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# The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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## The Teacher of the Year Daniel Stephenson, of Salt Lake City

As little foundation is there for the report that I am a teacher, and take money; this accusation has no more truth in it than the other. Although, if a man were really able to instruct mankind, to receive money for giving instruction would, in my opinion, be an honor to him.

A TRUE TEACHER is even harder to describe than to find. We have all known a handful of true teachers, and we can usually see that their differences were probably greater than their similarities.

What was it, then, that made them true? Is there *one* common trait? Are there several? Are there *any*? Can they be acquired?

If we knew the answers, we would print them right here and put an end to the spastic silliness of the teacher academies, but we suspect that nobody knows those answers, that the questions are just *too human* to permit final answers. The true teacher is a bit like an actor or a musician, a queer duck, with indubitable but finally inexplicable powers, powers that no amount of training will provide where something or other that we don't understand is absent.

Nevertheless, we do know a true teacher when we see one, and we see one in Daniel Stephenson of Salt Lake City. We heard of him because of a fascinating AP story and a few phone calls to Utah:

There is, in Utah, a certain Daryl McCarty. McCarty *was* a functionary of some sort in the state office of a teachers' union. Then, somehow or other, he suddenly became Associate State Superintendent of Schools for Instruction. While being interviewed by a reporter from the Salt Lake Tribune, the newly capitalized ASSS for Instruction somehow found reason to mention the

fact that he hadn't read more than two or three books all the way through.

We, of course, would have taken something like that for granted, and given it only the briefest mention. Daniel Stephenson, however, is not cynical. In fact, until he came to hear of Daryl McCarty, Educator, he "thought everybody in the whole universe liked to read."

Children, unlike grown-ups, who usually discover in others their own worst faults, usually presume in others their own best virtues. Daniel Stephenson is six years old, and from his point of view, all that unfortunate man needed was a little friendly help. In a letter to the editor, and with a little friendly help from his father, who gave some tips on spelling, the young teacher did his best to bring light into the darkness.

"Make a paper chain," he suggested, little suspecting that it is indeed out of prodigious chains of Paper that all McCarty's are made. "Add a new loop for every book you read," wrote Daniel, who believes that those who operate the schools actually *have* the values and attitudes that they urge on *him*, and that they announce to the world as witness to the honor of their labors and as claim to money.

"Since you are older," said Daniel, "your mom and dad won't mind. I bet your wife won't mind." And if she *did* mind, he added, McCarty could always "get a flashlight and read under the covers."

When asked what he had learned from all that, McCarty replied, with exemplary exactitude: "I haven't given it much thought."

"Just because one does not sit down and read Little Red Riding Hood, or novel after novel, doesn't mean they aren't educated or can't do their job," says this Associate State Superintendent for Instruction in Utah. "Basically, I don't do an awful lot of reading, it's just not my forte," says this educator. "I don't have a lot of remorse over it." And as to his teacher's best advice, he solemnly explains: "I don't like the idea of taking my flashlight to bed and reading under the covers. It might be suspect for an adult to do that."

Now there's an intriguing idea. Of what, exactly, would he be "suspect" if he *did* read by flashlight under the covers? Intellectual appetite, or some other horrid perversion? Which shall we prize the more: the Associate Superintendent for

Instruction who is addicted to reading under the covers, or the one who can do “their job” just as he is, thank you, who smugly tells us that he has “made it a long way without books,” and who isn’t about to take any advice from one of the children given into his charge?

Daniel Stephenson ended his letter with this: “Since you are a leader of schools, you should try to set the example. You should try to like reading. If you keep trying, you can’t help but like it.”

A leader of schools.

And that, of course is exactly what McCarty is—a leader of *schools* and *schooling*, a functionary of a government agency whose purpose is to *do* something *in the minds* of children, through what the Leaders choose to call Instruction, for which they have an Associate Leader, a *specialist*, no doubt, carefully selected by the *other* functionaries for the sake of whatever it may be that *is* his “forte,” and that has brought him such a long way.

What can it be, that mysterious forte, which can bring us an Educator of the People as readily as a Ruler of the Queen’s Nigh-vee? Can that fine forte be taught? Can McCarty, now that he’s in charge, work things out so that Daniel Stephenson can learn it? Can Daniel ever hope to become an Educator of the People by idling away his life with Little Red Riding Hood and novel after novel? Will he go a long way, or will he stay always at the bottom of schooling’s massy heap, never an Educator, just a true teacher to his children, never a Leader of anything, just a small lamp of thoughtfulness for those who know him, something just a little “suspect” perhaps, something like a flashlight under the covers?

## Department of Gaga

WHEN teachers in Santa Clara County get homesick for that scholarly life they came to know and love in teacher school, the local Dept. of Ed. is happy to provide them lots more of it, real neat stuff like this:

We will explore both theoretically and experimentally [*sic*] how to develop positive self-esteem in the classroom. We will create a positive and validating climate, in which we can relax, recharge and reinspire ourselves, and

reaffirm our own essential self-worth and learn numerous classroom methods for facilitating positive self-esteem in our classrooms.

We will use such methods as guided imagery, positive focus, the language of responsibility, physical nurturance, communication recognition, strength identification, relaxation, and many others to help our students learn to accept themselves totally and learn to take action in the world. (Fee \$30.00)

And here’s a cheapy (\$17) called “Science as a Verb.” which it may *be* in their “language of responsibility”:

Basic principles of science will be experienced through activities appropriate for classroom instruction; instruction will use common, easy-to-come-by materials.

*How* they experience principles, we don’t know, but we’d sure like to see it, maybe just as they get to osmosis.

## Annals of Educationism • I

### The Master of those Who Know

*And raising my eyes a little I saw on high  
Aristotle, the master of those who know  
ringed by the great souls of philosophy.*

**knowledge:** Knowledge is defined as the remembering of previously learned material. This may involve the recall of a wide range of material, from specific facts to complete theories, but all that is required is the bringing to mind of the appropriate information. Knowledge represents the lowest level of learning outcomes in the cognitive domain.

THAT intriguing definition comes from a “Pilot Curriculum” plan of “Program Gifted and Talented” in the Lakota Local School District. We don’t know where that is—the document came from a careful informant—but it doesn’t make any difference Lakota is everywhere.

The definition is miniature rehash of a section of *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, a book little known and little read, but influential beyond all measuring. It is at once the New Testament of

the cult of educationism and a post-post-Hegelian plan to describe the life of the mind in such a way that educationists might suppose themselves “scientific,” and thus win at last the respect of academe, which ordinarily dismisses them as addled appreciators not only of the Emperor’s clothing but of each of his frequent *changes* of clothing.

Luckily for the educationists, very few academics bothered their heads about *TEO*. If they had, the aspiring scientists of educationism might have suffered something more than mere disrespect. However, while the academics’ ignorance of this work is easy to understand, for the book is less fun to read than the customs regulations for the import of plucked poultry, it is less easy to forgive.

Although the *Taxonomy* seems to have been sort of “written” by a committee, the “credit” is usually given to its editor and principal instigator, a certain Benjamin S. Bloom. Bloom is to educationism what Aristotle is to thought, which is to say, not *exactly* the master of those who know, but at least, by Bloom’s own definition, the master of those who remember previously learned material.\*

Even a glance here and there into Bloom’s *Taxonomy* would at least have prepared us, as long ago as 1956, for the otherwise unaccountable results of American schooling.

You may, for instance, have wondered how it can be that a generation of Americans seems never to have heard of anything, and knows only as much of our history as the television industry

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\* Bloom is still extant. His latest, and probably most startling discovery is that students who study more will often learn more than students who study less. Such a complicated idea is difficult even for the *professionals* to *grasp*—and “remember as previously learned material”—without a master of those who know who can tell them all about the enhancement of learning outcomes through time-on-task augmentation. And it is of such wisdom that Bloom has fashioned the bold, innovative thrust now widely known, and hailed with capitals, as Mastery Learning. The rules for Mastery Learning, however, and not surprisingly, turn out to be not rules for some way of *learning*, but for a way of teaching: First, teach someone something—some “material,” maybe. Next, give him a test. If he passes, good; go on to something else. If he flunks, start over. Keep at it. Stunning. What next?

finds it profitable to show them It may have bemused you to hear how many college students in Miami were unable to locate Miami, or the North Atlantic Ocean, for that matter, on a map. It may have been a sad surprise to discover how many Americans could neither recognize nor approve certain provisions of the Bill of Rights, and how few social studies teachers in Minnesota were able to make any statements of fact about Fascism. Such things are *not*, as generosity, or hope, might dispose you to presume, anomalies, rare and freakish failures of a process that ordinarily produces quite different results. They are in the program.

In the pursuit of mere knowledge, “the lowest level of learning outcomes in the cognitive domain,” educationists are selectively vigorous. They do give each other pretty diplomas for the sort of “research” that reveals that seventeen percent of those guidance counsellors in Buffalo who double as volley-ball coaches never studied volley-ball in teacher school. But where anyone *not* a candidate for an Ed. D. is concerned, they find knowledge less deserving of high honor, and those who would foster it less than perfect in pedagogy. “Because of the simplicity of teaching and evaluating knowledge,” says the *Taxonomy*,

it is frequently emphasized all out of proportion to its usefulness or its relevance for the development of the individual. (p. 34)

Well, there. You see? Who can demonstrate that the ability to locate Miami is useful or relevant to the development of the individual? And if the answer is “no one,” how shall we answer the obvious *other* question: Who can demonstrate that it isn’t? Who can say—who can *know* enough to say—that this or that particle of knowledge is not worth having?

It is not out of *ignorance* that we discover understanding. It is exactly because of what we *already* know that we can know more, that we can discern organizing principles, and make and test hypotheses, and act rationally. But all of that is not the end to which the acquisition of knowledge is intended by Bloom, *et al.*

That end is rather the typically slippery and empty “development of the individual.” To decide that some degree of “emphasis on knowledge” is “all out of proportion” to the “development” of millions of “individuals,” or even of one, is

several steps beyond effrontery. Some might say that it borders on blasphemy. We are content to call it the *hubris* of invincible ignorance, which quite naturally and appropriately afflicts those who denigrate knowledge. What do *they* know, who know the “correct” nature of the development of the individual? Is a general and pervasive ignorance the result of some “emphasis on knowledge” small enough to be *in* proportion to that development?

If there is an “emphasis on knowledge all out of proportion,” to *what* is it out of proportion? How much time and effort should be reserved for a duly proportionate “emphasis” on whatever it is that is *not* knowledge?

There is a word for that which is not knowledge. It is ignorance. But Bloom and his friends must be either consummately cagey or colossally obtuse in championing ignorance.

They begin by claiming, maybe, that knowledge isn’t *really* knowledge in any case;

It is assumed that as the number of things known by an individual increases, his acquaintance with the world in which he lives increases. But, as has been pointed out before, we recognize the point of view that truth and knowledge are only relative and that there are no hard and fast truths which exist for all times and all places. (p. 32)

Well, *we* recognize that point of view too. It was a hot item towards the end of sophomore year, when its titillating paradoxicality brought on neat bull-sessions as to whether that statement could *itself* be permanently true. However, while the Bloomists seem to admit only to *recognizing* the sophomore’s delight, that is due not to cautious thoughtfulness, but only to imprecision of language. In fact, they subscribe to it, and derive from it a grand scheme of “education” depending on the belief that nothing can be known.

It is to support that belief that they must define knowledge only in a trivial sense. As though to prove the vanity of all learning, they point out that “punctuation is solely [that probably means “only”] a matter of convention.” We *know* that. And we can *know* its requirements and principles. The *Taxonomy* gladly informs us that “how we pictured the atom” has changed, Which is as enlightening as the fact that Aristotle could not

have located Miami either. And, most important, because this kind of assertion will lead to the *Taxonomy’s* true agenda, the promotion of “education” as “modification in the affective domain,” the demonstration of “what is knowable” concludes by calling to witness “the cultural aspect” of knowledge.

“What is known to one group is not necessarily known to another group, class, or culture,” Bloom tells us. As to whether that is a statement about “the knowable,” there is a test. Just read it again, putting “knowable” where “known” appears. It is to be hoped that not even Bloomists would say that there could be some knowledge accessible to Arabs but not to Jews, but that *is* what they say when they contrive a definition of knowledge that will permit the inclusion of attitudes, beliefs, and feelings, or any other variety of *supposed* knowledge. Those things, *all* of them “previously learned material” all too easily remembered, make up that *other* category, to which an “emphasis on knowledge” is “all out of proportion” for “the development of the individual.” Those are the things that the Bloomists wanted “education” to be all about. And it is.

Aristotle was partly right. Some, by nature, *do* desire to know; some remember previously learned material.

### Notes from Central Control

**WE** REGRET that we are not only late, but increasingly later with every issue. Man proposes. Our best hope right now is that the issue for May will be out by July, so that we can spend August preparing to get the issue for September out on time.

All of this has taught us something a-bout the vanity of human wishes and led us into an uncharacteristic prudence. We are going to have to make some changes, starting with this issue, which is not only the first of a new volume, but also, to *our* astonishment, at least, the fifty-fifth issue of *The Underground Grammarian*.

☞ In the past, we have often tried to discourage those who wanted to subscribe for two or more years. Now, we will not even consider it. It’s tempting Fate.

☞ From now on, there will be eight issues in each volume instead of the usual nine. January will simply disappear. We realize that this does

mean a rise in price, and we remind you again that half-price subscriptions are available both to retired teachers and any others who need them.

☞ *The Underground Grammarian* is addressed to *persons*, human beings, individuals who can will and choose. We have neither the time nor the desire to observe the silly guidelines of libraries, or resource centers, or multinational corporations. We fill out no forms; we provide no “identification numbers”; and we truly don’t know, or want to know, what an invoice *is*. Accordingly, we are increasing the price of subscriptions to non-human entities of whatever kind to \$25US. And if that doesn’t work—and it may not, for institutions don’t care about money—we will think of something else.

☞ There is no charge for back issues (such as we have), or for extra copies of our occasional supplements, but we will think especially kindly of those whose requests are accompanied by a stamp. We remind one and all that we *approve* when our readers make photocopies, however numerous. It just shows good judgment.

