AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
SUMMER 1984

AMERICAN Educator

THE TEXTBOOK IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS
THREE APPRAISALS

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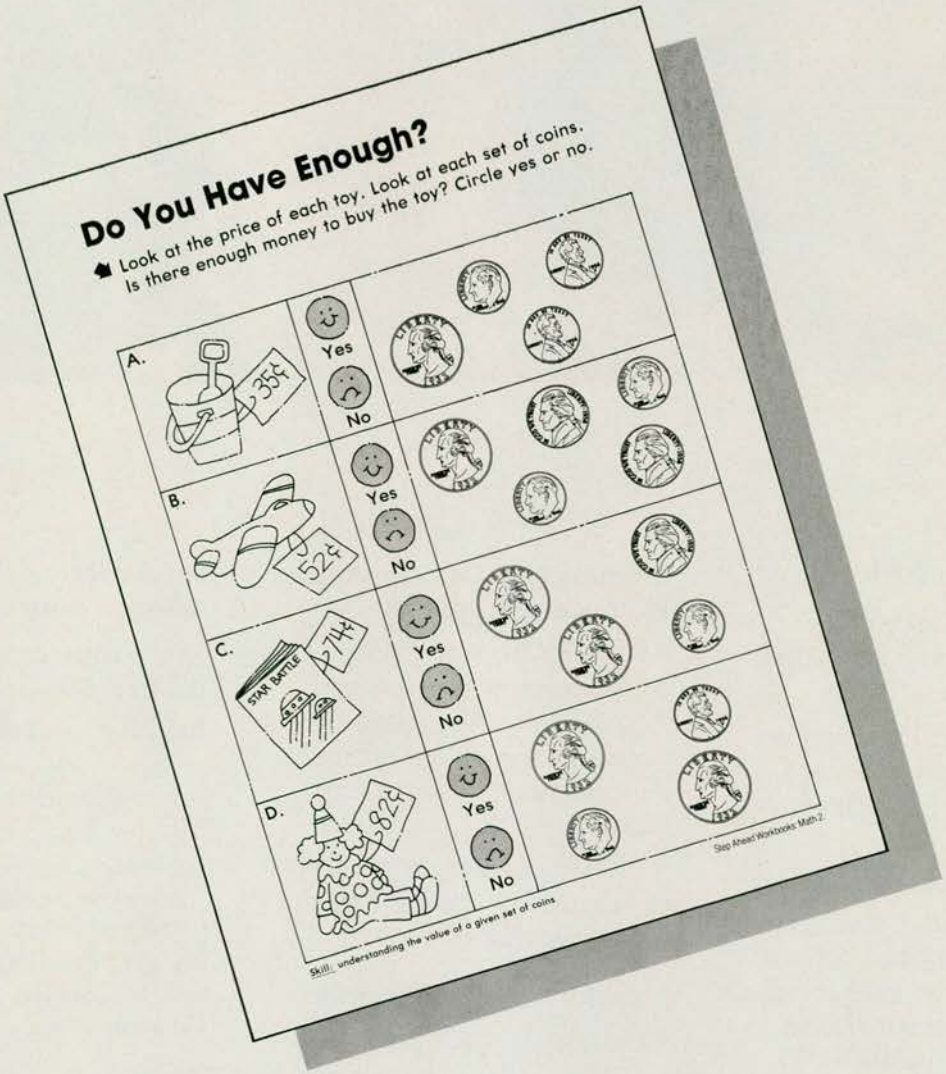

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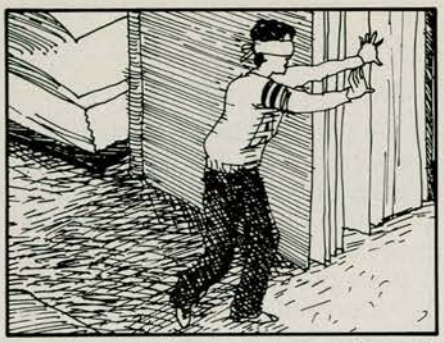
The American Federation of Teachers and Western Publishing Co., the makers of Golden Books, have launched a summer learning program geared to children grades K through five. During the summer months, our children are busy attending camp, going on family vacations, and taking part in sports activities. But, too often, we don't take full advantage of the summer months to ensure that our children's basic skills are keeping pace. Through the AFT/Golden Books project, workbooks will be provided so that children can work at home strengthening basic skills in reading, math, earth sciences, and computers. Watch your mail for information detailing how you can order *free* summer workbooks for your students.



