

The Blumenfeld Education Letter

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." HOSEA 4:6

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EDITOR: Samuel L. Blumenfeld

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The purpose of this newsletter is to provide knowledge for parents and educators who want to save the children of America from the destructive forces that endanger them. Our children in the public schools are at grave risk in 4 ways: academically, spiritually, morally, and physically — and only a well-informed public will be able to reduce these risks.
"Without vision, the people perish."

OBE and Mastery Learning or Educational Revolution by Stealth

Now that the educationist planners have decided that the traditional educational model is ineffective and obsolete and cannot meet the demands of the future, they are busily paving over the last 150 years of educational experience with a new concept for the government schools: Outcome-Based Education (OBE).

According to William G. Spady, chief wizard behind OBE, the idea for this revolutionary new concept of schooling started in 1968 with an essay written by psycho-educator Benjamin Bloom entitled "Learning for Mastery." According to education researcher Charlotte Iserbyt, who formerly worked for the U.S. Department of Education, mastery learning is based on B. F. Skinner's behaviorist conditioning techniques. In an article on mastery learning in the November 1979 issue of *Educational Leadership*, Carl D. Glickman writes:

Mastery learning is built on the assumption that the majority of children can become equal in their ability to learn standard school tasks. As Bloom has written, "To put it more strongly, each student may be helped to learn a particular subject to the same

degree, level of competence, and even in approximately the same amount of time." . . .

What mastery learning does is replace "page 55" with "criterion-referenced materials" or "learning modules." As Bloom describes it, the more advanced students who finish the work quickly are busy with enrichment materials; the middle third use the full 40 minutes to do the work; and the other third need extra time for reinforcing work, peer tutoring, and individual teacher consultations. Ideally, mastery learning works so that the previously faster, average, and slower students eventually reach the same levels of proficiency, and from that point on students can be taught together as a group, mastering the same materials at the same time.

Does mastery learning actually work? A mastery-learning experiment involving reading instruction was conducted in the public schools of Chicago beginning in the mid 1970s. Concerning the new program, the *Chicago Tribune* of November 16, 1977 reported: "It has been ten years in the making, but Chicago school officials now believe they have in place a complete, sweeping program to teach children to read — a program that may be a pacesetter for the nation."

An article in *Learning* magazine of

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November 1982 explained how the program, dubbed Continuous Progress - Mastery Learning (CP-ML), operated:

The program worked like this: Each elementary school student was accompanied by a "skill card" listing various reading skills at different levels from kindergarten through eighth grade. The traditional K-8 elementary school organization had been abolished; instead, students progressed from level A through level N during their nine years in elementary school. Teachers were required to teach each skill to individual children [or reading groups]; then the children were tested on each skill. Those who scored 80 percent or better on a skill test moved on to the next skill; those who mastered 80 percent of the skills at any given level moved on to the next level; and those who mastered 80 percent of all the skills moved on to high school, theoretically able to read.

How well did this method work? The article explains:

Pupils, for their part, were becoming very astute at taking and passing subskill tests, but not at reading. A growing number of students, many teachers said, were entering high school having successfully completed the CP-ML program without ever having read a book and without being able to read one.

It didn't take long before parents began to discover that their children weren't learning to read under the program and they filed a lawsuit demanding the removal of the program from the Chicago public schools because, in their view, the program constituted "educational malpractice."

In 1981, Ruth Love, the Superintendent of the Chicago public schools, asked the school board to replace the Continuous Progress - Mastery Learning program with a new one called Chicago Mastery Learning Reading (CMLR). As for the CP-ML program, Benjamin Bloom told a reporter: "The original Continuous Progress - Mastery Learning curriculum had little of continuous progress in it and no mastery learning. I was never consulted."

In other words, no one was willing to

take responsibility for the fiasco. But was the new program any better than the old one? The same article in *Learning* states:

But as the school year progressed, school officials made fewer and fewer claims that CMLR was completely different from Continuous Progress. The behavioral objectives were the same, although in some instances two objectives had been subsumed under one criterion-referenced test. The skills sequence was the same. The criteria for "mastery" were the same. In fact, CMLR culminated the streamlining of Continuous Progress - Mastery Learning. First the school system established objectives; then it wrote tests for each objective; and finally, it produced materials to teach the answers to the tests that tested the objectives.

