We were one of several American unions that was proud to send observers to South Africa to help monitor the elections.

white, but that is the reality of the new South Africa, a society building a nonracial democracy. When we met earlier, he joked that he is in the middle of what we call affirmative action.

[Laughter]

But Duncan is no newcomer to the anti-apartheid struggle. He told us that, as a youngster, he had always been aware of the injustices of apartheid, but his real education came when he graduated from college and was forced to become a member of a whites-only teachers' organization in order to get a job. Shortly after that, Duncan joined the National Education Union of South Africa, a nonracial teachers' union. At that organization, Duncan was a colleague of Curtis Nkondo, who many of you will remember as a featured speaker at our AFT convention in Boston four years ago. It was at the urging of that organization that the teachers' unions in South Africa, formerly divided by race, merged to create the South African Democratic Teachers' Union.

During those early days of his teachers' union work, the NEUSA Organization was banned and Brother Hindle, along with other union leaders, was harassed by South African police. Today he lectures on sociology and education at the University of Natal and serves as SADTU national vice president for education. Incidentally, he is the only white member of the national executive committee.

Duncan is responsible for developing the union's positions on education policy for the new South Africa, and that is one of the reasons that the union decided to send its education vice president to our convention—so he could discuss education reform policy with AFT members and leaders.

Duncan, please come to the podium to meet your fellow unionists, the delegates to the American Federation of Teachers.

[Applause]

Denouncing Bigotry

Where We Stand / July 31, 1994

Every other year, AFT gives the Bayard Rustin Human Rights Award to a person who is distinguished in the struggle for human and civil rights. This year, we were privileged to make the award to Cynthia Tucker, the editorial page editor of *The Atlanta Constitution.* In her acceptance speech, which was both generous and tough, Tucker talked about the racial and ethnic tensions that are threatening to tear our country apart, and she called on all Americans to unite in denouncing bigotry, no matter what its source.

America has a long tradition of pluralism and religious freedom, Tucker said, but it has an equally long tradition of prejudice and intolerance: "As great as this nation is and as daring as its great democratic experiment has been, America is a place where bigotry and intolerance have always thrived....Racism and anti-Semitism are as American as Jim Crow and George Wallace and Father Coughlin." And no one group, Tucker said, has a monopoly on being bigoted—or on suffering because of the bigotry of others.

Tucker believes that the present moment is particularly bleak from the standpoint of racial and ethnic harmony. Even opinions about O.J. Simpson's guilt or innocence tend to break along racial lines. These divisions among groups in their opinions, concerns, and goals lead many people to question the value of pluralism: "We have deep insecurities about this great experiment and the acceptance of peoples from many different countries with many different beliefs and attitudes. We have begun to wonder whether diversity is not a disadvantage."

Tucker talked about how she had been born at a time of extraordinary hopefulness, soon after *Brown* vs. *Board of Education* had struck down segregated schooling. As a young person, she believed this represented the path of the future: "I was confident that I would grow up in an America where racism was constantly receding and opportunity constantly expanding for all people, regardless of race or color or religion or gender or sexual orientation....I believed that in my lifetime people would be judged by the 'content of their character' rather than the 'color of their skin,' as Dr. King had dared to dream."

But after the great advances of the 1950s and 1960s, the "racial fault lines began to reopen." Tucker cites the current situation on many college campuses as an example of how far we have turned away from King's dream:

> Perhaps the most telling sign of the unfortunate change in the racial climate of our nation is on college campuses, which had been such beacons of the promise

of a fully integrated society. These days the stories one hears from college campuses are mostly stories of tension and hostility, stories of the disrespect or contempt one ethnic group holds for another.

Perhaps most bewildering are the expressions of stark bigotry from some African-Americans. Given the racism, the contempt, the hatred, and the inhumanity to which black people have been subjected, it would seem that we would be most careful not to turn that same bigotry and hatred on other racial or ethnic groups. And yet, on college campuses, well-brought-up black kids, who ought to know better, are chanting to the anti-Semitic, homophobic, sexist rantings of a Khalid Muhammad.

Tucker suggests a number of reasons for the growth of hatred and bigotry—white backlash, economic and social upheaval—and she laments that the clergy, who, she says, ought to be helping us to free ourselves from this ugly frame of mind, are sometimes cheerleaders for it:

> Louis Farrakhan, after all, considers himself a religious leader, but he encourages anti-Semitism, homophobia, and sexism. Minister Farrakhan might not believe he has anything in common with Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, but, in fact, he has much in common with them. Robertson and Falwell also teach bigotry and intolerance. They also seek to divide us.

Tucker's solution is both very simple and very difficult. Instead of "bickering over who has been most mistreated, black or Jew or Native American or gay," Americans must unite and denounce the evil of bigotry wherever it appears: "David Duke must be denounced. Louis Farrakhan must be denounced. Jesse Helms must be denounced. Jerry Falwell must be denounced." But Tucker knows that, to some extent, these are "easy choices." And she calls on people to denounce the "everyday casual prejudice that keeps us separated from each other....[A]ll of us have the opportunity to stop a co-worker who says, 'Those Mexicans have too many babies.' All of us have a chance to gently upbraid a friend who says, 'Those blacks are so loud'....[or] stop a conversation where someone says, 'Those Jews are so pushy.' This is where prejudice begins...[and] this is our challenge."

My View Was Always Very Simple

Options in Education
National Public Radio / June 30, 1980

Ocean Hill-Brownsville was consistent with anything that I've ever done in the field of civil rights, and I started being active in this when I was in college. I was one of the very early members of CORE in the late 1940s. I engaged in interracial sit-ins at the University of Illinois. I picketed the Palisades swimming pool in New Jersey when that was racially restricted, and so forth. And my view was always very simple. I did not believe that anyone should be discriminated against because of color or religion or any other such condition. Anyone, black or white. And therefore, when the freedom marches came and freedom schools down south, I was there, and we were there with money and with manpower for Dr. King, and most of the staff people that we have in our union, both locally and nationally, had some background and history in the civil rights movement.

I felt in New York City—during the Ocean Hill-Brownsville dispute—that it was just as wrong for a group of black extremists to fire white teachers without due process as it was for white extremists to fire black teachers without due process. I always felt that and I still feel it. And you know, I find it very interesting that when one single college professor is fired from a post because of his Communist views, the whole intellectual and civil libertarian world feels that this could be the end of freedom in America, and that it's McCarthyism and it's going to scare everyone. But when 19 teachers are dismissed in one part of New York, these same liberals just don't give a damn because these aren't teachers who are fighting for some ideology. They're just fighting for the right to teach in their schools, not on the basis of race or ideology or anything else, but to do a good job teaching. It's all the same thing. It's all ugly to me. It's all extreme. And what I did was continuous with what I believed before, and I've continued to do the same thing, and I didn't see anything opportunistic about it. It's exactly what a union stands for.

The Guts To Say What Was Right

From Bayard Rustin: Troubles I've Seen
by Jervis Anderson, 1997

In the spring of 1993, Mark Goldberg, an educational administrator, asked Shanker whether he had a "special hero or role model." Shanker named Rustin. "The great thing about Rustin," he said, "was that he didn't put up his finger to see which way the wind was blowing. He had the guts to say what he felt was right, no matter how unpopular it was."

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July 4, 1988 / AFT Convention, San Francisco, California

Facing the Problem

Two Decades Ago: Al Sounding the Alarm

ABC News Issues and Answers / September 12, 1976

Mr. Shanker: I think that the curriculum over the last ten or fifteen years has gotten kind of soft. We had student protests in the 1960s and many schools capitulated and said, "All right, you don't have to take math any more, you can take 'Learning to Live and Play Well with Each Other.' You don't have to take English anymore. You can take a 'Sitting and Happily Listening to Records' course."

Mr. Clark: "We don't care how much you learn as long as you like it"—is that it?

Mr. Shanker: That is right. The notion that it had to be relevant to the student at that given moment rather than relevant after the student developed the basic skills—that is one part of it.

I think another part is the increasing violence in our schools. Teachers often have to be preoccupied with a single child in a classroom who is violent or who is sick and who takes up an inordinate amount of time and attention in that particular classroom. Until we find some kind of way of helping that child and freeing the teacher and the other children to go ahead, we are wasting a lot of money—because we are spending money for a school, a classroom, children, teachers, and books, and that teacher spends all the time on one child.

College Entrance Scores Decline

Where We Stand / March 14, 1976

For a number of years there has been a decline in college entrance scores. This drop has occurred on all of the tests widely used—the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), the American College Testing Program (ACT), and such widely used tests as the Minnesota Scholastic Aptitude Test and the Iowa Tests of Educational Development.

Accompanying the decline in scores has been a debate on whether the downward trend is due to some defect in the tests themselves or to a real diminution in student knowledge and skills. Some argue that today's students know as much as their predecessors and that something must be wrong with the tests. Others maintain that the tests indeed show lowered achievement and suggest reasons for it that run the gamut from the breakup of the traditional family to the role of television, teacher militancy, "open" education and the failure to emphasize the "basics."

Two recent studies provide some answers to the questions raised. One study, "Achievement Test Score Decline: Do We Need to Worry?" by Annegret Harnischfeger and David E. Wiley, was sponsored by CEMREL, a national educational laboratory.

Both concluded that the decline was real and not due to a change in the tests or some testing error. Each year's decline is not too significant, but the decline over the last decade is large, among both public and private school students. There is no doubt that students are entering college today with a much weaker background than freshmen had 10 years ago.

The studies do not find a sole "cause" for the drop. However, the CEMREL study does point to one major factor: the courses that high school students are now taking. The lowered test scores are due, in large measure, to the fact that fewer high school students are taking "traditional basic courses of the college-preparatory curricula." Some examples: There has been a drop in foreign language enrollment of more than 7 percent. The enrollment in general mathematics has gone down 15 percent, physics 30 percent. "These course enrollment declines parallel closely the test score decline patterns," the CEMREL researchers point out—high school English enrollment has dropped more than 10 percent and English test scores have declined by 11 percent.

The CEMREL study authors do not know what has replaced the traditional high school courses. They found no evidence that any particular "elective or specialty courses" have replaced English, mathematics, and foreign languages. Nor have practical courses in vocational education, home economics or business subjects pushed out the traditional academic curriculum. These courses have also dropped in enrollment by as much as

30 percent. Further research is under way to find out just what curriculum has been substituted.

While change in curriculum is given as a major reason for the decline in achievement, other reasons are cited.

• There is a much lower dropout rate. Many students who in the past would have left school are now taking college entrance exams.

• There is increased student absenteeism throughout the country. No matter what the curriculum, students who are not present will not benefit from it.

• A large decline in female scores is seen as a plus. Until recently only better prepared women ventured to go on to higher education. With the recent emphasis on sex equality, many more women have been taking the tests and entering college.

Many other possible reasons for the decline in scores are suggested: the increase in the number of working mothers from 26 percent in 1948 to 51 percent in 1974; the rise in the number of single-parent families from 10 percent to 17 percent between 1948 and 1974, the tripling of the number of out-of-wedlock births in those same years.

Certainly, the question is far from settled. The decline is real. There is cause for concern. Many of the reasons are not known. Many are beyond the schools' control. But curriculum is within their control. Should the schools place greater emphasis on English, mathematics and languages? CEMREL study authors Harnischfeger and Wiley ask: "Are academic courses with stress on future long-term intellectual and economic benefits, especially in a time of lowered educational payoffs, losing out to courses allowing more short-term satisfactions and immediate gratification?"

Another possible reason for the enrollment drop in traditional courses and lowered test scores—although neither study discusses it—has to do with decisions made by school systems themselves. New York City high schools, for example, used to award a variety of different diplomas to graduating students, depending on which program they had taken. In those years, colleges—and prospective employers—could tell which students had taken tougher programs, which had elected an easier course of study. Some years ago, however, the New York City Board of Education decided that it did not want to so "label" its high school graduates and began to award the same diploma to all students. It is entirely possible that some students who might otherwise have chosen a more difficult program—and succeeded in it—decided to pursue an easier course, knowing that their diplomas would be no different from everyone else's. The decline in test scores, the current research and the research sure to follow may well succeed in reversing this and other policy decisions.

Excellence *and* Equity

From remarks to NYSUT Representative Assembly
New York City / March 1982

The crucial thing that will determine whether this organization is really going to bring back education is not whether we bring back excellence. We will and we have to or the public will abandon us. But the fight that we have to maintain during this period of time is to say to Ronald Reagan, "You know, you were right, we should have tests; we should have standards and we should take care of discipline problems. But you know something else. We are not going to abandon the kids in wheelchairs and we are not going to abandon the non-English speaking and the poor. We are going to continue working for those who most need it, just as we always have, but we are going to do it without sacrificing the quality that we need in education. We are going to do both. We are not going to trade one off for the other."

A Nation At Risk

Convention Proceedings
Los Angeles, California / July 1983

This year saw a major happening in the world of education—the appearance of reports that have placed education at the top of the national agenda. For a long period of time we thought this could never happen again. After all, the birth rate went down. And the percent of the voting public who are parents dropped from 50 percent or 60 percent to somewhere around 20 percent. Public concern focused on senior citizens or Social Security, and education somehow moved to the background.

But today education is one of the top two issues, second only to the economic and unemployment question, on the national agenda. All national polls show that your next president of the United States and next Congress will be elected on the basis of educational issues.

And there have been not one but a series of reports: the National Commission on Excellence, the Twentieth Century Fund, the Educational Commission of the States, and some others about to come out on high schools. By the time the year is over we may very well have 15 or 20 national reports all saying much the same thing. They point in the same direction. They move the emphasis to excellence and to quality. They talk about things that we have been talking about for a long, long time. And they discuss a few things that we haven't been talking about, at least we haven't favored.

They talk about tests—testing teachers, testing stu-

dents. They talk about a tough curriculum instead of soft courses and electives that don't have very substantial content. They talk about doing something about discipline problems in school. They talk about major investments of money in education. They talk about policies involving promotion of students and the graduation of students from schools. They talk about changing the nature of rewards for teachers. They all talk about finding some method to deal with the problem of dismissing incompetent teachers.

Another thing to see about these reports is that they reject tuition tax credits and vouchers either implicitly or explicitly.

Many people think this is just one of those fads. Every once in a while the country gets interested in something and you hear people saying, "Well, the country cannot focus its attention for more than a week or a month, or two months or five months. This will all go away."

I don't believe that it will. There are, of course, political, social, economic, and religious fads. They do come and they do go. But a fad is generally based on something that is not rooted in a real problem. But what we face in education is certainly very real. Our problem is similar to the one we faced several years ago when all of a sudden we discovered that we had not been rebuilding our auto plants, our steel plants, and our prior industrial capacity. Reindustrialization was a problem. We had to reinvest, reindustrialize because otherwise we weren't going to compete with the rest of the world and our own standard of living would decline.

Then, after reindustrialization, we discovered something else. Not only did our private industry have to be rebuilt, but our public infrastructure was falling apart—roads, bridges, water and sewer systems; our railroad system, harbors, docks and so forth.

Again, in large concentration, these are things that don't go away. If you don't rebuild plants, just thinking about it doesn't make the problem go away. It gets worse and worse. If you don't rebuild the bridges, that problem doesn't go away.

Now, we have found that neglect in education and neglect of human resources is having and will have exactly the same disastrous effect as neglect did in the area of private industry and the area of public infrastructure. So this is not something that will go away.

I like the phrase "a nation at risk" because those words put education on the same par as national defense. A nation at risk means that a country can go down. It can fall apart. We can lose it. It can disappear. Those are strong words, and they are good words. This is a period of great danger, and it is a period of unprecedented opportunity. To realize that opportunity, two things must happen if we are to turn education around and make it work.

First, you need a program that focuses on quality. You can't just keep doing the same things that have proven unsuccessful.

Second, as we move in the months ahead, we must be sure that the public doesn't see teacher unions and collective bargaining as an obstacle to the improvement of education.

We must show a willingness to move far in the direction of these reports, cooperatively and eagerly, because we stand a great chance that these powerful report sponsors will say, yes, the nation is at risk, we were willing to spend a lot of money and we wanted to make a lot of changes, but, you know, it is hopeless because we came up against inflexible unions, school boards, and administrators. If these leaders of government and industry, after having invested time, effort and prestige on a program to rebuild American education, find their efforts frustrated, there is no question as to where the tilt of public policy will go. We will lose the support that we now have. There will be a massive move to try something else, and it will all be over.

The stakes are not just education, the stakes are certainly not just union. The stakes are the future of the country, and I know this union will rise to the challenge.

The American Federation of Teachers is in a very fortunate position. We don't have to sit here and rethink our position on whether our students should be tested. We don't have to rethink whether a teacher coming in who is going to be a math teacher should be able to pass a math test or a language teacher, a language test. We don't have to rethink whether we want a tough program geared toward doing something about disciplinary problems. On almost every program put on the agenda, the American Federation of Teachers was there 20 or 30 years ago working on the problem.

And so I am here to say that even on issues that we feel uncomfortable with, that we disagree with rather strongly, we have to ask ourselves: What are the consequences if we win the fight? What is the price? Is it worth it?

In a period of great turmoil and sweeping changes, those individuals and organizations that are mired in what seems to the public to be petty interests are going to be swept away in the larger movements. Those organizations and individuals who are willing and able to

participate, to compromise, and to talk will not be swept away. On the contrary, they will shape the directions of all the reforms and changes that are about to be made. That is what we in the AFT intend to do. We intend to be on board shaping the direction of every change in education. *[Applause]*

The stakes are not just education, the stakes are certainly not just union. The stakes are the future of the country, and I know this union will rise to the challenge. *[Applause]*

Getting in Bed with Business

Convention Proceedings
Washington, D.C. / August 1984

Question: You mentioned the term "emerging trend." One thing that I see is a move toward a relationship with corporations. Could you explain that to me? I am a little concerned about this new relationship.

President Shanker: All right. Did everybody hear the question?

[Cries of "no"]

President Shanker: The question was about a trend toward a relationship with large corporations. We have a speaker coming in Wednesday morning who is the chief executive officer of a large corporation and, could I explain this?

Sure, I did last year and I will do it briefly again. We found, in elementary and secondary education, that we had a declining political base through the 1970s. That's because the base was made up of the people in the general public who have an understanding of what education contributes to society. There are some of those, but not very many. Not every citizen understands that educating the kid next door is not just for the parents and the kid.

The major part of this political base is the direct consumer, the parents, but their interest lasts only as long as the children are in school and maybe for a year or two more. After that they start looking at their taxes.

As people live longer, the groups within our society that politics were sensitive to has changed. Schools had a tremendous amount of power during the height of the Baby Boom, the 1960s and 1970s. Every politician, Republican, Democrat—it didn't make any difference—had to run around proving that they were interested in education because that was an issue for the majority of voters. They don't have to do it anymore.

During the New York City fiscal crisis, I noticed that not many firemen or police or garbage collectors or hospital workers were laid off. And I started asking, "Is our union weaker than other unions? Do I fail to communicate to people the importance of education? Why do all other institutions get cut 3 percent, 4 percent, or 8 percent, and we get cut 22 percent? Why?"

I took a while to find out the answer. I found that the business community in New York doesn't want people to fear coming into the city to live or buy there. Business people told the city government, "If you cut the police and we get an increase in crime, we are moving out. If you let the garbage pile up here, it is the same thing." The hospitals—every business has had someone collapse nearby and they rush him to St. Luke's and it is like a neighborhood thing.

Then I saw the subways get an $11 billion bond issue. And do you know what? A bunch of top business people were taken for a ride.

[Laughter]

Dick Ravitch took them for a ride to Queens and stopped the trains. He said to them, "See the water seeping? Those are water mains; we patch them up every day. One day the whole boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens will go; a few thousand people will die.

"You should know that all your customers and workers—one-and-a-half million who use the system—will have to wait about 15 years until it is rebuilt because this is quite a system." And that got the attention of those business people.

I am a slow learner, but I came to understand what was going on. These are powerful people. They like not to pay taxes, but they are willing to pay taxes if they feel that they and their business need that public service. They need police, firemen, a sanitation system, and a transportation system.

Why is it that nobody in education ever went to them and pointed out that they need people who know how to read and write and think? Don't they have a stake in that too?

By the way, I have not found a single businessman who wants us to produce students with what we used to call a "vocational education" because they don't know what machines they will have by the time the student gets out of school. Business people want students with the same kind of skills that we want; they are very good at thinking about education.

I have been working with the leading business figures in the country over the years, and I have literally spent hundreds of hours with people who now are so interested in education and its future that when there is a threat of a budget cut, they pick up on it right away—this year the Chamber of Commerce and David Rockefeller, and Dick Monroe, the head of Time-Life, all went up to Albany to lobby for an increase in state aid to education and to oppose a tuition tax credit bill.

[Applause]

Maybe they will change their minds a few years from now and won't do that, but I will keep talking to them. The fact is we ought to bring into the coalition to sup-

port us anybody who will support us. I don't think we can afford not to.

Armed With the Evidence

Remarks to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing / November 1987

What are the signs of failure? Well, I won't go into all the various types of exam scores where you have to know the difference between a 334 score and a 509 score; those don't mean much to most people, except we know it's good when they go up and it's bad when they go down. But, fortunately, we do have some extremely valuable information that comes to us from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and I hope that soon legislation will pass that will give us similar indicators on a state-by-state basis and even on a local basis.

Let's take a look at a few of the key indicators, starting with literacy. The good news is that everybody can read an exit sign or a stop sign. Practically everybody can read a simple comic book or can open a box and follow very simple instructions or read a very simple newspaper. But when we get to the point where we ask 17½-year-old students—mind you, we're only testing those 17½-year-olds who are still in high school and are about to graduate, so we've already lost the 20 to 25 percent who have dropped out and whose performance is probably not as good as those who remain—only 37 percent of the students remaining can read any nationally syndicated columnist in a good newspaper and understand what that person is saying. And when you get to how many can read an airline timetable or bus schedule or train schedule, it's 4.9 percent of the kids who are still in high school at 17½ years of age —4.9 percent! You might say that's not important because all you have to do is pick up the phone and ask what time the plane leaves. But if you can't figure out a bus or train schedule, that means you can't open up a world almanac and understand the population trends; you can't understand a chart that has a heading and some words at the bottom or along the side; you can't look at things like that and make sense of them. It means you lack a very important skill.

Now let's move over to writing. The most difficult writing sample that was assigned to youngsters was to ask them to write a letter to a prospective employer—17½-year-old students. Those who scored the exams were not tough on the grammar and they weren't tough on the spelling; you could make a substantial number of mistakes and the letter could still be considered satisfactory. What they really were looking for was whether the student could figure out what the employer wanted—that he wanted somebody who would come to work on time and be reliable, somebody who could handle money—you know, two or three or four things. Could the student be persuasive? Could he muster some evidence in defense of the proposition that he ought to get the job? What percentage of youngsters still in school and about to graduate could do that? Well, 20 percent.

The percentage of youngsters who could do simple mathematical problems that require two steps is under 30 percent. No difficult numbers, just the idea that first you multiply and then you subtract or something like that.

It's the System That's Not Working

From State of the Union Address, AFT Convention San Francisco, California / July 1988

I think you all know that I am not attacking teachers. Teachers are the victims of a system in which they are forced to do things they don't want to do and that in many cases they know will not work because that's what they're told to do. And if they didn't do it that way, they would be in deep trouble.

I am not criticizing teachers; I am criticizing the way schools are organized. My criticism of public education is no more an attack on teachers than my criticism of the auto industry is an attack on auto workers for losing that race. The auto worker came and did what he was told to do. He didn't design the automobile. He didn't design the product. He wasn't responsible for quality control or for anything else. He was just told, "Here, sit there and do that or stand and do that." And he did it.

But ultimately, it's the auto worker who pays the price. And even though we are not the ones who are designing the schools, we're carrying out the orders; we're doing it as well as we possibly can. When all is said and done, if the public loses faith in the schools, we—teachers and others employed in the schools, and also students—will be the victims once again.

Second, I think you ought to know that I have no view in my mind, as Bill Bennett seems to, that somehow the schools have gotten worse, that once upon a time there was a golden age when everyone sat in school and read Shakespeare or James Madison and worked on probability theory and calculus, and, all of a sudden, along came teachers' unions and tenure and collective bargaining and a few other things, and all of a sudden kids' scores went down, and standards went down and they stopped learning.

That's nonsense. There was no golden age. In 1940

about 80 percent of the kids dropped out and only 20 percent stayed in school. We are doing better now than we ever did before. We are keeping more kids in school for much longer periods of time, and they are learning much more.