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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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**The Children of the State**

A general state education is a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another; and the mould in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in the government, whether this be a monarch, a priesthood, an aristocracy, or the majority of the existing generation in proportion as it is efficient, it establishes a despotism over the mind, leading by natural tendency to one over the body.  
*J. S Mill*

Sometimes our readers imagine that we go too far. Once, when we concluded that the American government school system was exactly what Lenin ordered, certain readers imagined that we had gone too far. Later, when we concluded that religious schools were in no important way different from government schools, and that what Luther ordered was even more oppressive than what Lenin ordered, certain *other* readers imagined that we had gone too far.

In fact, however, we never have the space to go far enough. Of the inane pronouncements and the sentimental mantras of educationism, we ask one question, a question that should always be asked of *any* proposition, even the most familiar, *especially* the most familiar: If *this* is true, what *else* must be true? It is a little question with a big answer. It throws a wonderful ray of clear light into sunless stews of superstition all the way from astrology to the affective domain.

To answer that question, however, is usually an exasperating chore. It’s difficult enough to puzzle out exactly what the educationists are saying, and *why* they say it, is, therefore, all the harder to construe. Often, after having worked out the logical, and horrible, implications of their dicta, we don’t know whether to indict them for vice or for folly. It is thus a rare pleasure to discover an educationist who does not leave us in doubt.

He is a certain William H. Seawell, a professor of education at the University of Virginia, a paragon of clarity, a plain speaker in whom there is no mealy-mouthing, no obliquity, no jargon at all.

“Each child,” says William H. Seawell, “belongs to the state.” What could be clearer?

In saying that, Seawell, who is, after all, a paid agent of the government of a state, was doing nothing more than what he is paid to do. That function is called, almost certainly by every government on the face of the Earth, “Educating the People.” But Seawell’s forthrightness, in a matter that ordinarily puts educationists to pious pussy-footing, suggests that he is no mere time-server who is just following orders. He sounds like exactly the kind of agent that *any* government most prizes: a True Believer.

And a brave one, too. For he also said, to an audience of mere citizens, gathered to “celebrate” the opening of yet another government schoolhouse in Fort Defiance, Virginia, that the purpose of “education” is “the training of citizens for the state so the state may be perpetuated.”

Although Seawell probably holds to the orthodox educationistic belief that “truth and knowledge are only relative”<sup>\*</sup> he seems to have spoken as one who knew with absolute certainty that Jefferson had left Virginia forever, and could not possibly be sitting quietly, horsewhip in hand, out in the dim back rows of the auditorium. It could only be out of some such certainty although ignorance might serve as well—that a man would dare to admit that “public schools promote civic rather than individual pursuits,” and to argue from that, that “only public education can be used to gain a free society.”

Fort Defiance, eh? Well, times have changed in Virginia. Our source, *The Staunton Leader*, a remarkably restrained newspaper, says nothing at all about the mere citizens’ reaction to being educated by Seawell. We have to assume, however, that even *The Leader* would have made some brief mention of the fact if the man had been tarred and feathered and ridden out of Fort Defiance on a rail, So that probably didn’t happen.

And that it didn’t is witness to the efficacy of an “education” designed for the perpetuation of the

state. Such an “education” must see to it that its victims are habitually inattentive to the *meaning* of the words and slogans in which they are “educated.” No one, it seems, muttered any tiny dissent when Seawell over-ruled the Constitution and appointed unto himself and his ilk the task that many Virginians might have deemed more suitable to other hands: “We must focus on creating citizens for the good of society.”

So. We are now to hold *these* truths to be self-evident: That all citizens are encumbered by the State that creates them with certain inevitable burdens, and that among these burdens are a life of involuntary servitude for the perpetuation of the State, the liberty to be required by law to learn from their Creators the worth of the civic and the nastiness of the individual, and the assiduous pursuit—and this is Seawell’s parting shot—of only those pastimes deemed (by agents of government, we guess) “productive.”

It is possible, of course, that hidden among the impositions of George III upon the colonies there were provisions more heinous and tyrannical than William H. Seawell’s grand design for Educating the People, but damned if we can think of any just now. And it gives us sadly to wonder.

Some eminently reasonable and well-educated men found King George’s comparatively mild and unintrusive intentions nothing less than a “Design to reduce them under absolute Despotism,” as a delegate from Virginia put it. But the king never claimed that he was the creator—and *owner*—of his subjects, or that their *purpose* was the perpetuation of the state. He did not require the children to attend schools in which his hired agents would persuade them as to *his* notions about the “good of society.” Nevertheless—and it suddenly seems strangely unaccountable—those thoughtful men took up arms against that king. Was it for *this* that they delivered us from *that*?

The citizens of Fort Defiance probably gave Seawell, at the least, a free feed. Maybe even a plaque.

Well, not to worry. All this took place long ago in May of 1981. By now, surely, all the *other* educationists will have vigorously dissociated themselves from Seawell’s eccentric views. As soon as we hear news of his repudiation, we’ll pass it right along, lest you fret about the state of the Republic.

<sup>\*</sup> From Bloom’s *Taxonomy*, which we examined last month. It’s still in force.

## The I of the Beholder

I have now reigned above fifty years in victory and peace, beloved by my subjects, dreaded my enemies, respected by my allies. Riches and honors, power and pleasure, have waited on my call, nor does any earthly blessing appear to be wanting for my felicity. I have diligently numbered the days of pure and genuine happiness which have fallen to my lot. They amount to fourteen.

*Abd-ar-Rahman III*

You have no more right to consume happiness without producing it than to consume wealth without producing it.

*G. B. Shaw*

Indeed, we all wish to be happy, even when we live in such a way as to make happiness impossible.

*St. Augustine*

HERE are some excerpts from a questionnaire called “Perceptions of Sex Equity for Women Faculty at Virginia Tech”:

This section relates to your general feelings of satisfaction with your personal work situation as a Virginia Tech faculty member. In terms of your personal situation at Virginia Tech, how satisfied are you that . . .

This section relates to your perceptions of bias against women faculty at the University and attempts to identify areas where inequities may exist. Do you feel that problems of bias against faculty women exist at Virginia Tech in the following areas . . .

This section relates to your feelings about the treatment that faculty women would receive if they voiced concern about sexual harassment or discrimination. Do you feel that women faculty at Virginia Tech would get a fair hearing on concerns about sexual harassment or discrimination in the following places . . .

Virginia Tech is an affirmative action employer. This section relates to your perceptions of the success of the various affirmative action efforts with respect to women faculty. How successful has Virginia Tech been at ensuring that . . .

This section relates to your feelings about the need for additional efforts to ensure equitable treatment for Virginia Tech women faculty. How desirable do you feel it is for Virginia Tech to commit resources to make additional efforts to . . .

We, too, sent out a questionnaire. The findings are enough to make a stone cry. Countless millions all over the face of the earth are accorded less admiration and respect than they feel they ought to have. There is no numbering the victims of injustice, from life’s feast cast out, cruelly deprived of promotion and pay, and even of self-esteem. Whole legions are liked, but not *well* liked, and the endeavors of vast multitudes are not sufficiently appreciated. And everywhere, in each and every land and clime, people are unsatisfied, their potentials unmaximized, their self-images unenhanced. Alone in the dark, children weep, and some people are not entirely pleased with their personal work situations. What *is* this old world coming to? And what can we do to set it right?

Well, obviously, we need to set up a committee, which can draw up the guidelines for the establishment of a permanent commission, which will then formulate policy for the enactment of legislation, which will create a new department, which will mandate the existence of agencies and bureaus and offices, each and every one of which will send out questionnaires, which will remind everybody of how much there is to whine about, and will even offer some helpful hints to those few who foolishly imagine that they just don’t have much to whine about. And then we’ll need just one more little thing: a whole nation of people who are ignorant and gullible enough to answer the questionnaires. That part we can leave to the educationists.

We ordinarily suppose that philosophy doesn’t count. We deem it not even a luxury toward which only the few aspire, but rather an aberration, with which only the few are afflicted.

But philosophy does count, even in the most practical matters, *especially* in the most practical matters. All we have to do to make people ignorant and gullible is persuade them into a silly epistemology. Then they can believe that belief is a way of knowing, that feeling and sentiment are knowledge, that any opinion is as good as any

other, as long as it's sincere, of course, and that such speculations as these are of no practical use anyway, because, as everyone knows, philosophy doesn't count. People in that condition guarantee the continuance among us of astrologers and politicians and other pests almost as harmful. Ed. D. candidates and pollsters would also disappear if it weren't for the ready availability of those who will both offer and accept the uninformed and unexamined testimony of feelings and opinions.

And so, too, would the makers of "Perceptions of Sex Equity for Women Faculty at Virginia Tech."

The passages cited above are brief introductions to the sections of that document. Each is followed by an appropriate list of items to be weighed or selected or in some other way to be "perceived." At the end of the questionnaire, however, there is one last section without any introduction. It looks so naked and forlorn. The responder has to answer *these* questions without any guidance whatsoever, without even the least hint as to what answers the questioners most want. And these are *hard* questions, too. Rank and serial number questions, questions of mere fact, to be answered (by those who do choose to answer them) for the sake of mere knowledge.

How refreshing and encouraging it would be to hear that someone, somewhere, has sent out a questionnaire asking for knowledge, for the facts, and for the evidence by which those facts might be known to *anyone*, anyone at all, utterly without regard to anyone's feelings and perceptions.

It can't happen here.

One of the most effective illusions of our time is the belief that our "educational" system is a branch of our society. In fact, that system is the *root* of our society. We are its creatures, and truly, since the great, central themes of educationism are devised by agents of government, children of the state. It was not from silly parents, or venal hucksters, or from ignorant pals in the streets, that we learned to prize feeling more than fact, and that mere knowledge is only the "lowest level of outcomes," the first baby step on the long journey to the land of the affective domain, the realm ruled by awarenesses and attitudes, where the entertainers and persuaders flourish and govern, and where policy and law depend on the counting of perceptions.

Of "perceptions," an educationistic code-word for "feelings," there can be no end, and, even more important, no objective verification. Nor is there an end of persons who are less than perfectly happy in every respect. We can understand the Virginia Tech questionnaire, therefore, as a pretext for endless employment in soliciting subjective and anonymous testimony as to their emotions from interested witnesses about whose skills of thoughtful self-examination and temperamental propensities the questioner knows, and seeks to know, nothing.

We call that "research." And with its help, our social engineers, instructed by our educationists, who invented this kind of research by questionnaire, will, pretty soon now, bring in that bright new day when you won't even have to *pursue* happiness.

And if you have any perceptions or feelings in this matter, please try not to mention them where *they* can hear.

### **Only the Worthwhile Facts, Ma'am**

The little "thought" reprinted below comes to us from the *Teaching Excellence Center Newsletter*, which is regularly emitted by the Teaching Excellence Center at the Oshkosh branch of the University of Wisconsin.

The Center's staff includes, along with Richard (Dick) Buckley, two other part-time excellencists, Luella (Lolly) Ratajczak and Paul (no nickname) Johnson. And lest you accuse them *all* of lofty esotericism in their ivory tower, be informed that, as the excellence newsletter puts it: "Each of the three are teaching and administrative faculty who continue their teaching and administrative duties during their association with the Center."

(As to the agreement of pronouns and verbs, they have no duties. They have their hands full with excellence.)

We have no idea what *subject* it is that (Dick) "teaches," of course, but it doesn't matter. What he *does* teach, if that word can be used in this context at all, is (Dick); and that is perfectly harmonious with a major theme of educationism: the equation of both teaching and learning with "self-expression" in almost any form. Thus it is that (Dick)'s little "thought" seems to be made of approximately recalled snippets from any teacher academy's catalog of courses in inter-relating, or

perception enhancing, or any other of the self-indulgent—and oh so easy to “teach”—practices of those folk.

(Dick) “searches for the meaning behind the teaching act.” But a teacher, who is *not* in the business of committing “the teaching act,” whatever that abominable practice might be, wants to know what happens *in front of* his teaching. He already knows what is *behind* it; and what *is* behind it is *not* “cultural baggage” and “a different filter.” It is knowledge and the practice of a discipline. It is in the absence of those things that “teaching” must be hokily construed as a gaga groping around in other people’s minds.

It is hard to imagine anyone who would accuse (Dick) of being in an ivory tower. That metaphor is remarkably inappropriate for one who asks, out loud and in public, why others don’t seem to want to explore his reality. He is rather in the very opposite of the ivory tower, whatever that low station might be called. He says exactly what they all say, and what he supposes *his* “thought” is not, but only a wandering recitation, distinguished from any pretentious freshman composition only by that startling “whom’s,” which may actually be a piece of cultural baggage, used in the belief that “whom” is the form favored among intellectuals. His pedagogical “theory” is the usual—it’s all a matter of “relating” and hoping to “fathom” not a discipline but the students. His epistemology is right out of that *Taxonomy* we looked at last month, yearning for escape “beyond the facts,” of which some are not even “worthwhile,” and on into the “wasteland,” which he has at least *named* correctly, although his characterization of the place suggests that he knows no *more* of it than its name (That often happens to those who imagine that some facts, usually the ones they don’t know, are just not worthwhile.)

“Dialogue with us,” writes (Dick), “so that we can meet *your needs*.”

Thanks, (Dick), but you’ve given all we need. Just the worthwhile facts.

**An Editorial Thought  
by Richard (Dick) Buckley**

ONE SEARCHES for meaning behind the teaching act. One tries to fathom the minds of the parade of students who pass through the classroom. The teacher brings to the scene much

cultural baggage and so does the student. Each perceives the world through a different filter. Can they truly communicate with each other or do they merely talk to themselves?

What do people mean when they accuse me of being in an “ivory tower”? Do they mean that I am out of touch with reality? With whom’s reality am I out of touch? My world seems real to me. Why don’t others want to explore *that* reality? Maybe they don’t have the background of my experience to explore that reality with me.

Once one gets beyond the facts (and which facts are worthwhile to know), there is a wasteland of unexplored interpretations, feelings, and concepts to explore. Which interpretations are valid? Whose feelings are legitimate? Which attributes of concepts make a plausible conceptual map?

Teaching is a creative act. The best teaching is done before one even enters the classroom. When one plans what one is going to do (when the script is written), the teaching act is already highly staged. In this planning, it is essential that the teacher tries to understand his/her reality and how it might fit with the reality which the student brings to the classroom. One leads students to new arenas, but the student can only be led [*sic*] by someone who does not cause cultural shock.