It didn't take too long before parents began to realize that the new program was, indeed, no better than the old one. The children weren't reading books. The curriculum simply consisted of 5,000 pages of materials that taught behavioral objectives. But even the content of the lessons troubled parents. *Learning* states:

A fourth grade comprehension lesson, for example, featured a story called "Whiskey and Sweets," which depicted a drunken father tricking his son into buying him whiskey and sweets by feigning a heart attack.

A third grade spoof on Cinderella ended with the hero fitting the slipper on the foot of "an ugly forty year old lady who weighed three hundred pounds" and living "unhappily ever after." Junk food was mentioned frequently ("A Big Mac is heaven on a bun"); lessons of urban life were reduced to the basest levels.

What were the final results of this five-year experiment with mastery learning? The article spelled it out in stark, unequivocal terms:

On April 21, 1982, Chicago's superintendent of schools, Ruth Love, released the results of the city's first high school reading test in seven years. The scores were abysmally poor. . . . On the Tests of Academic Progress (TAP) administered in the fall of

1981, Chicago's eleventh graders in 64 high schools scored at the 25th percentile — a drop of 5 percentile points from the last time the test was given, in 1975.

The details were appalling. Only 4 of the 64 high schools scored above the 50th percentile, 34 scored below the 20th percentile, and 5 schools, with a total enrollment of more than 7,500, scored at the 10th percentile (a score students could have achieved by simply answering the questions as random). In other words, learning by "behavioral objectives" does not produce true learning.

Will Outcome-Based Education do any better? To get that answer we have to know more about Bill Spady who not only coined the term Outcome-Based Education but has worked for the last twenty years to promote its use throughout North America.

The Spady Bunch

In an interview published in *Educational Leadership* (Dec. 1992), Spady tells us that while as a graduate student at the University of Chicago and a member of the admissions staff, he recruited as a freshman a student by the name of Jim Block, a "bright, intense, athletic young man." During the next four years Block and Spady became fast friends. After Block got his bachelor's degree, Spady introduced him to Benjamin Bloom. Spady says: "Block became Ben Bloom's graduate student just as Bloom was developing the 'Learning for Mastery' idea. Block did a lot of the basic research in 'Learning for Mastery' and I was one of the earliest to know about it because I'd heard it straight from Jim, as it was unfolding."

Spady then moved on to Harvard to teach social relations and education. He also got interested in organizational theory. He says:

So, when Block told me about the the funda-

mental changes associated with mastery learning — turning time into a variable instead of time being a constant, and having what I now would call a criterion base for standards instead of comparative standards — I found the ideas theoretically compelling, and I took them immediately to the educational system level — because to me the fundamental barriers to making the mastery learning idea work were at the organizational and institutional level. So I said to Jim Block — I mean we literally made an agreement that day — "You fix the classrooms, I'll work on the total system."

And so, Outcome-Based Education was born. Note that Jim Block's mastery learning methodology would be the classroom mode of instruction, and Spady would reorganize the entire education system to make mastery learning work. In other words, the systemic barriers to learning that were part and parcel of traditional education would have to be removed.

The plan, obviously, was based on the assumption that the traditional school was an obstacle to learning. But was that true? There was a time, and this writer remembers it well, when the public schools did a pretty decent job of teaching children the basic academic skills along with history, geography, foreign language, touch typing, etc. That was certainly the case in the 1930s and 40s when this writer attended public schools in New York City.

It was only after the introduction of the new Dewey-inspired progressive curriculum, with its whole-word, look-say reading program and its shift in emphasis from the development of the intellectual skills to the development of the social skills, that the traditional model began to fall apart. Traditional education relied on intensive phonics in reading, cursive penmanship in writing, memorized arithmetic facts, and separate subject matter for its academic success. Today, nothing works in public education, not merely because of the way the system is organized, but because of its psychology-

based teaching methods, its obsession with the affective domain, and its perverse and corrupted substance. The system has become unreformable.

And so an entirely new kind of system must be created in order to make behaviorist mastery learning work. If it failed in Chicago, OBE theory tells us, it was because of the system, not the program. Outcome-based education *is* the new system.