But that isn't good enough. Unfortunately, sometimes you can be doing much better than you ever did before, but you're still in trouble. For example, the automobiles that American manufacturers are making this year are a hell of a lot better than the automobiles that they used to make in 1950. I don't know of anybody who would trade this year's or last year's model for a 1950 model. But in 1950, everyone wanted an American car because there weren't any Japanese cars around. There wasn't any competition.

So it's not a question of whether we are better today. When kids dropped out in 1945, they dropped into a world where they could go out and make a lot of money in jobs that were there, good union jobs. But when they drop out today, they don't find that world. It's not that we have gotten worse. We're doing better, a heck of a lot better than we ever did before.

But again, that doesn't mean that it's good enough. It's not our fault that it's not good enough. It's not good enough because the world around us has changed, and the consequences of not getting an education are very different today from what they were at that time.

The bad results aren't there because of what we're doing or because we aren't trying hard or because we're not good enough. Sure everybody can improve. But the problems we have are not in what we are doing. It's not in our efforts or in our intentions or our expectations. The problem is in the way this whole school system is organized. It's the same as in the auto industry. It wasn't the auto worker who was laying down on the job; it was a stupid assembly line and a rotten design of an automobile and not the worker who wasn't working. [*Applause*]

Look at what's happening in the automobile industry. The Japanese have come over here and opened up some Japanese auto firms, run by Japanese managers. They have hired exactly the same UAW people—exactly the same workers in a number of plants, some of them right here in California—and they are turning out excellent automobiles. It wasn't the workers who weren't doing a good job. It was management that didn't know how to organize the system of production. *[Applause]*

The Polish Miracle

From speech to AFT QuEST Conference
Washington, D.C. / July 1989

Now it's time for us to take some risks again. And the stakes this time are much bigger. They are the future of public education in our country.

Last year, I visited Poland twice. Poland, you know, used to be the bread basket of Europe. Now, as the result of its command economy, it's very poor. When I came back the first time, I read a little item in *The Wall Street Journal*. At first, I thought it was a Polish joke, but it was a real interview with a Polish economist. And I quickly realized that it was also an American education joke. So please translate.

The reporter who is interviewing the economist about economic conditions in Poland asks, "Do you think it's really possible to lift the Polish economy from this terrible state of poverty to a state of prosperity?" And the Polish economist answers, "Yes, I think it is. As a matter of fact, there are two ways to do it. There's a natural way and there's a miraculous way." The reporter asks, "Well, all right, what's the natural way?" "The natural way," says the economist, "would be for a band of angels to descend from heaven and lift Poland into prosperity." "If that's the natural way," the reporter asks, "what's the miraculous way?" And the economist answers, "The miraculous way would be if the Poles did it themselves."

We have no band of angels to lift our schools into effectiveness. And it would indeed be a miracle if we did it ourselves. But a miracle is the only thing we can count on.

We Told the Truth When Things Were Bad

Convention Proceedings
Boston, Massachusetts / July 1990

I'm often criticized because I talk about what's wrong with the schools as I travel around the country talking to many of you and also to many business people and others. Often people come up to me, many members in our leadership—and I understand why they do it. They wonder, "Why should you, Al, be saying these things? If you go around saying how bad things are in the schools, don't you think that there's going to be a loss of confidence? Don't you think some teachers will think this is teacher bashing? If you talk about how poorly the schools are doing, doesn't that mean that the teachers are doing a bad job?"

Well, I look at it a little differently. First of all, I think if you get a reputation for telling the truth even if the news is bad, other people develop confidence in you. For example, some of you weren't around then or are too young to remember, but during World War II, for the first part of the war, Hitler was winning the whole thing and the news was all pretty bad.

The British Broadcasting Company every night

broadcast the news around the world, and they said things like, today the enemy killed 5,000 British soldiers; today they sank three of our ships; yesterday they sank two of our submarines. People thought that the British were crazy. Why are they broadcasting all over the world that their own ships are being sunk and their own submarines and their own soldiers were being killed?

Well, the BBC knew what it was doing because when we started winning the war and the British said, today we advanced 20 miles and we destroyed so many German airplanes, so many German tanks, people believed them. Because the BBC told the truth when they were losing, people believed them when they were winning.

And I think we need to adopt precisely the same philosophy. Would the public have more confidence in doctors if doctors went around saying, well, the AIDS crisis isn't really very serious, don't worry about it? Would we have more confidence in the police if they said, well, crime is really exaggerated, don't worry about it.?

We can get faith and confidence in us as teachers and as an organization if we are the first to bring people the news, whether it's good or bad. And the news has to be the truth. And if we tell them now that things are bad, then when we see that things really are improving, they'll know that it's just not public relations. They'll say, the AFT, Al Shanker, when things were bad—they told us that the kids couldn't read and they couldn't write and they couldn't do mathematics. And now, when they come and they say it's getting better and improving, we believe them because they told the truth when things were bad. And we need to see that. I know it's tough, but we need to explain that to our members.

When the History Books Are Written

From State of the Union Address, AFT Convention
San Francisco, California / July 1988

Many union members feel uncomfortable about getting into the area of trying to change the schools. They say that's not what a union was there to do. We're good at negotiating. We're good at political action. We're good at bargaining contracts. But we don't really know about this. We weren't elected union leaders, they say, because we knew how to do this.

But, of course, when we all started, we didn't know how to negotiate either, because there was no collective bargaining. We learned, with some help from the AFT and some training programs. But mostly we learned through trying it.

Twenty years ago, teachers felt the same way about being involved in politics. I remember standing in front of a delegate assembly as president of the New York local in 1968, just weeks before the election between Hubert Humphrey and Richard Nixon. I suggested that the union endorse Hubert Humphrey. I was booed down. I was popular with the troops, but on that issue I was booed and voted down.

It wasn't that our teachers were for Richard Nixon or against Hubert Humphrey. In those days, they thought it was wrong for a union to be involved in politics. They said, "If you get involved in politics, you're going to get away from the main thing, which is collective bargaining and the negotiation of contracts.

"Al, you're going to get too friendly with these politicians. And before you know it, you'll start wondering whether you want to be nice to the guy you helped elect or whether you want to punch him in the nose to get a good contract."

Those delegates and teachers certainly had a point; there's no question about it. But a year later, New York City teachers found out that their whole contract and job security and everything else depended on the governor and the state legislature.

None of us any longer has to make an argument for being involved in politics. We know that that is money. It's Proposition 13. It's tuition tax credits. It's privatization. We know now that politics is as essential to our being as any contract we ever negotiated or any grievance we ever handled.

I submit to you that the improvement of our schools is just as essential. It will not make much difference if the UAW negotiates great contracts and handles terrific grievances if we produce automobiles that can't compete with the Japanese. There won't be an auto industry or an auto union or grievances or anything else there.

And there won't be an AFT or a public education system in this country unless we do it. No one else can do it.

I hope that as a result of this convention and the support that we offer to you after the convention, we in the American Federation of Teachers go on to make more history. We've already made history. We brought collective bargaining to America's teachers. But when the history books are written 10 or 20 years from now, I would like to see a chapter that would show the kind of danger that public education was in and that the people who were there in the classrooms with the kids—the only group of people who know and can figure out over a period of time what's wrong—turned schools around.

Solving the Problem: Focus on Rigorous Standards and Incentives

Good Schools Put Pressure on Students

Where We Stand / April 26, 1981

Some people seem to be accident prone. Others always seem to be misunderstood. Sociologist James Coleman easily fits the misunderstood category. Each of his reports, starting with 1966, made big headlines, often on page one. According to the newspapers and most researchers who read the 1966 Coleman Report, Coleman said that how well children do in school does not depend on class size, how much is spent on books and supplies, or what salaries teachers earn. Students do well if they come from families that are of higher socioeconomic status. They do poorly if they come from poor homes. And black children do better in integrated schools than in segregated ones.

Just as the liberals in the Great Society era were about to put more and more money into education, Coleman was interpreted as saying: "Stop wasting money on schools. Spending more won't do any good. If you want to be effective, try busing." But it seems that over all these years, that's not what Coleman really meant—according to Coleman in a letter to *The New York Times* printed last Sunday.

Now we have another Coleman Report—and another set of headlines. Again, the report is being misinterpreted (could it be the way Coleman writes?). Let's make sure that this time we don't lose the real message. What *does* Coleman really say?

Coleman says: The interpretation of the 1966 report was wrong. Schools do make a difference. In "good" schools students will learn more, in "bad" schools they'll learn less. This is true no matter what kind of homes students come from.

Coleman does *not* say—and this is where he is misinterpreted—that private schools are good and public schools are bad. He finds good and bad private schools as well as public schools. Coleman shows that it is not whether a school is public, Catholic or independent that makes it effective—but what goes on in the school. High-achieving schools have certain standards. What are they?

• High-achieving schools are disciplined and orderly. Action is taken against vandalism and drug abuse. Students know that some things won't be tolerated. There are fewer instances when students talk back to teachers, when they don't obey, when they get into fights with other students or engage in threats against teachers.

• The more time spent in learning, the more learning will take place. Achieving schools press for good attendance. They take action when students cut classes. Each day and each period missed is time lost from learning. But there's more. The time spent learning in school is just not enough to get most students to read and write well or develop their language and math skills. Achieving schools give homework, so that student time spent in learning is increased by 10 percent, 20 percent, 50 percent or more. There was wide variation in what schools did. Some gave almost no homework, while others gave more than 10 hours a week.

• High-achieving schools put pressure on students. Let's face it, not all learning is fun. There's plenty of hard work, drudgery, some of it involving pure memorization or the development of habits and routines, some of it plain boring. Students resist doing unpleasant things—as we all do—unless it's more unpleasant *not* to do them. Some educators have the philosophy that we shouldn't put pressure on students—we should just wait until they want to do it. Or, they say, you can't really force a student to learn something. Or, it doesn't really make any difference if a student doesn't learn to read (after all, this is an age of television) or learn good handwriting (he can use a typewriter). This failure of nerve on the part of adults leads to poor learning and, worse, poor character development.

Part of the pressure comes in the form of tests and grades. Grades are not just given out because the student has been nice enough to come to school—or even as a reward for good behavior. Grades are for achievement—test results count. And, if students are learning, we can assume that teachers were not selected merely because some college awarded a degree. Some test was applied in the selection of teachers to make sure that they were competent in the subjects to be taught.

• Achieving schools emphasize a tough, quality cur-

riculum. Students have fewer chances to substitute easy courses for hard ones. More students take geometry, trigonometry, calculus, chemistry, physics, foreign language. Shakespeare and Dickens are not replaced by courses in "modern media," nor is physics replaced by photography.

While there are good and bad among both private and public schools, historian Diane Ravitch concludes from Coleman's new report that "public schools have lowered their requirements, decreased their expectations, made basic courses optional, and learned to tolerate intolerable behavior."

Of course, private schools are selective—*they* choose their students. And *parents* who have chosen to pay tuition will, on the average, put more pressure on their children. Public schools are burdened with the most difficult cases, including many who are rejected or expelled by private schools.

But it's time to stop making excuses. School boards, administrators, teachers, parents should use these results of the Coleman Report as a basis for improving the quality of public education. The American people still support public schools and oppose aid to nonpublic education. But public school support is slipping. If schools don't offer both a safe and orderly environment and a quality program, the public will surely go elsewhere.

How Business Can Motivate Students

Where We Stand / March 5, 1989

"What can we in business do to help turn the schools around?" That's the question I'm asked most often as I meet with individual businessmen or address groups of corporate leaders. Most of them are deeply concerned about the low achievement levels of American students. They know that "adopt a school" and similar programs do some good but not enough to take us from large-scale failure to success.

One answer to the question appears in the January-February 1989 issue of *Educational Researcher* in an article entitled "Why the Apathy in American High Schools?" by John H. Bishop of the Center for Advanced Human Resource Studies, New York State School of Industrial Labor Relations, Cornell University.

No matter how good the teaching, students will not learn unless they work at it, unless they're engaged. Learning does not result from passively sitting in the presence of a teacher who's talking. The student must listen, write, question, discuss, imagine, experiment, construct. Yet almost all who have recently looked at large numbers of high schools across the country describe students as docile, bored, passive, lacking interest. While some policy makers have been pushing for a longer school day and year, recent studies estimate that almost half the time now available for learning is lost because of absence, lateness, and students not paying attention. Bishop cites reports showing that, "When homework is added to engaged time at school, the total time devoted to study, instruction and practice is only 18 to 22 hours per week...[whereas] the typical senior spent 10 hours per week in a part-time job and about 24 hours per week watching television."

Students, Bishop says, aren't the only problem. Their parents are, too. Even though American students were learning the least in school, American parents were the most satisfied with the performance of their local schools when compared with parents in Japan and Taiwan.

"The fundamental cause of the problem is our uncritical acceptance of institutional arrangements that do not adequately recognize and reinforce student effort and achievement," asserts Bishop. He analyzed the lack of incentives to do well in school for both college-bound and noncollege-bound students. In this column, I'll deal only with the noncollege bound.

According to Bishop, students know that "there are benefits to staying in school...[but] *most students realize few benefits from working hard while in school*...[because] the labor market fails to reward effort and achievement in high school." High school students first learn this when they get part-time jobs while still in school. Neither their grades nor their test scores have any effect on their ability to get a job or on what they are paid. The same is true after graduation. Students who earn excellent grades and take tough subjects have no better chance of getting a job—and get paid no more—than those who take easy subjects and barely graduate. The business world seems to be telling students that a diploma is a diploma is a diploma and all diplomas are equal.

After four or five years, students who do well in high school earn a little more, but "most teenagers are shortsighted, so benefits possible 10 years in the future may have little influence on their decisions."

The fact that high school performance is ignored is surprising. Bishop cites research conducted over the last 80 years and involving hundreds of thousands of workers that shows that "scores on tests measuring competence in reading, mathematics, science, and problem solving are strongly related to productivity on the job."

So why don't employers compete for the better graduates and pay them higher wages? Bishop cites a number of reasons. The use of tests by employers dropped dramatically after the issuance of EEOC guidelines in 1971. A 1987 sample of small- and medium-sized

No matter how good the teaching, students will not learn unless they work at it.

businesses showed the "aptitude test scores had been obtained in only 3.15 percent of the hiring decisions studied."

Businesses also have trouble getting information from high schools. The same survey showed that only 13.7 percent of the hiring selections were made after looking at high school transcripts. Many high schools are geared to supply transcripts to colleges but not to prospective employers. One company "sent over 1,200 signed requests to high schools in 1982 and received only 93 responses." And, "when high schools do respond, it takes a great deal of time," usually more than two weeks, preventing the employer from hiring within the usual time frame.

So, while employers know that how well a student did in high school is important, most failed to act on this basis because of "the low reliability of self-reported data, the difficulties of verifying it and the fear of EEOC challenges to such questions." Also, very few hirings were based on teacher recommendations. So "despite their higher productivity...students who work hard must wait many years to reap rewards, and even then the magnitude of the wage-and-earnings effect is hardly much of an incentive."

Bishop says that this "tendency not to reward effort and learning in high school appears to be a peculiarly American phenomenon. Marks in school are the major determinant of who gets the most preferred apprenticeships in Germany. In Canada, Australia, Japan, and Europe, the educational systems administer achievement exams that are closely tied to the curriculum.... Job applications, at all levels, require information about exam grades. Good grades on the toughest exams, those in physics, chemistry and advanced mathematics, carry particular weight with employers and universities. Parents in these countries know that a child's future depends critically on how much is learned in secondary school.

"...The key to motivation," says Bishop, "is recognizing and rewarding learning, effort and achievement. Employers should start demanding high school transcripts and give academic achievement (particularly achievement in math and science) much greater weight when hiring. Business and industry should communicate this policy to schools, parents and students. High school graduates should not be relegated to sales clerk jobs simply because of their age. Like their peers in Europe, Canada, and Japan, they should be allowed to compete for really attractive jobs on the basis of the knowledge and skills they have gained in high school."

So when American businessmen ask me what they can do to help turn American education around, I will tell them that one important part of the answer is this: Provide clear and early rewards for those students who work hard and learn the most.

Advanced Competency

Where We Stand / November 4, 1990

We all know that reforming our schools is going to be a difficult and complicated job. Making major changes in a complicated system always is. But Barbara Lerner believes there are some simple and effective steps we can take to raise student achievement. She gives us this piece of promising news in a paper called "Rethinking Education's Cinderella Reform."

Lerner, who is a lawyer and psychologist, is no Pollyanna. She acknowledges that student achievement in the U.S. is just as dismal as everyone says. Maybe worse. She points out that during the past decade the big achievement gap between U.S. students and students in other industrialized nations got even bigger. But Lerner believes we can begin to close this gap by the end of the century.

How? By learning and applying the lessons of the minimum competency movement—a reform that Lerner acknowledges is generally discounted but that she calls the only successful education reform of the last 30 years.

The minimum competency movement, a reform instituted by 20 or so states during the late 70s and early 80s, required that students be able to read simple material and perform simple calculations before they could get high school diplomas. On the one hand, this reform was assailed by educators who believed that it demanded too little and that the minimums would become the ceiling of student achievement. And it was denounced on the other hand by people who believed it demanded too much. This was just one more burden, they said, for poor, minority children. It would deny them diplomas and thus a chance for further education and decent jobs. It would destroy their self-esteem; it smacked of racism.

In fact, Lerner says, the minimum competency reform achieved exactly what was intended. In 1975, a National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test of functional literacy found that 57 percent of 17-year-olds still in school were illiterate or semi-literate. By the late 80s—after nearly 15 years of minimum

competency standards for high school graduation—virtually all of our in-school 17-year-olds were literate and numerate. That is, were able to read simple, everyday materials and perform simple calculations.

The achievements of minority students were especially striking. Take the case of Florida, where the minimum competency law was challenged in court. On the first few tries, 80 to 90 percent of the state's high-school minority students failed the test. But they didn't drop out, as some people had predicted. And by the fifth try, over 90 percent passed. Or consider NAEP, says Lerner. In 1975, 80 percent of the 17-year-old African-American students who were still in school were illiterate or semi-literate; now, nearly all are literate *and* numerate. Furthermore, unlike their white colleagues, they have improved their average scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test. So the minimum competency movement didn't place a ceiling on student achievement; it helped raise it.

Why did this reform work? Lerner says it was in part because its aims were modest. But more important, she believes, were four characteristics of the minimum competency movement that were absent in the more ambitious "excellence" movement of the '80s.

The minimum competency movement had a single, clear standard—Can you read and do arithmetic at this level? Second, success at meeting this standard was measurable with a single test. Third, there were important incentives involved: Kids didn't get their high school diplomas until they passed the test; they knew what they were supposed to do, and they knew what was at stake. Finally, teachers were treated like professionals. The standards were prescribed, but teachers were free to decide how to get their students to achieve them.

Lerner suggests that we apply these lessons to a more ambitious program to raise student achievement. She would retain current minimum competency standards but make them a standard for entering instead of graduating from high school. This standard, she says, would give students the foundation to achieve a lot more in high school than most do now. And she'd introduce new, advanced standards for students graduating from high school, entering college, and graduating from college. The issue is not can our students achieve at higher levels—it's figuring out how schools can stimulate them to do so. And Lerner believes that a system of advanced competencies with clearly articulated goals and incentives could do this.

Lerner presents some pretty strong evidence for her conclusions about the minimum competency reform but there are still unanswered questions. How does student achievement in states where there is no minimum competency requirement compare with states with the requirement? What influence might Head Start programs or Chapter 1 have had on the dramatic increase in functional literacy and numeracy? These and other questions ought to be taken up because Lerner has a serious proposal that merits serious attention.

Student Accountability

Where We Stand / March 22, 1992

When we talk about the poor performance of our students, there are always plenty of explanations. Public schools are rigid and bureaucratic; the curriculum is impoverished; students have no incentive to work hard; teachers have so many other responsibilities that they hardly have the time or energy to do their real job—in other words, it's everybody's fault but the students'. People seldom talk about the attitudes and habits of mind kids bring to school. What responsibility do students—and their parents—have for school performance? Usually I avoid asking this question; it sounds too much like passing the buck. But recently, a couple of things have brought it forcibly home to me.

A few weeks ago, Harold Stevenson, co-author of *The Learning Gap* (Summit Books, 1992), a book comparing education in Asia and the U.S. that I've already discussed in this column, talked to the AFT Executive Council. We asked him about the reasons for the differences in achievement between our kids and the Asian students he had studied, and he talked about the structure of the school day and the way teachers conduct lessons. But he also had a lot to say about the attitudes of students and their parents toward school and learning.

Stevenson studied schoolchildren in Minneapolis; metropolitan Chicago; Sendai, Japan; Taipei, Taiwan; and Beijing for more than 10 years. Asian students performed far better than American students on all tests Stevenson and his colleagues administered. Nevertheless, the American parents who were interviewed expressed much greater satisfaction with the quality of the education their children were getting than their Asian counterparts. Eighty percent of American mothers thought their children's schools were good or excellent in comparison, for instance, with 40 percent of Taiwanese mothers. And our kids were more satisfied with themselves and their performance than the Asian kids with theirs.

What can we make out of this? For one thing, Asian parents and children have higher—or different—standards from ours. Some of Stevenson's other findings bear this out. Whereas Asian mothers say that the most important thing for their school-age children is to study hard and do well in school, American mothers say that school achievement is just one among a number of things: Kids should also be popular, good in sports, and have other skills. Of course, the youngsters

reflect this attitude. When kids in Beijing and metropolitan Chicago were asked what was most important to them, nearly 70 percent of the Chinese kids said *education.* Only 10 percent of our kids mentioned education; they valued *money* and *things.*

Stevenson and his colleagues also found that Americans didn't have much faith in the efficacy of working hard in school. When Asian mothers were asked when they could predict their children's performance on college entrance exams, they replied, by 11th or 12th grade. American mothers responded, at the end of elementary school. In other words, Americans believed that ability, not work, was what counted. When Asian students were asked the most important factor in math performance, 70 percent of the Japanese and 60 percent of the Taiwanese said studying hard. Only a little over 20 percent of American students mentioned work; and 55 percent attributed success to having a good teacher.

Some of the same points are made by Nathan Caplan, Marcella Choy, and John Whitmore in "Indochinese Refugee Families and Academic Achievement" (*Scientific American,* February 1992). The children whom Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore studied were from poor Vietnamese and Laotian families who came to this country in the 1980s. They had "lost months, even years, of formal schooling while living in relocation camps....[and] they suffered disruption and trauma as they escaped from Southeast Asia." The students arrived with little or no English and went to schools in poor, inner-city areas. Nevertheless, 27 percent had an A average and over 50 percent a B average, and their grades in math were even higher. This was not because of lax standards: Half of them scored in the top 25 percent of standardized math tests.

Are Asian kids just smarter than American kids? Of course not. Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore find, like Stevenson, that these kids and their parents believe effort to be more important than ability—and the kids make the effort. After supper, "the table is cleared, and homework begins." Older children help the younger ones and "seem to learn as much from teaching as from being taught." The arrangement makes learning a part of family life, so youngsters are comfortable with it. This comfort carries over to school and makes the kids more likely to perform well.

The article discusses other factors that contribute to the success of these children. But both it and Stevenson suggest that we are neglecting something important in our efforts to reform American education.

We talk a lot about accountability for teachers and administrators and school boards. But what about the students? Are they learning at home that education is worth having—and worth working hard to get? Are they learning that achievement is mostly a result of the work *they* put in? Or are they being told that they are not really responsible for their success or failure?

In all other industrialized countries, where students achieve at much higher levels than our kids, students are held accountable for their learning. We can fiddle all we like with ways of making the adults in our schools accountable, but we will not raise student achievement levels to where they need to be unless parents and students take the job of learning seriously and kids come to school ready to be accountable, too.

Making Standards Count

"The Case for Student Incentives"
Remarks at The Brookings Institution
Washington, D.C. / May 1994

At the celebration for the passage of the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, there were signs at the White House calling for "World-Class Standards." This was always the hope behind Goals 2000—that we would set and try to help students meet world-class academic standards. How do we now make sure that this goal does not become just an empty slogan?

Goals 2000 calls for every state to come up with its own "world-class" standards. But I can tell you what could easily happen: Each one could come up with standards that are one slight peg above what they are doing now, and each one could call this new level a "world-class" standard.

We hope, with our recently launched series of booklets—titled the *Defining World-Class Standards* series—to point out that when you talk about world-class standards, *there is a world out there.* It is possible and not too difficult for us to find out what these world-class standards are.

The first book in the series, *What College-Bound Students Abroad Are Expected To Know about Biology,* includes exams taken by college-bound students in England and Wales, France, Germany, and Japan. It was jointly produced by the American Federation of Teachers and the National Center for Improving Science Education.