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And this just came in from the College of Education at the University of Arizona, another place where people explore each others’ realities:

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# The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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## The King Canute Commission

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.

We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us.

Reagan was right. The rising tide lifts all the boats. And the rafts, too. And all of the flotsam and jetsam, as well, the drifting grapefruit skins and beer cans, and the rotting bodies of dead things.

Now, “a rising tide of mediocrity” has just been detected by some sort of national commission on something or other about the schools. Gosh, it’s scary. Even the commission’s report seems, if that first quotation above is typical, to have been washed ashore by that very tide. That broken English about imposing the performance that exists has an unpleasantly familiar sound. We suspect that a couple of cagey educationists wangled slots on that commission and imposed the performance that exists in the report.

The second quotation is *not* to be found in the commission’s report, but it should be. In fact, it ought to have *been* the report. It says it all, and in much better English. And it has this further virtue, that it speaks in the first person, not of some hypothetically imposed performance, but of what *we* have done and left undone.

In the manner of the typical social studies text, which is likely to explain the Civil War by saying that “problems arose,” the commission’s report laments all sorts of bad things that are said to have “happened” in the schools. The commissioners are

perturbed to notice that courses in physics and courses in bachelor living carry the same credit, but hardly the same enrollment, in most schools. That, as they must know, didn’t just happen. Persons *did* it, and they did it by design and out of policy. And while *those* persons were doing that, and perpetrating countless similar outrages, *other* persons were standing around leaving undone those things which they ought to have done. Put them all together—you get *we*. And that includes every member of the commission.

To whom, then, do they speak? To them who brought us to this, in the fond hope that those miscreants are *now* willing to do the only thing they ever *could* have done to improve the schools, which would be to seek some other line of work? To the idle bystanders, who have known *all of this* for years, and who will now suddenly decide to do their duty and set everything right, an endeavor that can never succeed until all the bums have been thrown out?

But there is no whisper in this report of the bums who must be thrown out if anything is to change. The sad state of the schools, which the commission aptly characterizes by its allusion to courses in bachelor living, is remarkably *less* sad for those vast legions of people who make livings from the fact that the deepest principles of American educationism do not merely *permit* but actually *require* courses in bachelor living, and other like travesties beyond counting. Such things were not smuggled in through the boiler-room in the dead of night. Commissions, committees, boards of “education,” all approved them. Professors of education, who concocted such courses, commended them, and designed programs for “teaching” the “teaching” of them. Legislatures enacted them. Supervisors, developers, coordinators, facilitators, hastened into the service of every new empire and began at once the preparation of grant proposals for more of the same.

All those people, however some of them may have profited, were acting on principle, *the* explicit principle of American schooling for the last sixty years or so. It is, briefly and therefore all too simply, stated, the belief that *the* purpose of education is to bring about a certain kind of society, and that the individual benefits from education to the degree in which he is adjusted to that society. Combine that with educationistic

epistemology in which mere knowledge is “the lowest level of learning outcomes,”\* and you end up with what we have: the deliberate neglect of strict disciplines, which are not conducive to the persuasion and adjustment of students. Those bachelor living courses and all their siblings are not nasty growths on an otherwise healthy organism. They are the heart of the matter, and they will never go away unless the ideology that spawns them is specifically repudiated.

There is nothing even close to such a repudiation in the report. Taking pains to offend no one, the commission wags its finger in no discernible direction and never says what most needs saying: The trash must go! We must *stop* doing those things that we ought not to have done and do only those that we ought to do. The two cannot live together, for the bad will always drive out the good.

If it had said such things, however, the report would not have provided anyone with fresh ammunition in the Great War for Money. Good schools, stripped of all rubbish, would cost *less* money, but only the students would profit from such schools.

As only one of the many factions that make up the vast political entity we call “education,” students have little clout. But all the *other* factions should be delighted by the report. It offers golden opportunities for academies of educationism, administrative bureaucracies, teachers’ unions, purveyors and manufacturers of devices and materials, even guidance counselors and change-agents.

Well, maybe they just did the best they could. We can hardly expect to achieve “excellence” without a little compromise, can we? And when “the best,” the champions of excellence who lack all conviction, are sent out to do battle with “the worst,” those thrusters and adjusters who are filled with passionate intensity, what else would they do but cut a deal? You wouldn’t want anyone to get hurt in a squabble over *excellence*, would you?

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\* See “The Master of Those Who Know,” (VII, I; Feb; 83), for a consideration of the epistemology of educationism.

## Prometheus Rebound

Of human kind,  
My great offense in aiding them, in teaching  
The babe to speak, and rousing torpid mind  
To take the grasp of itself—of this I’ll talk;  
Meaning to mortal men no blame, but only  
The true recital of my own deserts.

For, soothly, having eyes to see they saw not,  
And hearing heard not; but like dreamy phantoms,  
A random life they led from year to year,  
All blindly floundering on.

ÆSCHYLUS - *Prometheus Bound*

*The understanding, like the eye, whilst it makes us to see and perceive all things, takes no notice of itself; and it requires art and pains to set it at a distance and make it its own subject.*

JOHN LOCKE

WE CAN now begin to make out, monstrously looming in the near distance, the swelling hulk of the next bold, innovative thrust, the great lurch forward into Thinking. It will bring us, at first, Basic Minimum Thinking. Next, so that consultants and departments of educationism may thrive even in an Age of Thought, there will come in-service thinking workshops, so that schoolteachers can acquire enhanced appreciations of this newest pedagogical modality. Then, either to pass the buck or spread the wealth, there will arise among us comprehensive programs of Thinking across the Curriculum, engendered by the exciting discovery that even in family living courses and driver training at least some rudimentary form of thinking might be justifiable. And, at the end of it all, professors of geography and Medieval literature will be hanging on to their jobs by teaching two or three sections of Remedial Thinking.

Although the seeds of this movement can hardly be said to have been sown, they did at least fall among the thistles as long ago as 1981. In the fall of that year, when the young victims of the Basic Minimum Competence Frenzy came back to school for more of the same, the National Assessment of Educational Progress discovered that seventeen-year-olds had suffered “sharp declines in inferential comprehension.” The results of its standard test, said the NAEP, seemed to “signal some erosion in older teenagers’ thinking and evaluative skills.”

At first, before the educationists realized that they were hearing the distant rumble not of a new storm of abuse but of an onrushing band wagon, they tried to explain away this *new* erosion by reminding us that we had burdened them with the old one. Here we are, fighting for functional literacy, they said, and bringing the blessings of minimum competence into the land! How can we, saddled with your petulant demands for mere *basics*, also be held responsible for the teaching of “higher-order” skills? We can hardly be expected to teach reading, writing, and ciphering, and also *thinking* at the very same time, you know, and without even a penny of thinking-funding either!

It must have that last point that lit their bulbs. Nowadays they say: Well, of course, we *could* teach thinking *too*, if that’s what you want, but we would have to have . . . And their shopping list will make such folk as the environmental awareness educationists and consumer educationists look like shy pikers. As “vital” as all such educations surely are, Thinking Education deserves some *big* money.

And then there are serious considerations, which arise not so much from the silly, self-serving behavior of our educationists as from the ideological presumptions that underlie *all* their behavior, all their practices and beliefs. From those who have never even defined *education* except as anything and everything done in schools, who neither own nor seek any firm principles by which to distinguish education from training, or socialization, or persuasion, or even from entertainment, what can we expect as a definition of “thinking”? By what principles, if any, will the idolaters of the Affective Domain distinguish thinking from guessing, or hoping, or remembering, or daydreaming, or, for that matter, from their most prized “mental” acts, appreciating, relating, and self-esteeming?

And what evidence can we find in the results of their practice and the ludicrous curricula of their own academies as to the quality of the educationists’ thinking *about* thinking? Are their inane questionnaires and the jargon-laden banalities of their pathetic “scholarship” the “pains and arts” by which they understand the understanding? Is it through awareness enhancement and arranging the desks in a circle that the torpid educationistic mind has come to

take the grasp of itself, and to the power of leading others in that enterprise?

We already have a hint as to what “thinking” will become in the schools. The National Council of Teachers of English has recently discovered that “thinking and language are closely linked.” (*NYT, Education Survey* supplement, Jan. 9, 1983.) Although that may seem a tiny step forward for that crowd, we have to see it in the pale and flickering light of their announced beliefs about the language *to* which they now find thinking so “closely” linked. Will the same rules of cultural relativity and political expediency govern their “teaching” of both? Will they concoct some kind of “holistic scoring” by which, without fussing about the “trivial mistakes,” to judge of the better and the worse in the practice of logic? Will they discover *other* thinkings, just as “valid” and worthy of “respect” as that kind of thinking that just happens to be the current and socially acceptable habit of the “dominant class”?

The questions are, of course, rhetorical, for the NCTE has already begun to make just such discoveries. “A policy statement by [that] organization,” says the *Times*,

suggested that teachers approach thinking skills from three directions—teaching creative thinking to recognize relationships that lead to new ideas, logical thinking to create hypotheses and detect fallacies, and critical thinking to ask questions and make judgments.

And there we have already three “thinkings,” which is only the barest of beginnings in that blindly teeming system that has already brought us a swarm of “educations” and even a little pack of “writings.” Soon there will be absurdities like Civic Thinking, Driving Thinking, Environmental Thinking, Family Thinking, and probably even Health and Personal Grooming Thinking, for so it is that empires grow and the goodies are passed around in the merry old land of educationism.

But there is much more at issue here than routine featherbedding, so, difficult as it is, we must try not to be facetious about the NCTE’s “policy statement.” (At this very instant, in fact, we are trying *not* to imagine how it came to pass that a band of schoolteachers suddenly decided, by golly, that the time had come for an *official* policy on thinking. Yeah. It’s as though the Pope

were to . . . Enough! We have to stop this *right now*.)

So let's examine their "policy." Do they truly suppose that "creative" thinking need *not* be logical thinking, that "logical" thinking is not *the* thinking by which to "recognize relationships that lead to new ideas," that "critical" thinking is going to detect fallacies without *being* logical thinking? Is the making of judgments achieved in *one* thinking and the creation of hypotheses in another? Do we need yet one *more* thinking, still to be named, by which to make judgment *of* hypotheses, and still *another* by which to form hypotheses about the provenance of weird judgments?

But again, enough. Such a game of words could go on forever, just like the list of "thinkings." It is by means of such games, and out of a remarkably superstitious belief in the reality of anything that can be named, that they have cooked up such things as microteaching and experiential continua, which can be elaborated (and funded) without any consideration at all of what is meant by "teaching" or by "experience."

In educationists, there dwells the demon Kakepistemé, who spake by the prophets of socialization through Ed. Psych. 101. He diligently compels them to define backwards, and without regard to the nature of what is being defined. As to education, for instance, they begin by guessing that some socially acceptable "outcomes" must be the result of education—making a living, for example, or appreciating a line from *Hamlet*, or being able to balance a checkbook and write a letter of application. Thus, by the educationists' definition, it is *the same thing* that brings about, in one case, the mind of John Stuart Mill, and, in another, the practice of brushing between meals.

So, too, will it be with thinking, for the educationists have no principle to distinguish it from their precious idol, problem-solving. Thus they can say, and believe, this sort of thing:

Thinking is the one skill that makes street-smart kids so adaptable. They know how to solve the problems of the street, and now they have to learn how to apply those skills in the classroom.

Those are the words, as quoted by the *Times*, of one Charlotte Frank, executive director of the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction in the public schools of New York City. If there be justice in the fabric of the universe—a consideration that calls *not* for problem-solving but for thinking—Frank will be demoted to the lowliest rank in education, teacher, so that those adaptable street-smart kids can go and apply their skills in *her* classroom.

So, it is *thoughtfulness* is it, by virtue of which those street-smart kids are what they are? And it must be out of an even greater thoughtfulness—the "creative" kind, maybe?—that their older counterparts, and mentors, are what *they* are. And what of the rats, the astonishing, problem-solving rats of New York, not only surviving but actually prevailing in an implacably hostile and enormously complicated environment?

To lead, however successfully, in the streets or in the board-rooms, a life of problem-solving is to lead "a random life from year to year," a life directed not from within by principle, but from without by accident. There is surely no recommendation in the fact that countless millions lead such lives; there is rather a reminder that thinking is not a "survival skill." While the thoughtful may prosper by thoughtfulness, they also may not. Utterly unlike the street-smart kids, who know just what they want and exactly how to get it, the thoughtful are at least occasionally handicapped in the Great Struggle for Survival by nagging questions as to whether they *should* want what they want and whether the getting would be worthy. If Charlotte Frank is right, if success in the schools' version of Thinking Education comes easiest to the street—smart, then we know something about the schools. We don't *need* to damn the whole system and all of its deeds. Its Charlotte Franks will do that for us, as they always have.

Maybe she just wasn't thinking when she said that.

And that leads to the big question: Who are *they* to teach our children how to think? For years we have examined the dreadful language of educationism, not simply to display its pitiable ineptitude, which is merely entertaining, but to analyze *the work of the mind* as done by those who are charged with the making of theory and policy and the training of teachers for the public schools of America. We have to conclude that the "professionals" who make our schooling what it is

must have been standing behind the door when Prometheus was handing out gifts. They persevere in blindly floundering on.

And it's too bad, because it is, in fact, so easy to teach the rudiments and habits of thinking that it could be done *even in our schools!* But first, those who are to *do* the teaching will have to follow Locke, and contrive, through art and pains, to do some thinking *about* thinking. To seek the understanding of understanding, the mind's grasp of itself, is nothing but the first stirring of thoughtfulness. After that, it gets easier, and even children can do that.

For that, we have the testimony not only of experience and Plato, of whom educationists seem to know nothing, but also of one Matthew Lipman, director of an Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, at Montclair State College in New Jersey. Here, in a letter to *Basic Education* (April, 1983), he says something very important:

I find myself quite uncomfortable with the notion that reason and inquiry skills are "higher order skills." . . . I find skills like classification, concept formation, inference, assumption-finding, criterion-analysis, analogy analysis, and the furnishing of reasons to be in fact rudimentary.

Much more worthy of being called "higher-order skills" are reading, writing, and computation. The reasoning and inquiry skills are relatively simple and eminently teachable. One might think of them, together with mental acts, as fairly atomic, in contrast with which reading, writing, and computation are enormously complex and molecular.