According to Spady, our present traditional instruction system (which produced the most literate nation in history until 50 years ago) is a relic of the industrial age, therefore we need a new delivery system based on mastery learning techniques (with no known record of success anywhere); the present school calendar is a relic of the agricultural age, therefore we need a year-round school calendar that sweeps the sacrosanct two-month summer vacation into the dustbin of history; and the present traditional philosophy of education is a relic of the feudal age (because it respected religion and parental rights) and is no longer suitable for the information age. What we need, says Spady, is a total revolution, a paradigmatic change.

Revolution from the Top

Spady is an establishment operative who knows how to organize a revolution from the top, a revolution planned and funded by the wealthy humanist foundations (Carnegie, Ford, Rockefeller), the graduate schools of education, the state departments of education, and the federal government: clearly a revolution from the top, which is not exactly the democratic way of doing things. In fact, parents across the nation are up in arms over the new plan.

But that's how it's been in public education from the very beginning. The academic elite foisted government education on the

American people in the 1830s, 40s, and 50s. The progressive academic elite imposed its socialist, humanist "reforms" on the public schools during most of the 20th century, and the new psycho-educationist elite will destroy whatever is left of the traditional system and replace it with an expansionist, New Age, holistic system of total control bearing the OBE label.

What Are the Outcomes?

That's the crucial question in outcome-based education. How do we decide what the outcomes should be? According to Spady, "We are starting with what the research suggests about the future and we design down, or design back, from there. We're talking about a systematic process called Strategic Design: determining as well as we can from studying the literature and available data about future trends and conditions what our kids will be facing out there in the world."

And so the first thing you must know about outcome-based education is that is based on a new, glorified form of fortune telling. Instead of using a crystal ball to predict what a student will be doing twenty years hence, they will use Strategic Design. And on the basis of that vision of the future the entire curriculum will be designed.

But what happens if the future turns out differently? Tough luck.

The simple truth is that nobody can predict the future with any great degree of accuracy. We couldn't even predict ten years ago that the entire communist system in Eastern Europe would collapse. No one could have predicted the Gulf War, even six months before it started. To base an entire education system on visionary assumptions about the future is not only foolish but dangerous. What students should be taught are basic academic skills that they can use under

any circumstances as well as the timeless spiritual and moral values that only the Bible provides. The Bible has endured for over 2,000 years as the unchanging standard and guide to a moral, healthy, and productive life regardless of the forms civilization has taken.

But the visionaries of OBE have a different view. In Spady's conference guide entitled *Transformational Outcome-Based Restructuring*, we read:

The visionary purpose reflects the rapidly changing social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental context in which our current students will live. As a result, Transformational OBE is inherently future-oriented and focuses on students' life-long adaptive capacities. It requires a fundamental shift in the prevailing paradigm of educational leadership, policy-making, priority setting, outcome defining, curriculum design, instructional delivery, assessment and credentialing, decision making, and implementation strategies.

The key word is "visionary," and success in the OBE school is measured in terms of how well the student achieves the "visionary higher-order exit outcomes."

What is an "outcome"? According to Spady, an outcome is "a culminating demonstration of learning." The emphasis is on performance, not content, on behavior, not knowledge. A "high-level culminating outcome" is a "complex role performance." Curriculum and instruction are geared to "what we want the kids to demonstrate successfully at the end."

Will the traditional subject-based curriculum be abandoned? Yes, says Spady, "But content itself can't disappear; we just develop a fundamentally different rationale for organizing and using it; one that is linked much more to the significant spheres of successful living rather than to separate disciplines and subjects."

In that case, how will history be taught? Spady's view is that there should not be a

separate course called history "that starts at some ancient time and moves forward to the present." The students should "thoroughly examine current problems, issues, and phenomena in depth and ask why, why, why, about their origins and relationships."

Which means that somewhere along the line, perhaps at home without the psycho-visionaries breathing down his neck, the student will have the chance to study history if he wants to understand the origins of today's problems which only a chronological study of history can elucidate. With history being taught in his OBE school only as an adjunct to current events, he will not be learning history as an ongoing drama of human action.

So what becomes the purpose of education under OBE? The conference guide states:

Transformational Outcome-Based Education exists to equip all students with the knowledge, competence, and orientations needed for them to successfully meet the challenges and opportunities they will face in their career and family lives after graduating.