When you look at these exams, you will see that most of our college graduates couldn't pass them—let alone our high school graduates. These exams require a great deal of factual knowledge. But they also demand thought and analysis. Except for the Japanese exam, none of these tests includes multiple-choice questions. And every high school student in England, Wales, France, Japan, and Germany who wants to go to college must take them or comparably difficult ones—and they must pass them. These exams are very, very tough. And if we adopt world-class standards—if we mean it when we say we want our students to achieve at world-

class levels—we will end up with examinations to measure the achievement of those standards that look something like these.

At the back of the Biology booklet, there are several revealing graphs: One of them shows, for example, the percentage of students in each of these countries that takes one or more exams of this difficulty. In England and Wales, 31 percent take it; in France, 43 percent; in Germany, 37 percent; and in Japan, well over 40 percent. In the U.S., 7 percent take the comparably difficult Advanced Placement exam. What about the pass rate? It's 25 percent of the age cohort in England and Wales, 32 percent in France, 36 percent in Germany, 36 percent in Japan, and 4 percent in the U.S.

Now, if I were to ask you which of these five nations is elitist, what would be your answer? Which system would you say provides a top-rate education to a sliver of its population? And which to a substantial portion? In which country is there more likelihood that a broad range of students receive a top-notch education? And in which is it likely that just a few—probably the children of the nation's elite—will get such an education? Despite common myths to the contrary, the kids in our country who get a top-rate education are a small group who have a lot going for them. They are the ones who are making it, not the rest. In this group of countries, we are the elitists.

There's another chart in this booklet. It shows how many exams of this difficulty students must take in order to get into college. In Britain, it takes an average of three exams; in France, seven to eight; in Germany, four; in Japan, three to four; in the United States, zero.

Now what do you think would happen in Japan or Germany or Britain or France if they announced next year that youngsters could get into college without passing any of these examinations? Would that have any effect on the number of students who would take them and prepare for them and study for them? Would it have any effect on how much homework they would do leading up to these examinations? On whether they would turn their television sets off? Any effect on whether teachers would take their time in class seriously or spend more of it on other things that don't relate to the exams? Any effect on whether parents and principals would tolerate chronic student discipline problems? You bet it would.

Without stakes for students, the education reforms that are proposed in Goals 2000 will not work. Without stakes, nobody has to take education seriously. Nobody has to be geared up to doing anything. When I taught, whenever I gave an examination or a quiz or told kids to bring in an essay, the whole class shouted out, "Does it count? Does it count?"

We have an educational system in this country in which nothing counts. As long as it doesn't count, the kids are very smart: They will do the least that they need to do in order to get what does count. And what does count is a piece of paper—the diploma. Grades don't count, except for the small proportion of students who want to go to an elite college or university; these kids work hard, but they are a very small group.

All of the standards, all of the other measures called for in Goals 2000—curriculum development, assessment, professional development, parental involvement—will not mean a thing unless we attach stakes to students' achievement of the standards, as represented by passing assessments similar to the ones in the biology booklet.

Right now the issue of stakes is not part of the public debate. But the absence of stakes threatens to make the effect of the Goals 2000 reforms—and all our efforts on their behalf—trivial. Without genuine world-class standards and stakes, we will continue to have an elitist education system—in contrast to the more democratic systems that are emerging abroad.

This is the one and only country that ever developed the philosophy called pragmatism. Europeans and Asians don't really understand it. John Dewey and William James and Charles Sanders Pierce were never popular anywhere else. And yet, when it comes to trying to change our schools, we are the most unpragmatic and I would say the most unintelligent. We should look at how other democratic, industrialized countries organize their more successful school systems.

Many of these countries have become demographically diverse in recent years. Like our schools, theirs are accommodating growing numbers of new immigrants. These countries are not identical to us—or to each other; but neither are they so dissimilar. If these societies can produce school systems in which 25 to 36 percent of the youngsters can pass exams of this caliber, there is no good reason why we can't.

Moreover, while producing large numbers of well-educated college-bound students, these school systems also tend to do better by their noncollege-bound students than we do. In each of the foreign countries represented in this book, all children receive essentially the same quality curriculum in common schools until at least fifth grade (in the case of Germany); and, more commonly, until age 15 or 16. Young children in these countries are not siphoned off into tracked reading groups called the "redbirds" and "bluebirds" at age 6 or 7—as is common here. And, in these countries, non-college-bound students generally have access to high-quality work preparation, along with an academic program that is substantially more rigorous than we typically offer to our work-bound youth. These countries show that tracking, provided it doesn't happen too early or too permanently, doesn't have to be evil. It isn't tracking that's evil; it's what you do with kids once they are on track. Tracking can be evil, or it can be good.

Now, how would each of us behave if after being very successful in a particular business for a number of

When I taught, whenever I gave an examination or a quiz or told kids to bring in an essay, the whole class shouted out, "Does it count? Does it count?"

years, suddenly our sales dropped and our competitors shot far ahead of us. I think the first thing each of us would do is look at what our competitors were doing. We would think about how we could copy them or leapfrog over them. We wouldn't copy everything, but we would try to learn as much as possible from them.

The reaction of all of us to these exams and to the large number of students taking them should be to look at these other systems. What are these educational systems doing that we should be doing? This kind of benchmarking is exactly what industry does. Companies hire people from their competitors; they investigate what their competitors do. If you look at these systems, you'll see that they all do a number of things we don't. I want to concentrate on two of their practices.

First, they have a common curriculum. You don't prepare a student to pass an exam at this high level without using every minute in school and out of school to prepare. This is serious stuff. If you have fifty different educational systems—as we do in each of our states—and if each of these systems is so different that, as your kids move from one to another, the teachers can never be sure of what students studied before, the teachers will do exactly what ours are doing now—which is to spend about 30 percent of the time going over everything the student should have learned before entering the class because they are not sure what the students have already learned. So we start with about a 30 percent waste of time.

Our citizens are terrifically mobile—and that's not likely to change. We have to come to grips with this. We don't have to have one single curriculum; we could have three. Different teachers could teach different curricula (children and parents could pick from among them, but each would be available everywhere). And the curriculum will have to be fairly descriptive—which is also rare now. As one example: When I was teaching in New York City, I got big fat books of thirty or fifty or sixty different topics and was told to teach whichever topics the kids liked or I liked, or if I didn't like any of them, I was to make up my own list. That was the curriculum. That won't do. Education involves building blocks, continuity, and articulation.

We have to deal with this issue or we will never provide our students with the education they deserve.

Second, if you want people to do certain things, you have to provide incentives. If you want students to buckle down and study and really work at school, you have to connect that work to the things youngsters want.

The last great experiment with a system that dismissed incentives—and instead relied on people's goodness—recently went down in flames across a good part of the world. I once hoped for such a world—one that didn't rely on crass incentives. I would prefer a world where you didn't have to force people to do things—where they would pick up a book by Shakespeare and say, "Gee, I'd love to read this." But unfortunately, the vast majority of young people won't do this—unless they have to. Once they've had to read difficult but rewarding material, many of them will do it again, on their own for the joy of it. But if we don't require them to wrestle through it the first time, most will never discover the joy that's there.

What are we really saying to our youngsters when we offer no incentives? It is the equivalent of saying to people: "From now on you don't have to come to work. This has been a very oppressive system—we realize that many of you have done this work and resented it. From now on you'll be paid and get your health insurance and pension whether or not you come to work." What would be the result? A few people who love their jobs—and there are such people and such jobs—would continue to come. (And there would be a handful of compulsives; they would either continue to come to work, or they would seek psychiatric help.) The rest of the system would descend into chaos. This is what we have visited on our youngsters. They can get their pay, their pension, and their health plan, but they don't have to work. They don't have to learn; they barely have to show up; they don't have to do anything.

In such a system, how much they learn becomes a function of how much the teacher is forcing them to learn. The onus is on the teacher. As a teacher, if I assign students homework, if I give difficult tests or assign papers, their response is, "Mr. Shanker, you're mean! You give us so much work. My sister—down the hall in Miss So-and-So's class—she doesn't have to do any work at all."

When there are no stakes, the teacher has to negoti-

Our kids must have incentives. None of these proposed reforms is going to work in any large way unless there are stakes.

ate with the students because the students know that no one in the outside world requires them to have learned anything serious. It's the kids versus the teacher, and it's a negotiation. This whole story has been told well in *The Shopping Mall High School.* It's all there; it's very clear.

This unhealthy situation does not exist in Japan, Britain, France, or Germany. In each of these countries, the teachers are all assigning similar work because all the students are heading for similar assessments. And when the kids say, "You're mean," the answer is, "Look, I'm just giving you the same work that all the other teachers in the state and country are giving....And I know you can do it. All the fifth-grade kids did it last year and the year before and the year before that."

The teacher in these countries is seen as the coach. It's like the Olympics. There's an external standard that students need to meet, and the teacher is there to help the student make it. The existence of an external standard entirely changes the relationship of teachers and youngsters, and it changes the relationship of children and parents.

When parents today tell their kids to work hard, the kids say, "Why? I don't care if I go to Harvard, and most of the other colleges will take me even without top grades. Some will take me no matter how poor my grades are. What's bugging you? The school doesn't care. Why should I work hard when I don't need to?"

When colleges dropped entry standards—and when a high school diploma became little more than an attendance certificate—our children lost the benefit of an external standard. And when we lost the external standard, we took away parental authority and we took away teachers' authority. Now all of us have to plead and beg. With a system of stakes, teachers and parents would regain that authority.

What do students want? One thing they want is to go to college. So we need to make going to college dependent on high achievement in high school. Is there any doubt that if one-third of French and Japanese and German students can pass an exam similar to the Advanced Placement that at least one-third of American students have the potential to do so as well? And is there any doubt that it would be worthwhile to have them do so? Would it make a difference to those youngsters and to the nation? Would it make a difference to higher education? There is no question that it would.

Of course, we will need to phase in the higher entry standard. If we established a world-class entry level tomorrow, we would have to shut down nearly all of our institutions of higher education and turn them all into junior high schools and high schools.

And what about the youngsters who are unable to pass such an exam and who thus would be excluded from going to college? This is very tough. Going to college in America is now regarded as an entitlement. Any effort to say that one needs any knowledge or skills to get into college will be viewed as a way of cutting off access and opportunity. But the truth is a huge number of our students who enter college don't graduate. They drop out because they're not prepared to do college work. In countries where college students have to pass rigorous exams, you don't have a 50 percent college dropout rate, as we do. In Germany, for example, 83 percent of those who enter college graduate. More of our kids enter college—but many don't survive it. We're not doing our kids any favor by pretending that they are prepared for college.

What about youngsters who are not headed for college? What incentive could prod them to work hard and do well in school? In many other countries, these students can study for special certificates that will entitle them to some sort of further technical training or facilitate their getting a good job. Or their school grades will count when they leave school and apply for jobs and for special job training. The connections between school achievement—and school effort—and what the students want are very direct and very well known.

Consider the effect such connections could have here. Suppose Roy Rogers and McDonald's and every one of these outfits that hire high school students said that from now on they're going to hire kids on the basis of some sort of standards; they are going to hire the best students first. There would be two immediate problems: First, they couldn't tell which students genuinely achieved more and worked harder because every teacher marks differently. Unless you have some sort of national currency—a national standard—a grade has little meaning outside the walls of an individual teacher's classroom. Second, high schools are not accustomed to getting the transcripts out quickly. It would take about six months for the school to send out the transcripts, and the employers would need it to take a few days.

But suppose we solved these problems. Suppose every high school student knew that getting a job depended on being a good student. Would that have an effect on students' working hard in school? I don't think there's any question about it. But employers don't do it.

Why don't they do it? One reason may be that they worry about civil rights laws that can prohibit employers from using hiring criteria that are not directly related to the job someone is being hired for. It's pretty hard to argue that high grades in school are necessary for a job at McDonald's where the employee simply punches a cash register with pictures of Big Macs. So the employer who tries to reward hard-working students might find himself liable for civil rights violations. None of these other countries has to grapple with anything like this.

But there's also a more intangible reason at work. In other countries, employers deliberately seek high-achieving students because they feel that's part of their social responsibility. It's how they help make the school system work.

In the U.S., kids know that whether they do well or don't do well, no good company hires anybody who is just 18 or 19 years of age. If you ask these companies they say, "Why should we? These are young kids and they're irresponsible. Let somebody else hire them, and when they're 24 or 25 we'll see how they're doing." So the kids who work hard in school and really do well graduate and end up getting the same poor jobs as the kids who weren't doing any school work at all! And then guess which kid looks at which kid and says, "You're a sucker."

Stakes are essential. Our kids must have incentives. None of these proposed reforms is going to work in any large way unless there are stakes. Stakes change everything. They change the teacher's relationship with the student and the parents' relationship with the student. School boards would be much less likely to uncritically promote new educational fads if they knew that what mattered to the public—and what would be known to the public—was student achievement. And, if everyone understood that his own kid's ability to enter college or get a job depended on how well the system functioned, there would be a lot less tolerance for schools' dysfunctionality—for the way we keep disruptive students in the classroom, for the way we turn teachers into social workers, and so on. There would be more mobilization of public concern and public support and participation.

When you have a system that basically says, "It doesn't count"—a system where it doesn't make any difference whether your kid passes or doesn't pass; where he can go to college regardless; where no employer will ever look at his school record—you have a system that will not work. And it will not work no matter how good and well intentioned our new curriculum and assessment reforms are, no matter how well-aligned everything is. Right now, what students want—college admissions, jobs, and job training—is disconnected from their school work. And as long as it stays disconnected, our educational system will not work.

Bridging the Gap

Where We Stand / August 14, 1994

One of our most troubling problems is the large and persistent gap between the achievement of white, middle-class students and that of poor, minority youngsters. This gap puts minority children at a terrible disadvantage. It also threatens the health of our democratic society. There is no dispute about the seriousness of the problem, but there is plenty about how to solve it.

Minority kids often go to schools with poor quality curriculum where little is expected of them. Should we set higher standards and work with these youngsters to help them meet the standards? Or is this another form of unfairness? Is it better to try to bring the youngsters along gradually by offering them a curriculum that doesn't expect too much of them?

In "High Standards for All" (*American Educator*, Summer 1994), Jeffrey Mirel and David Angus reveal that this debate on how to achieve equity in education is nothing new—it goes back at least 70 years. More important, they present evidence that minority youngsters are *not* turned off by high standards. When more is demanded of them, they produce more. Standards, Mirel and Angus say, are the most powerful lever we have to achieve equity in education.

Early in the 20th century, when large numbers of youngsters from white working-class and minority families began staying in school past the elementary grades, educators were somewhat uneasy. They believed equity demanded that they "educate" these youngsters—which meant keeping them in school until they got their diplomas. But educators had serious doubts about the youngsters' ability to master an academic curriculum—what we would now call a core curriculum—of English, history, mathematics, science, and foreign languages. If the kids were pushed into these courses, educators believed, they would drop out in huge numbers.

Their solution was to differentiate and dilute the curriculum. And the result can be clearly seen in the high school course-taking patterns that Mirel and Angus follow over a 60-year period, from 1928 to 1990. The number of different courses that were offered skyrocketed from about 175 in 1922 to 2,100 in 1973—as Mirel and Angus say, "curricular expansion run amok." At the same time, the percentage of aca-

demic or core courses being taken went steadily downward. In 1928, over 67 percent of the courses taken were academic; by 1961, the number had dropped to 57 percent. This sounds like the phenomenon described in *The Shopping Mall High School*—when kids are offered a choice between easier courses and tougher ones, they choose the easier.

The impact on working-class and minority children was particularly significant: "While these curricular decisions sought to promote equal educational opportunity, in reality they had a grossly *un*equal impact on working-class and black children....Beginning in the 1930s, these students were disproportionately assigned to non-academic tracks and courses and to academic classes that had lower standards and less rigorous content."

However, that's not the end of the story. Thanks to various reform initiatives, course-taking patterns began to change direction again in the 1970s. Students started taking more academic courses, and the percentage of academic courses has risen steadily until it is now over 66 percent—close to the 1928 high. Minorities have shared in this increase in academic course taking, and it has led to some remarkable changes for African-American and Hispanic students, both in terms of the percentage of academic courses taken and improved achievement, as shown in standardized tests.

For example, in 1982 only 28 percent of African-American students took four years of English, three years of social studies and two years of math and science. By 1990, 72 percent were taking these core courses. Did this increase in the academic course work lead to a big increase in dropouts? Not at all. In fact, the dropout rate for African-American students fell from 18 percent to 13 percent. And SAT scores for these youngsters rose 21 points on the verbal section and 34 points on the math.

The gap that remains between black and Hispanic students and white students is enormous and unacceptable, but the way to close it is to ask more of minority youngsters, not less. Students will not all be able to learn exactly the same material in exactly the same way—though these differences have nothing to do with racial or ethnic background: "The idea that all students should meet high standards (and essentially follow the same curriculum) does not deny that there are educationally relevant differences among individuals in interests and abilities."

Goals 2000 offers states and communities a chance to develop standards and curriculums and assessments that take individual differences in "interests and abilities" into account while pushing all youngsters to achieve their best. As Mirel and Angus warn us, we must be sure that we don't repeat the mistake of 70 years ago and confuse being easy with being fair.

A Baltimore Success Story

Where We Stand / August 20, 1995

What is the most serious problem facing the U.S. today? I'd put educating poor, minority students in urban schools close to the top of the list. For many of these youngsters, a good education will be the only chance to get out of poverty and become successful and productive adults. But test scores and other measures of achievement show that, on average, these children lag far behind students in middle-class schools. It's true that minority test scores have been improving over the past 20 years, but we are still doing poorly. Nobody knows this better than the people who work in these schools, and they are desperate to find answers. That is why the principal of Barclay, an inner-city elementary school in Baltimore, went, about ten years ago, to beg the superintendent to let her try something different in her school.

The principal, Gertrude Williams, knew that the program she wanted was excellent. She had visited Calvert, the Baltimore private school that has been using it for 90 years. Calvert's philosophy and curriculum are conservative. The curriculum still includes some books that were published in 1905 because the students love the stories and poems in these books, and the people in charge don't think you throw something away just because it has been around for a while. There is a strong emphasis on reading and writing and an insistence that students get things right. At the beginning of every day, students correct the mistakes they made in their written work the previous day. The curriculum is also very specific. It lays out what children should learn week by week and year by year and the way teachers should teach it.

Williams did not have an easy job talking the central office into letting her use the Calvert program at Barclay, even though she had foundation money to pay for it. In fact, three successive superintendents turned her down. (One told Williams that Calvert was a "rich man's curriculum," to which she answered, "I wouldn't look for a poor man's curriculum.") But finally the current mayor gave the go-ahead four years ago.

What has happened at Barclay? It is an extraordinary success story.

Barclay is 94 percent minority and its students come mostly from poor African-American families. Eighty-two percent are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (the Baltimore average for free and reduced-price lunch is 67 percent; the state average is 26 percent). Before the Calvert program was introduced, achievement at Barclay was in the cellar. For example, the average

Barclay students have gone from being just another group of low-achieving students to youngsters whose test scores are consistently above the national average.

reading scores for Baltimore students in grades 2 to 4 were between the 35th and 40th percentile; the average scores for Barclay students were in the low 20th percentile.

Now, according to a fourth-year evaluation of the program by Sam Stringfield, a Johns Hopkins University researcher, Barclay reading scores are "consistently at or above the 50th percentile, and, in one case, approach the 70th percentile"—a gain of 30 to 50 points. Language arts and writing scores, which were consistently below the 30th percentile, are now above the 60th percentile. Student achievement also compares very favorably with that of youngsters attending private schools. For example, a reading exam given mainly to private school students places Barclay fourth graders at the 69th percentile. In other words, they read better than 69 percent of a national sample of children who took this test. And there are comparable gains in every area. At the same time, attendance is up, the number of students qualifying for the school district's gifted and talented education program is up, and the number of children diagnosed as needing special education services has gone down by three-quarters.

I'll have more to say about why the Calvert program has been so successful at Barclay School in another column. The bottom line is that Barclay students have gone from being just another group of low-achieving Baltimore students to youngsters whose test scores are consistently above the national average. These are outcomes of which any school district in the country could be proud.

All of which brings up some interesting questions. Earlier this month, Baltimore decided to continue the contract of Education Alternatives Inc. (EAI), the private, for-profit firm that has been managing nine Baltimore schools over the past three years. The city did this even though an independent evaluation found that students in EAI schools are doing no better than students in other Baltimore schools. Why does Baltimore continue to bet taxpayers' money—and the future of Baltimore youngsters—on a firm that has yet to prove that it knows anything about educating kids when the Calvert program has shown the change it can make in the very same group of children? Why is Baltimore ignoring what looks like one of the genuine success stories in urban education? I'm sure Baltimore's children and their parents would like to know the answer.

Single Standard Versus Multiple Standards

From "Education Reform: What's Not Being Said" Daedalus / Fall 1995

A recent and popular slogan in American education is that all children can learn to the same high levels. This is news to parents, teachers, and the public; it defies everything we know and appreciate about human differences. But reformers are nonetheless insisting that we establish a single set of "world-class" performance standards and that schools be held accountable for getting all their students to achieve at that level.

The reference to "world-class" is ironic because none of the nations with more successful school systems have a single set of performance standards. They have a common curriculum throughout most or all the elementary grades and a relatively high floor of achievement, but that is not the same as having a single set of performance standards. Moreover, all of those countries put students into different tracks, beginning in the fourth or seventh grade, on the basis of their having met different performance standards. There is a common curriculum within these secondary tracks and, again, a high floor of achievement, but even within tracks there is not a single performance standard. And none of the "world-class" countries believe that whether or not students achieve is strictly attributable to what the adults in the school system do.

If we set a single standard, we essentially have two choices. One is to set the standard high. That is desirable, especially since we are talking about "world-class." Unfortunately, most of our students would not reach it. The very highest standards in other nations, those for university entrance, are reached by a maximum of 30 percent of the students. Of course, because they have multiple standards and paths to success, this is not considered a 70 percent failure rate. But it surely would be here. Even a much smaller failure rate would produce intense pressure to lower the standard, and we would effectively be back where we started.

The other choice is to set the standard low, perhaps slightly higher than the minimum competency standard we now have but at a level that would be attainable by virtually all of our students. We could then congratulate ourselves for raising the floor of achievement, but we

will have missed an opportunity to raise the ceiling and to move up the middle as well. If we can do better by all students by acknowledging that they, like all human beings, differ in their capacities, motivations, and interests, then why settle for a new minimum competency standard disguised in "world-class" rhetoric?

The Schools We Need

Where We Stand / October 27, 1996

Here's a Christmas gift suggestion for everybody on your list who is concerned about the state of public education: E.D. Hirsch Jr.'s latest book, *The Schools We Need: And Why We Don't Have Them* (Doubleday, 1996). Hirsch, who made a lot of people angry with his 1987 book, *Cultural Literacy,* will probably infuriate still more with this brilliant, combative, and intensely practical discussion of how our education system got into its current mess and what we must do to pull it out.

For years we have been hearing that progressive ideas will save our schools. Skeptics who point out that these ideas have consistently failed are told that they haven't had a real chance—if school districts don't mess them up in adopting them, teachers mess them up in the classroom. Hirsch agrees with the skeptics. The problem, he says, does not lie in the way progressive ideas have been implemented but in the ideas themselves. Giving schools an even stronger dose would not reverse the damage. It would be like giving a diabetic who is in insulin shock another shot of insulin.

A basic assumption of progressives is that subject matter is not really important. Schools are teaching the "whole child," so it's up to them to choose the subject matter they consider appropriate. Indeed, progressives dismiss specific content as "mere facts" and say that teachers who concern themselves with it are condemning students to a painful process called "rote learning." The result, they claim, is kids who are crammed with facts but who can't think for themselves and don't take any joy in learning.

Instead of worrying about content, progressives say, schools should teach children "problem solving," "higher-order thinking skills," and "critical thinking"—in other words, *how* to think. After all, the kids can always look up the information they need or find it on the Internet. And changes in the nature of work mean that thinking skills will be much more important than specific information.

All of this sounds plausible, but Hirsch says there is nothing to it. The picture of traditional educational practices is a caricature designed to shut off discussion; and there is no battle between learning and learning how to learn. Our schools have been disregarding content in favor of process for years. Furthermore, Hirsch says, there is no basis for accepting progressive ideas about how you teach children to think. The dismal record of student achievement points to the opposite conclusion. So does all the important research about how kids learn.