To begin the teaching of thinking with that understanding would make sense, but educationists, hearing, hear not. When they hear that "thinking" is *not* a "higher—order skill," they'll go right back to the *professional* stuff, writing letters of application for jobs and playing the Lifeboat Game.

*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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# The Underground GRAMMARIAN

Volume Seven, Number Four . . . . . May 1983  
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## The Invers Proportin

"...the ability to write well is inversly proportionate to salary...TV personalites who daily abuse the rules of grammar get infinitely more than English teachers."

Those alas, and yet once more, are the words—absolutely *sic*—of a schoolteacher whining about low pay and a bum rap. Why *do* they do it? They always end up looking, like the striking teacher whose placard called for "Descent Wages," overpaid and guilty as hell.

And, to look into *another* academic can of worms, here is the complete—also *sic*—text of a letter *to* a teacher from someone in the office of the superintendent of schools in Cook Co.:

Please, show your transcripts to the Personal dept. and the will advise you on procedure. If, any further questions please call are office.

Although such examples are often sent directly to us by readers, these two were sent in more or less *indirectly* by readers. The first was cited, with appropriate comment, in *Newsday*, in a serious, thoughtful column by Ilene Barth. The other was used by Mike Royko (one our favorites, because he always calls a fool a fool) in a piece in the *Chicago Sun Times*.

Barth and Royko, like most newspaper people, are literate and rational, and, in many matters, well-informed and realistic. We are grateful to them for bringing such examples to a readership that is even larger—but surely not *infinitely* larger—than ours, and we certainly don't want them to stop doing that. But they really ought to knock off all the deploring.

The trouble with journalists is that they lead very sheltered lives, never seeing anything more disgusting and horrible than corruption, rape,

murder, war, and an occasional volcanic eruption. This is what gives them the amiable but naive optimism out of which they deem it useful to deplore the routine and firmly institutionalized ignorance in the schools.

On the other hand, every member of *our* editorial staff has spent an entire lifetime *in school*, in the very belly of the beast. We know there is no hope of reform. In fact, even to put an end to the letters that incense journalists would require nothing less than dissolution of the entire system that we call “public education.”

It is only from a special point of view that “education” is a failure. As to *its own purposes*, it is an unqualified success. One of its purposes is to serve as a massive tax-supported jobs program for legions of not especially able or talented people. As social programs go, it’s a good one. The pay isn’t high, but the risk is low, the standards are lenient, entry is easy, and job security is still pretty good. By contrast with the teacher who wrote the letter, the uncouth “TV personality” is a daredevil entrepreneur working at a high altitude without a net. Should he commit the televisionistic equivalent of that pathetic letter, he would end up reading the midnight poultry market wrap-up in Lower Possum Trot. But nothing will happen to the teacher.

Regular readers might review our own long list of characters, all those decent, dull mediocrities, who work pretty hard to little avail. Pitiably ill-educated schoolteachers, and the ludicrous, drab professors of educationism who ill-educated them. Principals and superintendents sucked up from the least academic in a system where the merely academic is relegated to the most junior. The camp-followers of every kind, the facilitators, coordinators, consultants, who have jobs only because the system adopts causes and concocts programs that will *seem* to serve them. In a well and truly “reformed” education, what would happen to such folk? Do we want them out of the schools and onto the dole?

In fact, the system is perfect, except for one little detail. We must find a way to get the *children* out of it.

## The Reason of Rhyme

There seems to be some curious connection between piety and bad rhymes. *Oscar Wilde*

Wilde was surely posing when he said that, for he can not have been in doubt as to the reason. for that “curious connection between piety and bad rhymes.” He explained it himself when he called language “the parent, *not* the child, of thought.”

We were reminded of both of those Wildean observations by our recent discovery of *The Christian Mother Goose*, a flabbergasting compendium of hoary nursery rhymes revised to fit the vague suppositions of Basic Minimum Christianity. The redactress responsible for all this is one Marjorie Ainsborough Decker, who is proud to say: “I’m never going to grow old.” Her “book” is assiduously, and quite successfully, marketed by her little boy Kevin, 26. *He* is proud to say—and who are we to doubt his word?—“I’m never going to grow up.”

*The Christian Mother Goose* is exactly analogous to that change-agent revision of *Jack and the Beanstalk* that we looked at last December. Both are devices of persuasion directed to the sentiments rather than propositions of meaning directed to the intellect. For all that they squabble over details now and then, educationists and Christianists are united in principle, each faction believing that it is out of *right feeling* rather than out of rational inquiry that we can tell the better from the worse, and that rational inquiry itself, unless kept strictly in its place, will actually prove an impediment to *right* education. Thus it is that the educationists are most at home in their “affective domain,” and the Christianists most at home with the unexaminable “truths of the heart,” which are also found in that affective domain.

Neither Christianists nor educationists, however, seem confident that their beliefs will ever win acceptance by their own merits, for they are always building fences with which to protect them, and devising stratagems with which to sell them. In their indoctrination of children, or of the childish at any age, there is an anxious, prophylactic quality, a nervous, finicky concern for the possibility that some child might not understand something *correctly*, might fail to

appreciate it *properly*, might even *get the wrong idea*.

Thus, that lady who rewrote *Jack and the Beanstalk* fears that children will “misunderstand” the death of the giant, and even applaud it as the just dessert of brutal greed, thus rejecting the sermon that *she* wants to preach.

That her sermon turns out to be an endorsement of compromise with injustice is eloquent testimony to the Greek idea that you can not be good unless you are wise. Left untested by rational inquiry, *any* sentiments and beliefs will seem good to those who happen to hold them.

Some similar, but more mysterious, muddle must have been in the mind of Marjorie Ainsborough Decker when she decided to transform the three blind mice into three *kind* mice, who get to keep their tails, thus showing forth, we must presume, the wonderful power of the Gospel. Is there something un-Christian about blindness? Does the faith of little children crumble at the thought of pest control? When Marjorie gets around to Christianizing some other disquieting old books, will Samuel tell Saul to shake hands with Agag and forget the whole thing? Will Jesus cut a deal with the moneychangers?

Marjorie says, speaking in what we hope is nothing more portentous than a poetic plural: “We’re not trying to eliminate conflict or drama—only to provide a Christian resolution to conflict.” In that venture, one might well fail grandly, as Milton did in *Samson Agonistes*, and still produce excellence and thoughtful inquiry. When Marjorie fails, however, it is apparently because she has diligently appreciated the voluminous doctrinal pronouncements of the one theologian who, more than any other, deserves to be called the spiritual father of the Basic Minimum Christianity movement in modern America. Walt Disney.

Marjorie’s Little Miss Muffet, for instance, is *not* frightened away by the spider. Rather than recoiling in alarm at the sight of a big spider, as nature surely, and God perhaps, intended, the uncommonly pious girl elects to give thanks to Jesus for feeding the puppies and bunnies. The spider, proving once and for all the efficacy of Grace even in the hitherto unsuspected arachnid soul, decides to get down on all eight knees (now there’s an edifying thought) and join the simpering tyke in prayer.

Mowgli, terrified, as he should be, by the great cobra, greets it warily but respectfully, as it deserves: “We be of one blood, thou and I.” The moment is *important*, heavy with reverence and solemnity, and *truly* religious, a vision of all creatures here below as kindred spirits watching for the light of goodness through the night of necessity.

But Mowgli has a true teacher. A true teacher says: Here is truth. Live, and remember, for that is all a child can do. Life, in time, will show you what it means.

We remember daily, if we pay attention to living, the words of some true teacher, whom we probably never knew *except* through words. Again and again we say, Yes, *this* is what he knew, what, by his words, which we do not forget, he made us ready to know. And if we do not forget his words, it is because they are memorable. They are memorable because in them there is the *rightness* of respect and love for the Word, which is also the rightness of reason, and of rhyme.

In the words of the false teacher, who deals out doctrine, there is always a *wrongness*, the false note of words without rhyme or reason, words tormented or disdained for the sake of ideology. Here is Marjorie’s distortion of some words:

Jack and Jill went up the hill  
To fetch a pail of water.  
A man there said, “If you drink this,  
You’ll still be thirsty after.”

“But there is water Jesus gives,  
So won’t you ask Him first,  
To give you LIVING WATER,  
So that you will never thirst.”

Up Jack got and home did trot,  
A whole mile and a quarter,  
To tell the GOOD NEWS to his friends,  
About God’s LIVING WATER.

If there is any charm in the original doggerel from which *this* doggerel is derived, it is entirely in its pointlessness. And because it *is* nonsense, and nothing more valuable than a trinket that *might* briefly divert a child, the pairing of *water* and *after* requires no comment. It would be silly to complain of a piece of junk that it is also cracked. Marjorie takes an old piece of junk and

twists it into a new one, complete with *new cracks*.

And then, worst of all, she puts her tacky contraption forth as a “lesson” through which to introduce children to ideas, by her own presumed standards, of the highest importance.

Language *is* the parent of thought, for no one can think beyond the powers of his language. Childish language, which is not the language *of* children but the one in which wheedlers and flatterers speak *to* children, begets only childish thoughts. Kevin is right.

Let us close with a few words of inspiration from Kevin: “We have a hunch that faith is going to be consistently—and therefore commercially—a force in American life.”

*But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words shalt thou be justified, and by thy words shalt thou be condemned.*

### **Voodoo Educology** **Department of Temporal Plasticity**

IT is a poet’s luxury to sit around and wonder what the vintners buy one half so precious as the stuff they sell. For us, it is harsh necessity to discover what the school people learn one half so preposterous as the stuff they teach. It’s not all that easy, for the stuff they learn usually turns out to be *twice* as preposterous as the stuff they teach.

We continue, nevertheless, to compile our Catalogue of Kollege Kredit Courses, in which the following travesty is 4302.7Q. At the University of Bridgeport, however, the very same thing is advertised, to practicing and incipient schoolteachers, as a *course* in tensity awareness, worth three kollege credits, and maybe a little raise:

This course is designed to increase the participant’s ability to read, interpret, process, and respond to day-to-day sensory stimuli; to give participants a literacy in the many peripheral areas related to sensory perception and awareness; to prepare teachers to help their students expand the sensitivities of their eleven senses.

The above has been taught to high school seniors, to elementary and secondary school teachers, school psychologists, counselors, and social workers. The temporal plasticity of the course comes from its great material depth. This flexibility allows for an alteration of the subject profile to better fulfill objectives for participants.

We can explain some of that. The “great material depth” of this course comes from the fact that only the dead or deeply comatose suffer any shortage of “day-to-day sensory stimuli.” The rest of us have quite a few. And we can, if we please, and if we can find a sap who will listen, natter about our stimuli. Since such nattering has the same value whether it persists for ten minutes or for ten weeks, those who persist in it enjoy the blessing of temporal plasticity. They can knock off early. And the instructor, who could also find something better to do, can always “alter the subject profile” so that the participants can get plenty of flexibility out of the temporal plasticity of material depth and drop in on the class only when they have some *really neat* sensory stimuli to interpret and process—good stuff from way out in the tenth sense, maybe.

Some of it we can not explain. We do not, for instance, understand those areas, the peripheral ones that are said to be “related to sensory perception and awareness.” We sort of wish that the person who cooked up that description had *named* maybe three or four of the areas he had in mind. We can’t come up with a single one, and the more we try, the more our sensitivities seem to contract—in all eleven senses.

Nor is there any clue, as once there would have been, in the assertion that those mysterious areas are accessible to something called “literacy.” This is, of course, the New Literacy, a far more democratic skill than the old, of which many innocents were deprived either by native ignorance or induced stupidity. To the New Literacy, which offers scads of neat options very much like Bridgeport University’s “peripheral area literacy,” ignorance and stupidity are no impediments.

We found Sensory Awareness described, along with a full dozen other courses of like ilk, in a brochure put out by a certain Redecision Institute for Transactional Analysis. (Analysis of the

transaction in which the University of Bridgeport agreed to give graduate credit for these courses is not provided.) RITA offers more lessons than Madame la Zonga. From her, if peripheral area literacy is not your bag, you can also learn: “using stroking as a major stimulus to human motivation”; “pupilmometrics”; “techniques to establish and maintain rapport with students and elicit desirable responses”; and “strategies to produce behavioral changes in colleagues, peer group, couples, family, students, and parents.” Exactly what a teacher needs. No nonsense about math or literature or science—schoolteachers already know all that stuff—just a heady compound of Dale Carnegie and Dr. Goebbels. And all that for a lousy three hundred and sixty bucks a course.

In the old days, one of the day-to-day stimuli well known to teachers, and right in a peripheral area, was the sensory perception of sitting on a tack. Those old pros, without having taken a single course in sensory awareness, were nevertheless able to “read, interpret, process, and respond,” frequently managing to expand a few student sensitivities at the same time. They had what we would now call a kind of natural tack-sitting literacy.

Nowadays, when the schoolteachers come, as the excellence commission puts it, “from the bottom quarter of graduating high-school and college students,” we have to nurture in them what teachers seem once to have had by nature. So, if only they would use plenty of tacks, a course in sensory awareness would be right to the point. We could think of it as a way of sensitizing the bottom quarter.

### Notes from Central Control

✍ We thank all of our readers for their patience. It was not negligence, for which we are routinely prepared, but sickness, which tends to come as a surprise, that made it impossible for us to maintain our regular publishing schedule during this last academic year. Nil, however, desperandum. The summer is come at last. By September, we’ll be back on schedule.

✍ New readers may not know, and some old readers seem to have forgotten, that retired teachers are to pay only one half of the usual

subscription price. Administrators and educationists, however, are to read the tale of Dives and Lazarus and then pay much more.

✍ Almost every article in *The Underground Grammarian* owes its existence to some alert reader who found a smoking gun and sent it in for analysis. We have nailed many a miscreant that way, and we urge all readers, new and old, to keep up the good work. Think of it as a crusade for law and order in the precinct of the mind.

✍ But some subscribers have no interest in our articles. They care only that this is probably the last circulated publication in the world to be printed from hand-set type. For the sake of the nostalgia buffs, who might even recognize this antiquated typeface, we commit a few extra typographical frivolities in the May issue. The summery border below is one of them.

✍ That quotation below, which we print whenever space permits, and after whose source readers are always inquiring, is from Ben Jonson’s “*Timber*.” It states perfectly the principle that underlies and in forms the substance of this journal. We keep it always in mind.