What are "orientations"? They are "the affective and attitudinal dimensions of learning" that deal with the student's emotions, motivation, "attitudes," and relationships. The wrong attitudes — the spiritually and politically incorrect attitudes — will no doubt be corrected by values clarification. The conference guide states:

Teaching, mentoring, and advising lie at the heart of close personal relationships... and represent the core aspects of close interpersonal bonding, respect, and friendship. Teachers and mentors can successfully change the thinking, skills, orientations, and motivation of others through the explanations they provide, the counsel they give, and the example they set.

A key premise of OBE is that all students can learn and succeed and that the school can control the conditions of success. In other

words, time constraints will no longer decide how long a student remains in school. He will remain there as long as he has to in order to be able to demonstrate in an "authentic context the outcomes of significance." As the pro-OBE policymakers in Minnesota said when Spady told them that not every student would be in school for the same length of time or take the same courses, "If they can't demonstrate the outcomes of significance, then we shouldn't be letting them out of school."

Apparently, changes in the compulsory attendance laws will have to be made to accommodate this feature of OBE. In fact, OBE is a very good reason why compulsory school attendance laws should be repealed because they violate the civil rights of a specific age-group of Americans who will be forcibly subjected to brainwashing of the most blatant kind. There is no room in a free society for an education system that forces children to undergo unspecified attitudinal changes in order to conform to the values and standards of an empowered elite.

Hillary Approves

And what happens after the student has jumped through all of the hoops and can demonstrate a "higher order competency in a complex role performance"? According to Hillary Clinton and Ira Magaziner in an article in *Educational Leadership* (Mar. 92, p. 12):

Students passing a series of performance-based assessments that incorporate this new standard would be awarded a Certificate of Initial Mastery. Possession of the certificate would qualify the student to choose among going to work, entering a college preparatory program, or studying for a Technological and Professional Certificate.... The states should take responsibility for assuring that virtually all students achieve the Certificate of Initial Mastery. Through new local employment and training boards, states, with federal assistance, should create and fund alternative learning environments for those who cannot

attain the Certificate of Initial Mastery in regular schools.

There you see the makings of a three-tier society: a university elite at the top, born to rule; a body of technicians and professionals to keep the wheels of government, industry and the service economy working smoothly; and the "workers" who will be at the bottom of the new caste system. Perhaps this is the kind of system Spady and his fellow visionaries have conjured up in their crystal balls. They certainly are preparing American students for that kind of society. Spady says:

In January of 1980 we convened a meeting of 42 people to form the Network for Outcome-Based Schools. Most of the people who were there — Jim Block, John Champlin — had a strong background in mastery learning, since it was what OBE was called at the time. But I pleaded with the group not to use the name "mastery learning" in the network's new name because the word "mastery" had already been destroyed through poor implementation.

Apparently, Spady and his colleagues think that they can do a much better job of implementation. But they are wrong, because mastery learning is not based on a true knowledge of the mind, and that is why it failed so miserably in Chicago. But now the entire nation will be subjected to this insane experimentation.

What worked well in the past is being discarded because it represents a God-given view of the mind. The psychologists prefer their own view based on animal behavior. And that makes it more imperative than ever for parents to keep their children out of the government schools.

The psycho-educators know that a large number of children will not be able to learn to read under mastery-learning methodology, and they are already preparing American industry to accept that reality. It was Prof. Anthony Oettinger of Harvard Univer-

sity's Division of Applied Science who told an audience of executives in 1981:

The present "traditional" concept of literacy has to do with the ability to read and write. But the real question that confronts us today is: How do we help citizens function well in their society? How can they acquire the skills necessary to solve their problems? Do we really want to teach people to do a lot of sums or write in "a fine round hand" when they have a five-dollar handheld calculator or a word processor to work with? Or do we really have to have everybody literate — writing and reading in the traditional sense — when we have the means through our technology to achieve a new flowering of oral communication? It is the traditional idea that says certain forms of communication, such as comic books, are "bad." But in the modern context of functionalism they may not be all that bad.