This research has shown that there is no such thing as an all-purpose thinking skill. Skills are domain-specific. That is, you need specific skills to think about geometry that are different from the ones you need to think about American history. Moreover, the dichotomy between content and skills is false. You cannot think without facts and information any more than you can bake a loaf of bread if you have a recipe but no flour or yeast or water. And, generally speaking, the more well stocked your mind is, the better able you are to make the connections that are basic to thinking. If, on the other hand, you lack the necessary information, what you read will be meaningless. Most Americans who have tried to read a story about cricket in an English newspaper will understand this point. So, in order to develop thinking skills, children need what Hirsch calls "a generous number of carefully chosen exemplary facts."

As for the notion that teaching children content will turn them off learning, anybody who has seen the delight with which kids master the facts about dinosaurs or baseball teams or Egyptian mummies knows that is not the case. Hirsch concedes that focusing on content and guiding children in learning how to use what they know are not necessarily easy. But if we don't question the disciplined effort children must make to get on the soccer team or play the piano, why do we consider it a hardship for them to master important academic skills?

What should good schools look like in Hirsch's view? Teachers have detailed knowledge of the subject matter they teach. There is an agreed-on core of knowledge and skills that children are expected to learn in each grade, so that knowledge can build on knowledge and teachers can be sure of what their students have already learned. Because the goals are specific, students can be monitored and helped when they need it, and parents can know exactly what their children are learning. If this sounds like a traditional, no-nonsense, subject-matter-centered school brought up to date, that is exactly what Hirsch has in mind.

Progressives in education would tell you that one of John Dewey's central ideas is experimentation—try new ideas to see if you can do better. They seem to have forgotten that if you do worse, you should try something else. E.D. Hirsch's penetrating discussion of why the progressive experiment has failed won't win any applause from those who want more of the same, but the rest of us should be grateful for *The Schools We Need.*

Solving the Problem: Return Discipline to the Classroom

Crime in the Schools

Where We Stand / February 24, 1974

Several times each year we read headlines of some violent crime in the schools. On these occasions the teachers union demands more security, school authorities promise more help, and city officials express concern. Frequently school and city officials, while deploring the newest act of violence, deny that there is a widespread problem of crime in the schools.

This question—whether or not the problem is real or serious—is explored in the Winter 1974 issue of *New York Affairs.* The article, "Crime in the Schools," was written by Jeremiah McKenna, the director of Policy Sciences Center Inc., a research foundation. McKenna's study documents what teachers have known and been saying over the years—that there is much more crime in schools than the headlines or official statistics acknowledge, partly because "principals and teachers are pressured to suppress reports of assaults."

McKenna concludes that the crime-in-the-schools question is neither a media-induced crime scare nor simply the product of more accurate reporting. Rather, on the basis of actual police arrests of juveniles, we must recognize that there has been a real increase in school crime.

"In 1958," McKenna notes, "the police arrested 27 boys under 16 for murder. In 1972, they arrested 72. In 1968, 77 males under 16 were arrested for forcible rape. By 1972 the number had climbed to 152." The figures for robbery are 2,487 in 1968 and 4,386 in 1972; for juvenile burglary, 2,884 in 1968 and 3,703 in 1972.

McKenna points out that while most of these crimes took place outside school, "it seems fair to conclude that a young criminal willing to risk committing a crime against an adult in a public place is willing to commit a crime against a younger, weaker, and more vulnerable fellow student. The inclination of the young delinquent to victimize his student peers is reinforced by the knowledge that the victim will be reluctant to complain—whether out of fear of reprisal or a certain knowledge that school authorities won't take effective action on the peer group's code of *omerta* [silence]. The trend over the last six years has, therefore, been a rising rate of serious criminality among the school-age population that should have been visible to anyone interested enough to investigate."

"The schools do have a special obligation to protect the children entrusted in their care against victimization," McKenna asserts. But they are, instead, repeating the same mistakes as the city at large. One of those mistakes comes from believing that more guards and more arrests will, by themselves, control crime. There *have been* more guards and arrests in the schools; but that has not worked because few offenders are actually punished:

> "Some 97 percent of felons arrested in the state were receiving little or no punishment after being arrested and processed through the criminal justice system....In New York City, approximately 5 percent of the juvenile delinquents eventually brought before the Family Court are institutionalized for any period of time. But our city's juveniles appear to stand a better chance of getting into West Point than of being sentenced to some form of institutional detention for committing a serious crime."

McKenna blames what he calls "the Father Flanagan Syndrome"—the attitude that there is no such thing as a "bad boy." While the youthful offender may not be fully responsible for his crimes, the schools nevertheless have an "obligation to protect the other students against the predatory...student criminal." Since the number of students suspended in the entire school system is smaller than the number arrested for murder alone, it clearly follows that "many of these murderers and practically all the juvenile rapists, robbers, burglars, and drug offenders have been released by the courts back into the school system."

McKenna's figures show that in some schools 15 percent of the student body has been arrested for serious crime:

> "Society and the schools are not providing any deterrents to criminal conduct, with the resulting danger that the schools are becoming places where a significant minority of young criminals are concentrated in an environment that invites criminality. The absence of sanctions against crime outside or inside the schools has therefore transformed some of the city's schools into sanctuaries for crime. Stated another way, some of the schools are in danger of becoming *places where persons gather for the purpose of engaging in unlawful conduct*....Some schools, like our prisons, have become places where crime-prone juveniles are initiated into a criminal subculture and trained in criminal skills. The crime element in the schools amounts to a counter-order elite whose norms directly conflict with those of

the large majority of the school population and certainly with the stated norms of the school system itself. But the normative conflict seems to be resolved in favor of the criminal element."

Those who support the schools and society against the criminal, McKenna reports, do so at great personal risk; and even where they are willing to take that risk, they achieve no results. The consequences of this are grave for our whole society. For if the schools acquiesce in criminal conduct, why "should we be surprised at adult passivity and noninvolvement in the face of criminal conduct in society at large.... Our schools may be conditioning an entire generation in the perceived futility of positive resistance to the crimes in our midst."

Worse still, the schools may be sowing the seeds of their own destruction, for "can the generation now exposed to the rising level of crime in the schools be expected to send their [own] children through the same gauntlet? Not even the student criminal would want the same exposure for his children."

McKenna makes a number of recommendations. At the very least, "the schools must begin by isolating the violent and crime-prone student from the rest of the student body. It can be done through special schools or by suspension in cases of particularly dangerous conduct."

In addition, parent associations are urged to pressure for action, and the family court must modify its present confidentiality rules and inform the schools as to who the criminals are.

McKenna's article is tough. He does not provide answers to all the problems; but he does point the way to restoring some safety and tranquility to the schools. And, with tranquility, "perhaps we can also restore the pride our city once had in a splendid public school system."

Time To Ship Out the Violent Students

Where We Stand / April 19, 1981

Last week sociologist James Coleman issued a controversial report comparing achievement in public and private schools. Coleman claims private schools do better. His critics say he's wrong, that it's not private schools that do better but the students in them. These are a select group whose parents are willing to pay tuition in order to put them into a school that does not admit problem children or that expels those who don't measure up. The argument will go on, and there's no doubt that because of the selection processes of private schools, they will continue to be different. But, in spite of this, aren't there some things the public schools can learn from the private schools? Some changes that will make public schools more like private schools?

I believe there are three major areas in which public schools need change, and if these changes were made, the attraction of private school education would be greatly diminished. The areas are: (1) safety and order in the school and classroom, (2) increased pressure for achievement and maintenance of high academic standards, and (3) the teaching of commonly held values. The first issue will be discussed here, the second and third, in subsequent columns.

For many parents who have taken their children out of public school, the key issue is safety and order. They don't want their children to experience the trauma of a beating, mugging, or threat of being stabbed or shot. Beyond the question of actual or threatened violence, they know that one or two children who are extremely troubled, who constantly act out by throwing things, talking, screaming, running about, can take up most of the time of the teacher and the class, so that little learning goes on. Of course, there are some children who act this way only in the presence of a particular teacher, or only for a short time during a particular personal or family crisis, or only in the presence of certain friends or acquaintances. These problems can be handled, but there are other children who behave this way all the time.

Unless this problem is dealt with, there will be more and more movement to private schools and increasing pressure for public funding of these schools. What can be done?

Jackson Toby, professor of sociology and director of the Institute for Criminological Research at Rutgers University, made some suggestions in the Winter 1980 issue of *The Public Interest.* There is, of course, no simple answer to the problem, but Toby proposes the development of a long-term strategy. While noting that more experimentation has to be done with "rewards for good behavior rather than punishment for bad," he points out that such "positive reinforcement" will work with some but not all violent and disruptive children. Among his other suggestions:

• More parent involvement to bring informal pressure on students. "If it could be arranged, the routine presence of parents in junior and senior high schools might have appreciable effects on crime rates and the fear of crime, whether or not parents make a direct contribution to achievement." One way of bringing more adults into the schools might be to schedule adult education courses during the day.

• Expulsion of students from regular schools must be more widely used: Some youth advocates claim that if teachers were more stimulating and curricula more "intriguing," there'd be less violence but, says Toby, responsiveness to the clientele or lack of it "is only marginally relevant to the problem of violence. Rural schools are the least responsive and the safest; some of them paddle students and conduct strip-searches for drugs. *What makes violence likely is weak control.* Big-city

junior high schools have high rates of assault and robberies because they contain a handful of students whom they cannot control and cannot exclude, and because they have not devised credible rewards and punishments for the larger group of potentially violent youngsters who are susceptible to deterrence." The first thing is "to rid the junior high schools of the small percentage of violent students who have proved that they cannot be controlled by anyone....This means recognizing that the limits of the rights of students to remain in school for educational purposes are reached when their presence jeopardizes the education of classmates."

• Devising lesser punishments before expulsion is used, such as offering a student who is to be expelled the "option of working 14 hours every weekend at the school—painting, scrubbing, polishing—for three months." This may not work, but it's worth trying.

• Sharing information among school systems about remedies they have devised that work. A National School Resource Network was established to do this under the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the Justice Department, funded at $800,000 per year. But that office is scheduled to be eliminated after October of this year as a result of the administration's proposed budget cuts.

Some supporters of tuition tax credits and vouchers say: "We don't really want tax credits. We agree that they will destroy the public schools. But we don't believe the public schools will ever have the guts to kick out the violent and disruptive. Tax credits will do that. They will place all those who are nonviolent in a tax-supported private school system, while keeping the violent and disorderly in the public schools. Since you can't seem to get rid of the violent ones, you'll get rid of all the others."

It would be a terrible thing if public education in America were destroyed because it lacked the will to expel the hard-core violent. And setting up a huge private school system, instead of kicking the violent out of public schools, makes as much sense as burning down an entire house each time you want to produce roast pork. But the fight to shape up the public schools in this way will only happen, says Jackson Toby, if parents "become indignant enough about violent schools to make safer schools a political issue."

A Pencil Through the Cheek

From remarks to the Symposia on Citizenship Education, Florida International University Miami / Spring 1986

I was impressed by a story told by Amitai Etzioni, a sociologist at George Washington University, who was a White House intellectual in the Carter administration. One day, Etzioni was called at the White House by his son's principal and told that his child had just been in an accident. During class, the boy sitting next to his son had taken a pencil and poked it through his son's cheek. While it turned out to be not dangerous, it was unpleasant and certainly very shocking.

A few days later he talked to the principal about the incident and the principal said he hoped Etzioni would understand that it happened on a hot, muggy day and the boy involved had many problems at home. Etzioni answered that as a sociologist he understood how those problems may have affected the boy's behavior. Then he asked the principal some questions: "Did anyone in the school tell the boy who was at fault that what he did was wrong? That it was unacceptable behavior and there was some price to be paid? That if it occurs again there will be some bigger price to be paid?" There was absolute silence. The principal assumed that if a person understood why something happened, that in itself satisfied the moral component and in a sense justified it.

This relates very closely to the subject we face here. Have we become so sociologically and psychologically smart that we have become morally paralyzed? Do we believe that what happens must happen and has reasons, and that there is no way of intervening? By asking these questions, I give an indication where my prejudice is, but I think this is a key issue.

School Rules

Where We Stand / January 9, 1994

Americans are worried about violent crime, more so than about any other problem. And of course they are worried about how to solve it. The Clinton administration has set up a task force to find solutions. This is a welcome move. Schools, too, need help in coping with the eruption of violence that threatens to turn them from safe havens into extensions of the street. But schools are also part of the solution to ending the violence afflicting our entire society.

Beginning in kindergarten and continuing all the way through grade 12, school is one of the chief places where youngsters learn about rules and responsibility. Do they learn that obeying rules gains them approval and respect and helps them succeed, whereas disobeying rules brings unpleasantness, punishment, and failure? Or do they discover that they can get away with breaking rules—and, indeed, that if they do it with enough flair, they can become big heroes and leaders of their peer group?

Many of us remember how, in second or third grade,

some kid who was trying to show off repeatedly yelled out bad words in class. If the teacher was unsuccessful in getting the kid to shape up, the principal appeared and led him off—and the kid didn't come back to class that day and maybe for several more. The rest of us didn't know what had happened, but we were sure it wasn't good, and we thought, "Thank God that wasn't me."

A lot of people would say that pulling a kid out of class—or having his parents come in, which sometimes also happened—is too stiff a punishment for a little thing like yelling out. But if youngsters don't learn that rules are to be taken seriously for little things, pretty soon you have to deal with much bigger problems, like shouting obscenities or hitting someone, and you have a school in which very little learning can take place.

But rules that are fairly and consistently enforced have another important function: They teach youngsters about taking responsibility for the results of their actions. And when they see that lesson reinforced time after time in school, that experience becomes a permanent part of their character.

Our schools today tolerate a tremendous amount of disruption and disorder. Kids do and say pretty much what they want, without fear of the consequences. In a recent article in *The Baltimore Sun* (October 22, 1993), a teacher reported that a student told her, "I'm going to come back and kill you. You can't do anything to me." There are rules against this kind of thing, but they are not being enforced because some people say that suspension or expulsion will not help the kids who are tossed out. That may be true in some cases. But it does a world of good for the majority of students, who can now enjoy an orderly learning environment. And it's not just a question of reading and writing. When students see rules enforced, they are learning the habits and sense of responsibility that people need to live together civilly and safely.

What's to be done? First, we should adopt the idea put forth by John Cole, president of the Texas Federation of Teachers, of "zero tolerance" for the violation of rules and regulations that are necessary to carry on learning. Having zero tolerance means that students will find there are consequences for violating rules and that these consequences will increase with increasing numbers of violations and with their seriousness.

If we are to be able to follow through with consequences for seriously disruptive kids, we have to re-examine state regulations and court decisions dealing with suspension, expulsion and placement of students outside of regular classes. In recent years these decisions and regulations have made it difficult or impossible to remove even the most disruptive student from regular classes. We should not put these kids out on the street, but we do need to create special classes or facilities for students who are so violent or disruptive that they prevent others from learning.

We are unwilling to suspend or expel students in this country, or even put them into separate facilities, because we fear violating their rights. But we have to realize that no other country permits a small number of kids to destroy the learning of the majority. No matter what kind of standards and curriculum we set up, if we allow one or two kids to stay in a class where they ruin learning for everyone else, we can forget about achieving world-class educational standards. And if what kids learn in school is that any rule can be broken at any time, we will continue down the road to destroying our civil society.

The Crab Bucket Syndrome

Where We Stand / June 19, 1994

When teachers at Frank W. Ballou Senior High School in Washington, D.C., talk about the "crab bucket syndrome," they are describing a terrible fact of life at their inner-city school. That is, the way kids who have surrendered to the culture of gangs and drugs react to a kid who is trying to escape it: They do their best to pull him back into the bucket.

In a recent *Wall Street Journal* article (May 26, 1994), reporter Ron Suskind talks about Cedric Jennings, a 16-year-old student who is trying to escape from the bucket. He's knocking himself out to make it to college—MIT is his dream. But as big a job as this would be for a 16-year-old anywhere, it looks nearly impossible for someone attending Ballou.

According to Suskind, students at Ballou are more likely to be schooled in the violence of the streets than in math or history. This year, one student was shot by another during lunch period, a second was hacked with an axe and a body turned up near the school parking lot. The dropout rate at Ballou is astronomical—20 percent of the sophomores who registered last September were gone by Thanksgiving. But staying on doesn't mean kids are devoted students. Only a tiny percent get average grades of B or better, and Suskind quotes a teacher who says that conducting a class is a lot like "crowd control."

What does all this mean for the few students like Cedric who are eager to learn? While teachers are occupied with 17-year-olds who read at a fifth-grade level or with kids shouting obscenities, those interested in learning are left to take care of themselves. As one teacher says, they "have to put themselves on something like an independent study course to really learn—which is an awful lot to ask of a teenager."

But what Cedric is put through by the other kids makes school a million times more difficult. Lots of adults remember how they were sometimes taunted at school for being a "brain" or a "grind." At Ballou, the abuse never stops.

Suskind describes a school assembly at which outstanding students were supposed to receive awards. Fearing that these kids wouldn't come and subject themselves to sneers and catcalls, school officials kept the awards a secret. "It sends a terrible message," says the assistant principal, "that doing well here means you better not show your face." However, the message is accurate: One unfortunate honoree had to be ordered to come to the stage as other kids shouted "Nerd!" at him. But bad as it is, this kind of public humiliation is not the worst. Cedric has been threatened with a gun and is regularly beaten up.

The kids who sneer and threaten and brutalize explain their behavior by calling students like Cedric "traitors." They say that academic achievement is a "white thing" and kids who work hard in school are showing disrespect for black people—as if the only way to be authentically black is to be a gang member or a dope pusher. But underlying this reaction, of course, is despair. As one teacher puts it, these kids "think they're supposed to drown."

Cedric has been relatively lucky. His mother has supported and encouraged him since he was a tiny child. But even kids who are able to nurture dreams and work hard to realize them are likely to be crippled. A recent Ballou graduate who has gone on to college finds that, for all her hard work and success in high school, she is poorly prepared to do college work—and she wonders if she can possibly make it.

Suskind's description of life at Ballou raises a number of painful questions. Are we going to lose a whole generation of inner-city youngsters? What can we do, right now, to reverse what looks like an irreversible process?

I don't know the answers to these big questions, but one thing is clear. Every inner-city school, no matter how blighted and hopeless, has a core of Cedrics. It's immoral to leave them in a situation where their efforts to learn—to do what society wants them to do—will harm them. And for every Cedric, there are other youngsters who would like to learn and achieve but who don't dare take on the mob. To say, as some people do, that leaving the gang members and bullies in with the achieving kids will somehow improve them is like saying that putting a group of Harvard or Princeton students into Sing-Sing would improve the hardened criminals. That's ridiculous. We need to help violent kids, but letting them rule the schools isn't helping them, and it's destroying the kids who want to save themselves. That's not decent, wise, or practical.

A Conservative Plot?

From remarks to the AFT State Federation Presidents' Conference
New Orleans, Louisiana / November 1994

I want to talk about one more set of issues, and it has to do with violence—the law-and-order issue. Now you have in your booklets a copy of a survey done by the Public Agenda Foundation. It tells you that the number one issue on the minds of parents in the United States of America—up around 86 percent—is school violence. That's true whether they are white, black, fundamentalist, Christian or whatever—it's the same for all groups. And it's not only violence, it's disorderly kids who prevent the teacher from teaching and other kids from learning. It dwarfs all other concerns. If you ask fundamentalist parents about teaching about sex in schools, well, about 35 percent are concerned that sex education is too explicit, but 86 percent are worried about violence. On the other hand, the National Association of State Boards of Education just put out a report suggesting that this problem is exaggerated, and we should do everything we can *not* to remove violent or habitually disruptive kids from classrooms.

I want to describe two events: a teleconference on youth violence in which I participated—it was held just before the election—and a conference that John Cole attended.

Well, I couldn't make the meeting to draft the consensus statement. And when I looked at what the other participants had prepared, I saw it was four pages all along the lines that punishment is no good; it never helped anybody. Incarceration is too expensive, and this country is going to go bankrupt if we keep putting people in jail. So I said, "I can't sign a statement that says that punishment is always negative. One good thing about punishment is, if you've got someone who is a killer or a rapist and if you lock him up for 30 years, he's not going to kill or rape anybody outside the prison. That's a plus." Well, they just wouldn't change the statement. And I asked them, "How many of you would like to open up all of the jails now and let everybody out?" Nobody said *yes.* So finally, they agreed to put in a sentence saying that we are not against punishment in all circumstances. I also pushed in a sentence about zero tolerance for bringing arms into schools.

The second part of the statement named three causes for youth violence: racism, poverty, and lack of educational opportunity. I told them I thought that was very inadequate. I agreed that those are factors, but I said that I grew up in the 1930s when there was a hell of a lot more racism and a hell of a lot more poverty. Thirty percent of the whole country was unemployed for ten years and no educational opportunities existed

for most people, but there was practically no crime.

So, I told them I'd accept these as factors, but that there was something missing. What about the high correlation between crime and being the child of a single teenager who can't take care of kids? Well, they refused to put that in, but they agreed to include a special statement about increasing programs designed to prevent teenage pregnancy. They agreed to put it in, but they never did.

So then came the teleconference. I got in my two minutes on zero tolerance and was attacked by a woman who had just been re-elected to something in New Orleans. She said that she had run against all of the zero-tolerance stuff and that it was nothing but a conservative plot.

The second part of the teleconference originated in Chicago. I was not there but was able to watch it, and it was very, very similar—15 people saying that those who make violence an issue really don't know what they're talking about. And to the extent that violence does exist, what you need to do is to have more therapy and no other programs.

Well, I was sitting there thinking to myself, this is going to have a hell of an effect on the election. It's one thing to say that, sure, you should do something about the causes so you don't keep throwing lots of people in jail, but you need to have balance between the two.

So then, after election day, I get a letter from John Cole, who, as you know, is president of the Texas Federation of Teachers. John wrote "At the request of your office, I attended on Sept. 23, 1994, a conference in Atlanta called the Annual Summit on Youth Violence. I am writing this memorandum as a brief report of that activity."

I won't read all of it, just a few of the paragraphs. It says what I've been trying to say better than I've said it:

> Start with the concept that the real victims of violence are those unfortunate individuals who have been led into lives of crime by the failure of society to provide them with hope for a meaningful life. Following that logic one must conclude that society has not done enough for these children and that we must find ways to salvage their lives. Schools must work patiently with these unfortunate individuals, offering them different avenues out of this situation. As the institution charged with the responsibility for education, schools must have programs to identify those who are embarking on a life of crime and violence and lift them out of the snares into which they have fallen. Society meanwhile should be more forgiving of the sins of these poor creatures, who through no real fault of their own, are the victims of racism and economic injustice. If you can buy into the premise underlying the preceding paragraph, then you would have found the Annual Summit on Youth Violence a rewarding and worthwhile experience. I left the conference early.

I'll skip a few paragraphs where John talks about the various programs that different people at the conference described. He does say that the concept of zero tolerance of violence on school grounds was specifically denounced. As one of the panelists observed, "We need to be more tolerant, not less tolerant of these kids." John says:

> I know these people are well meaning and I feel tremendous sympathy for all of their efforts. All of them are working very hard to try to help young people who, by and large, are resisting help. However, I could not help thinking over and over that these people are simply on the wrong road. The message, at least to me, came again and again: Those who commit crimes, abuse drugs or disrupt schools are crying out for help and we should rush to help them. My problem with this line of logic is that if young people learn that the way to obtain help is to strike out in acts of violence or defiance, then that will become the normal method for seeking special help in our society. By attempting to help these people, are we not also encouraging others to emulate their behavior?
>
> We must somehow come to grips with the idea that individuals have responsibilities for their own actions. If we assume that society is to blame for all of the problems these young people have and we then assume that society must develop solutions to take care of these young people's problems, we take away from each individual responsibility for his or her own life. Once the individual assumes that he or she has lost control of his own destiny, then that individual has no difficulty justifying any acts because he or she feels no responsibility for the consequences.

So that is, I think, very well stated. I am going to use some of this in my column this Sunday in commenting on the report of the National Association of State Boards of Education. But violence is only one issue. We could do four or five other issues that the public feels strongly about also. There is this tremendous gap that has developed between liberals and the general public on a number of issues where the liberals deny the existence of a problem that the general public feels is very important.

Now here's the interesting thing about the polls after the election. People were asked do you want less government or do you want better government? And only about 23 percent said they want less government. The majority said they want better government. And it's the fact that the government isn't working, not that they have bought into the Republican philosophy of less government. And by "not working," they mean exactly this sort of thing—that people aren't doing things to reduce the amount of violence. They're doing a whole bunch of other things.

