained in mathematics, except, presumably, in the way that the teachers of Environmental Education are trained in environment, probably by hearing all about its importance often enough so that they reach a state of what the teacher-trainers would call enhanced environment awareness. Math and science have it in common that they are, before all else, habits of mind, and that they can find expression only in clear, conventionally correct utterance. Those incapable of such utterance cannot be teachers.

Well, who cares? With a little help from a core of personnel and a few file “ideas” from the practice-related domain, they can be educators. That’s already a better job. Not too much work, automatic membership in a nifty education clientele, and no lifting.

Brief Notes

□ We recommend to our readers the Council for Basic Education, a league of concerned and thoughtful people working hard for sanity in the schools. The CBE has been around since 1956, dogged-paddling upstream all the while, and that “basic” has nothing to do with the zany simplifications of the “back-to-basics” enthusiasts. What’s more, CBE is not supported by hapless taxpayers. Those two things should sufficiently commend the CBE to our readers, but we must say also that its monthly *Bulletin* is a small treasury of clear thought and good prose. (Can there be either without the other?) You can find the CBE at 755 Fifteenth Street, N. W., Washington, D. C. 20005. Write.

□ *Less Than Words Can Say*, a melancholy meditation on the dismal consequences of the new illiteracy, will be published early in the Fall of 1979. The publisher is Little, Brown, of Boston, and the author is Assistant Circulation Manager of this journal. The book is not likely to be adopted for use in schools.

□ We often get requests for back issues and even for complete collections of *The*

Underground Grammarian. Ha. We’d like to have some of those, too. A solution, of sorts, is now offered by the Microfilming Corporation of America, 1620 Hawkins Avenue, Sanford, NC 27330. They’ll send you, on microfiches, the whole of Volumes I and II for five dollars. Subsequent volumes will be three dollars each.

A microfiche, to be sure, is a wretched gizmo, but it’s the best we can do. We remind all readers that nothing in this journal is copyrighted. Most readers make duplicates of their copies and send them about.

□ Warm congratulations to many of you. We have a growing collection of copies of your letters to Wilhemina Perry, none of which has been answered. (We did say that you’d learn “how reluctant they are to display unnatural acts to civilians and taxpayers.”) Wilhemina Perry is not, we must say, the author of the now notorious “Summary of Work in Progress,” merely the guardian. She says there’s a shortage of copies but she’ll talk to someone about it. Those who haven’t yet written for their copies can help her along with her work by writing now. For new readers: Glassboro State College, Glassboro, NJ 08028.

□ More warm congratulations to those who have written to Commissioner Boyer asking for copies of Tom Sticht’s “The Basic Skills: A Frame of Reference.” Boyer has been passing your letters on to Sticht, who has been wondering what the hell the flap is all about. He says that he showed the thing to herds of educationists and *they* didn’t find anything wrong with the language.

(Correction: Sticht rhymes not, as our title suggested, with “Pict,” but with “enriched.” All the better. It actually *improves* the line in which “Sticht has bunched much such stuff.”)

One outraged reader, pointing to “the high level of idiocy” and the “uncoordinated meanderings” of the educational bureaucracy, sent copies of his letter to President Carter, both his senators, and a small gang of representatives. Go and do likewise, remembering that “these garblers of thought and language fear only one thing—an informed and irate public.” That’s you. Again, the man to write is Ernest L. Boyer, U. S. Commissioner of Education, 400 Maryland Ave. S. W., Washington, D. C. 20202.

If you have some good use for reprints of “Sticht in the Eye Again,” just ask.

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**Neither can his mind be thought to be in tune,
whose words do jarre,
nor his reason In frame,
whose sentence is preposterous.**



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Three Mile Island Syndrome

IF you were lucky enough to have been a reader of this journal in March of 1978, you may now remember where you heard it first. In that issue, we (more or less) accurately predicted not only the recent mishap at Three Mile Island but also the collision of a southbound Metroliner (a crack train, that) with a hastily abandoned repair vehicle of some sort. “We are,” we told you, “in the hands of people who say they know what they’re doing, but they don’t.” We called them “self-styled experts failing in the work they said they could do and excusing themselves because the work is difficult.” Those are precisely the people who smash us into tampers and bring us to the brink of “super-prompt critical power excursion,” as the old AEC once called “meltdown.” It sure is good to know, isn’t it, that there couldn’t possibly be any such ninnies scratching their heads and tapping the dials down in the bunkers and silos of the North American Air Defense Command.

Curiously enough, in the same piece we cited Adam Smith’s observation that when people of the same calling consort together, the result is

always a conspiracy against the public. That, in the context of recent calamities, must bring at once to every mind dark suspicions about the National Council of Teachers of English. In every control room and laboratory in America, in the cockpits of aeroplanes and the swivel-chairs of agencies, wherever meters are read and decisions made and dials twiddled, this sinister confraternity has planted unwitting agents. Dr. Fu Manchu never had it so good.

It wasn’t even hard. All they had to do was convince us that painstaking accuracy in small details was *nyet* humanistic and not worth fussing about in the teaching of reading and writing. They seized and promulgated, for instance, the bizarre notion that guessing at unknown words was more creative than learning the sounds of letters, thus providing us with whole bureaucracies full of nitwits whose writing, at best, is made out of more or less approximate words that might sort of mean something or other. After all, if your teacher applauds your creativity when you read “supper” for “dinner,” you’re little likely to grow up caring about the difference between parameter and perimeter.

The NCTE worries about the “trivializing” of competence tests by persnickety questions on punctuation and spelling, preferring that student writing skills be judged “holistically” and with no “emphasis on trivia.” (*College English*, March 1979, pp. 827-828.) By that, they mean that student writing should be judged subjectively by members of the teacher club (who else could provide a “holistic rating”?), and that skills like spelling and punctuation, objectively measurable by mere civilians, are to be held of little or no account.

One NCTEer, a certain Seymour Yesner, a public school teacher in Minneapolis, questions whether spelling or capitalization “is as important as presenting ideas in logical sequence.” Sure. There must be *millions* of kids who haven’t been taught too much about the relatively undemanding skills of spelling and punctuation but have nevertheless mastered the rigorous discipline of “presenting ideas in logical sequence.”

Another, James Hoetker of Florida State University, laments a competence test “that makes no mention at all of student creative work . . . or appreciation.” You can’t get away with pretending to teach spelling and punctuation; the facts will

find you out. Creativity and appreciation, however . . .

The most pathetic whimper, and probably the most revealing, comes from one Thomas Gage of Humboldt State University in California. He bemoans “thirty-five performance indicators which are clearly utilitarian” and because of which he fears that “little humanistic education can be provided.” That’s the heart of the matter.

Whether or not NCTEers *can* teach things like spelling and punctuation, who knows? In any case, they obviously don’t want to. They want to wear the robes of prophets and priests and peddle to their students the same bogus “humanistic” attitudes that were peddled to them in the teacher academy. They want to preside over rap sessions on values clarification and play charades of holistic creativity and appreciation enhancement.