Obviously, the parents in Chicago who sued the schools for "educational malpractice" were not interested in having their children learn how to read comic books. They certainly were in favor of the traditional concept of literacy and had expected the schools to be in favor of it too. But they were wrong. Prof. Oettinger reveals the true aims of the educational elite when he asks, "Do we really want to teach, etc." The key word is "want" and his implied answer to his rhetorical question is "No, we really do not want to teach children to read and write in the traditional sense." And that is what American parents must come to grips with: the reluctance of American educators to really impart high literacy.

Unbelievable Quotes

We found the following quote in *The Whole Language Catalog*, page 71. It is from a book by James Moffett, *Storm in the Mountains*. Moffett is identified as "a major foundational thinker of the whole language movement":

"God believes in the beauty of phonics" means that those who see themselves as God's spokespeople prefer phonics precisely, I think, because it shuts out content by focusing the child on particles of language too small to have any meaning. In other words, what phonics really amounts to for those who are sure they have a corner on God's mind but are very unsure of being able to hold their children's minds is *another way to censor books* (unconsciously, of course) *by nipping literacy itself in the bud.*

That's about as stupid a statement as I have read to date on phonics by a "foundational whole language thinker" or anyone else for that matter. The great benefit of intensive phonics is that it produces an independent reader who can read anything he or she wants to read. The idea that "by focusing the child on particles of language too small to have any meaning" you can permanently prevent the child from understanding what he is reading is ridiculous beyond words.

Apparently, Mr. Moffett has quite a thing about Christian parents, because it was one of his books along with other materials that became the object of parental protests in Kanawha County, West Virginia, in 1974. That's why he thinks that Christian parents like phonics, because it will prevent their children from being able to read his books!

Gay Teachers Win Protection

Gay teachers in Portland, Maine, have new protection against discrimination. The Portland School Committee voted 9-0 (11/11/92) to approve a homosexual rights policy after hearing parents and others speak for and against it. Some supporters said the policy completes protection under the city's gay rights ordinance. Portland voters upheld that ordinance in a referendum in the Nov. election. (*Boston Globe*, 11/12/92)

Condoms Available in New Hampshire Schools

Portsmouth High School will be the first New Hampshire school to make condoms available to students as the result of a school board vote on an AIDS prevention program. Six of the ten board members on 11/11/92 approved a health committee's recommendations for a broad AIDS prevention program that includes making condoms available through the high school nurse. The committee suggested latex condoms be made available after the school nurse provides verbal and written instructions. (*Boston Globe*, 11/12/92)

Teen Member of Occult Group Commits Suicide

A teenager who committed suicide in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, was in a 50-member occult group of area students, Police Chief Frank Sleeter said. The beliefs of the group are based on some recent books, movies and heavy metal rock music, he said. (*USA Today*, 2/12/93)

Top Students Get Low Scores in Civics

Many students at the nation's elite universities are political illiterates who cannot even name their U.S. senators, according to a survey released 4/5/93. The survey of students at Ivy League colleges found many lack the basic knowledge of American history and civics required for U.S. citizenship.

Three out of four could not identify Thomas Jefferson as the author of the opening words of the Declaration of Independ-

dence. Three out of five could not name four Supreme Court justices, half could not name their two U.S. senators and 44 percent could not identify Thomas Foley as speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives.

According to Jeff Lichtman, a senior communications major at the University of Pennsylvania who helped conduct the survey, no student made a perfect score on the 17-question civics portion of the 200-question survey. According to the results, 36 percent did not know who follows the vice president in the line of presidential succession, 35 percent could not identify the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board and 35 percent could not name the prime minister of Great Britain.

The project was supervised by adjunct assistant professor Frank Luntz, a fellow at Harvard University's Institute of Politics. Luntz said students who read newspapers and magazines were better informed and scored better on the history and civics questions. "The problem is too few students read daily newspapers," he said.

Luntz said the most striking finding was that students absorb the biases and cultural prejudices of their environment. Drinking and sexual behavior, for example, appeared to be directly correlated to the behavior of their parents. And an overwhelming majority of the students described the media as biased, even though most neither read newspapers nor watch television news.

"These students are like vacuum cleaners," he said. "If they are not told they should know about their country, they will not learn."

The survey found that sex, drugs and alcohol are part of the college experience for most Ivy League students. Sixty percent of the freshmen described themselves as virgins, but only 12 percent of the seniors did. (*Boston Globe*, 4/6/93)