Must Johnny Feel Good In Order To Learn?

Where We Stand / July 29, 1979

> *Public opinion is a weak tyrant compared with our own private opinion. What a man thinks of himself, that it is which determines ... his fate.*

With this quotation from Thoreau's *Walden,* two Cornell University researchers, Mary Ann Scheirer and Robert E. Kraut, begin their analysis of a popular educational hypothesis—the idea that if we can improve the self-image of students, their educational achievement will also improve. The Scheirer-Kraut article, "Increasing Educational Achievement Via Self-Concept Change," appeared in the Winter 1979 *Review of Educational Research.*

The idea that what we believe about ourselves and how we feel about ourselves will influence our decisions and actions is a deeply held American view. It is embedded in American philosophy and an important element in the psychology of William James. It continues to be influential at the present time. Many recent books dealing with the question of why children fail stress poor self-image. Some have written that the way schools are organized fosters negative self-image for students, especially those from lower class and minority groups. Other studies have claimed that there is a strong relationship between self-concepts of children and how well they achieve. Still other studies have indicated, report Scheirer and Kraut, "lower self-esteem among black children than among white children," although the authors note that such studies are now under challenge and at least one survey, in 1973, found the self-esteem of black children higher than that of their white counterparts.

Of course, not everyone accepted these studies on the role of self-concept in learning as gospel, and they have been subject to criticism. But, in spite of this, hundreds of millions of federal dollars have been added to local dollars to try to improve student achievement by improving self-image. The movement toward open classrooms and the efforts to humanize schools are part of this.

The authors look at the evidence previously provided in published studies and dissertations. One study of preschoolers, reported in 1970 and subsequently followed up, produced results that were "equivocal at best," say Scheirer and Kraut, "for the slight positive differences found in self-concept for the experimental children in grade did not persist in later grades, and small achievement gains for the experimental participants also did not remain after grade two."

Studies done in the primary grades did not favor the theory that if you improve the child's self-image, the child will do better on schoolwork. Rather, these studies seem to support the opposite theory, that of the behaviorists, or the basic skills approach. That is, students who were placed in a highly structured program emphasizing specific skills needed for academic success did better in achievement, and their academic success resulted in an improvement of self-image. These results, say the authors, do "not support the assumptions of the open classroom theorists that the child's internal development needs, including a positive self-concept, must be the basis for educational progress."

A number of junior high programs were successful in improving self-concept. This was done through special programs and greater school participation, but even though self-concept was improved, this did not lead to higher academic achievement. One junior high school experiment was successful. It used parents, individualized counseling, and university experts. The parents were specifically trained to communicate with their children about school work, to provide support and reinforcement for the child's positive statements about school. There was improvement in both self-image and achievement. These positive results were not achieved by a "placebo" parent group that engaged their children in general discussions of the problems of junior high school students.

After looking through the research that has been done, Scheirer and Kraut find that "in no case were changes in achievement unambiguously associated with changes in self-concept. None of these educational programs showed measurable effects on all target groups' self-concept scores while at the same time increasing academic achievement. Only two studies found positive changes on both variables for even part of their target population."

The Scheirer-Kraut survey considers a wide range of programs. Some of these programs are based on the theory that children have "several internal needs that the environment must satisfy in order for the child to 'feel good' about himself. Particularly at the preschool

and early primary school age, roughly age 3 to 7, positive self-concepts are thought to be ensured by providing freedom for the child to explore, to make choices, and to follow the urgings of his internal developmental states." Other programs are based on the theory that identification with and pride in one's ethnic or racial group is the key to feeling good about oneself. Still others give the improvement of self-concept as a major reason for bilingual education. According to Scheirer and Kraut, there is no evidence that any of these have worked, and they suggest that the reason there is no evidence to support these ideas is that "the underlying theory is wrong."

Of course, this does not mean that we should not try to improve self-image. And there is no reason to turn back the clock on efforts to humanize schools. But if it is achievement we are after, we ought to stop wasting time trying to make Johnny "feel good" about himself so that he can learn. Rather, we should work immediately at getting him to learn because, when he does, he will feel good about himself.

Educator Blasts Black English Approval

Where We Stand / June 22, 1980

A new educational controversy has been raging over the last year. The fight stems from a case in the federal courts in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The U.S. District Court there dealt with a problem similar to that raised some years ago in the *Lau* decision of the United States Supreme Court. In the *Lau* case, the courts ruled that a school district violates the rights of a non-English-speaking student if it merely provides the same schooling for that student as for all others. The courts directed the schools to develop programs for the non-English-speaking child that recognize the educational problems.

In the more recent case in Ann Arbor the argument was not over Spanish, Chinese, French, or Italian, but whether many black students were failing to learn in school because the schools were not taking into account the fact that these students spoke a different language—black English. The court did not require that teachers teach in black English. But it did require that the school district establish inservice training courses for teachers "(1) to help the teachers of the plaintiff children...to identify children speaking 'black English' as the language spoken as a home or community language, and (2) to use that knowledge in teaching such students how to read standard English."

While the court merely called for teacher training, the nationwide publicity has been quite different and very misleading. Much of it has reported that the schools were now going to teach in black English rather than standard English. Also, a recent national conference on black English sponsored by the National Institute of Education (NIE) called for recognition of black English as a legitimate communications system. According to a report in the June 10 *Education Daily,* NIE psychologist John Chambers said that "black English is just as legitimate as any other communications system." He warned that negative attitudes by teachers toward black English could dampen students' interest in learning. He said that the past practice of trying to eradicate black dialect is being re-evaluated nationwide as school systems realize that if they abandon the use of the vernacular, they are telling their students that their dialect is bad. "You're attacking many personal things about the individual and his culture, and that can have detrimental effects," Chambers said.

But there is another side. Benjamin H. Alexander, president of Chicago State University, opposes any school recognition of black English. In a strongly worded speech delivered to the Fellows of the American Council on Education last September, Alexander says: "I refuse to recognize that the achievement of excellence is possible without mastery of standard English. I will not accept the legitimacy of black English or any other kind of non-standard English—no matter what many of my colleagues may say."

Alexander described his youth in plantation Georgia, the plantation mentality that assumed the inferiority of blacks. "My parents did not believe in this plantation mentality and encouraged me and my brothers and sisters to become educated and find our place in society. As a result of my parents' encouragement, I did earn an education and gradually have risen and been accepted in society." His parents' words came back to him, Alexander said, when he read of the Ann Arbor ruling of District Judge Charles W. Joiner. "His ruling, which calls for implicit recognition of black English, is nothing more than blatant plantation mentality. I cannot support it." Alexander continued:

> This ruling is criminal, a travesty of justice, because it implies that blacks are still on the plantation—despite the passage of over 100 years—that blacks are basically inferior and must be treated differently...
>
> When the German, Russian, Polish, Greek, Italian immigrants and even African slaves came to America, unable to speak the language, there was no recognition given their non-standard broken English. The immigrants and slaves were compelled to learn standard English and without specially trained teachers, despite the fact that each day those immigrants returned from work to homes where only non-standard English was spoken. That is why I consider it a cheap insult to see educational standards lowered in Ann Arbor schools—solely for black students. How can we justify recognition of their non-standard broken English and then

ask teachers to learn it? Was it necessary for teachers of the immigrants to be given formal training in Polish English, German English, Italian English or any *non-standard English?*

The answer, of course, is no! Then, why train teachers in non-standard English when the English applies to blacks?...

All children should be taught standard English from the moment they enter the classroom, and the numbers who cannot speak standard English in this country are legion. However, the race of the children is not the cause of their deficiency. The cause is their socioeconomic status; they are poor and come from environments discouraging education. In total numbers there are no doubt more whites than blacks and browns who cannot speak standard English because in number there are more poor whites than there are poor blacks and browns. Should we set up special programs that recognize all the various white dialects? Must we teach the teachers all the various white dialects?...

If we educators do not protest this Ann Arbor ruling, we are encouraging the next lawyer to sue to suspend college requirements, to lower standards because college lectures are unintelligible to those who speak black English...

That as an educator and a black man who as a child was very poor himself, I plan to speak out on every occasion against this blatant plantation mentality. The poor blacks of this nation are not inferior; they do not need the crutch of black English. Most of them are able and willing to meet standards. They don't want to turn back the calendar to plantation days. I urge you to join me in battling this paternalism in education. Join with me in saying: standard English—the hell with anything else!

Can U.S. Force Schools To Go Bilingual?

Where We Stand / August 24, 1980

The new Department of Education has issued a set of proposed regulations on the education of children whose original language was not English. The proposal is an unmitigated disaster. It threatens the fabric of American education and the future of our country. The public should bring pressure on President Carter and Secretary of Education Shirley Hufstedler so that the plan is abandoned.

Back in 1974 the Supreme Court decided in *Lau* v. *Nichols* that it was not enough for a school district to provide the same education for a child who could not understand English as it provided for children who do. The decision deserved support. Obviously, when a child who speaks and reads no English is put into a regular class, the child cannot be expected to understand or to learn.

The Department of Education's proposed regulations are an unmitigated disaster.

The Court did not say what should be done. It just ordered that something be done, something that recognized the special needs and problems of the non-English-speaking child. The Court suggested some approaches: "Teaching English to students of Chinese ancestry who do not speak the language is one choice. Giving instruction in Chinese is another. There may be others."

While the Court demanded that something special be done, it left open the question of the specific program to be used. It was to be left to educators to decide on just what is the best educational method and to local school boards, elected by the people in their communities to oversee the schools. It was appropriate for the federal government to state and define the law, right for qualified professional educators to find the best educational methods and within the political province of local school boards to adapt programs to local conditions and needs.

Furthermore, there is no evidence that any given method of teaching children who do not speak English is better than another. Were there overwhelming evidence that one approach was successful while others were not, it might make sense to mandate the successful program. Where no such evidence exists, it makes sense to allow for professional and local choice—and for widespread experimentation so that better programs can be developed.

Now, despite the lack of evidence that one program is better than another, the administration proposes to mandate one program for the majority of other-language children, whether or not that is the choice of the teacher, the principal, or the local school district. That program is bilingual education, instruction in the child's original language while the child is learning English.

Under the new rules, children from other countries with a different native language will be instructed in English if their English is superior to their use of their native language. Such children are few in number. Those who are superior in their native language—almost all—and whose English ability is at a level with 40 percent of *all* students in the same grade nationally or statewide must be taught in both languages. In other words, unless an immigrant child is nearly at or above

the average for native-born children, the child must be taught in both languages.

School districts will have to comply or face federal prosecution. They will need thousands of bilingual teachers—who are not available. They will be required to retrain their existing staff to become bilingual—a noble goal but one that is difficult and expensive and adds to the great burdens already faced by the classroom teacher. But also, while the existing teachers are learning to speak a second language, the regulations require that "...other bilingual individuals...provide services in the interim." In other words, instruction will be given by individuals not licensed or certified to teach. The administration has determined—without any empirical evidence—that children from Spanish, Chinese, Italian, Vietnamese, and many other backgrounds will learn more if taught in both languages by someone other than a teacher than if they are taught intensively to learn English by a regular teacher.

Still another section of the regulations sounds good but, in light of the previous conflict on this issue, it may have ominous consequences. The regulations require educational programs and activities to be "operated with respect for the culture and cultural heritage of the...limited-English-proficient students." Does this mean just what it says? If so, there can be no argument. But it may mean much more. If a Puerto Rican teacher is employed to teach Mexican-American children, could this be viewed as a lack of respect for the Mexican culture and heritage? Will this section be used to enforce the notion that only teachers of the same ethnic origins can teach their own?

The issues raised by the proposed federal regulations are huge. Should the U.S. government impose particular educational programs? Can it mandate programs that are still experimental and whose superiority has not been demonstrated? Can it override professional judgment and local control? And should it impose huge new costs on hard-pressed local school districts? The government estimates the cost at between $180 million and $591 million, but that is like its estimate of the cost of educating the handicapped and of other programs. It will be much, much more, and with money in short supply, it will be taken from other current educational programs. Money that could be used to teach English intensively to these very children will be used for testing, placement, and teacher language training.

But the biggest issue of all is the question of bilingualism. Will federal programs lead the U.S. to become another Quebec? The American people come from many cultures, many language backgrounds. One of the major purposes of the American public school has been to "Americanize" waves of immigrants—most of whom did not speak English. That meant teaching them English. Ethnic groups had their foreign language newspapers and neighborhoods where their language was spoken, their culture preserved. But in the schools, as in public life in general, English was used. This policy worked. It brought many together to forge a nation. This new policy is a radical change. It is bad for the child. It will do harm to the nation.

A Role for Rote Memory

From remarks to the Conference on Critical Thinking and Education Reform, Sonoma State University Rohnert Park, California / August 1984

Mr. Shanker: Little kids like to memorize a lot of things. Let us not be anti-memory because we are in favor of critical thinking. After all, you can't critically think about everything.

You think about important social issues. You think about important issues in your profession. But the reason we are able to think is that we do most things habitually and we use our critical-thinking skills in those places where we want to develop new ways of doing things. You can't leave everything open to thought at all times. Not everything can be in jeopardy. This is not to say that critical thinking is bad. It is most important. But critical thinking is based on a foundation of things that are uncritical.

The Moderator: Would you want to distinguish rote memory from some other means of study that promotes learning and therefore memory, but is not rote, or are you arguing for rote memory pure and simple?

Mr. Shanker: I would argue for a certain amount of rote memory, yes. Absolutely. *[Applause]* ...There is a role for rote memory at certain times and there is nothing wrong with it and it does not replace other kinds of learning. It becomes a foundation later on for something else. I think where we go wrong with many of these movements is when we say there is only one way.

There isn't only one way. Critical thinking is not the only way people learn. Most of the things we learned in life we learned through habit, through all sorts of other ways. We need critical thinking because these habits break down, because they are not always rational, they are not always good, because we meet other people with different habits, and so on. But you know something, if every morning I go to the train and I don't bother to look where I am because I have been doing this every day for the last 40 years and, without looking, I just go to the left and sit on the train and open my newspaper and read it, and if this way of doing things gets me there, I don't want to think about it. The first day I follow my usual routine and it lands me in a different city, then I am going to be engaged in critical thinking.

[Laughter]

Making a Multicultural Curriculum

Where We Stand / November 10, 1991

We're in the midst of an important change in our school curriculum. By including the contributions of many different groups that have not previously been recognized, we're trying to make a multicultural curriculum that accurately reflects our society.

However, some groups, including the New York State Board of Regents, which has just accepted guidelines for a new social studies curriculum, may end up sacrificing accuracy for diversity. They seem to think that, in order to give kids varied points of view, it is perfectly okay to teach ideas and theories that few or no reputable scholars accept. The Regents' proposal calls this using "noncanonical knowledge and techniques" and "nondominant knowledge sources."

You can see some good examples of what's wrong with this idea in the Portland (Oregon) "African-American Baseline Essays." This mini-curriculum, made up of essays on social studies, science, language arts, mathematics, art and music, has been adopted by school systems all over the country and used as a model by many others.

The Portland essays present ancient Egypt as an African culture that strongly influenced the development of European civilization, and this is fair enough. It's a view most reputable scholars have agreed with for 40 years, and it corrects distortions of previous historians who were inclined to ignore Egypt's contribution or to disregard the fact that Egypt was an African civilization. But the baseline essays go far beyond discussing Egypt as an African society, and they assert a number of ideas that are inconsistent with the best scholarship. For instance, they maintain that the inhabitants of ancient Egypt were black Africans.

Scholars of Egyptian history and archeology say that the evidence suggests an entirely different story. Far from being all black (or all white), ancient Egypt, they say, was a multiracial society with a variety of racial types much like that of modern Egypt. In any case, our concept of race—a relatively modern invention—would not have made much sense to ancient Egyptians, who did not look at people in terms of skin color or hair texture. So the baseline essays not only misrepresent the evidence by insisting that Egypt was a black African society; they distort the example that Egypt has to offer our own multiracial society in order to make a political point.

The science section of the baseline essays reveals the same preference for politics over scholarship. The ancient Egyptians' excellence in mathematics, medicine, and astronomy is widely acknowledged. For example, we owe our 365-day, 12-month year to them. But kids who learn science from this baseline essay will be told that the Egyptians developed the theory of evolution (thousands of years before Darwin), understood quantum physics and flew around for business and pleasure in full-size gliders—all stuff that no serious scientist believes for a minute. We used to laugh at the Soviets for saying that baseball and everything else of any importance had been discovered or invented in the U.S.S.R. These claims for Egyptian science are no more credible, and they are equally political in nature; they are propaganda rather than science. But this is not the biggest problem.

The science baseline essay presents as science stuff that is no more scientific than the Ouija board or mediums or the horoscope in the daily newspaper. Although the essay says it's important to distinguish between science and magic, it treats magic like a legitimate part of science. Kids whose teachers follow the Portland curriculum will be told that the Egyptians could predict lucky and unlucky days with the help of "astropsychological treatises"; and they'll hear how the Egyptians' highly developed "human capabilities" allowed them to see events before they happened ("precognition") or at a distance ("remote viewing"). Ideas like these make good subjects for movies or TV series, but they have nothing to do with science. Kids who are fed this kind of thing are not getting an alternative perspective; they are being cheated.

School boards and teachers accept the legitimacy of what's said in the baseline essays because they assume that the writers have solid credentials—and the introduction to the essays plays along with this. The writer of the science essay is described as a "Research Scientist of Argonne National Laboratories, Chicago," implying that the essay was written by a top-notch scientist, perhaps with the endorsement of a federally funded lab. But it turns out that the writer is not a scientist at all. According to Argonne, he's an industrial-hygiene technician with a high school diploma whose job is collecting air samples.

We all want to improve the achievement of our students. And poor, minority children, whose performance still lags far behind that of white, middle-class kids, deserve the best education possible. They're not going to get it if we substitute myths for history or magic for science. Here's how Frank Snowden, a professor emeritus of classics at Howard University, puts it:

> Many students already have been misled and confused by Afrocentrists' inaccuracies and omissions in their treatment of blacks in the ancient Mediterranean world. The time has come for Afrocentrists to cease mythologizing and falsifying the past. The time has come for scholars and educators to insist upon scholarly rigor and truth in current and projected revisions of our curriculum. *Tempus fugit!*

One Size Does Not Fit All

From "Full Inclusion Is Neither Free Nor Appropriate"
Educational Leadership
December 1994 / January 1995

What happens when a fourth-grade teacher with a class of 30 or 35 finds that several new students have severe behavioral disabilities? The teacher has no previous training in working with disabled children, and the principal says that getting any extra classroom help is out of the question—the school district simply can't afford it. The teacher's main resource, the special education aide, who must serve 60 children in four schools, is stretched pretty thin. As the year goes on, the teacher finds that math class is disrupted every single day by the demands of one or another of the special needs students. How can the teacher meet these extraordinary demands without robbing some students? Many teachers are facing problems as difficult as this—and far more difficult—as the result of a movement known as *full inclusion.*

Rush To Include

Since the passage of the landmark Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) in 1975, youngsters with disabilities have had a right to a "free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment." Until recently, this usually meant some kind of special placement. Now, state departments of education and school districts, as well as some advocacy groups for the disabled, are pushing to have all handicapped children educated in regular classrooms, regardless of the nature and severity of their handicap. And inclusion advocates are taking advantage of court decisions that favor their position to move ahead quickly.

Advocates for full inclusion raise the issue of equity. They say that disabled youngsters are burdened with an additional handicap when they are segregated from their nondisabled peers because they are denied the chance to develop the social and academic skills necessary to function in the mainstream of society. Many local school boards, state departments of education, and legislators also back full inclusion, but for a different reason. They see it as an opportunity to cut back on expensive special education services. These services have become a crushing financial burden, especially because Congress has never appropriated funding at the level promised by P.L. 94-142, leaving states and local school boards to shoulder most of those costs.

Not all advocacy groups are enthusiastic about full inclusion. Many—including those for children who are blind, deaf, attention-deficit-disordered and learning-disabled—believe a one-size-fits-all approach will be disastrous for the disabled children themselves. Nevertheless, we are seeing a rush to inclusion regardless of the disability.

Who Pays?

Of course, disabled children placed in regular classrooms are supposed to get special services so they can participate academically and socially and so the other students' learning is not disrupted. That's the behind-the-scenes reality in the documentary film *Educating Peter,* which won an Academy Award in 1993. Filmgoers see a moving story about a child with Down syndrome who learns to work and play with his new classmates. What filmgoers *don't* see is that the class was relatively small—19 students—and Peter's teacher was intensively prepared for his arrival, as were the parents of his classmates. Moreover, a full-time special education aide was with Peter every minute of the day, and an "inclusion specialist" worked with him daily and was available to help his teacher and classmates.

As the year goes on, the teacher finds that math class is disrupted every single day by the demands of one or another of the special needs students.

This kind of comprehensive help is expensive. Because states and school districts are putting disabled children into regular classrooms as a cost-cutting measure, such expenditures are the exception rather than the rule. Instead, the responsibility for disabled youngsters, who may need specialized medical attention (like having catheters changed or mucous suctioned out of their lungs), falls on teachers and paraprofessionals. Unlike Peter's teacher, most have no more than a few hours of training. And they are largely on their own when it comes to figuring out how to help the child fit in and how to tailor lessons to his or her requirements, while keeping other students up to speed in arithmetic and reading and science.

Full inclusionists say this ad hoc approach to inclusion must change and all the supports for disabled children in special education settings must follow them into regular classrooms. This is the ideal, but given the reason most states and school districts are adopting full inclusion—to save money—it is no more likely to happen for disabled children than it did for mentally ill people who were de-institutionalized years ago. Their

supports were also supposed to follow them, but now, as we know, large numbers of these people are out on the streets. That's one reason that many parents of disabled children oppose full inclusion. They fear their children will lose the range of services now available and end up, like those who were de-institutionalized, with nothing.

Who Benefits?

Who are we helping if we put disabled students into regular classrooms without the supports they need? If they get these supports, a regular class would be the best possible placement for many of these youngsters. But will a child with multiple physical disabilities or behavioral disorders learn to socialize with other children simply because he or she has been put into a class with them? Will the other kids receive that child as a friend in the absence of special encouragement and support, or will they ignore or tease that child and make his or her life a misery? What happens to attempts to raise the reading or math achievement levels of other children when their teacher must devote extraordinary time and energy to disabled classmates? (In the documentary, Peter's classmates learned to live with him and accept him—and Peter himself improved—but the film does not address his impact on their education.)

Staying Put

Finally, what happens when a child whose disability has led to disruptive and even dangerous behavior must, as the law requires, remain in class because a judge refuses to have the child removed? Those who created P.L. 94-142 and its subsequent amendment wanted to prevent these kids from being jerked around from one placement to another. But one of their tools, the "stay-put" provision, has turned out to be a nightmare for other students and for teachers. According to stay-put, once a child has been placed in a class, he or she can't be excluded because of behavior related to a disability for more than 10 days a year without consent of the parents or a formal hearing process that could take months. This means that a student with a behavioral disorder who constantly disrupts the class—or even assaults a teacher or schoolmates—cannot be excluded.

Separate but Equal

Full inclusion is often justified by an analogy with the racial segregation practiced during a large portion of our history. "Separate but equal" always meant "inferior," and inclusionists feel the same is true of any separate classes for any disabled children. But the analogy is faulty. African-American children have the same range of abilities and needs as white children. They were excluded only because of the color of their skin, which was irrelevant to their ability to function and benefit in a regular classroom. This is quite different from putting a blind youngster into a special class so he or she can learn Braille, or from excluding a youngster who is emotionally disturbed because he or she will disrupt the education of others while deriving little benefit.

When I was growing up, the great majority of children with disabilities were not allowed to come to school at all. And the ones who were—mostly children who were considered mentally retarded—were warehoused in "opportunity" classes where their capabilities and needs were ignored. It's a good thing those days are gone. However, this bad policy is being replaced by another bad policy. In calling for all disabled children to be placed in regular classrooms regardless of the severity and nature of their difficulty, full inclusion is replacing one injustice with another.

We need to discard the ideology that inclusion in a regular classroom is the only appropriate placement for a disabled child and get back to the idea of a "continuum of placements," based on the nature and severity of the handicap. Make the ability to function in a regular classroom, given the necessary support services, a condition for placement there.

Disciplinary Learning

Where We Stand / February 5, 1995

Interdisciplinary learning is a big educational fad these days, and it's no wonder. It's a very attractive idea. The world is not divided into disciplines so why should school be? Why not integrate what kids learn—and show them how math and biology and history fit together—instead of putting these things into separate boxes? A holistic approach, advocates tell us, will make learning far more engaging for students. It will also be more stimulating for teachers, who will be encouraged to make new connections and see things in new ways.