Children *always* learn something in school, but what they learn is seldom what we had in mind to teach. Children who grow up under the influence of the humanistic education mongers, what do they learn? They learn that hosts of errors will be forgiven for even the pretense of good intentions. They learn that shabby workmanship brings no penalty, especially in the context of anything silly or self-indulgent enough to be put forth as “creative.” They learn that the mastery of skills is of little importance, for even the supposed teachers of skills have found comfortable jobs in spite of their indifference to those skills and, not infrequently, in spite of an obvious lack of those skills. They learn to be shoddy workers in any endeavor, comforting themselves, as their teachers did, by fantasies of a holistic excellence unfettered by precision in small details, or “emphasis on trivia.”

Then they take jobs with power companies and railroads, where machines and toxic substances, unmindful of “holistic ratings,” take heed only—and always, always—of the little things, the valves and switches, the trivia.

Song and Dance in Tennessee

Dear Underground, I have been reading and studying you magazine for sometime and I truly do enjoy reading it. The onliest thing is, is that it is hard to study out what it means. A least always. I don’t mean the Latin or whatever it is in the

“headlines” which I can skip them anyway but it seems to me that folks up *North* make things out harder than they have to be some time and you could learn from us as well. You take Philosophy, as any one would call it a hard “subject” (but not in Knoxville) because you would want to read about the material dialects and the rational. Still, I think you would very seriously do it but end up finally with book learning that is alright in its place, however, life must go on as they say. You will see from the “enclosed” that Philosophy does not have to be hard, and not even Existentialism that is the hardest known Philosophy. It tells about Anand Kumar Malik and his course he is teaching called The Existential Student, and very well put by the “headline.” “You are hereby invited to become no one but yourself.” It gives a good feeling and the smiling face picture really gets the message across. Any one who could get themselves down to the University of Tennessee, in Knoxville this summer, could learn Existentialism *and* Humanism thrown in as the flyer says in only four (4) weeks in the dept. of Education, and that’s what it is about after all. If I may give some quotes from the flier you will see that school can be fun, when the students learn “to sing their own song” and “to dance their way through life.” It gives some selected writings too, and as I said there is not a thing wrong with book learning, but I have to admit that I don’t recognize the names, except Elizabeth Lacey tells me that a friend of hers has a whole book of Philosophy by that Mr. Kahlil Gibran, or probably Prof. Gibran, and she says that he is “very good.” (*Exact* quote!) They will have existential music and existential art slides, and “making your own existential painting.” Best of all is they will “relate themselves to themselves through self-understanding” and that makes good sense if you ask me in my humble opinion. Maybe you shouldn’t think school should be all that hard as you seem to think some times, because here is Mr. Malik whose not only an education teacher but he can teach Existentialism too, and he even lets the students figure up their grades so there won’t be all that worry about flunking (failing.) Now that is the whole difference right there between the teachers and the others, and I bet you you won’t find any cheerful smiling face picture drawn up at the top of any fancy medical school flyer. You take doctors and lawyers and even I hope you

don't mind my saying so some of your college professors and you will find there is more than just one stuffed shirt between them. That is because all those "subjects" they study they make them so serious as though somebody's or other *life* depended on it. Life isn't all a rose colored glass, you know, and it is good to have faith that our school teachers can learn Existentialism and dance through it with a song in their heart nevertheless. I know you hate mistakes, so I looked up the hard words.

Jack "Dirty Hands" Sartry
Belts it Out in Knoxville

*If you sing your own song, Baby, and your heart is pure,
Your existence may be maybe, but your essence is for sure!*

A Brief Note

WE wondered how all those math and science "educators," presumably well trained in the skill of logic and the habit of accuracy, could bear to read the silly gabble in the ERIC/SMEAC newsletter. Now we know, for we've seen the work of Marlow Ediger, an actual math educator at Northeast Missouri State University. He warns, in *Wisconsin Teacher of Mathematics* (XXXI: 1, 18), that "the individual learner and society [will] ultimately reap consequential results." Like other educationists who refer to the subjects they don't teach in evasive euphemisms like "sphere," "field," and "area," Ediger speaks of "the mathematics arena."

If the editor of *WTM* isn't permanently out to lunch, then he's one hell of a great *agent provocateur* boring from within. Here's how he lets Ediger find enough rope:

Problematic situations must be life-like and real. Thus, relevant problems to be solved in the school-class setting must also have transfer values to societal settings. The mathematics curriculum then must not be separated from that deemed vital and relevant in society. If, for example, a classroom needs carpeting in the school setting, pupils with teacher guidance may determine the number of square feet or square yards needed. Metric measurements may also be utilized! Comparisons can be made for costs of diverse

carpets from competing stores carrying the needed merchandise. Pupils in this situation are involved in identifying and solving a problem which integrates the goals of school and society. What is learned in the school-class setting is definitely useful in the larger society arena.

So much for the habit of accuracy and the skill of logic among math educators. Do you suppose there is, in mathematics, some flaw in procedure equivalent to redundancy? Is there some way, in an equation, to say that things are *definitely* equal? Is that weird exclamation point in fact a factorial sign? Is *utilized* to *used* as y' is to y , and the *school-class setting* some power of the *school setting*, itself some power of a mere school? Will multiplication cease in Missouri when all the classrooms are carpeted, or will the math educators, in some boldly innovative thrust, discover new problematic situations in the broomclosets?

Well, let's not be too hard on Ediger; maybe he just knows his audience. After all, he's remarkably specific about "stores carrying the needed merchandise," lest the hapless math educators go wandering into haberdasheries and bakeries asking about diverse carpets.

A few readers correctly identified last month's Porseffor of Eglinsh as one Harold Bloom, a distinguished scholar and noted practitioner of Eglinsh at Yale University. All right, you think you're so smart, let's see what you can do with this month's masked marvel. Here's a characteristic excerpt from one of his recent major works, a fill-in-the-blanks form letter that he sends out on behalf of students who probably wouldn't be able to make it as college professors and must look for an honest way of making a living. We are assured by the grammar guerrilla who provided the document that the prose has been much worked over and polished. (Or maybe that word was "Polished"—the agent's note was obviously a hasty scribble, in blood.) In any case, what you see is absolutely *sic*:

In reference to the above captioned individual; please be advised that I am overjoyed to articulate said individual's fine qualities.

I have known the distinguished applicant for a duration of two years as a fine student.

The applicant's concern was transmitted into meaningful ideals that helped evolved numerous frontiers regarding the Criminal justice System.

Regular readers will easily caption unsaid individual, already noted for his articulating of frontiers regarding the outer limits of English prose. For others, a hint: He's a newly tenured member in a band of *professionals* of education famous for their love of excellence.

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Clenched Teeth on the Potomac

WE have little sympathy for politicians. The best that can be said for most of them is that they have not yet been indicted. They insure permanent ignorance and illiteracy by delivering our money into the trotters of wifty educationists, for whom we did not vote. They hasten meekly to give over their stewardship of the common good to truculent trade unionists whose devotion to clarity of thought and language finds eloquent expression in their habitual recourse to the sleazy jargon of hucksterism and strident sloganeering for something they *invariably* call "quality education."

The politicians themselves provide us daily examples of garbled thought and language, and their continuance in office seems to depend upon an electorate oblivious to garbled thought and

language. If they have any interest at all in the education business, it lies in keeping that electorate duped and mute, the political equivalent of pregnant and barefoot. If we count on politicians to come to our aid in informing the discretion of the people, a duty laid upon them by Jefferson, we imagine a vain thing. They have theirs. An electorate skilled in language—thus in thought—might see to it that they *get* theirs.