*“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  
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# The Underground GRAMMARIAN

Volume Seven, Number Five . . . September 1983

## As Maine Goes...

The South Portland Board of Education voted April 11 to introduce a new high school course. Low Level American History, starting in September 1984.

The course would be aimed at the “slow readers or non-readers at the high school,” Principal Ralph Baxter told the board.

The purpose of the course, Baxter said, would be to help students achieve the necessary number of points to graduate. He said the high school already has similar low-level courses in English, math, and science, the other three subjects required for graduation.

THAT is the news from Maine, as reported in the *American Journal* of South Portland for May 4, 1983, and we have to admit that we are absolutely astonished (and impressed) by that Ralph Baxter chap. We would never have dreamed that there could be a principal so precise in his use of prepositions. “Non-readers *at* the high school,” he calls them, as though they just happened to be hanging around in the halls and waiting for someone to give them diplomas.

And so they are. And they will get those diplomas sooner or later, but not, as one might idly suppose, out of the compassionate largesse of an egalitarian society. Something, to be sure, *is* handed to them on a platter, but it’s just a nasty mess of gristle and grease. On commencement day, when the new graduates gratefully wag their tails and lap up the orts, the Ralph Baxters of educationism wipe their jowls and belch.

In educationistic ideology, there are at least three justifications for mind-boggling monstrosities like the courses offered in Maine. Of two, the educationists are actually aware. The

third, however, can be detected only through knowledge and reason.

First, there is the body count.

Even in these days, when *everyone* ought to know better, you can find an occasional defense of the schools, usually as a filler in the neighborhood shoppers’ guide. The apologist is usually a superintendent dodging flak or an assistant porseffor of education padding his list of publications, and the “arguments” are always exactly the same, always the party line. And one of them is always the body count.

By counting the bodies, an educationist can easily prove, by the logic he learned in teacher school, that the American public schools are not only better than ever, but also better than any *other* nation’s schools. Never in the whole history of mankind have so *many* “achieved the necessary number of points to graduate.”

And then there’s the business of democracy in action. The schools *are* democracy in action. When people are denied diplomas just because they were never taught to read, all who *can* read will become elitists.

The third justification, the one of which the educationists are *possibly* not aware, is the approach of 1984. The schools have certainly done their best by fostering Doublethink and Newspeak, and rewriting history as social studies. They have managed, even without two-way television, to find out lots of neat stuff about their students’ feelings and beliefs. They have not yet, however, provided the One Thing most needed for the New Day—a sufficient number of proles, those slow readers and non-readers without whom 1984 just won’t be the real thing. They’re working on it.

Those who imagine that American education can be “reformed” would do well to meditate *not* on more money for merit pay and computers but on a child, one child. Any one of the non-readers of South Portland will do.

Consider him. He is the victim of an injustice, deprived of the fullness of humanity, the habits and powers of rational discourse amid the thoughtful consideration of meaning. And how can we *now* deal justly with him? By giving him a diploma? By denying it, adding insult to injury?

In fact, the injustice can never be undone, as though it had never befallen him. He is a crooked branch, having been badly bent as a twig. It would

need wise and mighty efforts even to begin to help him to grow straight. Who will put forth those efforts? If the schools were “reformed” miraculously tomorrow, what good would that be to him? Or to hosts of others in the same plight?

In the glorious world of tomorrow, when all the high school graduates can read and reason thoughtfully, our non-reader from South Portland will still be a prole, governed, and *easily* governed, by unexamined appetites, easily engendered; led, and easily, by pandering politicians, flatterers and entertainers of every sort, and those wheedling behavior modifiers who made him not only a prole but also a prole full of self-esteem,

It is *the* goal of education to deliver us from the captivity of the unexamined life and out of the power of persuaders. Those who now offer to reform education are the persuaders themselves, the politicians of either stripe, and the social engineers now running the schools and peddling garbage like Low Level English for Non-readers, for which they have already assured the need. They imagine that education is a process for *producing* certain kinds of people for collective purposes. For the moment, they suppose that the ultimate boon of education is not the examined life but the ability to outsell the Japanese.

Our famous excellence commission meditated not on the dismal destiny of one child, but on a *nation*, “a nation at risk,” at risk of *not* outselling the Japanese. It will bring forth, therefore, if anything, only a revised *nationalistic* “education,” a *modernized* program of life-adjustment, this time with computers. And, when the need arises, the school board in South Portland will approve Ralph Baxter’s proposal for a course in Low Level Computer Science.

The nature of the injustice done long ago to our non-reader is exactly this: He was put into a system that exists not for his sake but only for the sake of the nation.

The “success” of a school system designed “for the good of the nation,” as construed by the government employees who run the schools, is not to be measured by the lifelong captivity of one poor clod. Some number of such clods *is*, in fact, “for the good of the nation.” They can do the scutwork and provide employment for government functionaries in social services. They will always be crying for the moon and illustrating

“democracy in action” by flocking into the faction of those who most persuasively promise it. We can’t have *too many*, however, lest we fail to outsell the Japanese. Ending up with just the right number is an appropriate, and quite sufficient, goal of a school system that is intended for the good of the nation. In that great cause, what does it matter that some poor clod in Maine can’t lead an examined life, which is probably an over-rated, and *surely* a suspiciously elitist, enterprise? He’ll be all right. We’ll tell him whatever it is he needs to know. And he may turn out to be a productive worker, anyway, and thus to serve the good of the nation after all.

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*He who would do good to another must do it in Minute Particulars. General Good is the plea of the scoundrel, hypocrite, flatterer; for Art and Science cannot exist but in minutely organized Particulars.* William Blake

## The Stand-up Cosmic of Texas

“He can be purely physical or a separation from the physical to a broader understanding and acceptance of one’s focus beginning here in Austin then the United States, the world and—I don’t know.”

**LIKE WOW.** Those are the heavy words of one Jerry Grigadean, the stand-up cosmic of Texas, actually revealing, to some lucky young reporter at *The Daily Texan*, his cosmic masterplan for...uh...we don’t know either.

Good ol’ Jerry is not *just* a cosmic. (“Cosmic refers to the levels upon which a person functions,” y’know.) He is also a porseffor, a porseffor of rock *and* of roll at the University of Texas in Austin. And he must really be some *great* teacher, because *ninety percent* of his students get A’s, and he hangs posters on the ceiling, too.

And his students sure do learn a lot. They learn all about “connecting with music, with each other and with a professor [must be a typo] who is a person, not a dictator or something.” After all, what’s a university for, if not to spare the children the chagrin of listening to rock and roll for *no credit*, and to let them *connect* with a *person*, a

real cool person, who goes “to class with no shoes on, and makes you feel comfortable.”

One of Grigadean’s colleagues at the University of Texas is Ilya Prigogene, a Nobel laureate in physics. Maybe they lunch together regularly in the faculty club. But then again, maybe they don’t. Grigadean might just find that Prigogene guy a little hard to take—what with those shoes and all. Probably *not* a person. More likely a dictator or something. May even flunk people. And not cosmic. Probably gives tests.

Grigadean doesn’t do that sort of thing. “When I gave pop quizzes and tests,” he says, “the class was too academic.” Too academic.

So he goes with the flow, a role-model in the best pedagogical tradition, displaying for children a way of life that is, like rock and roll itself, “a mode of expression, a way of living without rules.”

And the children *need* to be liberated from rules so that they can learn to *think*, dammit! That’s the whole *point* of education, isn’t it?

Ah, but it’s a struggle. “Students,” Grigadean laments, “*like* following rules. It’s safe, and it does not require much thinking.”

And that’s exactly what’s wrong with that Prigogene guy and everything that he stands for. Rules. Hell, that’s just about all physics *is*, just a bunch of rules, and constants, and laws, and stuff like that. Now rock and roll, as Grigadean instructs us, is “spontaneous, open to change, daring, energetic, not too organized, fun.”

We’re ashamed to admit that we have never before given due consideration to the important distinctions between rock and roll and physics as academic disciplines. Now that we are enlightened, we can at last make an *informed* judgment as to the relative worth of the two, and as to the appropriateness of their inclusion in a university curriculum. And now we have to wonder what the hell those clowns think they’re *doing* down at the University of Texas.

We know how universities operate. We know that it took lots of people, lots of paperwork, lots of time, lots of approvals from lots of colleagues, just so that Grigadean could teach that course in rock and roll. Those things don’t just *happen*, you know. They require the collective wisdom of many fine minds.

And then what do they do? They go out and hire some fancy-shmancy physicist whose very

*presence* on the campus undercuts everything that Grigadean stands for!

Physics, for God’s sake! Kids who like that stuff—let’m watch *Nova*.

## A Lecture on Politics

The state in which the rulers are most reluctant to govern is always the best and most quietly governed; and the state in which they are most eager, the worst.

WE have heard from a faithful, but worried, reader. He is afraid that Ronald Reagan might read THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN and make use of our arguments for his own devious purposes. And we have, indeed, often argued that *good* schools, cleansed of trashy courses and parasitic functionaries, would cost *less* than the schools we now have.

Strangely enough, our worried reader obviously did *not* suggest at all that our arguments are *wrong*; he feared only that they might be used by a wrong person in a wrong cause. And now *we* are worried, for that fear is itself a frightening reminder of the tremendous power of factional belief over the freedom of the mind.

If an argument is sound and rational, it is sound and rational no matter who uses it. If Reagan, or some other politician, or the Devil himself, should choose to espouse sound and rational argument, we would all be better off. But that can not happen. Politicians—and the Devil— just don’t work that way.

In fact, if *any* politician were to adopt our understanding about the costs of public schooling, it could only mean that he has decided not to run. No office seeker, even should he find it true, would dare to say what we say. We do not fear, therefore, that we may provide unintended—and utterly unmerited—aid and comfort either to Ronald Reagan or to *any* of his currently numerous opponents.

What we do fear, however, is a result even worse than that. Thanks largely to that pussy-footing excellence commission report, which looks more and more like a clever ploy to precisely this end, the future of education in America may be delivered into the hands of politicians, the only people around whose

influence on the life of the mind is even more baleful than that of the educationists. When the *very* last returns of the election of 1984 are finally in, they may well show that the American people have been persuaded at last not only to accept but also to approve the notion that the character of “education” should be determined in the voting booth. Nothing worse could happen to us.

Among us, the rulers are not reluctant to govern. In pursuit of office, they will bellow with the herd in broad daylight, and, in darkness, hunker down with the wolves. They prosper by persuasion and the exacerbation of factional discord. Like the educationists, they prefer to ply their trade in the misty precincts of “the affective domain,” where sentiment and belief can be assigned a greater “moral” power than knowledge and reason, provided only that they be “worthy sentiment” and “right belief,” to which every faction lays claim. Politicians must thus depend upon the existence of a certain number of citizens who share similar desires but who neither will nor can inquire as to whether they *should* desire what they desire. Nor do our politicians find it useful to encourage such inquiry.

All of that may be “only realistic,” but if it is, it points to certain loathsome realities. It must mean, a) that Americans have not achieved that “informed discretion” that Jefferson deemed essential to a free people, b) that politicians profit from that lack, and c) that, as to improvements in the hen-house security system, the foxes will have some ideas of their own.

For that is exactly what an education is—a security system that signals the intrusion of ignorance and unreason. It is education that unmasks opinion or belief parading as knowledge, and defrocks persuasion pretending to be logic. It is our defense against the tyranny of appetite and ideology, and our only path to self-knowledge and self-government. It is, in short, exactly the sovereign remedy for politics as practiced among us.

We have listened to Reagan, and we have listened to Mondale, who seems sufficiently typical of the other pack. They show no sign of knowing what they *mean* by “education.” According to the faction they hope to please, they take education to be some sort of more or less practical training in something or other, or an indoctrination in somebody’s favorite version of

socially acceptable notions, or an incoherent muddle known as “adjustment to life.” They address themselves to issues related *not* to education but only to the school business, to schools as agencies of government and bureaucratic structures. They believe, or pretend to believe, that *the solution* lies in this or that, prayer, or pay, or something.

And one of those men, or someone just like one of them, will win the presidential election of 1984, trailing behind him his promises and debts. To whom then will he turn in the great cause of excellence and the reform of schooling? Plato? Jefferson? To *anyone* who understands education as the mind’s strong defense against manipulation and flattery? Will he drive out once and for all, by denying them their “monies,” the clowns and charlatans of educationism who have brought us to this pass? Or will he rather prove that he “supports education” by handing those innovative thrusters *more monies*?

The educationists do claim that they run the only game in town, that they are the only real *professionals* who know all about education. And, since they are not able to detect irony, they can claim with perfectly straight faces that they are the only ones who can help us, now that we have gotten ourselves into this mess.

They lie. But politicians are realistic, and they don’t care that educationists lie. They care only that the educationists be *perceived* as panting after excellence, and *that* they can manage.

We face nothing less than the ultimate test of democracy, a sterner test than war itself. The survival of *the nation* may be a necessary condition of individual freedom, but it is certainly not a sufficient condition. If “democracy” means rule by those who know best how to please the uninformed and thoughtless, which is the condition asserted, and presumably accepted, by those who excuse politicians as “realistic,” then we can not be free. We must suffer the tyranny not only of our own appetites and notions, but of the appetites and notions of any slim majority of everyone else. If we tolerate the existence of such multitudes, we can not be free. And if we permit the politicians and the educationists to define the nature and purpose of education according to *their* appetites and notions, to say nothing of their track records, then we will ensure the existence of such multitudes. And we will never be free.

Democracy is *not* a form of government that provides freedom. That it is, is the sort of illusion easily (and conveniently) induced in the multitudes who are given pep-rallies in “citizenship” rather than the disciplined study of history and politics. But democracy may well be that form of government that most liberally *permits* freedom. Even Aristotle, who had no illusions about the supposed “rightness” of multitudes in proportion to their size, was willing to grant this:

“If liberty and equality, as is thought by some, are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be best attained when all persons alike share in the government to the utmost.”

An uneducated person is simply *unable* to “share in the government.” (governing is exactly what is *learned* through education. The uneducated, of whatever rank or station do not even govern themselves, but simply obey whatever desires and beliefs they suppose to be their own. But if they can not govern, they can certainly *rule*. And should they be reluctant to do that, some realistic politician will be delighted to set them straight.

Jefferson did not commend “informed discretion” as a graceful adornment for a lucky few. He *prescribed* it as a necessary condition for *freedom in a democracy*, for he knew that the latter does not ensure the former. And he prescribed it for “all persons alike...to the utmost.”