But throwing away disciplinary learning for youngsters who have not yet mastered the disciplines creates serious problems. It constrains what teachers can teach—and, therefore, what kids can learn—instead of enlarging it. That's what Kathleen Roth, a science teacher and teacher educator, found when she participated in an integrated science and social studies unit ("Second Thoughts about Interdisciplinary Studies," *American Educator,* Spring 1994).

The theme of the unit—1492—was a real grabber, and Roth and her colleagues planned something far more ambitious than learning the names and customs of various native American peoples and, perhaps, how to build a bark house or a canoe. They organized the year-long unit around themes of diversity, change, and adaptation and questions about how the people and land have changed since 1492 and how they might change in the next 500 years. They believed that such

themes and questions would be powerful vehicles for teaching and integrating basic concepts in science and social science.

What Roth found was something quite different. The interdisciplinary focus made it difficult for her to teach scientific concepts at all. For example, because the anchor point was 500 years in the past, the kids were pretty much limited to learning from books, and Roth was unable to give them practice in the basic scientific activities of observing things, trying to explain these things and making predictions about their behavior—as she had done with her previous classes. The interdisciplinary approach meant that her students learned less science, not more—some new names and facts but little if anything about how scientists raise questions and resolve them.

This could have been a limitation in Roth's teaching, but a recent article by Howard Gardner and Veronica Boix-Mansilla ("Teaching for Understanding in the Disciplines—and Beyond," *Teachers College Record,* Winter 1994) suggests a different explanation. Disciplines are not impediments to real learning, Gardner and Boix-Mansilla say; they are powerful tools. And we are making a big mistake if we discard or ignore them in educating our children.

Gardner and Boix-Mansilla acknowledge that disciplines necessarily change with changing knowledge. And disciplines are murky around the edges—where does biology leave off and chemistry begin? But a discipline is not an arbitrary set of restrictions that keeps us from seeing the whole picture. It is an essential body of information, built up over the centuries, about how to explore a particular area of knowledge. The discipline of biology, for example, provides the tools, the vocabulary and techniques for asking questions about life and living organisms and trying to answer them.

Gardner and Boix-Mansilla do not think that disciplinary knowledge is optional: Without it, "human beings are quickly reduced to the level of ignorant children, indeed, to the ranks of barbarians." And disciplinary knowledge is not interchangeable. How far would a medical researcher get if he threw away the techniques of his discipline and used those of a historian to find out why one group of people stayed healthy while another got sick?

Children are not born with disciplinary knowledge. They develop it as they learn what questions they can ask in history and math and science and literature, and how they can answer them. And the K–12 years are essential to this process. It is then that teachers need to use what Kathleen Roth calls the "powerful lens" of the various disciplines to focus the facts that kids are learning. It is then that teachers begin to help children learn that you don't look at the structure of a leaf using the same tools you use to examine the structure of a poem about trees—even though both could be part of an interdisciplinary unit about nature.

If the schools are failing our students, it is not because we are burdening them with disciplinary knowledge or are failing to provide them with holistic learning experiences. It is because we are satisfied with the shallow kind of knowledge that comes from insufficient grounding in the basic disciplines—history and math and science and literature. Trying to give students this grounding would be a lot harder than simply grabbing for the latest fad, but at least it would get us somewhere in the long run.

Reading and Ideology

Where We Stand / November 12, 1995

The recent Fairfax County, Virginia, school board elections featured a battle between right-wing and liberal candidates. According to the *Washington Post,* at least 12 of the 35 candidates favored teaching creationism in the schools. Other hotly debated issues included "what to teach about homosexuality and how big a role phonics should play in reading instruction" (October 21, 1995). A commentator describing the election said, "What is at stake is the ability to educate our children in the values that both sides hold dear." Values? Wait a minute! What you want your children to learn about homosexuality is a matter of values—or ideology. But should science be subject to an ideological test? Or methods for teaching reading?

All of this sounds unpleasantly familiar. Once upon a time, in a country called the Soviet Union, the validity of science was decided on political grounds. Many Westerners still remember the story of a fellow named Lysenko. His theory of genetics was more consistent with Marxism than was Mendelianism, which was the scientific standard everywhere else in the world. So Lysenko and his genetics were elevated, and the others learned they had better shut up. We laughed at the Soviets for deciding science on the basis of ideology; yet we are making that mistake with education.

In the so-called Reading Wars, two groups are battling for control over how children learn to read. According to supporters of phonics, children must be taught to connect words that are part of their spoken vocabulary with the unfamiliar combinations of letters on the page, and they do this by learning how to "sound out" letters and letter combinations. Phonics supporters also say that youngsters need lots of practice in decoding—making the connection—until it becomes automatic. Phonics supporters are absolutely correct in these beliefs. But more extreme advocates of phonics—we might call them the phonics-only people—favor a dry and mechanistic approach to introducing children to the world of reading and writing.

Purist whole-language advocates, on the other hand, believe that reading is as natural as speaking. The best way to teach reading, they say, is to expose children to stories they will want to read, and let them figure out words from their context in the sentence or story, guessing if necessary. Sooner or later, they will get it right.

But as a group of articles in the Summer 1995 issue of *American Educator* makes clear, children learn best in a system that combines aspects of phonics *and* whole language. Researchers have exploded the whole-language contention that children learn to read as naturally as they learn to speak. (If they did, there wouldn't be any illiterate societies because there aren't any societies where people can't talk.) Some children learn without being given systematic, explicit instruction in sounding out words. Many do not—and that is where phonics comes in. However, researchers stress that, while knowing how to decode is essential, it is not enough. They agree with whole-language advocates that teachers must also expose their students to materials the youngsters are eager to read. Otherwise, youngsters may have little interest in reading, probably won't read much, and will never get enough practice to be skilled readers.

You'd think that most school districts would opt for the system good reading teachers have always used: a combination of phonics and whole language. That hasn't happened. Instead, the teaching of reading has become an ideological football. The left wing, with its romantic ideas about how children learn, has adopted whole language as the sole path. And for the past several years, it has been tremendously popular. The right wing, on the other hand, which believes that learning doesn't have to be fun and that children need to be shaped up by discipline, has seized on phonics. As a result, parents whose only interest is in making sure their children get a good start have become frustrated and infuriated because they see that, in order to get phonics instruction, they might be forced to vote for school board candidates who favor teaching creationism and gay bashing.

But there are signs that evidence is beginning to prevail over ideology. After seven years of whole language—and plummeting reading scores—California recently decided to reintroduce phonics into its reading program. That needs to happen all over the country—in phonics-only and whole-language-only districts. We have sound research on the subject of how children learn to read. It is up to the people in central offices and school boards to make policy decisions on the basis of this research. Soviet agriculture went down the drain when ideology took over from science. We ignore that lesson at our peril.

A Recipe for School Reform

Where We Stand / December 24, 1995

A couple of weeks ago, *The New York Times* food section ran an article about a French bread that you can make with a food processor (November 22, 1995). The article claimed that the baguette was as delicious as the kind you buy in a good bakery. I was skeptical. I have made bread for my family and friends for a number of years, and I know that a good French loaf is a real accomplishment. I had no trouble believing that the bread would be quick and easy. But delicious? Nevertheless, I tried the recipe for Thanksgiving. It was terrific!

Though making the bread was as painless as the article said, the process by which Charles van Over, a chef and restaurateur, arrived at the recipe was anything but simple. Van Over experimented over a period of several years in order to get a bread with the best possible texture, flavor, and crust—and a recipe that could be made with predictable results by other cooks. It occurred to me as I read the article that there might be some lessons for school reformers in Van Over's systematic efforts to perfect his recipe for a food processor baguette.

Van Over thought his first batch of bread was pretty good—but not good enough. So he went on working and reworking the recipe and playing with the different variables in the recipe. He experimented with different flours, types of yeast, water temperatures, and rising times. In the course of this experimentation, he discovered that chlorinated water impeded the growth of the yeast, so he began using spring water. Another chef suggested that he use the metal blade of the food processor instead of the plastic one. He did and liked the result, so that, too, became part of his recipe.

In the end, Van Over had a bread that resembled its excellent prototype. This was quite an accomplishment. But even more impressive is the fact that ordinary people can make this bread in ordinary kitchens, with a one-minute mixing time, and be sure of getting good results. Van Over continues to "refine his techniques [but] he now believes he has come close to the near-ideal combination of the best quality with the least effort."

What would have happened if Van Over had proceeded like some school reformers instead of like a baker?

He might have rejected the idea of adapting French bread for a food processor in the first place. Too traditional. Not innovative enough. And not American, anyway. Never mind the fact that French people have been enjoying it for years, and it is admired as a stan-

dard all over the world.

If he had gone ahead, it's unlikely that he would have tried to get exact ingredients and procedures—many school reformers stop when they have a general idea of what they want. People would have implemented this general idea in all kinds of ways, and most of them would have been disappointed with the results. ("This is French bread?") So they would soon have abandoned Van Over's idea and started looking for the next new fad in baking.

But Van Over knew that he needed more than an appealing idea with some general guidelines about ingredients and proportions. So he tested results and refined procedures until he had created a recipe that was excellent and certain to succeed. If this were school reform instead of cooking, would he get applause for developing a reliable way of getting children to understand a particular idea? I don't think so. He'd be more likely to hear, "It's okay for him, but our situation is different," and complaints that his detailed procedures stifled creativity.

I wish I could say this is an exaggeration but it's not. Many school reformers would not consider working for years to figure out every detail of their system and trying it a thousand times to make sure it would work for everybody. (Often, they have no proof that it will work for anybody.) And if they did subject their idea to the Van Over method, it would probably be rejected because the procedures they developed would be considered too rigid.

We could laugh about the absurdity of these ideas if their results were not tragic. In cooking, as in medicine and pharmacology and every branch of pure and applied science, innovators understand that they must perfect a procedure before going public with it—and the people who use a new procedure feel obliged to follow it exactly because it is far superior to the "creative" ideas they can come up with on the spur of the moment This is not an attack on all school reformers. Fortunately some are working carefully, trying out their ideas, and getting them right before recommending them for general use. They must be distinguished from those—unfortunately many—who do not follow this path.

Decentralization, Again?

Where We Stand / January 7, 1996

Americans are trying to fix their schools. There are many proposals for how to do this and movement in different directions, but one of the most popular directions now is decentralization. The theory is that school district bureaucracies are largely to blame for our education problems; they issue rules and regulations that, together with the rules in union contracts, hinder school reform.

Rules force all schools to be the same, the theory goes. They make flexibility difficult, if not impossible. In bureaucracies, employees are rewarded for complying with rules rather than for educating students. And rules, the theory continues, are made to make life easier for officials rather than to make schools more effective for students. Also, children are all different, as are their teachers, so if we're to have good schools, they will each have to be as different as our students and teachers.

Seems reasonable, doesn't it? A similar theory was advanced 25 years ago in the New York City school decentralization battle. It said, "Central officials don't care about students and don't really know what's going on in the system's 1,000 schools. And the central bureaucracy is not representative of the diverse groups in the city. If the system is broken up so that each community elects its own board, hires its own principals, chooses its own appropriate curriculum, and holds teachers accountable, we'll turn the schools and student achievement around. Parents will go all out in electing school boards—and we know that parental involvement improves student achievement. Parents will hold board members accountable through elections, just like in the suburbs. And if suburban communities can do a good job managing their schools, the communities in our city can, too. Besides, nothing can be worse than what we have now. And if it doesn't work, the legislature can change it again." That, too, sounded reasonable, and the New York State legislature created 32 school districts in New York City.

What's the evidence after 25 years? Was the decentralization theory correct? For starters, student achievement has not soared as predicted. Also, the community boards have been frequently involved in scandals. Community board members have been caught selling jobs for money, drugs, and sex, and some have stolen funds. And there is little political accountability, since only about 10 percent of community members bothers to vote in school board elections.

Last May 30th, we got a good, down-to-earth look at the condition of community school boards—and the decentralization theory in real life—from *The New York Daily News*. "Shocking Report on District School Boards," the headline read; "Exclusive Poll Every Parent Must Read." The *News* interviewed 236 of the 288 school board members and found that:

- 56 percent did not know the number of students in their district.
- 80 percent did not know the percentage of students in their district who could read at grade level.
- 78 percent did not know the percentage of students who were at grade level in math.
- 67 percent did not know the occupancy rate in their district schools, and 74 percent did not

know how many schools in their district were over 100 percent occupied.

• 79 percent did not know the amount of their district budgets, even though they had voted on their budgets just a few weeks earlier.

The decentralization theory—and the reform it prompted—was wrong. Instead of knowledgeable and committed school boards, New York City got boards that the *News* called "Dumb and Dumber." Instead of better governance, the city got a system of mass patronage. And instead of a greater focus on student achievement, the city got schools that were almost actively encouraged to have less. Things couldn't get worse, they said 25 years ago, but they did. Now almost everyone wants a change, but since local school boards use their little patronage machines to support other politicians, that would be a heavy lift.

Does all this mean we should oppose recent proposals for even more decentralization? Like having each school on its own, apart from any central system? Like having parents, businesses or community groups run individual schools? Like creating more and more charter schools? Not necessarily. But we should be aware that things don't always work out the way our theories and hopes tell us—and that things *can* get worse.

Above all, we need to question and debate a hidden assumption behind these decentralization proposals: that changing the way schools are governed will change—that is, improve—teaching and student achievement. Only changes focused on teaching and student learning can do that. So far, we can confidently say that changing school governance will change things, but the assumption that it will be for the better is not proven.

The Smiley-Face Approach

Where We Stand / June 16, 1996

The school board in Clark County, Nevada, has decided that its students deserve a new grading system. Now there will be no more hurt feelings—or damaged self-esteem—because somebody got a D or an F and no more swelled heads because of a straight-A report card. Here's how the system goes, according to the most recent issue of *The Quarterly Review of Doublespeak:*

> [S]tudents who earn D's or below will be characterized not as borderline passing or failing but as *emerging.* Those earning A's will no longer be commended for excellent work but will be told merely that they are *extending,* and those in between will not be described as doing adequate or mediocre work but [that] they are *developing.*

The people who invented the traditional grading system undoubtedly thought it was a way of providing information. The Clark County innovation is more likely to produce headaches as those concerned try to figure out what the various "grades" mean. *Emerging* from what? (What if a student is not emerging but is still stuck?) And how is *emerging* different from *developing* or *extending?*

The new "grades" are the educational equivalent of the familiar smiley face. Their message: "You are all terrific!"

If you switched the grades around, would anybody notice? Probably not, and that is probably the point. Grades used to tell a ninth grader and his parents how successful the student was in mastering algebra. They also distinguished between levels of performance, showing who was doing well and who was not cutting it. The nearly indistinguishable present participles that the Clark County board plans to substitute for A's, B's, and the rest, imply that, if there is any difference, it's not important. The new "grades" are the educational equivalent of the familiar smiley face. Their message: "You are all terrific!"

What will students make of them? First graders were always smart enough to see that the Bluebird reading group was for kids who were having a tough time and the Cardinal group was for those who learned to read in the first two weeks, so Clark County students will probably be able to crack this code. But they'll get another message, too: If the difference between failing and outstanding work is not significant enough to put in words that are plain and clear, why should they make a big effort to do well?

Parents who want only good news about their children will be big fans of the new system. But those who are used to discussing their children's grades with the kids will be in trouble. You can say to a child who has just gotten a C, "This shows you are not trying. You have to do better next time." (Or "That B in science is

great; your hard work really paid off!") What can you say about *developing?* That it won't do?

Of course the Clark County board could solve these problems by collapsing the three grades into one (called *breathing*). And we could sit back and enjoy a laugh—if the foolishness in Clark County were an anomaly. Unfortunately, it isn't. And until we take it on—until we have schools, families, and communities sending consistent signals that achievement counts—all our "reforms" will fail.

For example, officials in many school districts have become uneasy with the practice of honoring the two top-ranking students in senior classes by naming them *valedictorian* and *salutatorian.* Some have stopped the practice altogether. Others, even more mysteriously, have decided that seniors should elect classmates to those honors. It's as though a basketball team decided that the high scorer for the year should be elected.

Officials in a large number of school districts have also gotten rid of class ranking—even though a majority of colleges say they would like this information for the admissions process. There are some good reasons for the change. For example, a student whose grades would put him in the top 10 percent in most schools might not make the top quarter or even the top half in a high-achieving school. However, problems like this could obviously be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. The real reason school officials insist on blurring the distinctions between students is that they think it is somehow unfair to acknowledge that some students have achieved more academically than others. (This is seldom a problem when it comes to sports.)

If this is our attitude toward academic achievement, we will never convince students that working hard in school is worthwhile. Fortunately, a countermovement is developing. One sign is the recent "education summit" where governors and business leaders endorsed high academic standards and agreed to cooperate in working for them. Another is President Clinton's proposal to recognize hard work and good grades by giving $1,000 scholarships to the top 5 percent of high school graduates and a tax credit for a second year of college to students who get a B average the first year. But these initiatives are not enough. They will work only if we get rid of the smiley-face approach to academic achievement and attach real stakes to what students do in school when it comes to graduating from high school and getting a job or getting into college.

Public Education: Essential to a Pluralistic Democracy

What Would You Do If...?

From speech at AFT QuEST Luncheon
Washington, D.C. / May 1979

I want to conclude by presenting a little problem that I presented at a staff meeting that the AFT had some months ago.

It tries to suggest the complexity of the problems that we're faced with. The question that I raised at the staff meeting was this: Suppose that at this very moment I told you I just received a message that the Congress of the United States had overridden the veto of the president and passed the tuition tax credit bill. The Supreme Court had already considered the matter and, by a 5-to-4 vote, found that tuition tax credits were constitutional in an advisory opinion.

The point is, we have to ask ourselves, what could we be doing now, long before a bill passes, to prevent it from happening? If we believe—and we do—that vouchers and tuition tax credits would mean the end of public education and if we believe that public education must continue, then these issues of what we can do now, of what changes could we bring about to re-establish quality and increase public confidence are not mere hobbies. They are not a question of trying to gain for ourselves a favorable public image because we're sitting here and talking about these questions. They are the bread-and-butter of the union and the life and death of public education, and they deserve the same amount of attention, of energy, of intelligence, of money, of staff that we devote to every other activity of the union.

[Much applause]

Vouchers Would Pull Our Society Apart

Where We Stand / June 3, 1979

When the people of California were debating Proposition 13, many Americans thought they were merely watching a political event in California, much the same as watching a gubernatorial race in another state. But now we know better. Proposition 13 not only amended the California Constitution, it also set in motion a new national political force, Proposition 13 "fever." The political mood is one of cutting back, demanding balanced budgets and reducing taxes.

Now California is getting ready for still another referendum. This one is called the "Family Choice Initiative." If adopted, it will have an even greater national impact than Proposition 13, for with Proposition 13 other states can argue that there were special situations in California: booming real estate values, a $5 billion state surplus, property reassessment just before the vote, and so forth. But if the "Family Choice Initiative" is passed, many other states can be expected to follow California's example.

What is the "Family Choice Initiative"? It is a type of voucher plan designed to provide public tax support for public and private schools (both religious and secular). In effect, the plan would put an end to the public school system of California. It would create a new category of schools, called "common schools," which would include both public schools and "private scholarship schools." Instead of funds being sent to schools through local taxes or state aid, funds would be given to parents, who would then choose schools for their children. Schools would compete for students in the same way that supermarkets compete for customers. Those failing to attract enough students would go out of business.

The chief supporters of the plan are John E. Coons and Stephen D. Sugarman, authors of *Education by Choice: The Case for Family Control* (University of California Press, 1978). The plan calls for strict spending limits on schools and would allow private schools to employ teachers and other staff members without regard to any state standards for professional and personal qualifications. According to Sugarman (writing in the April 1979 issue of *Where,* a British education magazine for parents):

> The case for family choice rests on the belief that there is not social consensus over what are the proper goals and means of education. In short, there is simply no public agreement on basic matters such as what is the good life for which education might prepare one, whether childhood primarily is to be a time of joy or apprenticeship and so on.
>
> ... Besides, even as to the basic skills, there is no agreement on how to impart them. But if both the goals and the means of education are uncertain...what is one to do? The answer, I submit, is to turn away from the issue of 'what is best' and to ask instead who should be given the power to decide what education is best for children. Parents are the ones who should decide, according to Coons and Sugarman.

Before the vote takes place, many aspects of the voucher idea will be debated. Some weeks ago, in a paper delivered at San Jose State University, R. Freeman Butts, author of *Public Education in the United States* (Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1978), attacked vouchers as an idea aimed at making private profit out of the public purse and a scheme that would destroy the basic intent of our founding fathers. According to Butts, *public* education is embedded in our state constitutions:

> The founders of this republic...were trying to build common commitments to their new democratic *political* community. The prime purpose for a public rather than a private education, was *political;* it was to prepare the young for their new role as self-governing citizens rather than as *subjects* bound to an alien sovereign or as *private persons* loyal primarily to their families, their kinfolk, their churches, their localities or neighborhoods, or their ethnic traditions. In its origins, the idea of public education was *not* to give parents more control over education, *not* to promote the individual needs and interests of children, *not* to prepare for a better job, *not* to get into college.

In a society where only an elite few are educated and rule, or a society that is "homogeneous in religion, language, ethnicity, and cultural tradition...and where there is common agreement as to what the core of education should be," it could be argued that private schools could do just as well, Butts said. "But in a democratic society where education is intended for most, if not all, persons, and where there is enormous diversity of culture, of religion, of class, and of educational goals, the private schools are likely to divide along lines of one kind or another and are not likely to provide the overall sense of political community needed for a viable political life. Especially is this true if the government itself and public funds are used to encourage parents and families to coalesce around other like-minded families in order to do their own thing."

Coons and Sugarman are less than honest when they use the term "common schools." In the *Where* article, Sugarman admits that under his plan there is the possibility of schools financed from public funds operating under the auspices of what he calls the "'minority' ideological group." Discussing who (besides parents and teachers) might be likely to organize schools under his plan, Sugarman writes:

> Plainly there are cultural and political organizations in Britain whose members feel that their values are not

part of the social mainstream. These could be groups of feminists, socialists, libertarians, blacks, fascists, and so on. For many, their children today go to schools in which the values taught clash with the values of the home. Some people laud this: education, in short, is designed for socialization into mainstream values. Those with other values, of course, can be quite embittered by this unwanted indoctrination.

(In the United States, one imagines, there would be many quite embittered about their tax money financing schools designed to impart fascist values.)

The choice is not between public schools as they now exist and some imagined picture of ideal private schools. Our public schools can and must be better than they are in many instances, but better or not, they must be preserved. For they are designed to keep our society together. Vouchers are designed to use tax money to pull our society apart.

The Fight of the Century

From State of the Union Address, AFT Convention
San Francisco, California / July 1979

Now, of course, we are faced with the voucher question. I would like to spend a few minutes on it because it is going to be with us for a while, and there is no doubt that, should vouchers become the accepted method of financing public education in America, there will be no public education in America. I would go a step further. If we end up with schools that teach in other languages, that do not have certified teachers, that can teach any ideology that anybody wants, or schools whose only purpose is to make money and who advertise on the radio and television and give away goodies in order to get student customers, that is the end of more than public education in America. It is the end of America itself because if we don't have an educated population, we don't have a country.

[Applause]

Now, the people who talk about vouchers make them sound very, very nice. Calling vouchers "family choice" is such a good way of packaging them.

Who is against family?

And who is against choice?

It is something like the slogan "the right to work," which does not give anyone a job, but that gives you the right to work without the protection of a union, under substandard conditions.

And vouchers, of course, give you family choice.

What does that mean? The kind of image that voucher supporters try to conjure up in the minds of the public is a comforting one. "Don't worry. There will always be a public school system and public school teachers. What vouchers do is just to give you a choice. You can take this voucher, and whenever you are unhappy, you can go across the street or down the block or down the road to some other school. Then if you don't like that one and it turns out that the public school was better, well, that is simple. Next year, just take your voucher and go right back to the public school."

Some experiments are reversible but others are not.

Vouchers are, they say, an experiment. What do we have to lose if we try them out? If private schools are better, we will find out soon enough and everybody will love them and will stay there. On the other hand, if all the terrible things that you tell us about these schools are true, they won't last very long.

Well, the trouble with that image is that there are several types of experiments. Some experiments are reversible but others are not. You experiment with a new type of food, and if you don't like it, you don't try it again. You have lost nothing except that you didn't enjoy that meal.