Nevertheless, we do feel a small twinge of sympathy for one William Proxmire, a politician who has been dealt by the Supreme Court the same kind of utterly unaccountable four-flush that politicians usually deal to us. *Sic semper*, to be sure, but Proxmire, for having thought to do good by ridiculing a grant of our money for research into the tooth-clenching habits of some monkeys, will now have to fight off a libel suit.

Our sympathy for Proxmire is diluted by the following: 1) The taxpayers will pay his legal fees, his fellow politicians having voted him a little grant of his own, one to which a Golden Fleece Award will not be given and which puts us all in our usual place—double jeopardy. 2) If the research project is in fact without merit, the proper objects of ridicule are surely some politicians or bureaucrats too stupid to have seen that. 3) The history of *scientific* research provides many examples of important discoveries made in the course of studies that might well have been thought trivial or foolish, even by the well-informed. The italics, of course, lead to: 4) *Scientific* research can be distinguished from nonsense not by "common sense" speculation about some imaginable value but by logical analysis of the language that simultaneously depicts the research and displays the mental capacity of the researcher. If Proxmire has made such an analysis, he ought to put it forth in defense of his judgment, but we suspect he has just neglected his homework.

For the scientist, as for the philosopher, or even for the politician, language is the symbol system in which he *knows* his knowledge and of which he makes knowledge. It is the medium not only of speculation and hypothesis but equally of measurement and observation. It is through clear and complete *statement* of the question that we learn where and how to seek the answer, which will also be a clear and complete statement. Beakers and microscopes, all his devices, are

elaborations of the scientist's senses and hands; his mind does its work in language.

It is true, of course, that plenty of public money is spent on pseudo-research, perhaps even slightly more than the members of our Congress spend on their own little comforts and rewards. Nevertheless, we wonder: Did Proxmire, instead of studying the language of the monkey business in question, choose to lambaste it just because some member of his staff thought it a nifty target?

Although word, thought, and deed seem to be distinguished from each other in books of prayer, they are not truly discrete. Words *are* thoughts, and deeds as well. We justly ascribe knowledge and wisdom to many of whom we know only their words. To others we can, by those same tokens, justly ascribe ignorance and folly. To praise one man, it is enough to quote his words; and the same will serve to disgrace another.

The writer of the following words is, unfortunately, unknown, but we can still say a lot about him. And we *should*. He is probably not what the court would deem a "public figure," but his words are a public deed:

The National Institute of Education has set an August 9 due date for RFP-NIE-R-79-0017, for a study to: (a) develop an empirically grounded framework for understanding the nature, antecedents and consequences of sense of efficacy in elementary and secondary school teachers; and (b) develop one or more research designs which evolve from the framework and whose purpose would be to produce knowledge necessary to reject, elaborate, refine, and/or extend the conceptual framework.

So where was Proxmire when we needed him? Why didn't he read this stuff—it was in the Federal Register—and ask some of these obvious questions? Is a "sense of efficacy" so rare among the educrats at NIE that they must spend our money for a "framework" to understand its "nature"? Why couldn't they just ask the nearest wind-up toy salesman? What would you know if you *did* understand the nature of a sense? As to that sense, what other evidence could we hope for than some subjective (and self-serving) testimony from those who *feel* it, or *say* they feel it, or *think* they feel it, or *say* they think they feel it, or

whatever you like? And look at (b). Does it *mean* to say, as it *does*, that the NIEers will fork out our money to some educationist who will promise to find out *how* to find out what (a) is supposed to find out after that has *been* found out? (Go ahead; read it again.)

So much for the clarity of thought and the promise of research at NIE. (Good name.)

Come to think of it, we'll take back that sympathy we offered Proxmire. It's Proxmire and his pals who make such nonsense both possible and profitable by voting money for educationism. If he wants to serve the public, let him head the bandits off at the pass instead of tutting a few tuts as they ride into the sunset with the loot.

And as for the tooth-clenching study, we're for it. It may well show that exposure to the prose of educationists causes violent gnashing and temporo-mandibular joint syndrome even in monkeys.

Gschmrub Ahoy Again!

THAT dot you see on the horizon—right there, just below that cloud no bigger than a man's hand—is nothing less than the Flagship Gschmrub, Jan's fighting ship and troop protector. The board of trustees has concluded that the water in the basement of the Triad *will* always be deep enough to float her, and our jaunty educationistic swabbies are panting to go aboard and hoist something.

So far they've hoisted little more than the flag, and no tattered ensign, but a genuine banner with a strange device. They couldn't string together enough words for "Excelsior," but they did manage to eke out EPIC, from Experiential Pre-service In-service Continuum,* which is now the official name of our really neat new Program of Distinction.† We can't wait to read all about it, but

* One advantage of being humanistic and laid back is that you learn to shed elitist hang-ups about shame, and our *professionals* were not reluctant to associate themselves with Vergil and Milton. Unfortunately, of the incipient teacher-trainees who were supposed to be impressed, few have heard of those dead elitists. For most, "Epic" is the name of the sway-backed nag in the comic strip, *Tumbleweeds*.

† A Program of Distinction (or POD) is what used to be called a Flagship (or F-----). We're happy to say that it

for now all we have is the title. ‘Tis enough; ‘twill serve.

They love “experiential,” partly because it sounds like “existential,” a high-class word, and partly because it suggests that education courses are The Real Thing. Trigonometry is *not* experiential, not The Real Thing, but cutting cute bunnies out of construction paper *is* The Real Thing. To an educationist, one who studies the Federalist Papers hasn’t had an “experience”; one who natters desultorily with sullen and inarticulate children about universal human rights and the brotherhood of all mankind—now *he* has an “experience.” Serves him bloody right, too.

“Experiential,” like “Professional,” is not used to describe courses *about* things. French and botany, for instance, while permitted, in moderation, to teacher-trainees, are neither professional nor experiential. They can only be amateur and . . . and . . . Hmm. Well, if the silly word *meant* anything, it would *have* an antonym. Beneath those words, you can smell one of those “values” the educationists are always claiming to teach. And they *do* teach it, through the power of pernicious language. That’s why many language and science teachers think holistic creativity and behavioral objectives more to be prized than irregular verbs and the laws of motion.

The “Pre-service In-service” was probably “Pre-service/In-service”[†] in the first version. Budgets aside, these folk slash whatever they can. Someone must have noticed, however, that that would generate EP/IC, which isn’t even the name of a horse.

“Pre-service In-service” is a familiar form of the linguistic snow-job we looked at last April, when the ERIC/SMEACers gave us the “group and individual contact” business. The rule goes thus: Should you unfortunately find yourself stuck with something that needs no further specification, be sure to provide at least two further specifications.[‡] Now if they could just find a way to squeeze some

was ridicule in this journal that forced the change. Now we’ve *really* got’m. Just imagine the nasty things we can do with POD.

[‡] A splendid example of the Principle of Unnecessary Specification (or PUS) can be found in our issue for January, 79, where Burke’s “laymen” dream up nine separate specifications and an *et cetera* to prove that by golly they do know what “written matter” is.

tuition money out of teachers who have resigned or died, they could add a “post-service.”