Well, let’s keep on looking for a bluebird. Maybe Jefferson was wrong. Maybe we *can* be “ignorant and free.” Someday, maybe, we’ll find out. Maybe as soon as November of 1984.

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**The Underground  
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**Up Pops Optimism**

Just yesterday I was conducting a workshop for teachers, and one of them said, “Look, we made a lot of progress with some of these ideas in the 1960’s, and now they are all gone. How can you be optimistic once again?” I simply said that to be an educator and pessimistic is an inconsistency. Good ideas will keep popping up...and we will try to inject them into the system.

**GOLLY**, what fun it must be to be a genuine *educator* and get interviewed by Edward B. Fiske, the Education Editor of the *New York Times*. Fiske is certainly a man who might display the typical thinking of *educators* accurately and completely, but there is no need to worry. He would never do that sort of thing to an *educator*.

We’ve been reading, with rue and chagrin, Fiske’s interview of John I. Goodlad, *educator*. Goodlad, once the dean of a teacher-training academy in California, has recently had his name associated in some way or other with a bound volume of printed pages. It is called *A Study of Schooling*, and it is the end-product (a happy term) of eight years of what the educationists call “research” — questionnaires, evaluative instruments, perception/assessment doohickies, and punch cards.

What made us sad about the interview was that we couldn’t help comparing our own education editor—a crude and pushy wiseacre—with the courteous, considerate, Fiske.

Our man might actually upset an *educator* who said what is cited above, which Goodlad did in the interview with Fiske. We can hear him now: “Just a minute there, buddy, just a goddam minute. How about a little list of all those great ideas of the 60’s? Does that mean stuff like relating to the Eskimo experience by chewing blubber in the open classroom and toting around cute little

chickie eggs and staging mock weddings complete with caterers for God's sakes so that little kids who still can't keep their noses clean can learn all about family living and alternative lifestyles?"

You can see why we keep him at his desk. Still, we almost wish he had been there when Fiske, referring to a weird notion that students ought to do well on some sort of test before getting diplomas, asked Goodlad if he "liked the approach."

Goodlad did not like the approach, and he hastily recited the incantation that educationists always use to ward off *any* approach of the demon of mere cognition: "Tests measure a very narrow array of student behaviors."

"Oh, yeah," our man would surely have sneered. "You must mean that piddling little array of those few, trivial 'behaviors' that actually *can* be measured by testing. Silly stuff like skills and mere knowledge, eh?"

And he might even have verged on rudeness at Goodlad's sloganized rehearsal of the *real* aims of government schooling, which can not, of course, be "tested" by objective inquiry, but only judged and pronounced upon by the very people who concocted them: "Higher scores do not necessarily mean that the educational system is getting better. Higher scores don't mean that you have improved the abilities of youngsters to tackle new problems, to develop all of their senses in creative kinds of activities or to get along with others."

Although Fiske had the courtesy to let all that rubbish pass without comment, and without asking whether it might be those ideas that brought us all those "courses" in appreciating and relating, our education editor would have put some snarky questions:

So what *would* higher scores "necessarily" mean? Are you saying that even if more students had more knowledge and more skill, it wouldn't make "the system" better? That seems stupid, of course, and suggests that we should judge "the system" on something *other* than its effects, which would get you people off the hook, but it's also nasty. Did you *mean* to say that the system is more important than the students, so that you can blithely derogate some obvious benefit to the latter because it may "not necessarily" prove a benefit to the former?

And what the hell is that "tackle new problems" business? Do you imply that schoolchildren are

busily at work "tackling" a whole bunch of *new* problems, from which significant enterprise they should not be diverted by trivial tests of their power to *solve* some *old* problems? Could you name about five or six of those indubitably fascinating new problems and tell us how the kiddies are doing on them?

Could it be that *one* of those "new" problems really is comparatively new, having afflicted us only since the day that saw the first meeting of a course in educationism—the problem of getting the hell out of school before your mind is turned to tapioca by a crew of cretinous busybodies developing all your goddam *senses* through collage and leading you into the pathway of righteous getting along with a bunch of significantly unspecified "others" in rap-sessions on the toleration of *everything* and the diligent practice of diffidence, irresolution, flattery, hypocrisy, and obsequiousness?

He does get carried away. And, we must admit, he sometimes actually turns a bit nasty. We wouldn't dare to print what he said when he heard all about Goodlad's terrific proposal for what he calls "head teachers":

Let's say an elementary school has 400 children. I would divide that school into four units of 100 children each and then assign to each team ["unit"?] the equivalent [?] of four teachers. Then I would want to take those four positions and divide them up in different ways.

One of them would be a "head teacher," with a doctorate in the tasks required for that position: understanding children and learning, the ability to diagnose learning disabilities, and the ability to prescribe the kinds of treatment to correct deficiencies in learning.

There, you see? There's not really anything wrong with the schools or the people who operate them. It's all those damn *children*, with all of their pestilential disabilities and learning deficiencies, who have sunk us under that rising tide of mediocrity. What we need now is *not*, as ignorant civilians have been led to believe by all that "nation at risk" ruckus, teachers who actually *know* science and math and history and language. What the teachers need (if they want the "head teacher" bucks) is more educationism courses, naturally, and some "doctorates in tasks," so that they can do the *real* work of a teacher—the

diagnosis of deficiencies and the prescription of treatments. And, as it happens, such a “head teacher” program will work no hardship at all on any of Goodlad’s old pals in the teacher academies, who are a little troubled these days by a small cloud on the horizon.

Well, surely Fiske understands all these things. He must have known that the simple truth about Goodlad’s plan wouldn’t be news that is fit to print.

### The Mouths of Babes

“Everybody thinks that Russia is the bad guy. We found out that the U. S. A. is just as bad because we’re doing a lot of things like they are, like making nuclear weapons, like we dropped the first bomb... We got the whole thing started.”

“To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child.”

The second quotation is from Cicero. It is one of those sayings that lodge themselves securely in a quiet corner of the mind, only now and then nagging for attention and elucidation. The words *seem* to have the ring of truth, but what, exactly and in detail, do they mean?

Our ruminations on that question have been helped along prodigiously by the *first* quotation. It is the “work” of a thirteen-year-old schoolboy somewhere in Wisconsin. A child. A child whose teachers have apparently been admitted to the greater mysteries without having to pass through the tedious apprenticeship of the lesser. They have not taught this child much about the natural form of the sentence, but they *have* told him who “got the whole thing started.”

We found this schoolboy’s understanding of what happened before he was born (which must be rigorously distinguished from his *knowledge* of what happened before he was born) in a column in the *Times & World News* of Roanoke, Va., July 11, 1983.

The author, Harold Sugg, a journalist, suggests that the child might have been given some knowledge before he was handed an “understanding”—knowledge about the progress and intentions of German scientists, about the well-founded fears of Einstein and other refugees,

Roosevelt’s perfectly prudent reaction to Einstein’s letter, and Truman’s dilemma, unresolved to this day, and, like any of history’s “what if’s,” unresolvable by anything less than the mind of God.

Regular readers will easily sniff out the source of the schoolboy’s “understanding.” It is, of course, the “packet of materials” put out by a teachers’ union, the National “Education” Association. That handy-dandy guidebook for teachers who are ignorant of what occurred before they were born was “to dispel misconceptions [specifically in junior high school children] about nuclear war and the buildup of nuclear arms.” When we discussed this project last December, we wondered whether that teachers’ union had come up with some new and hitherto unsuspected knowledge, or whether they would dispel misconceptions in their usual way, *i.e.*, by modifying children into some new feelings without bothering about mere knowledge. But, of course, we didn’t *really* wonder.

Now that we have some evidence as to their methods, we want to consider their enterprise from another point of view.

They did indeed proclaim that their program of megadeath education was meant to “dispel misconceptions” *in teenagers*. What can be the meaning of that curious qualification? If there were some line of argument or collection of knowledge that would in fact dispel misconceptions about nuclear war *in teenagers*, why on earth would it not have precisely the same effect on *anyone* of *any* age?

Surely, knowledge is knowledge, and reason, reason. There can hardly be several of each, severally suitable to different ages. Some persons, to be sure, and no matter what their age, still have minds so credulous and unpracticed that knowledge and reason do not touch them, but if the NEA does in fact command the knowledge and reason that would dispel misconceptions in teenagers, then it must be able to do the same for many of the rest of us.

So why are we left in darkness? Why hasn’t this union, ordinarily loud in protesting its devotion to the common good, dispelled all our misconceptions and brought us, in this most critical issue, to a national consensus? Why are some of us still in confusion as to who the good and the bad guys are and who started it all?

Or, to put it in a more useful way, do you imagine that those “teachers” would dare to do in public, before an audience of educated adults, whatever it was they did to bring that little boy to his shallow and altogether pitiable “understanding” of history?

Do you suppose that the little boy’s teacher *shares* his belief? If so, how does such a gullible and uninformed person get to *be* a teacher? And if not, how is such a teacher anything other than a hypocrite and a molester of children? How else are we to describe one who would take advantage of a child’s natural ignorance and pliability in order to arouse in him certain feelings and beliefs that will suit the manipulator’s purpose?

Perhaps, however, there is a third possibility that seems, at first, slightly less horrendous. It may well be, for such *is* the standard practice of those educationists, that the devisers of holocaust education actually admitted (to themselves, but certainly not to the rest of us) that such a study might prove, well, just a bit “advanced” for the juvenile mind to understand “correctly,” and thus in need of some judicious and pedagogically practicable adjustment. After all, to bring a child of thirteen to a mature and thoughtful understanding of so large and vexed an issue might take years and years! There just isn’t going to be all that time in our nifty little mini-course. We’ll have to leave something out, all that science and history and politics stuff, maybe, all those confusing mere facts.

Years and years. Yes, that is what it takes even to *begin* to form a mature and thoughtful understanding of *any* serious human issue, years and years of finding and ordering knowledge, and rational inquiry, and living, and paying attention to living, and always, always, living under the decent government of vigilant doubt.

The whole story of our educationists can be told in miniature by the example of this “course” in the dispelling of misconceptions about a stupendously complicated issue. They are reluctant to teach those things that *can* and *should* be taught to children. They do not find that a sufficiently *professional* calling. They dream of being priests and prophets, lofty enlighteners, healers of disordered young psyches, beneficent agents of social change. Scorning skill and knowledge as “minimum,” “basic,” and “mere,” they hustle their charges into “awarenesses,” “perceptions,” and

“appreciations” of the Great Issues, as though such sentiments were ways of understanding. Even when they have faint inklings of the fact that it *does* take years and years to seek out mature and thoughtful understandings, they decide that children *are* children, after all, and that for *them* a childish and simplified “understanding” will be quite good enough, and surely better than none at all.

So it was, for instance, that the boy who was brought to “understand,” all about nuclear war was not burdened with the study of history, which could take up a lot of time and would just confuse him. And that much is true; there is a lot of history, of which we can never know more than a little. “The well of history,” Thomas Mann put it, “is very deep. Shall we not say that it is bottomless?” And so it is, as anyone who has actually studied history can testify. And that is precisely why we must study it.

The study of history is an antidote to arrogance and dogmatism, because it reminds us that even those who have great knowledge, *especially* those who have great knowledge, can not agree. It shows us that the “good guys and bad guys” theory of history is puerile nonsense, and that we can no more understand “who started it all” than we can know what “it all” is.

But our little boy did not read history. He was instead, as educationists say, “exposed to social studies.”

The hokey cant of the educationists has at least this virtue through it they reveal, however unintentionally, what is *really* in their minds. Their routine admission of wanting to “expose” students to this or that is a way of saying that they want the children to “catch” something—an “appreciation,” or an “awareness,” or the most virulent infection of all, a “right response.”

(A “right response,” in pedagogical theory, has nothing to do with a “correct answer.” The latter exists only in the merely cognitive domain, while the former floats in the affective. The correct answer, in fact, may actually *prevent* the right response, just as that little boy’s right response might have been prevented had Harold Sugg been sitting in the back of the class and obstructing the dispelling of misconceptions with a few correct answers.)

The swamp of social studies is *not* deep. It is shallow, very shallow, fetid and septic. Shall we

not expect that he who drinks of it will catch some thing? And that little boy in Wisconsin has indeed caught a “right response,” for his meager understanding is dearly *the* understanding that was intended by those who “instructed” him.

So the third possibility turns out to be not less but more horrendous than the other two. The claim that some inquiries that are just too “advanced” for children to understand can be simplified or abbreviated so that children can understand what they can not understand is arrant nonsense and rank hypocrisy. In this program of nuclear warfare education, no inquiry at all was ever intended, no search for understanding through knowledge, but only the implanting of a certain belief in the uninformed and acquiescent minds of children. In Albania, too, the educationists call that “education.”

If there are issues that children can not understand because their minds are insufficiently practiced and informed, and because they have little experience of living, then *they can not understand* them. Nor have they *come* to understand them when they have learned to recite the opinions of redactors and simplifiers claiming to be teachers.

And when they have learned that kind of lesson often enough—how often *is* that?—they will slip easily into the condition that Cicero had in mind: lifelong childhood. Childhood is not best understood as a *time* of life, for its time is variable and indeterminate. Childhood is better understood as a *kind* of life, the kind that is simply natural to those in whom the mind is still credulous and unpracticed. Such a mind can not seek understanding by knowledge and rational inquiry, but will readily accept and recite opinions delivered by anyone to whom credulousness grants authority. There is no point in asking, of the boy in Wisconsin, What did he know and how did he reason? The useful question would be: Whom did he heed? He heeded certain *other* children, who learned the same lesson in the same way.

This is the fact that lies at the heart of all of our troubles in “education,” the fact that must ultimately defeat all attempts at reform. The children in the schools are just children, who might someday, if left unmolested, put away childish things. But the *other* people in the schools, the teachers and teacher trainers, the

educrats and theory mongers, are confirmed children. They are, indeed and alas, exactly what they claim to be—“role models.” And they represent the end of that process to which schooling is the means: the subversion of knowledge and reason, stern governors, by bands of cunning babies, feelings and beliefs.

If we can escape a nuclear calamity only through some brand of ideological indoctrination in all our children, then we might inquire as to whether we *should* escape it. But thus we will not escape; we rather make it all the more possible. Violence is an extremity of unreason, and we do not escape either unreason or violence by calling the one to save us from the other.