If you experiment with drugs, it is not so easy to change your mind. You may very well be on a road where the experiment has determined your future. And it is the same with vouchers. They are an experiment that is both destructive and irreversible.

Let's look at how vouchers would work in any big city or state. Take New York or Chicago or take the state of California. Let's suppose that vouchers are enacted so parents all get checks, vouchers—not for $500, as under tuition tax credits, but for $2,000 or $2,500 per child, the full amount that is spent for public education in that particular community or state.

And let us say—and I will use New York City as an example—let us say that only 10 percent of the parents decide to take their students out of public schools. With 900,000 students, that means that almost 100,000 students would leave public schools.

These 100,000 students would leave at a time when New York City, like all our cities, is in great financial need. Can we expect the taxpayers of New York City to keep 950 schools open with fewer students in those schools? I doubt it very much.

So we can expect that 95 schools will be closed, and if we close those 95 schools, will the public say those schools should sit there and wait for the children to return? Or will people say, "Look, these buildings are worth millions of dollars; let's sell them?"

And because they would be sold, there would be no schools for the students who left to return to if they ever made that decision. And the same process would be repeated in a second year if another 5 or 10 percent left and in a third year if another group left.

This is not one of those experiments where you can change your mind. It is a decision that leads to a line of irreversible actions that will ultimately lead to the closing of the public schools.

Now, who would buy those buildings? Well, there certainly would be ready customers. After all, if 90,000 to 100,000 students leave the public schools, I don't know of any existing private or religious schools that could handle them. So the customers for those school buildings would be the brand-new private voucher schools that would open. They would undoubtedly also be customers for some of the textbooks and supplies that would now be in surplus. So the voucher scheme really is a wholesale selling of public schools to the private sector that would allow no opportunity for return.

What I am saying is that there will be no choice in a very short time. Students are going to end up in the same schools, and you know something, even with the same teachers. After all, you don't have a million or two or three million people out there waiting to become teachers. So as public school teachers are dismissed and start looking for jobs, they will be hired by private schools. And by and large, you will have the same school buildings with the same teachers with the same children with the same textbooks that have been sold by the public sector. The only thing you will not have is democratic control of the schools. The whole system will be run by the kind of characters who run nursing homes.

And when vouchers gobble up the public schools, we will have another problem. As long as we have public schools and they exhibit some shortcomings and some failures, there will always be critics saying, look, we have to improve the schools, we have to improve what students are doing. And there will be pressure from parents and others who care about education to get more for Title I, more state aid for education, more support because their children are in the public school system.

But with vouchers, that will not be so because when mother X or father Y complains that their children didn't learn anything, the officials will say, "You are the one who chose that school. Take your voucher to another one next year."

There will be no pressure to improve public education because the responsibility will be taken away from society as a whole, and the mother and father will be told, "You made the mistake. You didn't like that brand. Go off and buy another, and another and another. The responsibility is yours."

Well, I want to say here, and I am sure I express the view of every person in this room, that as far as the American Federation of Teachers is concerned, this is a fight that we will take on. We will use every resource, and it is going to be the fight of the century.

Tax Credits: The Myth of Parental Choice

Where We Stand / January 25, 1981

The tuition tax credit fight goes on. Last Wednesday, *The New York Times* printed a letter from Virgil C. Blum, S.J., president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights in Milwaukee, criticizing the *Times'* strong editorial opposition to tax credit and voucher schemes that would pour tax dollars into the support of private and parochial schools.

According to Blum, research conducted by his own organization shows that private schools are very effective in the inner city and that "nonselected black and Hispanic children achieve at the national level in skills tests." Half of the families in the schools studied, he said, have annual incomes under $15,000. Blum gives a number of arguments for "parochiaid" and finds it particularly significant that "children would attend the schools of their parents' choice—which is of considerable psychological importance for all parents, especially minority parents."

These will be the two themes running through the parochiaid campaign: (1) private schools do a better job of teaching, and (2) parents should be free to choose schools for their children.

Do private schools do a better job? Some probably do better; others do worse. But the success statistics of private schools against public schools are about as convincing as statistics that show that people enrolled in YMCA health and exercise classes are in much better shape than patients in the local hospitals.

Blum claims that "nonselected" black and Hispanic pupils in the private schools that his group researched have done very well. But are they really "nonselected"? Were they just chosen at random from the entire minority population in their neighborhoods? (Blum says the schools have an "open admissions policy," which does not necessarily mean the students were "nonselected," especially if the schools had limited places available.) Do the students pay tuition? How many poor minority children are in each class? How many are

in private school classes in which all the other children are also poor and minority—as is the case in many public schools? Or were a few minority students (whose parents are motivated enough to pay tuition and fees for books) placed in classes made up mostly of middle-class students who come to school with fewer problems? Can Blum really show that it is private school education that is so successful—or is he just showing that putting a poor minority child into a different setting, a middle-class setting, is beneficial? If the latter is true, he's not proving anything about private schools. Rather, he's advancing an argument for a good pupil mix in schools, public or private.

In order for Blum to prove his point conclusively, perhaps he should arrange for a real experiment. Volunteers from the nonpublic schools should take over a number of classes from tough public schools—or perhaps even take over a few of the toughest public schools in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia or Washington. Take them over as they are—without picking the students they want, or those whose parents are motivated, or those who can afford to pay—and put them under private auspices for a year or two. Then we'll see if the nonpublic schools have some magical ingredient for success—and if they do, whether they'll share it with the rest of us.

The question of free choice is an interesting one, too. Under tuition tax credits, it is not the parent or the student who has the right to choose, as Blum and the other advocates claim. Rather, it is the school that has the right to select and reject the students it wants. If Blum and Senator Moynihan really believe in parental choice, they should provide for it in the legislation. The bill should clearly say that no public tax money—via tax credits or vouchers or any other such scheme—can go to any school that refuses to accept any student who wants to enter. If there are more applicants than places at the school, the available seats should be filled by a lottery. Even such a modest proposal will be opposed, because the tax credit does not aim to give free choice to parents but, rather, to schools. (Free choice of schools, incidentally, doesn't mean much to a poor child whose parents are given a tax credit of $250 or $500 or even $1,000 to attend a school that charges $2,000 or $3,000 in tuition.)

While the propaganda tells parents that they will be getting free choice, actually they will get nothing of the kind. They, and all of us, will be paying tax dollars to support schools that are free to accept their children or to lock them out. And we will be helping to foot the tuition bill for those who can already afford to pay huge sums for swanky private schools.

It's going to be a tough fight. But the message is already going out to those who will be most directly affected, the parents of children in our public schools. In a recent "alert" to members of the United Parents Association of New York City, President Meryl Schwartz stated the issue well. She wrote:

> We will, I'm sure, hear the same old story about parochial and private school parents paying taxes for public schools. But in our society people who have no children pay taxes too, and those of us who choose not to use public transportation, public beaches or public libraries pay taxes for their upkeep also.
>
> Public school doors are opened to every child, rich, poor, handicapped, gifted. They are the backbone of our American heritage, composed of all races, creeds, religions. Private and parochial schools (which comprise over 90 percent of all private schools) cannot and do not make that claim, nor do they have to. Their doors can close on any child.
>
> Every parent has the right to choose religious or private education for their child—but not the right to use public tax dollars to subsidize a private choice because he/she opts not to use available public services.

We Can Fix Them!

Speech at AFT QuEST Luncheon
Washington, D.C. / May 1981

I would like to conclude this talk with a quotation from a president of a private college. His name is Stephen Trachtenberg, and he's the president of the University of Hartford, a private institution. In a speech he recently gave at the University of Maryland, he told a story that deals with what I believe is our role, in the next year or two, in putting education back together. Let me read from Trachtenberg's speech: "At public school #254, all the seventh-grade boys took a course called 'shop'. There we were exposed to the wonders of wood-working and taught to distinguish a brad from a nail, and a crosscut from a rip saw, and provided with other similar bits of information thought likely to be useful to us as adult males. The girls, of course, were at cooking class while we boys were busy at our bench, a clear violation of the law today. Our carpentry instructor was named Mr. Vogel. He was a lovely man, an artisan and educator who welcomed the chance to teach his craft to young people. I was, however, a source of some despair to him. Everything I touched seemed to splinter. Bookends never ended, tie racks never racked, and lamps never lit. Nevertheless, I came away from the experience informed in at least three ways. First, I developed a great and lasting respect for skilled workmen. Second, from that day to this I have done my best to avoid hammer, chisel, and vise. Third, I remember what Mr. Vogel used to reply to me when I went to him with my project in pieces and said, 'Look, Mr. Vogel, it broke'. He would say, 'Trachtenberg, it didn't break. You broke it. You fix it.'"

Our schools didn't break. We broke them. We

should never have to confront another Sputnik. No professor should have to challenge his students as citizens of a second-class power. We hear talk of the reindustrialization and the revitalization of America. Their time has come. Our schools are the place to start. They can be fixed. We can fix them with your help.

Market Schools

Where We Stand / July 22, 1990

With communism crumbling in Eastern Europe and nations rushing to adopt a market economy, it seems that more people than ever before believe a competitive market system is the only one that will work. John Chubb and Terry Moe think the market system will also work to revive America's faltering schools. In *Politics, Markets and America's Schools* (The Brookings Institution, 1990), they suggest a voucher system that would give students publicly funded "scholarships" to attend any school of their choice—public or private. They paint a rosy picture of how the market would provide schools geared to satisfy every type of education "consumer." Markets undoubtedly do many things well. They're also lousy at other things, but Chubb and Moe don't discuss the down-side of their market schools.

Being driven by market forces is no guarantee of quality for schools. Far from it—market schools are subject to the same abuses as other businesses. A Minneapolis-St. Paul *Star Tribune* reporter, David Peterson, found this out when he investigated Minnesota vocational and technical schools in 1988. In competing for students, these public and private schools used slogans like "90 percent of all technical institute students start careers in their chosen fields. You can, too." Upbeat slogans like this probably impressed prospective students, but few of the schools had placement records to match—"50 percent of all students get permanent jobs" was more like it. And, Peterson found, even those figures were generous because they included people who got menial jobs that had nothing to do with what they had studied in vocational-technical school—for instance, two graduates "trained" as electromechanical technicians working as janitors.

Chubb and Moe say consumers will be protected by the government even under a system of market schools. But it didn't work that way in Minnesota, which was spending more on these schools than on its state universities. In fact, the state regulators did check, but when student surveys disagreed with the information provided by the market schools, the regulators mostly ignored what the students had to say. Finally, they stopped asking for student surveys.

This isn't an isolated case, either. A 1984 survey of proprietary trade schools conducted by the U.S. General Accounting Office sampled 1,165 private, for-profit schools that were getting $185 million a year in Pell Grants from the federal government. Its findings? Nearly half the schools admitted students who did not meet federally mandated admission requirements. (And when 74 percent of these students dropped out without having gotten the training they expected, the schools of course held on to the $13 million the students had brought in government grants.) Two-thirds of these market schools misrepresented themselves in recruiting students, many by lying about the jobs their graduates got.

Again, the agencies—public and private—that were responsible for monitoring the very minimal standards that these 1,165 schools were supposed to maintain had not done so. They were hampered by scarce funds and lack of personnel. And if we were to move to a system of market schools, more than 100,000 schools would have to be monitored. Could we afford to do this? And if we did somehow find the money, wouldn't we be moving the schools back to the bureaucratic control from which Chubb and Moe are—rightly—trying to free them?

Chubb and Moe can make a powerful argument in favor of vouchers because they don't meet the scholar's obligation to deal with both sides of the story. So they aren't worried about crooked entrepreneurs or the costs and dangers of regulation. They're not worried about schools' getting mediocre results, either. They say that academically excellent schools will prosper and grow because parents and students will surely select them and that bad schools will lose customers and either shape up or close. But is their assumption that parents and students will always—or almost always—make choices on the basis of how good schools are warranted?

We already know that nonacademic issues are very important for students taking advantage of Minnesota's choice plan. In 1989-90, 40 percent of students who went to a school outside their district did so for reasons of "convenience," like easy transportation or the availability of day care. And market schools would increase, not diminish, the tendency to make choices for nonacademic reasons. Creative marketers with schools to sell would find plenty of ways that had nothing to do with producing more learning to attract kids to their schools—Get a free trip to Disneyland! Come to the school that produced last year's state champs! Swim in our new Olympic pool!

At this moment, we are in the midst of a vast national effort to set American education right—the president, the governors, and the whole business community are involved. The process is slow and difficult, and we're not entirely sure what will work. But this much is clear: Our efforts are focused on improving student learning; the market schools that Chubb and Moe pro-

pose are focused on attracting and holding onto students. One has a good chance of making our schools what they should be; the other will stop short with making our students happy.

No One Is Born An American

From remarks to U.S. Department of Education conference, Improving History and Civic Education Washington, D.C. / October 1991

This is a topic which is of more than academic interest to me, although there is nothing wrong with academic interest. It is, as you'll see, a passionate concern of mine. So if I hadn't been invited here, I might have tried to crash.

We're meeting at a time when there is a deep crisis in public education in America. We've had a focus on education now for almost a decade. Those people who thought, after "A Nation At Risk" and after the other reports, this would all go away, all we had to do was close our eyes and wait until something else hit the headlines, have now seen a continuing interest by the president and by the governors, by the Congress, by the business community and many citizens, and one which stays with us.

The reason for that concern is largely economic. Most of the focus on the problems of American education deals with our inability to compete economically. It deals with the fact that we are basically only educating to what might be considered a world-class college level three to five percent of our high school graduates, as against 30 percent in Germany and 23 or 24 percent in most other industrial countries, with a low of about 16 percent in Great Britain.

Now, this view of how poorly American education is doing is now moving toward a strong push for educational vouchers, which would provide access to use of public dollars for private and public schools. Part of that, of course, is just the historic pressure on the part of those parents who already use private schools as we face an economic squeeze in the country. There is more and more pressure for those who use those services to be reimbursed.

Part of this pressure is also just anger and frustration, the desire to give the public schools a good swift kick, because otherwise they won't change. Of course, on the part of some, the idea is to eventually close public schools down and get rid of that big obligation.

But the emphasis on our economic competitiveness is not the only issue. One of the things that Americans have historically been concerned with is, I guess, what we might call the Americanization process. So in the past when the issue of funding nonpublic schools has come up, no matter what the shortcomings of public schools, people have said they play a role that other schools would not play.

I quote from a recent book by Abigail Thernstrom. It says, "Schools educate children in the civic culture. American society relies upon its teachers to turn diverse children into citizens, speaking a common language, committed to the American political and economic culture, and prepared to make it work. No other country in the world has opened its doors to so many different people, and none has so successfully integrated immigrant groups into the culture, creating a stable polity. Other countries make greater use of educational choice, advocates say, but those countries are so demographically different as to make the point worthless."

So, one of the strong supports for American public education has been precisely that. And we are very different as a nation. One is born a Kurd. I don't know how anyone in this room would go about becoming a Kurd. The same is true of other nations and cultures. It is very, very clear what makes you a Turk or a Kurd or a Japanese or a Chinese. But clearly, one is not born into something that we call being an American. There is no word comparable to the word "Americanize" in any other language. We need to look at that.

The AFT does a lot of work with teachers in other countries and especially with those who are in countries seeking to establish democratic systems. Recently we had a teacher from Bulgaria who spent time with us.

At one of our large meetings, that Bulgarian teacher went up to some of our black members and asked questions about how blacks organized to fight whites in the United States in order to gain equality and civil rights. The black teachers who were approached pointed out that this was not a fight of blacks versus whites, but it was a fight of blacks and whites who believed in freedom and equality and civil rights fighting against others who didn't believe it. It was not a conflict of one people against another, but a conflict of one set of values and ideas against another set of values and ideas. The Bulgarian leaned back and said, "In my country, all the fights are one people against another people, one history against another history, one blood against another blood. Your system is much better."

That is a difference that needs to be looked at because in some of the proposals and pressures that we face today, when some people use words like "to Americanize" as though it were a dirty word, we begin to undermine one of the major supports for public education in this country.

I will turn once more to Abigail Thernstrom in the description of what may be happening to our schools:

> The public schools may be falling down on their historic job. The theory of the common school may be better than the reality. Public school advocates worry

that private and parochial schools, if they become dominant forms of education, will cater to the particular interests of a particular group. Schools will cease to educate children in the values and the language of the larger culture. But are public schools doing so now?

Graduates of bilingual education programs have often learned neither English nor much American history. Curricular changes now being discussed in New York state may result in changes in the state curriculum that amount to an ethnic definition of knowledge. If the plan in New York proceeds, the history curriculum in particular will become politicized and ethnocentric. Race and ethnicity will become the dominant prism through which all historical events are examined.... Parents have always been able to buy an education geared to a religious, ethnic, or other group with which they strongly identify. Even parents who send their children to a public school often supplement their education with religious or other instruction. But the public schools are seen as having a different mission.

Common schools, they were once called. Schools that should celebrate diversity as one of the nation's strengths, but never a particular religious or ethnic heritage....If public schools cease to transmit common values and the shared culture, the main argument in support of their exclusive claim to taxpayers' money will have lost its force.

Now, what is the basis of the current conflict? Well, *E Pluribus Unum.* Out of many peoples, one nation. It is interesting to contrast that notion with the slogan that has at many times rallied many other peoples, which is quite different, namely, one people, one nation, which is essentially the cry of all of those who seek to carve separate nations out of Yugoslavia or those who seek to break up Czechoslovakia.

There are motivations behind the movement to change the curriculum that are quite good and that I would hope all of us share. As we look back to what our teaching of history was throughout most of our history, we see that our politics and culture was depicted as a history of white men, ruling, making the decisions, and making all the contributions. It was essentially a patriotic picture that showed the inevitable progress of the nation, and it was a spectacular saga.

It served to create the kind of loyalty and patriotism that was desired. It worked. But it was incomplete and not honest. It ignored women and Native Americans and the African contributions and the Latino contributions and the Asian contributions. I don't know of anyone today who would defend that type of patriotic saga of progress. Clearly there was too much *unum* and not much else.

So we have a current push away from that, a reaction. Usually when you find that something is going wrong, frequently the tendency is to do the same stupid things, but a little faster or a little better or a little more. So the dry, boring materials that jumped hectically from one big event to the next and one president to the next have been replaced by books crammed with more dry facts and with some sidebars to take care of all those who had been left out.

Now we face some very troublesome solutions. One of them is very popular today, and that is essentially that we replace one simple patriotic saga for the whole country with a simple patriotic saga for every racial and ethnic group in the country. So we're not doing anything that would be more intellectually honest. We're just saying, give all these folks their own simple myths. We used to have one. Let's have many.

I'd like to share with you what I think is wrong with this. It was best said the other day by *Washington Post* columnist Bill Raspberry in a column where he discovered some of the writings of a dear friend of mine, Bayard Rustin:

Fifteen years before Afrocentrism became a part of the academic, cultural, political lexicon, Bayard Rustin was raising a warning flag. "Be proud of your ethnic history," he was saying back in the late 1970s. "Be insistent that it become part of the nation's general history, but learn the difference between racial pride and racial arrogance."

Rustin, who was deputy director and principal planner for the 1963 March on Washington, died in 1987, a couple of years before the Afrocentric movement triggered shock waves across the university campuses and public school systems. But he had seen similar stirrings and he understood how easily they could be transformed from the simple demand that the contributions of black people to the American culture be acknowledged to the more contentious notion that the black contributions are superior.

I don't know what Rustin would say about the present dual effort to elevate the ancient Egyptians to cultural supremacy and to prove their blackness, with the twin goals of demonstrating the purity of the black American cultural heritage and the derivative nature of the Eurocentric culture, which, goes the argument, was stolen from Egypt. But if his earlier remarks were any indication, I don't think he would clamor aboard the Afrocentric bandwagon. His message was not for blacks alone but for all minorities who reacted to a sense of exclusion by embracing exclusiveness: women who insisted they were better suited, by virtue of their womanhood, to govern; blacks and Hispanics who insisted that only they were capable of teaching their children; ethnics who placed tribal objectives above the more important social goals. Rustin understood the difficult distinction between helping immigrant children to retain familiarity with the language and culture of their parents, and, in the name of ethnic solidarity, locking them into that language and culture. I wish he were around to help us with the even more difficult distinction between an insistence that history be taught whole, for the good of the whole society, and the notion that it be taught from a peculiarly ethnic point of view so that students from the ethnic background could feel good about themselves and become avid learners.

The implication is that many black children fail to

learn because they have been brainwashed into thinking that they come from an inferior culture. The cure teaches them how superior their ethnic culture truly is. Rustin, almost as if anticipating the contention in another article he wrote in 1976, offered this warning: "Cultural diversity has its values, but the celebration of cultural uniqueness must be very carefully looked at. It could very easily become a campaign for ethnic superiority. Black is beautiful only if one says, black is beautiful also." The point is not to demonstrate the superiority of the black heritage, or even its perfect equality with other heritages. The point that needs to be driven home is that the ability to learn and think and create and contribute exists in individuals, not in cultures. The message our children need to hear is that genius can crop up anywhere, including right there in their classroom, if we only give it the chance.

So, we need to fight against this effort to replace one set of simple and false notions, distorted notions, with another set.

The recent proposal that comes out of New York state is based on the notion that we ought to teach history and social studies basically from the point of view of multiple perspectives, starting in the very earliest grades.

Well, there are several things that are wrong with this. First, it has the danger of being an inherently racist concept. The notion, as I read it in the New York statement, says that after dealing with a particular historic event, it is the teacher's obligation to turn to each child and ask, "What is your point of view on this?"

"Your point of view," to a black child, is intended to mean, what is the black point of view. To a Jewish child it is intended to mean, what is the Jewish point of view. To an Irish child, what is the Irish point of view. There seems to be no recognition that there may not be a single black view, and indeed, that a black child may have a view that is based on being rich or poor or having read extensively or being a liberal or a conservative or a socialist. That is, no matter what background you come from, in a society like ours we are often and delightfully surprised that people do not carry with them views that stereotypically they are expected to have.

Is it the job of the school to tell each child that there is only one point of view that he is entitled to have because he is from a particular racial or religious or ethnic or national group? Is this what public schools are for?

Then we have another idea that comes out of New York and elsewhere, which says that instead of insisting on scholarly, nonpoliticized history, we need to open up the schools to diverse theories, theories that are not accepted by the "power structure" in the field of history.

Well, that sounds very good. It sounds very open and very liberal. I consider myself on the liberal left side, so you will allow me a little criticism of this view. If the schools are to be places where we are so open to various theories that are not accepted by responsible scholars in the field, why are we so resistant to the teaching of Creationism in our schools? Why do we feel that it is "liberal" to say that there are some things that we do not teach because they are not accepted by the community of inquirers in the field of science, but somehow it is perfectly all right to do it in the field of history?

When we hear the popular chant of "Hey, hey, ho ho, Western culture's got to go," we should ask ourselves what other culture we would substitute.

Well, unfortunately, there has been thus far very little resistance on the part of the schools. To some extent, it is due to the new faddish theory—and we in education are subject to all kinds of fads—the theory of self-esteem. There are several types of self-esteem. One type of self-esteem is the kind you get by being told that your ancestors were great people and did wonderful things. There are lots of people throughout history who had that kind of self-esteem and who were otherwise bigoted and ignorant. That is, they believed in the superiority of their people, they hated other peoples, and they went out and killed and tortured and maimed and did all sorts of things. They had lots of self-esteem but they were stupid as all hell.

If we're talking about self-esteem being the basis for learning to read and to write and to do mathematics and to understand things that need to be understood, that is not the kind of self-esteem that does it. Yet, school people buy that idea very easily and they buy it because it is a lot easier to give each ethnic group nice stories about themselves than it is to get them to work hard at learning to read and to write and to learn mathematics. That does not mean that each individual should not feel some pride in his own heritage and background and culture, but it ought to be tempered with the understanding that there is no group of people that has not also committed crimes and atrocities, that no group comes as pure hero onto this stage.

Why else is this moving? Well, at a time when there is not much money around and a lot of people out there are making noise, this is something that you can do that doesn't cost anything, or at least very little.

Another part of this is the idea that "all cultures and values are equal." The New York State Board of Regents put out a statement some years ago that says that we ought to know and understand—which is fine—the history and the traditions and the values of other cul-

tures and other people.

But then it goes on to say that we have to value and sympathize with those particular values. Were the people who wrote this statement serious? There are cultures that still have slavery today. Should we value and appreciate and sympathize with those values? Should we sympathize with the values of the Nazis or the values of Saddam Hussein or the values of Apartheid in South Africa? And yet there, as part of a statement about what ought to drive the New York State curriculum, is a statement of absolute relativism, obviously designed to defend educators against the charge that we are ethnocentric.