“Service”[†] is worth some attention. People with little skill in language always fall into pits of their own digging, and this inappropriate use of “service” is an inadvertent revelation. How many teachers, think you, would tell you that they “served” or “did service” as teachers? In such a context, “service” carries inescapable connotations of impermanence or even of insufficiency. We say that soldiers *serve* in the army, because most of them are just passing through. Even the Secretary of Defense is said to *serve* in that post, because it isn’t, we hope, his profession or his career. For the ship-wrecked, a pillowcase may have to *serve* as a sail. And Mercutio’s grim joke, cunningly quoted above, would have fallen flat if it hadn’t been for this sense of *serve*.

Like Pinocchio’s nose, gobbledygook grows by mendacity. When we don’t know what we mean, or when we *do* know but would prefer that others didn’t, we retreat into the murky obliquities of jargon. But a canny reader can always spot the bulging beak of bafflegab, and that protruding proboscis in “Pre-service In-service” causes dark suspicions. It seems that our EPICers, having flaunted “experiential” to imply that their stuff is The Real Thing, assert unconsciously, through their habitual use of “service,” that what real teachers do in real schools *isn’t* quite The Real Thing.

“Continuum,” however, *is* The Real Thing. Wow. You have to be *very* smart indeed to talk about a continuum. Now you take that Einstein. He was smart. He talked a lot about a continuum. *Professionals* of education are *so* smart that they can talk about a continuum any time they stumble on a way to do more than one thing in a row.

Our readers are not that smart. We’d better explain. If you eat an egg—phooey, that’s nothing! If you eat the egg and *then* drink a cup of coffee, *that* is a continuum. It’s even an *experiential* continuum, an experiential ingestion continuum. If you *prepare* to do those things, by tying a napkin under your chin, for example, and then *do* them, that is what we call an experiential pre-ingestion in-ingestion continuum. If you take integral and then differential calculus, that’s just a couple of math courses. But if you hear all about

behavioral objectives in one course, and then in another, and then in yet others, that's an EPIC!

We wish we could tell you more, but what can we do? All we have is four lousy words. But don't be despondent. If not of man's *first* disobedience, this pedagogical muse will yet sing further, for the EPICers plan to emit a little newsletter. We can't wait.

Since the newsletter, along with all other promos and blurbs, will consume tax money, please ask (now) to be put on the mailing list for *all* EPIC stuff. Write Jan Weaver, EPIC Leader, Glassboro State College, Glassboro, NJ 08028. When she fails to answer (*nobody* ever heard from Wilhemina Perry), send a waffle to Tevis M. Goldhaft, Chairman of the Board, at the same address. He'll understand.

Still, nothing beats a good epic, we always say. "Our foes," Vergil says, "will provide us with arms." How's *that* for experiential?

Brief Notes

□ We did warn you, more than a year ago, that it was out of weariness rather than wisdom that our Representatives adjourned without foisting upon us a Department of Education, a welfare system for self-styled *professionals* of education clutching hokey doctorates in things like intercultural studies, learning facilitation, and cafeteria management. In this last session (there wasn't much to do anyway) 210 idle hands were lifted in favor of a DOE, thus making good (if that's the right word) on President Crater's campaign promise of a tax-supported annex for the National Education Association.

Hope, however, remains. The opposition came up with 206 votes, and some wily politicians tacked on some vexatious amendments. This boondoggle may yet die in conference. You can help. Write to your neighborhood politician.

On the other hand, just think of the fun we can have examining selected passages from the thesis by which America's first Secretary of Education finally scrounged up a DEd in guidance.

□ By now, you should be able to find, in almost any respectable bookstore, a copy of our assistant circulation manager's gloomy contemplation of the new illiteracy, its roots and consequences, and its prosperous practitioners. The book's original

title, *The Worm in the Brain*, proved too frightening and grisly for Little, Brown, a cautious publishing house in Boston. Well, it's a long worm that has no turning, and the title was changed to *Less Than Words Can Say*. The text, however, survived, and it remains frightening and grisly.

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A Big "A" for Effort

The essential factor that keeps the scientific enterprise healthy is a shared respect for quality. Everybody can take pride in the quality of his own work, and we expect rough treatment from our colleagues whenever we produce something shoddy.

[The words of Freeman Dyson, a physicist, in *The New Yorker* for August 6, 1979, page 40.]

WELL, sure, but let's be reasonable. There are, after all, enterprises in which rough treatment for shoddy work would be downright churlish. When your kids come home from camp, do you tell them that their pots are lumpy and leaky and their popsicle-stick pencil-holders all askew? Do you inform that sweet old lady who plays the harmonium at choir practice that her rhythm is

uncertain and her accidentals accidental and that she'd do better playing on a touch-tone telephone? And how about that tap-dancing at the junior high talent show, and the mimeographed newsletter your Aunt Tabiatha emits every Christmas?

Now, if you'll just give such things a little humanistic thought, maybe you can enhance your values on a holistic basis in the good old affective domain. Then, when your neighborhood principal sends out a page of ungrammatical babble, maybe you'll be sensitive enough to give him as much consideration as you give the baton twirlers in the homecoming parade. It's honest effort that counts, isn't it, and that principal is doing the best he can.

Those of us who have landed steady jobs in the schools understand these things, and we always give each other A for effort, and never, *never*, any of that rough treatment stuff. When our colleagues undertake a modification of the sequencing of modules within clusters exposing students to a variety of experiences including module instruction in basic skills, do we mutter about a shared respect for quality? We do not. We know that that's the best they can do, and we give them A for effort. When the guy down the hall is teaching intercultural sensitivity enhancement through sampling the foods of many lands, do we fret about some utterly hypothetical distinction between academic study and those swell self-enrichment courses at the Y on Thursday nights? We do not. It's a shared respect for academic freedom that keeps *this* enterprise healthy, and if we find blintzes better than bibliographies and pizzas more to be prized than papers, that's academic freedom and none of your damn business, or any elitist physicist's either.

Physicists, you must realize, are unlikely to share those humanistic values inherent in things like experiential curriculum development and the making of collages from scraps of uncooked pasta. They have little appreciation of the noncognitive aspects, phases, and factors of observation-participation-involvement and painting on velvet.

So let's just restrict that "rough treatment" stuff to the physicists, OK? After all, those birds are *dangerous*. What *they* do might even have *consequences*, for God's sake!

Up the Jolly Roger!

THE *professionals* of education at Glassboro include a bunch who practice what they call Developmental Education. ("Developmental" is a face-saving code word for "remedial.") On August 29, 1979, our doughty developmentalists met to lay their plans for the coming year. One item of business was a stern warning to one and all not to write any memos lest they fall into the hands of some agent of *The Underground Grammarian*.

We received the news with mixed feelings. It's good to know, of course, that taxpayers may spend a bit less for paper this year, but we wonder: Is this clear admission about the degree of their confidence equally a clear admission about their competence?

It is astonishing that the developmentalists meekly accepted this shocking and degrading direction. They were being told, in effect, that they could not be trusted to make, in public and permanent form, creditable displays of the work of their minds. Did that suit them?

Those who, all unknowing, can't devise clear thought in coherent, conventional prose are merely ignorant. They deserve instruction, not disgrace, but we may still question the wisdom of offering them shelter and sustenance in the professoriate. What, then, might we think of those who, *knowing* that they cannot devise clear thought in coherent, conventional prose, continue nevertheless to accept the shelter and sustenance? How much better might we think of those who are so uncertain of their skills in thought and language that they will not risk the appraisal of their colleagues?