Nor can we hope that little children who have been dosed with unreason and praised for swallowing it will one day, by magic or luck, put on thoughtfulness and require, of any who would persuade them, knowledge and reason. If that *is* a part of the natural process of growing up, which is at least questionable, it can obviously be prevented, and by nothing more than a little modification in the affective domain and the relentless display of role models who have already been suitably modified.

And it is a great pity, for children can learn from other children. The very teachers that we now have could easily teach the younger children things like the skills of language and number, upon which all mature and thoughtful understanding must ultimately be founded. They could lead them into reading the words of the thoughtful, words to be stored up against need, for need will surely come. They could treat the younger children like what they truly are, inheritors of wealth beyond counting, the great record of our long struggle to understand “it all,” which permits no shortcuts.

But that is to say that the smaller children might someday grow up if the bigger were to grow up today. What do you suppose the chances are?



# The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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## Real Good in Detroit

*The more things a man is ashamed of,  
the more respectable he is.* G. B. SHAW

ONE of the most delicious ironies of our ironical time is the fact that schoolteachers often make less money than garbagemen. Although garbagemen seem to have reconciled themselves to this curious inequity perhaps out of a phlegmatic realism inevitably induced by their labors, schoolteachers have not.

How can it be, schoolteachers ask in letters to editors all over the land, that “society” holds them so cheap? Have they not labored mightily to make society exactly what it is today, clarifying values, facilitating appreciations, and teaching everyone how to relate? Have they not been the principal providers of universal public self-esteem, creativity, and social awareness? So how come they don’t get no respect? What kind of society can it be that better rewards those who haul away garbage than those who produce it?

Such complaints seem, at first, indubitably justifiable. At least, they require of any thoughtful citizen a scrutiny of whatever differences can be discovered between garbagemen and schoolteachers:

¶ While the work of garbagemen is of unquestionable social value, they never hire public relations experts to nag us about their selfless devotion to the common good. They don’t even have a bumper sticker. That ought to be worth a few bucks.

¶ When garbagemen ask for more money, they gladly admit that what they really want is the money. As to recompense for the self-sacrifice out of which they consented to become garbagemen rather than executives of multi-national corporations, they say nothing. Such reticence is surely worth a little more money.

¶ Although they shouldn’t be, garbagemen are just a little bit ashamed of what they do, and thus deficient in self-esteem. Schoolteachers are not the least bit ashamed of *anything* that they do. They have great big oodles of self-esteem. Would it not be an appropriately democratic redistribution of wealth to take some money, since they’ll never part with that self-esteem, away from the privileged schoolteachers and give it to those emotionally deprived garbagemen?

The shame that arises from believing what the world tells us to believe is a form of slavery, but when shame arises from self-knowledge informed by a principled consideration of what is estimable and what is not, it is virtue. The same is true of self-esteem. Consider how estimable a little bit of decent shame would have seemed in the following case, recounted by Vermont Royster in *The Wall Street Journal*:

In Reidsville, N. C., a Southern Association consultant visited five elementary schools to assess their progress... After a “quick trip” through each of the schools, according to the monthly news publication of the city schools, the reports on all of them were favorable.

The consultant, so it says here, found many examples of student work that reflected the instructional program both in the classroom and on the hallway bulletin boards. “These were in most cases mounted attractively amid labeled with correct manuscript. There was a wide variety of student work evidenced ranging from creative stories to chocolate pudding finger-painting.”

The school publication was thus happy to report “we’re all doing fine” and that only “minor modifications” to the program would be required.

We can not begin to imagine the abominable practice that would be to garbage collection what chocolate pudding fingerpainting that reflects the instructional program is to education. We’re sure, though, that any garbagemen who might indulge in it would rather not have that known. But schoolteachers know no shame. “We’re all doing fine,” they proclaim, tickled pink that the labels have, in most cases, “correct manuscript.”

And then there’s the case of Edward Ransom, who reported to work as a substitute janitor at

Redford High School in Detroit. From the principal's office, he was sent to Viola Chambers, head of what is called, with more accuracy than was ever intended, a department of interdisciplinary studies. She did wonder, but not very much, apparently, why he asked whether she needed anything cleaned. She did, but she didn't know that, so she just handed Ransom his lesson plans and sent him to teach a couple of classes in what is called, again with more than intended accuracy, "social studies."

Wanda Hogg, an English teacher at Redford High, had this to say of Ransom's first outing as a teacher: "I heard he did real good."

Walter Adams, the principal, said that such a thing had never happened before, and that he had instituted an elaborate system so that it could not happen again. It's hard to see, however, why he should have been at all troubled by the event, since he also seemed to shrug it off with the astonishing admission that lesson plans are "structured so any teacher can instruct the class without having knowledge of that field of study."

So. What an unusual "profession" schoolteaching must be. A teacher *is* a teacher not by virtue of knowing what is to be taught, but by virtue of being *named* a teacher, which title is reserved for those who supposedly know, however vast their ignorance, *how to teach*. Thus a lawyer could be ignorant of law, needing to know only how to *practice* the law. And the knowledge of *how to teach* is obviously just a matter of following a lesson plan. Ransom did real good his first time out. And Adams sees no shame in assuring the public *not* that he will prevent *bad* teaching, for by his own definition Ransom did exactly what any good, ignorant teacher would do, but that he will prevent *good* teaching if it happens to be provided by a person not called a teacher.

If there is ever to be any significant improvement in the schools, from whom is it most likely to come? From the self-esteemers who believe that they're "all doing fine," or from those who are a little bit ashamed of something that is done in schools? And who seems to *deserve* more pay? The teacher who actually believes that there can be a teacher "without having knowledge," or the one who would be ashamed to be a party to such a disgrace?

Money and respect *do* go together. If we give teachers little money, it is because we give them little respect. If we give them little respect, it is because they give themselves so much. When they learn a little shame, we'll do the respecting, and the paying too.

## **We, and the People**

### **The King Canute Commission Revisited**

WE have received a thoughtful letter from a regular reader, an astute and well-informed person who assisted in the writing and editing of "A Nation at Risk," the report of the National Commission on Excellence.

It is one thing, he said, to disagree with the commission's opinions or to chide it for failing to say something that we think ought to be said. "But it is unfair," he added, "to give TUG readers the impression that the Commissioners have not expressed views that they have stated clearly—and which are in perfect accord with a view you take them to task for not having!"

He was referring to this passage from "A Lecture on Politics," in our issue for September, 1983:

Jefferson did not commend "informed discretion" as a graceful adornment for a lucky few. He *prescribed* it as a necessary condition for *freedom in a democracy*, for he knew that the latter does not ensure the former. And he prescribed it for "all persons alike...to the utmost."

And in the same essay we did indeed take the commission to task, saying that its emphasis on a *nation* at risk would ultimately deliver the making of school policy into the hands of the politicians. The notion that a nation can be educated is preposterous; only a mind can be educated. The notion that the education of a mind should be devised to serve the nation is mischievous; it will always concentrate power and influence in those who can claim to represent the nation as the "educators" of the people. It implies also the notion that the state is more important than a person, a notion which, thanks mostly to the socializing preachments of government educationists, we have somehow been persuaded not to abominate.

However, and in spite of its frequent appeals to the supposed needs of the nation, the report, our reader asserts, *also* says exactly what we say in the cited passage, and ought to be given credit for that. As evidence, he adduces this passage from “A Nation at Risk,” p. 7:

Our concern, however, goes well beyond matters such as industry and commerce. It also includes the intellectual, moral, and spiritual strengths of our people, which knit together the very fabric of our society. The people of the United States need to know that individuals ... who do not possess the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential to this new era will be effectively disenfranchised, not simply from the material rewards that accompany effective performance, but from the chance to participate fully in our national life. A high level of shared education is essential to a free, democratic society and to the fostering of a common culture...

For our country to function, citizens must be able to reach some common understandings on complex issues, often on short notice and on the basis of conflicting or incomplete evidence. Education helps form these common understandings, a point Thomas Jefferson made long ago in his justly famous dictum:

“I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them but to inform their discretion.”

We are sorry to seem obdurate or contentious, and sorrier to seem, as our correspondent cautions, readier to discover enemies than friends. Nor do we doubt the hard work and good intentions of the commissioners. But we are not in “perfect accord” with what that passage says. We find it, in fact, whether so intended or not, an exoneration of the worst practices of government schooling, and an incitement to more of the same.

When “A Nation at Risk” first appeared, we thought of doing a piece on nothing more than the second paragraph of that passage, but it just seemed too difficult a task. We gave it up, excusing ourselves with Emerson’s comment on advocates of any ideology: “Every word ...

chagrins us, and we know not where to begin to set them right.” Now, however, we owe a thoughtful reader a reply.

The second paragraph speaks of “understandings” to be reached out of what is called “conflicting or incomplete evidence,” and on short notice. It asserts, furthermore, that it is by such “understandings” that “our country” must “function”; and the process that “helps form” those extraordinary “understandings,” the commission has called “education.”

There *is* a name for that act of the mind which results from brief scrutiny of incomplete or conflicting evidence, but it is *not* “understanding.” It is “guessing.” There is also a name for the *condition* of that mind which has only incomplete or conflicting evidence: it is “ignorance.” There is even a name for that process by which a mind, driven to guessing by the fact of its ignorance, can be led to one guess rather than another, but it is surely not “education.” It is “persuasion.”

To say that our country functions by the collective guesswork of the ill-informed is only to acknowledge a sad truth. To resign ourselves to that sad truth—saying, Well, that’s politics—is bad enough; but it is far worse to conclude that our country *should* so function, and that a government agency calling itself “education” should serve as an especially influential party to the process. And to assert that *that* is what Jefferson meant in his “famous dictum” must suggest either insolent mendacity or prodigious confusion.

In this case it’s confusion, which begins, as always, with the recitation of unexamined words. Such confusion always begets progeny. The passage’s implicit, and alarming, definition of *understanding*, for instance, depends on its careless use of “evidence.” A thoughtful and attentive writer would have to reason thus:

Just a minute. This passage obviously refers to voting and to those things that bring people to vote one way or another. Is “evidence” the best word for “those things”? Is it any the fitter for being qualified as “conflicting or incomplete evidence,” as though such lawyerish fastidiousness might legitimate as “evidence” that which is not exactly *the* evidence? And is it not the case that much of whatever is put forth toward “common understandings on complex issues” is not *evidence* at all, strictly speaking, but

*testimony*? Is there not some useful distinction to be made between the state of mind enforced by evidence and that aroused by believing in the testimony of A and rejecting B's? Or shall we casually call both the same thing, including furthermore a third state of mind, the ignorance in which the mind is stranded by "conflicting or incomplete evidence"?

And reasoning thus, a thoughtful and attentive reader comes inevitably to the central confusion not only of that paragraph but of the entire report: the commission obviously has no clear and intelligible idea of what it means by "education."

Education is, no doubt, damnably difficult to define. Still, you would think that an outfit calling itself a National Commission on Excellence in Education really should have tried to do it. In their report, we can ferret out what they might mean by "education" only through their implicit, and perhaps inadvertent, characterizations of it. For instance, while many might hold that the ability to distinguish evidence from what is not evidence, and the tendency to reserve judgment where evidence is scant or ambiguous, are wholesome fruits of an education, the commission does not share that view. In fact, it calls education a "process" rather than an inner quality that can belong only to a person, and grants that process the power to annul individual discretion for the sake of collective compromise, no matter how scant or ambiguous the evidence.

Many say, of course, that that is the only way in which democracy can work. If that is true, it is very bad news indeed, for it implies that democracy will ultimately depend on the persuasion of sentiment and belief, in other words, the irrational. And to say *that* is to say that, if there is to be "education" in a democracy, it had better be the *right kind*, or, as the commission puts it, "essential" not to the freedom of a mind but "to a free, democratic *society*," for whose sake the minds of those supposedly *not* "disenfranchised" by lack of "skill, literacy, and training" must nevertheless remain susceptible to collective persuasion. The *wrong kind* of education will afflict us with citizens who will *not* accept "common understandings" of "complex issues" generated, all unaccountably, by a truly amazing "process" called "education" out of the thin air of "conflicting or incomplete evidence." Such citizens might even decide, if that's the way "our

country" must "function," that there is no significant *worth* in the commission's grandly proffered "chance to participate fully in our national life." A few such malcontents, "our country" can ignore, but, should they grow numerous, it would mean the end of what now passes for the "realistic" practice of politics among us.

The primary effect of the "education" implied by the commission will be the preservation of that practice, which depends absolutely on the collective belief that it is "democratic" to take action on the strength of collective belief. "A Nation at Risk" has no quarrel with, does not even stop to analyze or question, the deepest dogma of the educationists; that the primary beneficiary of "education" is to be "society." There is nothing in the cited passage that will make the social change-agent educationists the least bit uncomfortable. They agree with Jefferson too.

And now, having been driven to consider yet again that "famous dictum," we're not so sure that *we* agree with Jefferson. For the first time we notice something fishy about that quotation. Who, exactly, is to be included in that "we"? Who are those "we" who think the people not enlightened enough? Who are those powerful but enlightened "we" who apparently *could*, if they chose, take the people's control from them, but who might rather inform their discretion?

It seems especially important just now to ask such questions, because we are suffering a plague of education reports. Almost every one flows from the unstated theme: This is what *we* should do to *them*. (The exception is Adler's *Paedeia Proposal*, which has conveniently vanished.)

When A is empowered to judge of B's enlightenment, and also to inform B's discretion, abuses may follow. A reasonable C would ask: Who in hell is A to have such power, and who is to judge of *his* enlightenment, to say nothing of his self-interest? When it turns out that A is the one who is supposed to govern within limits set by B, all will be clear to C.

As for the judging of A's enlightenment, any attentive reader can do it. All those reports are the sayings of A. But we can never inform A's discretion, for A *has* no discretion, no mind, no will, nothing that properly belongs to a person. A is an illusion, a spooky nonentity who seems to exist only because we are naturally ready to

believe that where there are sayings there must have been a sayer.

But there is no sayer of “A Nation at Risk,” no person who will say: *I say this*. These are *my* words and *my* thoughts, here set forth to the *best* of my abilities and out of *my utmost powers* of knowledge and reason. He who can better instruct me should do so; he who can’t should be instructed.