I don't know of anyone who would dare to go out and campaign on that platform before the American public, who are paying for our schools. And I don't know how the people who say that all values and cultures are equal can also argue that we ought to have greater equality in the United States, that there is still discrimination here, that there are still aspects of racism.

How can a person who is willing to fight for certain values within our society not be willing to stand for those same values and acknowledge that they are more embodied in the values of Western civilization than some other civilizations?

Well, what is it that we need to do? I hope that we are here to assert, indeed to fight for, certain things. I think we need to take very seriously the idea that American history is naturally multicultural because that is the kind of nation we are. We don't have to do something that is special or dishonest, and we don't need a curriculum that is created by political pressures in order to have a multicultural curriculum in history.

The history of America is the history of the unfolding of the ideas of freedom and democracy, of groups that were excluded from that, of groups that fought together with groups that were already in, and of battles that are still yet to be fought.

I think that we need not be ashamed of the relationship of our values and our society to the Western tradition; we need to assert that relationship. So, when we hear the popular chant of "Hey, hey, ho ho, Western culture's got to go," we should ask ourselves what other culture we would substitute. That's not to say that other traditions aren't important, that we don't have things to learn from them, or that others shouldn't be proud of their particular cultures.

One of the people that I have had the pleasure and good fortune of spending some time with is Jan Orban. I first met him when Czechoslovakia was still a terrible dictatorship. Through an underground grapevine, he found out that I was coming, and we met in Prague. We had, in advance, decided how we would dress, and we met walking through the Jewish cemetery in the middle of Prague.

A few years later, Jan Orban became the head of the civic coalition that brought President Havel into office, and when he came to the U.S., a few months after that, he attended an AFT convention.

We were having some of these discussions about Afrocentrism in connection with efforts to teach American history different ways. He listened, and he spent hours and hours talking to people to see what was going on here. And he could not believe what we were doing to ourselves.

He said, "Do you realize that every country in Europe—we in Czechoslovakia, the Yugoslavs, the Hungarians, the Bulgarians, the Romanians, all of us—are looking at this great miracle that is the United States. We cannot understand how different people can live together for hundreds of years and think of themselves as one, and yet maintain those differences. We are trying to figure our how we can emulate what you have so that we can hold ourselves together and not go back to the historic struggles and wars and racism and bigotry and pograms and everything else that existed before. We are looking to your country, which is our ideal, at a time when you are about to head in our direction."

He could not understand it. So I will remind you that in William James's *Will To Believe,* he points out that sometimes truth is something that you can verify, but sometimes truth is something that you create as a result of your own actions. I guess that perception was the origin of our popular notion of the self-fulfilling prophecy.

James describes a skier who suddenly finds himself hanging on with both hands at the edge of a cliff with a drop of thousands of feet. If he lets go, he will die. James says, if he has the will, the stamina, the courage to believe in himself, and if he holds on, someone may come to rescue him. The belief that someone may come may actually turn out to make that very belief come true. Of course, letting go will make a different belief come true.

I think we are in very much the same situation. What we do will influence our youngsters. What we do will influence whether we have an American school system, democracy, multiculturalism. More than anything else, we as educators need to say that educational decisions are going to be made on the basis of scholarship and evidence, not on the basis of political pressure, not on the basis of people ordering us to do something that is intellectually dishonest.

We in the United States often criticized professors in Nazi Germany for blindly moving forward and teaching theories of racial superiority and inferiority. We said, "Why didn't they have the guts to stand up?" Of course, they had reasons. They might very well have been sent to a concentration camp and immediately have been shot.

No one in this room will be sent to a concentration

camp if you stand up and say, that is dishonest, that is not accepted by any historians, there is no evidence for that. We don't teach Creationism and we're not going to teach your version of history. What is going to be taught in the schools is going to be something that has a relationship to the life of mind and not to ideology and not to the question of who's got the biggest numbers.

If we can't stand up and say that to the public, there is no reason for them to continue their support of public education. They will get nothing worse if they support public funds for all kinds of other schools.

Well, I hope we put it together right.

[Applause]

Trials of an Education Consumer

Where We Stand / April 26, 1992

Choice is a word with great resonance for Americans because we consider it basic to our definition of freedom. Being free means being able to choose what you believe, what job you want to do, where you want to live and work, what you buy, etc. It's no wonder that the idea of school choice has caught on with a lot of people.

Supporters of school choice are confident that it will create a chain reaction of important changes in our education system. Students will stop patronizing poor schools, and lots of new schools of all different kinds will spring up in response to consumer demand. All this will lead, choice supporters say, to great satisfaction with the schools and a dramatic rise in student achievement.

But these results are almost entirely speculative. In fact, we have very little experience with public school choice, which allows parents to choose the public school their children go to, and virtually none with private school choice, which would use public money to send children to private schools. And even if choice results in offering education consumers an enormous number of different schools to choose from, is being different the same thing as being better?

In "The Private Hell of Public Education" (*Lear's,* April 1992), writer Bonnie Blodgett talks about what it's like to shop for a school. Blodgett is not an administrator or teacher or member of a union. She's a parent who got to choose where her child would go to school—and decided that there were big problems with the choice process and the assumptions behind it.

Blodgett and her husband are the kind of parents choice was created to satisfy—serious and responsible consumers—and St. Paul, where they live, has public school choice. In St. Paul, it is accomplished mostly through an array of magnet schools that were designed to give parents and children lots to choose from. But being a good shopper depends on having good information, and that was the Blodgetts' first problem.

> When GM wanted to design the Saturn car to beat the Japanese, the company didn't design 535 different Saturn cars; it concentrated on designing one.

The magnet program guide didn't give them much help: "Every school promised to bring out the particular interests and strengths of our child, to build her confidence, character, and social skills.

"Every school differed in the methods deployed, ... but evaluating that difference, whether it was an experimental teaching method or immersion in a particular subject, was difficult." Blodgett's husband observed that the information they got was "about as helpful as the nutrition information you find on the side of a cereal box." But they weren't buying cereal; they were deciding which program out of over two dozen would be best for their child—without really understanding any of them.

For a while they considered a Spanish-language immersion program. It was based on the theory that bilingual children learn better than kids with only one language. But they discarded this idea when they met a parent with a first grader in the program who complained that his kid was having a tough time reading in any language.

Their next choice was a new school that billed itself as a "world model of excellence in curriculum design" and promised "teaching teams...thoroughly trained in methodologies that incorporate the very best and latest research and practice in human learning and development." They weren't sure they understood what all this meant, but the enthusiasm of the principal and the teachers sold them. Unfortunately, the reality bore little relation to the hype. There didn't seem to be any curriculum, and there were few books. The cross-age groupings, a central feature of the school's philosophy, fell apart and were replaced by groupings according to achievement level. When Blodgett visited her daughter's class one day, it looked like an unsuccessful first grade in an ordinary school: Her kid was asleep at her

desk; most of the others were talking and horsing around; a few were listening to the teacher.

The story had a happy ending when their daughter was finally admitted to a school for which she had been wait-listed, but that's not the point. The point, Blodgett believes, is that the consumer model for education is seriously flawed. What does it mean, she asks, to tell parents they can choose from among things they don't understand? And what do all these choices mean anyway? Do they reflect what people know about education? Or are they just strategies for attracting customers?

"The agonizing choice process," Blodgett says, "...left me wondering why I should know. I find it inconceivable that nobody out there really knows better than I do what sort of elementary education will work for my child. ... Why don't they know whether (or under what conditions) it's good to group kids by age or skill levels? Why don't they know whether having one's own desk is a good thing, an indifferent thing or a bad thing?"

Some people think that Americans want a lot of choice in schools; President Bush and Secretary of Education Alexander are calling for 535 "break-the-mold" schools, no two alike. But maybe people don't want all that choice—and confusion. Maybe they want schools that are not all that different but that achieve the things they think are important: graduates who are prepared for work or college and prepared to live and work together in a multicultural democracy.

This is no defense of our current schools; they aren't working well enough and we must find out what will make them work much better. But when GM wanted to design the Saturn car to beat the Japanese, the company didn't design 535 different Saturn cars; it concentrated on designing one. Perhaps we should take a page from GM's book.

Good-bye, EAI?

Where We Stand / February 4, 1996

Recent months have been disastrous for Education Alternatives, Inc. (EAI). In November, Baltimore pulled the plug on the for-profit company's contract to manage 11 Baltimore schools—eighteen months before the contract was due to expire. Last week, Hartford, which had hired EAI to run its entire school system in October 1994, said good-bye after months of bickering between the two parties about how much EAI would be paid. All of this came on top of EAI's failure at South Pointe Elementary School in Dade County, Florida, last summer. Despite the outside money EAI had pulled in—and its claims of extraordinary success—an independent study found that South Pointe students achieved no better than similar students in other district schools. So Dade County declined to renew EAI's contract. And EAI, which had hyped itself to superintendents and school boards all over the country, claiming it could quickly and dramatically improve student achievement with the same per-pupil expenditure, was left without a single contract—and with egg all over its face.

There is no reason to be surprised. Many people greeted EAI as the idea of the future in school reform. Indeed, in 1992, when the ink was hardly dry on EAI's contract with Baltimore, then-Education Secretary Lamar Alexander gave the company a "Breaking-the-Mold" award for "successful educational innovation." But EAI had no qualifications. It had no experience in running urban schools; it had no curriculum and no blueprint for raising standards and achievement in Baltimore's underachieving students, or students anywhere else, for that matter.

If I announced I was about to mass-produce an automobile that would outperform all the cars currently on the market, people would greet my claims with skepticism. They'd ask, Where's your factory? Who's backing you? What revolution in design will make the car possible? But nobody asked EAI any tough questions. The company got a free ride because it uttered some magic words: It would institute a program that was "bold" and "innovative." Because it had "management expertise," it would know how to slash bureaucracy and waste. In doing so it would find enough money to improve the schools and make money for its stockholders.

Time has revealed that the emperor has no clothes. An independent study of Baltimore schools last year found little difference between EAI schools and the rest: Student achievement has not improved—in fact, reading scores are down; technology is not being more effectively used; parents are not more involved. And EAI did not run its schools with the same per-pupil allowance given to other schools in the system. The only significant difference between EAI and Baltimore's other schools was that EAI got an extra $18 million.

EAI has been able to keep afloat partly because the media have helped to give it an aura of credibility. There were exceptions. For example, Joe Rigert of the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* did a 1994 series on EAI in which he tested the company's claims against its performance. But in many stories, EAI's claims were accepted at face value and presented as fact—even after it was obvious that they were questionable, if not outright lies. The bias was often visible right up front—in the headlines:

- "Bold Stroke for Education: Baltimore Schools Open to a Bold, New Experiment" (*Washington Post,* September 2, 1992). How would readers be likely to respond to a story about EAI coming to Baltimore after reading this head-

line?

• "Why Smith Decided To Call in the Cavalry: Baltimore Schools Convinced D.C. Superintendent There Is a Way around Bureaucracy" (*Washington Post,* December 14, 1993). You haven't heard of EAI before? This makes clear that they are a bunch of heroic rescuers.

•And how about this headline from the *Hartford Advocate* (June 23, 1994) for letting readers know well in advance who they should be rooting for: "Will the Pols Blow School Reform?" (The story continues, "The question now is whether Hartford's warring pols will squander the most promising opportunity to reform the schools in years.")

Lots of media coverage insisted that the union had opposed EAI from the start. This approach injected an element of drama into the stories—if EAI is having trouble, it must be because of an adversarial relationship with the union rather than its own incompetence. The fact is, EAI won its first public school contract at South Pointe with the support of the union. And though Baltimore was a different proposition from South Pointe, we supported EAI in Baltimore, as well—until it became clear that they were behaving more like authoritarian bosses out of Charles Dickens than modern employers in the knowledge industry. What about Hartford? By that time, there was plenty of reason to oppose EAI, and we did. Nevertheless, they won a contract to manage the entire system. They lost it because they antagonized the very people on whom their success depended; I call that poor management.

Is EAI finished? Not unless people have decided that they need to deal with a business that manages schools the way they deal with any other business. And not unless the press has decided to stop hyping EAI's performance and start looking at it. Otherwise, EAI can go on courting school boards. And school boards, which are political creatures, are likely to be impressed by talk of cutting bureaucracy and squeezing out waste and fat, even though EAI has done nothing of the kind. (As I write this, the school board in Wappingers Falls, New York, is considering hiring EAI.)

The other day, a reporter asked me whether EAI's problems will keep other companies from entering the school management field. The answer depends on whose "problems" you are talking about. EAI's stockholders might not be interested in buying stock in another school management firm. The school systems that wasted time and money pursuing an educational dead end might think twice before hiring another EAI. But the problems undoubtedly look different if you are a member of EAI's top brass. Some of them, like founder and chairman of the board John Golle, are not losers. They knew when to sell their stock and when to hold on. So the school systems that believed EAI's plausible lies are out time and money—and the youngsters in their schools have lost time they could ill-afford. But the people who knew how to play the system? They have done very nicely, thank you.

It Works

Where We Stand / September 10, 1995

Last week, the AFT launched a national campaign for standards of conduct and achievement in U.S. schools. The public overwhelmingly supports these standards—and so do the people who work in the schools. But they haven't been heard.

Policymakers and reformers have gotten caught up in faddish and radical schemes for improving the schools, and they ignore what is obvious to people who work in the schools and to parents who send children there: Unless you have order and civility, not much learning will go on. And unless there are high academic standards, which students are expected to meet and helped to meet, school programs become trivial and meaningless; they do not prepare students to become responsible and productive members of society. Focusing on safe and orderly schools and high academic standards makes common sense, it works and it's long overdue.

What kind of teaching and learning can take place in classrooms where teachers have to spend their time dealing with students who are violent or who constantly disrupt the class by shouting obscenities and threatening other students? And yet, in too many schools, students who want to learn, and teachers, have no protection from this kind of thing. A school district may have a discipline code that is poorly written—or it may have none at all. But even an excellent code can only be effective if it is enforced, and many are not because school districts may be worried about their reputation or a court challenge. Or perhaps there is no place to send troublemakers but out on the street.

Safe and orderly classrooms are essential preconditions of learning. But we also need clear and rigorous academic standards. Students and parents—and all citizens—need to know that promotion from one grade to another and graduation from high school mean that academic standards have been met. They need to know that high grades stand for high achievement and a high school diploma means having the knowledge and skills essential for college and a good job.

Teachers, and the AFT, have supported high standards of conduct and achievement for a long time, but they can't bring it about alone. Parents and the public, across all demographic groups, have also said for a long time that safe and orderly schools and high standards

AFT's national campaign is about giving people the hope and the tools they need to get what they have been asking for.

in the core academic subjects are their priority. The 1994 Public Agenda Foundation survey, "First Things First," and the 1995 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll that I have discussed previously are only the most recent evidence. But individual parents and citizens, acting one at a time, have not been able to get school districts, their elected representatives, and reformers to make high standards of conduct and achievement a priority. Acting together, however, we can get the job done. And that's what the AFT's national campaign is about.

How will AFT's national campaign accomplish its goals? In the first phase, we are concentrating on urging individuals and community groups at the local level to endorse the "Bill of Rights and Responsibilities for Learning" (see below) and to urge school districts to adopt it. We'll also work together to get school districts to establish or modify discipline codes so that they are clear, fair, and enforceable and to establish alternative educational placements for violent or chronically disruptive students. And we'll continue urging states and districts to establish clear and rigorous academic standards, helping them to do it and to ensure that students have the help they need to meet standards.

The second phase of the campaign will concentrate on making sure discipline codes are enforced and reviewing how current due-process procedures for students help or hinder fair and consistent enforcement, as well as beginning the process of tying promotion and graduation to meeting rigorous academic standards. Putting high standards of conduct and achievement firmly in place in our schools may also mean working together to change state and federal laws that stand in the way.

Last November's elections showed how angry people are because they can't seem to get what they want from their government. It is the same thing in education. Parents and the public strongly support public schools. They do not want to turn the schools over to for-profit outfits, and they have repeatedly rejected vouchers. What they want, first and foremost, are safe and orderly public schools that focus on high academic standards for students. AFT's national campaign is about giving people the hope and the tools they need to get what they have been asking for.

A Bill of Rights and Responsibilities for Learning

Standards of Conduct, Standards for Achievement

The traditional mission of our public schools has been to prepare our nation's young people for equal and responsible citizenship and productive adulthood. Today, we reaffirm that mission by remembering that democratic citizenship and productive adulthood begin with standards of conduct and standards for achievement in our schools. Other education reforms *may* work; high standards of conduct and achievement *do* work—and nothing else **can** work without them. Recognizing that rights carry responsibilities, we declare that:

1. All students and school staff have a right to schools that are safe, orderly and drug free.
2. All students and school staff have a right to learn and work in school districts and schools that have clear discipline codes with fair and consistently enforced consequences for misbehavior.
3. All students and school staff have a right to learn and work in school districts that have alternative educational placements for violent or chronically disruptive students.
4. All students and school staff have a right to be treated with courtesy and respect.
5. All students and school staff have a right to learn and work in school districts, schools and classrooms that have clearly stated and rigorous academic standards.
6. All students and school staff have a right to learn and work in well-equipped schools that have the instructional materials needed to carry out a rigorous academic program.
7. All students and school staff have a right to learn and work in schools where teachers know their subject matter and how to teach it.
8. All students and school staff have a right to learn and work in school districts, schools and classrooms where high grades stand for high achievement and promotion is earned.
9. All students and school staff have a right to learn and work in school districts and schools where getting a high school diploma means having the knowledge and skills essential for college or a good job.
10. All students and school staff have a right to be supported by parents, the community, public officials and business in their efforts to uphold high standards of conduct and achievement.

We Can Do It

State of the Union Address,
AFT Convention
Cincinnati, Ohio / August 1996

Our Lessons for Life campaign can give the public hope that the schools can become what they want them to become. But please do not think that you can do this yourselves. Local presidents, delegates to the AFT convention, officers of locals, we can't do it alone. We have to involve the greatest asset that we have, our 907,000 members. Yes, lots of times we do things for them, and they don't even know what we've done or they take it all for granted. They often only come to us as leaders to complain about what we weren't able to get or something that occasionally we lose.

But sometimes we have to turn to them. I know it's difficult. It's hard to get people to work phone banks; it's hard to get people to volunteer to go out and get parental support and community support; but, you know, I bet that the majority of people sitting here in this room still remember the time before collective bargaining. They remember the time when the union didn't have full-time people and you developed a bargaining campaign by getting a lot of volunteers to come after school. You had telephones or you visited schools or you dropped off literature; and you ran the mimeograph machine in those days yourselves. You developed an awful lot of skills because there wasn't anybody else to get the job done. I remember that. How many people remember that?

Well, it was a great period of time. And it was great because everybody could feel that they had helped. It was not just a handful of people working for everybody else.

So I ask that you go back and do something that's difficult. I know most of the time we feel it's easier to do things ourselves than to try to get other people involved. It's hard. But we will not win on this unless we mobilize a good percentage of our 900,000 members.

We've got a good story to tell. We've got a great historic institution to preserve. And we can do it. We know how to do it because we've done it before. We've overcome tremendous odds, and we've done it against money and animosity and power; and we've done it by the volunteer activity of a large number of members.

That's my message. That's what we need to do over the next couple of years. Do that and we'll win.

Keeping Public Education Together

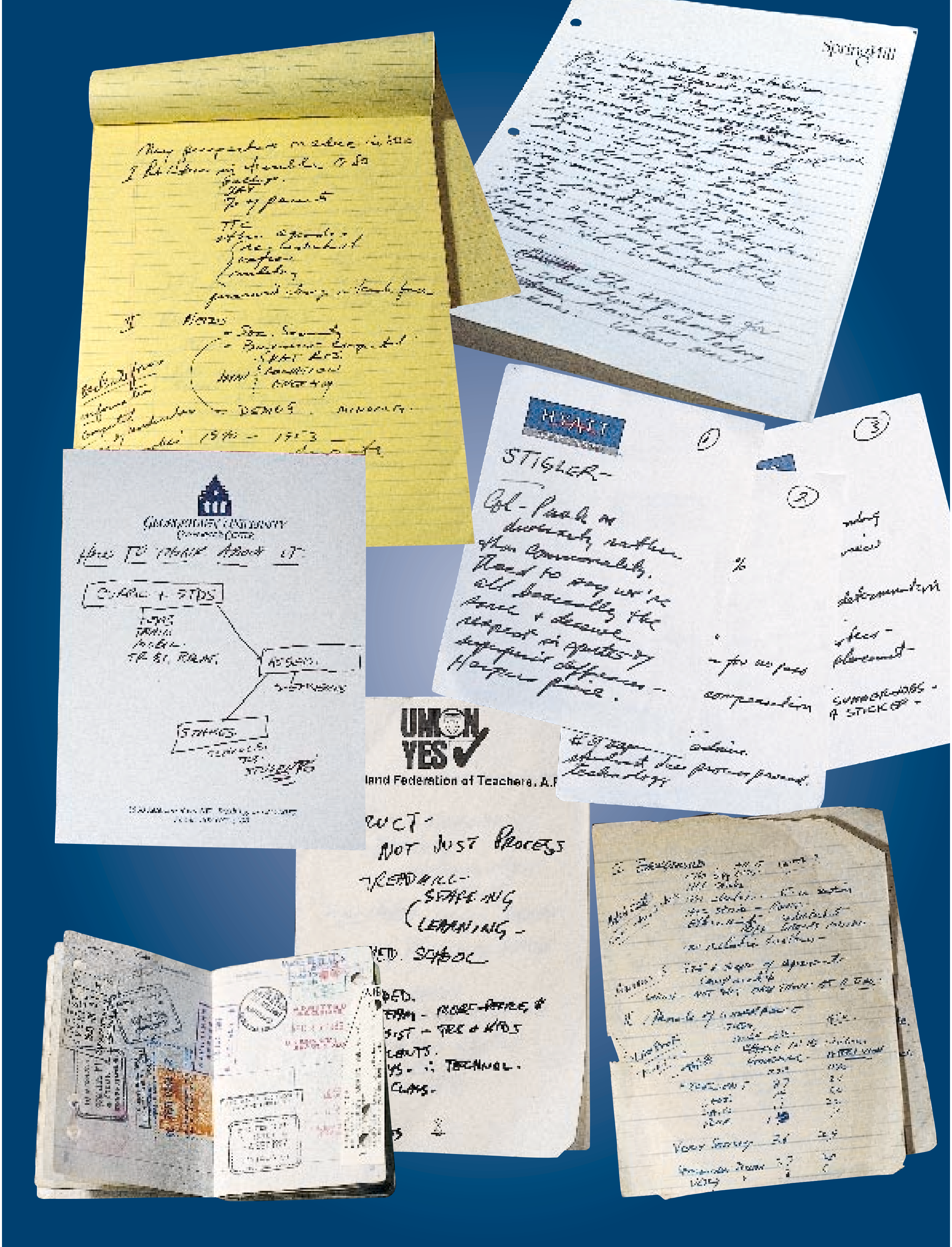
Where We Stand / March 2, 1997
This final column of Al's, which appeared after his death, was taken from the conclusion of an earlier article entitled "Forty Years in the Profession."

Why do I continue when so much of what I've worked for seems threatened? To a large extent because I believe that public education is the glue that has held this country together. Critics now say that the common school never really existed, that it's time to abandon this ideal in favor of schools that are designed to appeal to groups based on ethnicity, race, religion, class, or common interests of various kinds. But schools like these would foster divisions in our society; they would be like setting a time bomb.

A Martian who happened to be visiting Earth soon after the United States was founded would not have given this country much chance of surviving. He would have predicted that this new nation, whose inhabitants were of different races, who spoke different languages, and who followed different religions, wouldn't remain one nation for long. They would end up fighting and killing each other. Then, what was left of each group would set up its own country, just as has happened many other times and in many other places. But that didn't happen. Instead, we became a wealthy and powerful nation—the freest the world has ever known. Millions of people from around the world have risked their lives to come here, and they continue to do so today.

Public schools played a big role in holding our nation together. They brought together children of different races, languages, religions, and cultures and gave them a common language and a sense of common purpose. We have not outgrown our need for this; far from it. Today, Americans come from more different countries and speak more different languages than ever before. Whenever the problems connected with school reform seem especially tough, I think about this. I think about what public education gave me—a kid who couldn't even speak English when I entered first grade. I think about what it has given me and can give to countless numbers of other kids like me. And I know that keeping public education together is worth whatever effort it takes.

MICHAEL CAMPBELL



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