Professors, unlike wind-up toy salesmen or jockeys, are morally obliged to display to one another the work of their minds. When they neglect to do so, the worth of the academic enterprise is diminished. When they *refuse* to do so, that worth is destroyed utterly, and they show themselves freebooters, renegade officers, as it were, who, having accepted from the king their commissions and commands, make off with his ships and serve the realm no longer but themselves only.

Those who fear the just consequences of bad work can prevent them by doing good work.

Prostrate Trouble at NJEA

THERE is a kind of thoughtlessness that is not exactly stupidity. It is a failing seen in ordinarily intelligent people who, under the influence of self-interest, prefer to evade clarity of thought in precise language, giving themselves instead to recitation of the vague and comfortable. They write prostrate prose in which they let themselves be walked all over by verbal inaccuracies and the failures of logic that those inaccuracies always cause. Such prose is especially dangerous because it often sounds like common sense around the old pot-bellied stove. We will consider a case of cracker-barrel cant from the ruminations of one James P. Connerton.

Connerton is the new executive director of the New Jersey Education Association.* All we know of him is what we read in the *NJEA Review* of January, 1979, to wit, that he has now returned to New Jersey after ten years spent in unspecified enterprises “in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Michigan, and other states.” How many other states, deponent saith not, but he *doth* say: “His goals are our goals. Our aspirations are his aspirations. Our joy and our pain are his joy and pain.” The pain probably has to do with moving expenses.

Deponent is Frank Totten, the president of NJEA. Here’s more of what he writes:

Together we are the NJEA. All of us have made us what we are today. What we will be in 10 or 20 years depends on our determination, our foresight, our hard work, and our togetherness.

Jim Connerton is determined, farsighted, hardworking and one of us. As in the past, we’ll do it together. We will determine our future and the future will be better because we have worked together.

Welcome home Jim. We need you. The present and the future will be better for us because we’ll work through them together.

* This is a subsidiary of the National Education Association, a trade union devoted entirely, if properly, to the welfare of its members. When the NEW studies educational problems, it discovers that what is good for schoolteachers is good for America.

That has a quaint charm, no? It sounds like the language in which invocations are spoken at the firemen’s annual clambake and certificates of achievement awarded at Little League banquets. Very American. However, we’d be readier to accept it—even to applaud it—if only it had begun with the traditional Unaccustomed As I Am. In this case, though, we might feel more confident about the future of civilization if one of the state’s best-known schoolteachers seemed more accustomed to written English, even to such trivia as comma splices and paragraph logic.

Never mind. Totten is only a harbinger. The har that he binges is an article in which Connerton speaks *his* mind: “Our ‘top’ priorities.”†

Strictly speaking, we can not name more than *one* priority, or *first thing*, but the plural is irresistible to those who want to dignify anything they think they may someday prepare to begin to get ready to do something about or even just to think about. When a word means almost anything, it means almost nothing. To name something is to distinguish it from all the other things.

At the NJEA, they seem to have so many priorities that they have to distinguish *them* from one another, calling *some* of them “top” priorities. We must assume that they have also some middle priorities and bottom priorities.‡ Of top priorities, Connerton explores a mere twelve. Here’s what he says about a vexatious top priority indeed:

† Mysteriously inappropriate quotation marks are a hallmark of written English in New Jersey, where roadside stands sell “fresh” tomatoes and community bulletin boards in supermarkets announce the availability of welding “equipment,” some of it “unused.” The taxonomy of the mysterious quotation mark has yet to be concocted, but the principle out of which it must grow can be stated: A writer’s every twitch sends a message all its own. In “top” we may have an example of the Condescending Quotation Marks, which, always on some word more at home in a lower level of discourse, a remote and disreputable cousin at the wedding feast, announce that the writer, no stuffed shirt, no sirree, is perfectly willing to talk like one of the “guys.” On the other hand, however, these may be the Artful Dodge Quotation Marks meant to justify some over-worked vulgarity for which the writer could find no “viable” alternative.

This phenomenon deserves more study. Should you find some good examples, please send them on to us.

Every reasonable person concedes that we can't hold the parent accountable for the color of a child's hair, that we can't rate the minister by the number of parishioners who break the Commandments, and that we can't blame the coach when a linebacker misses a tackle. Most people also concede that we can't judge teachers by the scores their students make on tests—especially on tests approved by some state office in Trenton that does not mesh with the local curriculum. Students should be evaluated by a variety of relevant measures, and so should teachers.

That “every reasonable person” is a rhetorical gimmick similar to a speaker's promise to make no mention of the well-known fact that his opponent is a thief and a pederast. In this case it is less effective, for it introduces either a shocking inanity or some hitherto unimagined cataclysm in genetics. But Connerton knows his audience. His pains are their pains, you'll recall, and they feel an almost intractable pain whenever they hear “accountable.” By using the word in this context, he deludes readers into swallowing his absurdity, because they are predisposed to think that to hold parents “accountable” for attributes passed on to offspring is to castigate them for dereliction. If Connerton had said *that* in plain English, he would have avoided the absurd only to fall into the irrelevant. “Every reasonable person,” and even some members of the NJEA, would have asked, So what else is new, Jim?

Having grounded his argument firmly on a proposition that is either preposterous or pointless, depending on how we understand “accountable,” but having thereby won the hearts and minds of thoughtless readers, Connerton offers two further propositions meant to be analogous to the first. However, if they were plain statements of fact, which they are not, they could be analogous only to the irrelevant version of the first proposition. In order to be analogous to the *other* possible version, the absurd one, they would have to be obvious misrepresentations of fact, which they also are not. Therefore they are *not* analogous to the first proposition. In one way, that's lucky for Connerton, since even schoolteachers might be able to spot three logical monstrosities in a row. In another way, it's unlucky. His second and third propositions *are* analogous to the business of

evaluating the effectiveness of teachers, and they suggest the opposite of what Connerton wants to say.

We can expect some normal amount of ox-coveting and idolatry in any congregation; but, should sinning increase inordinately and persist obstinately, as illiteracy has in the schools, we might indeed think to “rate” the shepherd of the flock. Furthermore, meek as they are, ministers would probably reject the implication that their work can be presumed to have no effect at all. Are teachers defending themselves by claiming that what *they* do cannot be presumed to have any effect? Why else would Connerton imply as much about the ministers? Maybe that's why we don't see those cute billboards anymore, the ones that used to say, “Teachers make the difference.”

And those hard-eyed entrepreneurs who invest in football teams do indeed blame coaches—and fire them, too—when more and more linebackers miss more and more tackles. It's only amateurs who want to talk about “how you played the game.” Does this analogy tell us that schooling should be judged as leniently as amateur athletics, and that we should be good sports, saying of each newly graduated illiterate, Well, that's how the ball bounces? If we were willing to concede that, do you suppose that Connerton would then concede that teachers should get the same salaries as those guys who coach the Little Leagues?

[That, in fact, is not a bad idea. A volunteer teacher force might well attract a better class of candidates, educated, people unsullied by “education” courses. More on this anon. Ed.]