Should some member of the commission stand forth to make such assertions as to the cited passage, we’ll gladly inquire into it again, either to instruct or be instructed. Neither is the least bit shameful.

But that won’t happen. The passage is simply the predigested pap of groupthink, which is routinely regurgitated by commissions. *What it says* is nobody’s personal responsibility. No one asks: So say you all? Do you, each and every one, *understand* and *intend* what is said here? And, just so that your fellow citizens might be assured of your seriousness of purpose and the solemnity of your enterprise, and so that you might seem unquestionable stewards of the trust with which you are endowed, would you be willing to lay a little something of *your own* on the table, some pledge of your certain commitment to the principles here set forth? Your lives, perhaps, or your fortunes? So how about a little sacred honor?

Our correspondent says, as though to commend them, that the commissioners do admit that their report is “an imperfect document.” How gracious they are, and how modest. Well, here’s what we call sort of an understanding, more or less, probably not more than just a little wrong here or there, or maybe somewhere else, but that’s the way “our country” is supposed to “function” you know.

In other words, without even pretending to have done *the* job for us, they don’t at all mind saying that they have done *a* job *on* us. What no good person does to another, “we” will not mind at all doing to “the people.”



# The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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## Reading Maketh Nitwits in New York

“We have to get away in some ways from basic skills. We tried to respond to society’s demands for basics. In doing that, particularly in reading, we emphasized the mechanics of reading. Recent studies show that our students know how to read better, but that their ability to think and comprehend is wanting.”

Anthony J. Alvarado

We have been following, from *Times* to *Times*, the path of the mind as walked by one Anthony J. Alvarado, chancellor of the public school system in New York City. He is point man, perhaps, for the Long Reconnaissance into the dim forest of knowledge and thought. If the children of New York are ever to make it through the woods, they are going to need a pathfinder who knows how to read the map of thought and knowledge. Alvarado doesn’t.

He is, in fact, an addict of argument by adjective and a gushing fountain of astonishing non sequiturs. Here is an example of his thinking, taken from an interview in the *Times*:

Q. Why not teach only English to students until they master the language, rather than teach other subjects in their native tongue?

A. Isn’t that ridiculous? If you are a brilliant student and you are dominant in a foreign language and you want to learn calculus, should you not learn calculus?

Q. Must youngsters are not brilliant in calculus.

A. Yes, but people forget the goal of education; it is skill-oriented & people-oriented.

We filed that interview away a few months ago, hoping that Alvarado would just go away. But apparently he didn’t. He popped up again in the

*Times*, whining about a plan cooked up by the state board of regents. The plan, whose details are irrelevant, and also irrelevant to this story, is meant to stem New York's share of the rising tide of mediocrity.

Alvarado does not like it, but it is hard to say exactly why, because Alvarado can't seem to say anything exactly. He explained something to the board of regents thus: "We've got to increase standards, but you can't just throw them out and, in the good old John Wayne fashion, say those that can do, and those that can't won't."

Maybe it means something. Maybe it means that those silly regents actually believed that they could throw out their standards and increase them at the same rime, and Alvarado is giving them a vocabulary lesson. Or maybe Alvarado is a bit uncertain as to the precise meaning of "but." Those conjunctions can be tricky.

What John Wayne has to do with all that we don't know. We've not seen all of his pictures, we admit, but it just doesn't seem likely that it was he who said that the people who can do something can do it, and the people who can't do something can't do it. Too philosophical for Wayne. More likely Charlton Heston.

But Alvarado wasn't through. He wound up with the crusher, the final argument, and in a form that you will immediately recognize.

"When someone is homeless," said Alvarado to the cold, unfeeling board of regents, "how can you say, 'Take another English course.' It's ludicrous."

Of course. Absolutely ludicrous. It has just never occurred to us before that nothing could be less appropriate for the ignorant poor than "another English course."

Now you take your typical homeless kid, living (sort of) in a squalid and crowded (but remarkably expensive) hotel, with an unemployable and illiterate mother who is not "dominant" in any human language. Here is a kid who has rarely heard a complete sentence, has never had a story read to him, has never had a book, and surely has no need for one, has never discussed anything with anyone, because all his pointless little life requires (and provides) is the ability to stand around in the streets exchanging simple signs and slogans with others of his kind. What earthly use could one more English course be to a miserable

wretch like that? What he needs is a good course in welding. Or gym.

And it's a good thing he has that Alvarado fellow to protect him from the arrogant elitists, with their la-di-dah, and ludicrous, notions about the examined life, which is the last thing he needs. With a life like that, who the hell wants to examine it?

And furthermore, English courses are sometimes clogged up with a lot of reading, almost all of it unfamiliar, and not even written at an appropriate grade level.

So what's going to happen to our homeless kid if those tricky regents should succeed in forcing him to take yet another English course?

He's going to come up against a whole bunch of reading, that's what. And he won't be *able* to read that kind of stuff, now will he? After all, he *is* homeless, you know.

And then what's going to happen? The first thing you know, someone is going to be assaulting poor Homeless Kid with those baleful "mechanics of reading," mentioned, and unmasked at last, in the epigraph above, by a man who should know, a real *chancellor*, Anthony J. Alvarado, himself.

And so, poor H. K., already a hapless victim of fortune, will be put to the study that has already eroded in countless others their precious "ability to think and comprehend." *And his mind will be overthrown!*

You see how cunning those regents are? On the one hand, by making him take yet another English course, they want to deprive H. K. of his right to live the life of yet another ignorant prole. On the other hand, by making him take yet another English course, they want to destroy his life with mechanics and condemn him to the life of yet another ignorant prole.

Deep. Very deep. Only a mind like Alvarado's could see through such subtle machinations. Thank goodness all those homeless kids have Alvarado one thousand percent on their side.

And it also takes a strange sort of mind to figure out *how* to teach the mechanics of reading in such a way as to inhibit the ability to think and comprehend. Alvarado surely knows.

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

## The Education of “William Thorburn”

WE have been reading, with due revulsion, a pamphlet called *What’s Wrong with Teacher Training A Case Study*, by “William Thorburn.” You will find below a page of excerpts from same. If you want to read the whole thing, you can have it for three dollars from LEARN, Inc., 5910 Wisconsin Avenue NW, Suite 118, Washington, DC 20016.

It will not, however, do a damn bit of good. It is devoted to what its targets dismiss out of hand—except when they like it—as “anecdotal evidence.” What the eye has seen and the ear heard means nothing to them.

*What’s Wrong* is a memoir by a man who decided, in spite of a couple of graduate degrees in an academic discipline, to become a schoolteacher. He found that he would have to take a batch of education courses. So he did. This sad tale is an account of what it was like to sit, for millions of hours, through the mindless maunderings of ignorant vulgarians. It is, like literature, a meditation on the universal in the guise of the particular, which might also be said of anecdotal evidence.

“William Thorburn” is not the author’s real name, a fact that we regret. We regret even more that the teacher academy he attended is not identified except as “a state teachers college in New Jersey.” We can imagine no good reason for such concealments. He who fears the consequences of saying what is so would serve himself best by not saying it, as thousands of schoolteachers know; and who thinks it a duty to expose iniquity can hardly be said to have done it by asserting that someone, somewhere, has done some evil.

Just now, therefore, this pamphlet is not much more than gossip, and in printing excerpts from it we hope to make of it something more. Many of our readers have also attended state teachers colleges in New Jersey. Next month, we should be able to name the place and the persons described.

The reticence of “Thorburn” is all the more regrettable because his memoir has appeared just when it might have done some good. New

Jersey’s commissioner of schools has floated a plan to grant teaching certificates to college graduates with liberal arts degrees untainted by education courses. There is a slight chance that it could improve the quality of teachers, since many who might have become good teachers were besotted in the teacher schools, but the profit would hardly be worth the pain of fighting the unions and the educationist lobby. We have a better idea, and an idea to which the educationists can not afford to object: Let New Jersey offer, to anyone with a respectable liberal arts degree in an academic discipline, free tuition, and even some hardship pay disguised as a stipend, in the graduate program of any of the state’s teacher academies.

The benefits would be uncountable. Unemployed college graduates would be kept off the streets and provided with marketable skills; poreffors of education, whose clients are rapidly disappearing would be kept in work, for a while; and the rest of us would find out whether anything done in the teacher schools actually needs doing.

One of the biggest problems of the state teachers colleges, not only in New Jersey, is the quality of the students who attend them. They are, to put it as gently as possible, for they do deserve a little pity, not sophisticated. They have had little truly academic experience, and their intellectual skills are undeveloped. They are notably eager not to displease their teachers, for a steady job in teaching is their best hope. They think of education as the gathering of data, in which category they include, and dutifully recite, in class and on their short-answer “examinations,” the pet notions of their instructors. They are easy marks. The habit of skeptical inquiry, which is surely one of the clearest signs of an educated mind, is not common among them.

People somewhat better educated would expect, and perhaps even elicit, a kind of teaching not usually found in teacher schools. To good teaching there is no greater incentive than students who can recognize bad teaching, and nothing can be fitter for pushers of pap than a class of grown-ups who don’t swallow that stuff.

In return for their stipends, the new breed of teacher-trainees might give us, at the end of their training, public reports, *with* names, names regularly printed on the state’s payroll checks Every June would bring Thorburn reports *without*

quotation marks. In just a few years, the weight of testimony would either clean up the state teachers colleges or discredit them utterly. Either would be a fine result, and a blessing for generations to come.

Although the “Thorburn” memoir will not bring us that blessing, it is, at least, the work of a man who has been to real school, done real scholarship, and studied with teachers who were expert in real disciplines. And he does recognize pap when he sees it.

### The Excerpts:

“Unlike most of the other instructors, ... this one refrained from waxing autobiographical as a substitute for unprepared lectures. Many tended to consume the bulk of a session with detailed descriptions of youthful adventures, divorce proceedings, surgical operations, stress (deriving mainly, some students thought, from fear that their jobs would be abolished), and hobbies.”

“A more typical instructor of reading... did not seem to want to hold classes for more than half of each scheduled session.... A good portion of class time was devoted to promoting his own consulting firm, which specialized, oddly enough, not in reading, but in stress control.”

“Other sessions were devoted to rambling, ill-prepared discussions having almost nothing to do with her syllabus. She justified these digressions with the claim that the text was so thorough that there was little she could add.”

“The next session was devoted to the problem of student tensions. In the present competitive nature of schooling, said the instructor, students could not avoid tension. Cheating was one excellent way to relieve tension. Knowing that one can cheat and not be punished for it will make students less anxious and more willing to keep coming to school and tolerating the otherwise intolerable, authoritarian nature of education.”

“The defects of the education professors at this New Jersey college are not the sort that might be corrected by even the most idealistic and determined administrators. It is in their broad cultural formation, not just in their work habits, that these faculty members are grossly deficient for the mission of creating and sustaining an environment where learning is taken seriously.”

“The culture of the typical state teachers college... is not hospitable to the values of intellectual inquiry... To the limited extent that inquiry and discussion are tolerated in education courses, they take the form not of dialogue but of bull sessions.... Students in these courses unavoidably acquire many of the habits and values of their professors and take them into their own classrooms in the public schools, Thus it is no wonder that there is widespread boredom among today’s high school students. Ignorant teachers are bored teachers, and that boredom will unfailingly be conveyed to their students.”

### Notes on Forgotten Wisdom

Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* is an old and neglected book. Many of its ideas we can now see as simply silly, and its bland paradise must seem even less bearable than believable, but it does contain several unorthodox and surprisingly modern ideas about education. ¶ In Bellamy’s utopia, three rights are assumed: The right of every person to the highest possible education, so that he can enjoy a full, thoughtful life; the right of every person to live in educated and decent company; and, most unusual of all, the right of children not yet born to have as parents thoughtful and educated people. All it would take to annihilate our system of public education, and to rebuild it in the right way, would be to add those rights to our Constitution. ¶ There is, after all, an obvious truth in Alvarado’s presumption that the “homeless children” will be students who “can’t do.” While they are sometimes children of the unfortunate, they are more often children of the improvident, parents who themselves can’t do,

and who have been, in their time, also denied all true education, and set to the meager practice of trivial trades. However innocent and injured, they are still people who have blighted the lives of their own children simply by giving them life. ¶ It is not a calamity to be born to poor parents, as countless examples can show. The calamity is to suffer parents, whether rich or poor, who are self-indulgent, intemperate, unreflective—parents who are, in the highest sense of the word, no matter how informed or skillful, not educated, ¶ When we say that the children of such parents, especially of those who happen to be poor, neither need nor can hope to acquire the powers of a true education, we assure a greater calamity, not only for them but for their children, and for the children of their children. We spoil all the future, for which our children are the only hope. ¶ When the Alvarado's of schooling would excuse the "homeless children" from humane studies, they doom them to remain, by design, what they first became by chance. Out of ignorance, no doubt, their parents made them "homeless." Out of curriculum, school will keep them that way.

(In future issues, we will give more attention to some of Bellamy's ideas.)

### **Amazing Blurb Contest!**

**...along with Other Notes from Central Control**

THIS issue marks the end of Volume Seven. We are astonished, but then we are just as astonished that any issue actually appears. This issue is late because we bought one of those computers that are meant to help people do things faster. It probably will, next month. But we can, for now, tell you that if there is anything wrong with your mailing label, we'd like to know. We'll fix it. All by ourselves.

IN August or maybe September, of 1984, Little, Brown, Inc., plans to publish if that sort of provocation is still permitted, an anthology of pieces from the first seven years of *The Underground Grammarian*. It is to be named "The Leaning Tower of Babble and Other Outrages." It will have a book-jacket, and blurbs, of course. But we have agreed with Little, Brown that the jacket

blurbs should all come from our subscribers and regular readers. Some of you have been with us a long, long time, and probably understand this enterprise better than we do. It is, after all, quite as much as we can do to keep it going, never mind understanding it. ¶ You are all warmly invited, therefore, to enter the amazing blurb contest. Just send us your blurbs, of whatever length seems good to you, and the sooner the better. Publishers take a long time to do things. It's probably their computers. ¶ Prizes for blurbs used on the jacket will be signed copies of the book and lifetime subscriptions. That means, of course, our lifetime, not yours.

Will the lady who wrote us about kicking furniture please report in?

We haven't room for a Christmas poem, and it's too late anyway, so we wish you all a happy new year.

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