We have to presume, having heard of no mass defection from the NJEA, that most of the schoolteachers in New Jersey read this passage and found no fault in it. They were apparently content to find themselves defended in a ragged mishmash of non-sequiturs and false analogies that would earn a big fat F in any freshman logic course in the country. It must have reminded them of the papers that always guaranteed a big fat A, and perhaps even a cheerful, rubber-stamped smiling face, in all their education courses.

Whether or not Connerton knew what he was doing, who can say? But we can *say* that if he did he is an exceedingly clever writer, who knows that teachers are *not* too good at noticing fallacies. If he did not know what he was doing . . . well,

that's not our problem. He is paid for the work of his mind not by taxpayers but by schoolteachers.

This tiny passage raises colossal questions: Does it reflect accurately the intelligent power of the average teacher in New Jersey? If so, we have given the teaching of our children into the care of the slow-witted. Or can it be that our teachers can see through this stuff but choose to let it stand because they *like* it, presuming (oh, so correctly) that it will prove effective in persuading a slow-witted public? Must we choose between dullness of mind and self-serving cynicism? What can we hope for where the interest of teachers is best served by the stupidity of the people? Do you *want* a world in which reasoning like Connerton's is accepted without question?

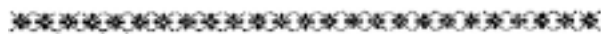
This is the most depressing text we have ever examined. It suggests a horrifying hypothesis, to wit, that, far from *failing* in its intended task, our educational system is in fact succeeding magnificently, because its aim is to keep the American people thoughtless enough to go on supporting the system. What educationists may *say* or even *believe* that they are doing is not to the point. Their self-interest is evident, and the cogency of their thinking is at least questionable. A hypothesis must be tested by reference to facts and its ability to account for the facts.

Now do your homework. Find some facts to test that dismal hypothesis. Brace yourself. You're going to have a bad day.

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The Answering of Kautski

*Why should we bother to reply to Kautski?
He would reply to us, and we would have to
reply to his reply. There's no end to that. It
will be quite enough for us to announce that
Kautski is a traitor to the working class, and
everyone will understand everything.*

Nikolai Lenin

TYRANNY is always and everywhere the same, while freedom is always various. The well and truly enslaved are dependable; we know what they will say and think and do. The free are quirky. Tyrannies may be overt and violent or covert and insidious, but they all require the same thing, a subject population in which the power of the word is dulled and, thus, the power of thought occluded and the power of deed brought low. That's why Lenin's bolshevism and American educationism have so much in common.

"Give me four years to teach the children," said Lenin, "and the seed I have sown will never be uprooted." He wasn't talking about reading, writing, and arithmetic. He wanted only enough of such skills so that the workers could puzzle out their quotas and so that a housebroken bureaucracy could get on with the business of rural electrification. Our educationists call it basic minimum competency, and they hope that we'll settle for it as soon as they can cook up some way of convincing us that they can provide it. For Lenin, as for our educationists, to "teach the children" is to "adjust" them into some ideology.

Lenin understood the power of that ready refuge from logical thought that is called in our schools the "affective domain," the amiable Never-never Land of the half-baked, to whom anything they name "humanistic" is permitted, and of whom skillful scholarship and large knowledge are not required. Lenin approved of the "teaching" of values and the display, with appropriate captions,

of socially acceptable “role models.” He knew all too well the worth of behavior modification. He knew that indoctrination in “citizenship” is safer than the study of history, and that a familiarity with literature is not conducive to the wholehearted pursuit of career objectives in the real-life situation, or arena.

On the other hand, Lenin knew that there was little risk that coherent thought could erupt in minds besieged by endless prattle about the clarification of values. He knew that reiterated slogans can dull even a good mind into a stupor out of which it will never arise to overthrow the slogan-makers. In this, our educationists have followed him assiduously, justifying every new crime against freedom of language and thought by mouthing empty slogans about “quality education.”

“Most of the people,” Lenin wrote, not in public, of course, but in a letter, “just aren’t capable of thinking. The best they can do is learn the words.” If that reminds you of those bleating sheep in *Animal Farm*, try to forget them, and think instead of the lowing herds of pitiable teacher-trainees, many of whom began with good intentions and even with brains, singing for their certificates dull dirges of interpersonal interaction outcomes enhancement and of change-agent skills developed in time-action line. Lenin’s contempt was reserved for the masses. These educationists, pretenders to egalitarianism, hold even their own students in contempt, offering them nothing but words.

If you think it too rash to charge our educationists even as unwitting agents of tyranny and thought control, consider these lines from a recent proclamation of the Association of California School Administrators:

“Parent choice” proceeds from the belief that the purpose of education is to provide individual students with an education. In fact, educating the individual is but a means to the true end of education, which is to create a viable social order to which individuals contribute and by which they are sustained. “Family choice” is, therefore, basically selfish and anti-social in that it focuses on the “wants” of a single family rather than the “needs” of society.

So what do you think? Would it suit Lenin?

And if you’d like to object, you’ll see that these people also know how to answer Kautski. They’ll just pronounce you an elitist, and everybody will understand everything.

Pontiffs and Peasants

UNLIKE socialism, the realm of educationism was never meant to be a classless society. Just now it’s an emasculated feudalism whose few surviving *pugnantes* have decided to settle down with the unholy but happy Saracens, leaving the miserable *laborantes* to fend for themselves under the silly governance of the puffed-up *orantes*. The go-getter, self-promoting grant-grabbers have all wangled themselves cushy consultancies and juicy jobs in government. The wretched tillers of the soil are hoeing hard rows in the public schools and risking life and limb in the cause of minimum competence. The jargon-besotted clergy are bestowing upon each other rich benefices of experiential continua and peddling cheap remedial indulgences, fighting to keep their teacher-training academies growing in an age of closing schools and dwindling faith in bold innovative thrusts in non-cognitive curriculum design facilitation. Fat flocks, fat shepherds. Things do look bad, but let us not despair. The Black Death has been reported in Arizona, and it may yet spread.

It’s not always easy to tell the pontiffs from the peasants. The sumptuary laws no longer apply. In the time of love-beads, both classes wear love-beads; in the time of Levi’s, Levi’s. Our best clue—*always* the best clue when we want to assess the work of the mind—is the language used by each class, *Lumpensprache* by the peasants and *Pfaffesprache*, a classier lingo indeed, by the pontiffs.

Here’s a typical passage of the latter as it appeared, unfortunately without attribution, in an otherwise splendid column by Howard Hurwitz, a syndicated writer on education:

These instructional approaches are perhaps best conceived on a systems model, where instructional variables (input factors) are mediated by factors of students’ existing

cognitive structure (organizational properties of the learner's immediately relevant concepts in the particular subject field); and by personal predispositions and tolerance toward the requirements of inference, abstraction, and impulse control, all prerequisite to achievement in the discovery or the hypothetical learning mode."

So. It may mean that what a student learns depends on what he already knows and on whether or not he gives a damn. For a pontiff of educationism, that's already a novel and arresting idea, but if he said it in plain English he wouldn't be allowed to teach any courses in it. Indeed, if he *could* say it in plain English he would probably have enough sense not to say it, thus disclosing to the world that years of study have brought him at last to a firm grasp on the obvious.

Even when intoning the obvious, however, a pontiff keeps his head down. Did you notice that "perhaps"? He doesn't actually commit himself to the proposition that approaches are best conceived as a model where variables are mediated by factors; he is willing only to opine that approaches are *perhaps* best conceived as a model where variables are mediated by factors. If that were humility rather than self-defense, it would suit him well, for he seems to think that *conceived* means *understood* and that *mediated* means *mitigated* and that *factors* and *variables* can mean anything at all. He's not so good with semicolons either.

That point is important. Although inflated with fake erudition, *Pfaffesprache* always reveals, inadvertently, its roots in the vulgar, but usually honest, *Lumpensprache*. Thus we find in that passage the defensive errors of the ignorant, who always use too many modifiers and achieve thereby either redundancy or incoherence. There is no need to specify that a student's "disposition" is "personal" or to elaborate "subject" into "the particular subject field." We are not enlightened by hearing that a property is organizational or that the relevant is immediately relevant. "The hypothetical learning mode" tells us only that this pontiff is hazy about the meanings of "mode" and "hypothetical" and short on "learning."

The pontiff, of course, preaches what he practices in some teacher-training academy. Nevertheless, in spite of his baleful influence,

many of his students do not adopt his ignorant babble. They cling faithfully to their own ignorant babble.

They become schoolteachers and compose "thought" questions for study guides: "What did the sculpture told the archologists?" They admonish parents: "Scott is dropping in his studies he acts as if don't care. Scott want pass in his assignment it all, he had a poem to learn and he fell to do it." When asked to demonstrate their own literacy, they go out on strike, demanding on the placards "quality educacion" and "descent wages."

Maybe you *can't* fool all of the people all of the time, but the pontiffs can fool all of the peasants forever. That accounts for the fact that the society of educationism is made up of two apparently dissimilar classes. Deep down where it really counts, they're equally less than minimally competent.

We can understand why the educationists defend so truculently that bizarre article of their faith which pronounces superior intelligence and academic accomplishment traits not suitable to schoolteachers. Well, they may have a good point there. There's more than enough violence in the schools already. If we were to send a bunch of bright and able students to study with the hypothetical learning mode pontiff, they'd ride him out of town on a rail and hurry back to burn down the whole damn teacher-training academy.

The Steaming Bird

THIS year's Steaming Bird Award must be sliced into enough portions to stuff the craws of the Curriculum Sub-Committee of the EPIC Steering Committee, whose members have cooked up a fine turkey basted with clusters and modules and garnished with the sequencing of modules within clusters. These folk are not so presumptuous as to say that they will *teach* anything, but only that students will be "exposed to experiences" and "involved in experiences," sometimes in experiences "concerning" something or other. (That's sort of understandable; *the Bulgarian Immigrant's Phrase-Book* does offer "I please to be involved in experience concerning toilet." "Exposed to" is also allowed.)

Where native speakers of English would have the EPIC student keep a journal, these

languageless educationists want him to “maintain” and “organize” a “written” journal, condescendingly specifying what is implicit in “journal,” and strangely *not* specifying that the student is to *write* the damn thing. He could meet this requirement by *finding* a written journal to “maintain” and “organize.”

Having finished Cluster IV, Practitioner as Individual/Self, the EPIC student can sashay on over to Cluster V, Practitioner as Professional/Self as Professional. He will use nothing, but he will utilize materials. He will observe an “individual” child, not a plural one. He will “correctly name and relate to and of handicapping conditions as related to special education children.” Figure that one out.

Then, having had one third of his “education” in our epical Cave of Winds, buffeted by pomposity and incoherence, he will go forth, duly certified to teach your children all about values.

Brief Notes

☞ Thanks to a stupid blunder, we have in stock a massive supply of paper from which, as you see, the deckled edge has been carefully removed. We’re sorry, and we’re looking for a new Assistant Purchasing Agent.

☞ Some readers have commented on what *seemed* a typo in September’s brief note about President Crater’s handsome gift to the NEA, a DOE of their very own. (Nevertheless, there may be but little truth to the rumor that he has also promised control of the Department of Justice to the Mafia.) It’s not that simple.

That block of copy was set in type back in the summer, when our President returned in haste from the Orient and almost immediately disappeared. On the *very same day*—and of all the political analysts in America ours was the only one to notice this—Marie Osmund *broke off* her engagement. Our typesetter, naturally enough, was thinking about *Judge Crater* when he *should* have been thinking about *President Crater*. There. That should explain everything.

☞ In last month’s issue there was a double dagger (***) on “bottom priorities” but no footnote to go with it. The footnote was to have been a probing examination of the fundamental

meanings suggested by that term. A rump session of the editorial board, hastily assembled by the conservative faction, thought the piece perhaps too coarse for this journal. They have decided to sit on it for a while.

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**Neither can his mind be thought to be in tune,
whose words do jarre,
nor his reason In frame,
whose sentence is preposterous.**

The Underground GRAMMARIAN

Volume Three, Number Nine . . . December 1979

Bah, humbug!

The Underground Grammarian began with the idea that the work of the mind is done in language and that disorderly language is an inexcusable fault in those who take money for the work of their minds. We imagined at first that the language of ignorance and inanity was the native tongue of bureaucrats and administrators. We were wrong. It took us more than a year, a year spent in scrutinizing vile specimens, to realize that all those silly geese had learned that gabble from the Great Gobblers themselves, those wiggly-wattled, biggety birds, the Teacher-training Turkeys.

The knowable content of what they profess, what they call “subject matter,” is very small.

Most of it is cribbed, more often than not adulterated and simplified, from other modish pseudo-sciences, themselves blown this way and that by every puff of fashion. From vapid near beers like Pop Psychology and Pop Sociology they have concocted a sour brew of Pop Pedagogy, and our children must drink it until they die—usually in the fourth or fifth grade.

In one dialogue of Plato, in one essay of Bacon, in one novel of Dickens, there is more understanding of human learning than in all of the educationists' experiential continua put together. They either don't know that or they pretend not to, lest someone discover that a teacher needs not a dreary indoctrination in educationism but an education.

It is out of that ignorance, feigned or not, that they judge the worth of what little they think to have discovered. From the top of the midden-heap, they gobble forth the news that their assessment instruments have produced hopefully viable findings centered around the hypothesis that teachers may (perhaps) be perceived as critical variables in the learning-teaching process. Or maybe not.

These people are not funny.

The unspeakable practices of their writing arise partly from plain ignorance but mostly from the fact that they have nothing to say and many incentives to say it. They publish themselves copiously and indiscriminately in hundreds of educationistic journals, periodical vanity presses of pedagogue. They "write" dissertations by tabulating the responses of those who couldn't care less to questions about what couldn't matter less. Since the typical legislator is unable to see that they speak inanity, or even that their pronouns agree only occasionally with their antecedents, the turkeys are influential. That's why every rinky-dink administrator in academe wants to speak their gobble.

And that's why they have become, and will remain, our primary targets. Their language is what it is not because they are careless, not because they have complicated things to say, but because, wittingly or not, they are charlatans, either deceived or deceivers.

Easy targets? Yes, of course, but this is not a sporting journal. We will shoot sitting turkeys any time we can. We will shoot turkeys in a barrel, especially turkeys that quack.

We don't even wish them Merry Christmas.

The Missouri Compromise

YOU will not be astonished to learn that there are some people in Missouri who cannot manage commas, cannot avoid sentence fragments, cannot regularly make verbs agree with subjects and pronouns with antecedents, and cannot help sounding like literal translations from Bulgarian. If you are a regular reader of this journal, you'll also be unastonished to hear that those pitiable illiterates are members of the Missouri Association of Colleges of Teacher Education.

These poor saps have finally noticed that lots of irate citizens "have indicated concern of [yes, *of*] the decreasing standardized test scores of students." They even know that a "sensitivity has become quite manifest in the development in state wide [yes, two words] assessment systems." But they don't seem too worried. They've cleared up the whole mess in a "position statement" called *Assessment of Basic Skills Competencies of Potential Teachers*.

The Missouri educationists have also just discovered, or have at least come to suspect that they might perhaps decide to assume—tentatively, what the rest of us have always known. They put it thus: "Although many factors may intervene the teacher is viewed by many as a critical variable in the teaching-learning process and, therefore, the key to the improvement in the basic skills of students." (No, we *didn't* leave out the missing commas. Punctuation in pedagogue is "viewed by many" as an *uncritical* variable to which sensitivity need *not* be quite manifest.)

"The teacher," they say, "must have a high degree of proficiency in the basic skills. They are expected to transmit to their students through precept and example."

Yeah. And here are some of the precepts and examples through which these Missouri Teacher-training Turkeys transmit:

"The latter ['field experiences'] being principally in student teaching with a major emphasis on institutional planning, execution, and evaluation of subject matter to be presented." And, "Utilizing the assumption that the measuring/ascertaining of the competencies of potential teachers should be done on or about the

end of the traditional sophomore year.” For the Turkeys, those are sentences. So why should *they* care? It’s the taxpayers and children who’ll have to serve them.

Those, of course, are just supersaturated, freebooting participles, but this one passes understanding: “If the student does not meet the prescribed standards of basic skills and the student, before they are formally admitted into teacher education and certainly before graduation, should have remediation and reevaluation.” (Wow, these people are tough! *Before* graduation, no less.) Any competent sixth-grade teacher would flunk such rubbish, but the Turkeys aren’t worried. As long as they’re in charge, there will be damned few competent sixth-grade teachers in Missouri.

“Also,” say the Turkeys, “there is a question of the relationship of secondary and co-secondary schools in terms of relationships. The authors [!] of this position paper agreed that such an assessment process can have a significant impact [they never discuss *insignificant* or *mere* impacts] on secondary school curriculum in turning to an assessment instrument to which the public schools might be inclined to reach toward.”

Why do the good people of Missouri suffer such humbug, without turning to some blunt instrument to which they might be inclined to reach toward? We can tell you why. It’s because these ugly crimes against nature are committed in private among consenting Turkeys. How many “authors,” do you suppose, conspired to write, rewrite, edit, and finally to *approve* all that gibberish? How many of Missouri’s teacher-trainers, would you guess, have read it? Was not one of them embarrassed or outraged by this sleazy display of ignorance and ineptitude? And if there *was* one, what do you think he did? He kept his mouth shut. It’s better to suffer a momentary discontent than to attract the taxpayers’ attention.

So, unhampered by pesky public outcry, people who cannot devise sentences or make sense or even punctuate will get on with the business of providing Missouri with teachers. And they don’t want *any* interference, if you please, as they make, well, not “clear,” to be sure, but at least “quite manifest,” in their ghastly and ungrammatical peroration:

“There is an advantage to each institution in Missouri preparing teachers to have an

institutional level responsibility rather than a state wide . . . responsibility for assurance of proficiency of basic skills. Alternate assessment processes allow for diversity of response by each institution. It [?] allows for diversity of response loads [?] by students, it allows for diversity of interpretation of what is basic [that’s the part they like best] for that institution’s student population, and it eliminates conflicts of prerogatives [typo?] and rights of faculties of institution [from *The Bulgarian Immigrant’s Phrasebook*] to set curriculum in means of assessing a testing or assuring of competencies.”

We have some advice for the good people of Missouri. Turn those rascals out. Pension them off for life at full pay, requiring only that they never again set foot on a campus. Don’t worry about the cost. In fifty years or so, there won’t *be* any cost. As it is, you’re planning to pay more and more of them for ever and ever. Once they’re gone, on the day they go, in fact, your schools and colleges will become the best in the land.

A knowledge of history is one of the basic skills of which we have been deprived by the educationists’ fervor for shabby social studies and smug civics. We have forgotten that the storekeeper used to pay miscreants to stay *away*. It worked We’ve gotten it backward. We pay them to hang around and smash the windows. Let’s be realistic and pay the miscreants to do that one thing that we most need them to do—nothing, nothing at all.

All-Purpose Gobbledygook

HERE’S some swell news from the *Newsletter* of the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Commission:

“Minnesota post-secondary education is at the threshold of what may become the most dramatic transition ever experienced in the state’s educational enterprise, according to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission. Several partially interrelated circumstances and forces are converging in such a manner as to cause a potentially profound impact on the shape of education beyond high school, according to *Making the Transition*, the Commission’s biennial report. Minnesota post-secondary education also is faced with considerable uncertainty, says the

report. . . . Some of the uncertainty stems from conflicting and changing societal forces that impinge on education, and some emanates from lack of agreement on what constitutes desirable and undesirable modifications and directions for post-secondary education.”

So, did you note the remarkable subtleties of its elegant metaphoric texture? It’s not the threshold of a transition; it’s the threshold of what *may become* a transition. Circumstances and forces, *partially* interrelated (therefore partially uninterrelated) converge, but not in just any old way. They converge *in such a manner* as to cause an impact, maybe not a profound one, but *potentially* profound, and an impact that we might well have *missed* had the circumstances and forces converged in *another* way. And that uncertainty! Some of it stems from forces; some of it emanates from lack. And . . . enough. The mind reels.

But here’s the beauty part. If you memorize that passage, leaving out all reference to schools in Minnesota, you’ll find that you can speak with confident authority on *any* subject just by filling in the blanks! Try it. See?

Holy Cow! Maybe they *are* educators after all. You’ll never get experiential skills enhancement like that from reading Emerson!

Teratology

The back-to-basics nuts are always hollering that the children can’t even write decent letters of application for jobs. Well, they may be right, by gosh. Here are some excerpts from two of those educationally deprived children, one, a graduate in “communications,” the other, an Ed. D. from Boston University:

“I hope to impress upon you my ability to communicate effectively with professionals and lay persons. Having learned to critically assess personal dynamics, I can meaningfully interact with other individuals. In the following account, I purport to assure of my composure and poised demeanor in situations of central focus May I also delineate for you a tendency to adapt myself beneficially . . . utilizing available resources to construct an effective operational strategy.”

“As a way of knowing, writing is crucial, a way of perceiving relationships among bits of experience and information acquired in the

interaction with fact. . . .I believe that content, presented in sentence transforms and used as a means of expanding students’ conceptions of possible interrelationships among social and academic structures, might address the issues of thought and expression in composition Teachers are beginning to use insisive [*sic*] syntactic materials as part of the drafting and re-drafting processes they facilitate in composition sequences.”

**The Underground Grammarian
has made it to the end
of Volume Three,
but will continue
nevertheless.**

Merry Christmas!



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This is a

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