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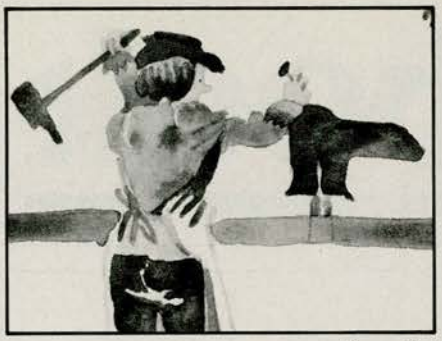

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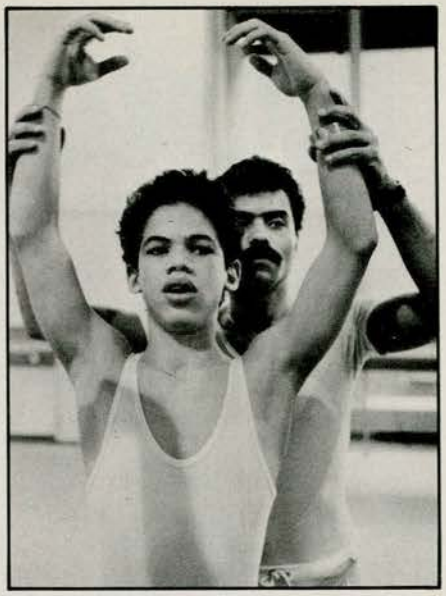

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AMERICAN Educator

The Professional Journal of the American Federation of Teachers
Volume 8, No. 2, Summer 1984

Cover illustrated by Dan Sherbo

Subscriptions: $1.30 of AFT members' annual dues are designated for **American Educator;** $2.50 per year for nonmembers.

American Educator is published quarterly by the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, 555 New Jersey Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20001. Telephone: 202-879-4400.

General advertising office
555 New Jersey Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC 20001

American Educator is produced with the assistance of members of Local 2, Office and Professional Employees International Union, AFL-CIO, and members of AFT Staff Union. Composition and printing are done in 100 percent union shops.

Notebook

ILLUSTRATED BY SUSAN DAVIS

Kids and the Book Drop

"In the age of electronic entertainment and personal computers, books are thriving. Despite increased competition for Americans' leisure time, book reading has retained its unique appeal: 55 percent of the adults in this country were book readers in 1978, and 56 percent are today."

That's the good news from a study of reading and book-buying habits sponsored by the Book Industry Study Group, a nonprofit group of publishers, librarians, manufacturers, and others in the publishing field.

The bad news, which the report called an "unexpected finding," is that the proportion of book readers in the sixteen to twenty-one age group declined from 75 percent in 1978 to 63 percent in 1983. Though the study did not seek to determine reasons for the decline in this age group, some experts blamed the new electronic entertainment and the lack of substantial literature in developmental reading programs.

The 1983 study, unlike its predecessor, examined in detail the leisure reading habits of children aged eight to fifteen. "Over and over again the same fact emerged: Parents' attitudes toward reading have a profound effect on the number of books children read. Book reading is highest among children whose parents value reading for both the pleasure it affords and as a key to achievement. Children who read a great deal were regularly read to by their parents."

In their list of favorite activities, children gave fourth place to reading a book. Mysteries were the most popular (mentioned by 51 percent), followed by humor and joke books (45 percent), and comic books (37 percent). A little less than a third also cited space and the future, biographies, and sports.

Children obtain over half of their books from their school libraries. Twenty-one percent are borrowed from the public library, while only 16 percent are purchased.

"To reach the child in the most effective way," the report concludes, "the book industry must reach the parent who is the role model for the child. By converting adult nonbook readers into book readers, society would reap a double benefit."

Resources — Free and Otherwise

- The Children's Book Council continues to produce delightful materials to promote reading among children. The latest addition is a cheerful poster depicting a giant pelican engrossed in his favorite book while taking in the sun at the beach. Also available are bookmarks, mobiles, and informational pamphlets for parents and for aspiring writers and illustrators of children's books. For a full description of the spring 1984 materials, send a 6x9 self-addressed envelope with thirty-seven cents postage to: The Children's Book Council, 67 Irving Place, New York, New York 10003, Attn: Calendar/order form.

- Special education teachers: *A List of Audiovisual Materials Produced by the U.S. Government for Special Education.* This twenty-six-page catalog gives brief descriptions and ordering information for hundreds of films and videocassettes designed to help those who work with disabled children and adults. Free from the National Audiovisual Center, National Archives and Records Service, Reference Section/RT, Washington, D.C. 20409.

- Beat the High Cost of Traveling. The new 1984-85 *U.S. and Worldwide Travel Accommodations Guide* lists more than five hundred university sites in the United States and abroad where lodgings are available for $6 to $16 per day. The campus facilities offer teachers and their families a variety of accommodations, from single and double dormitory rooms to bedroom apartments with kitchens. Sports facilities and cultural activities — theatre, film festivals, concerts, lectures — are frequently offered, as are inexpensive meals in an atmosphere of friendliness and informality. The guide lists 275 university sites in forty-four states, plus 230 campuses in twenty-five countries. The average price for bed and breakfast at any one of fifty universities in England is $14 per day. The guide provides daily room rates, available dates, types of accommodations, activities, food

Dennis Panek for The Children's Book Council

services, and addresses and phone numbers of housing officials to contact for reservations. Copies can be obtained for $7.95 from Campus Travel Service, 1303 E. Balboa Boulevard, Newport Beach, California 92661.

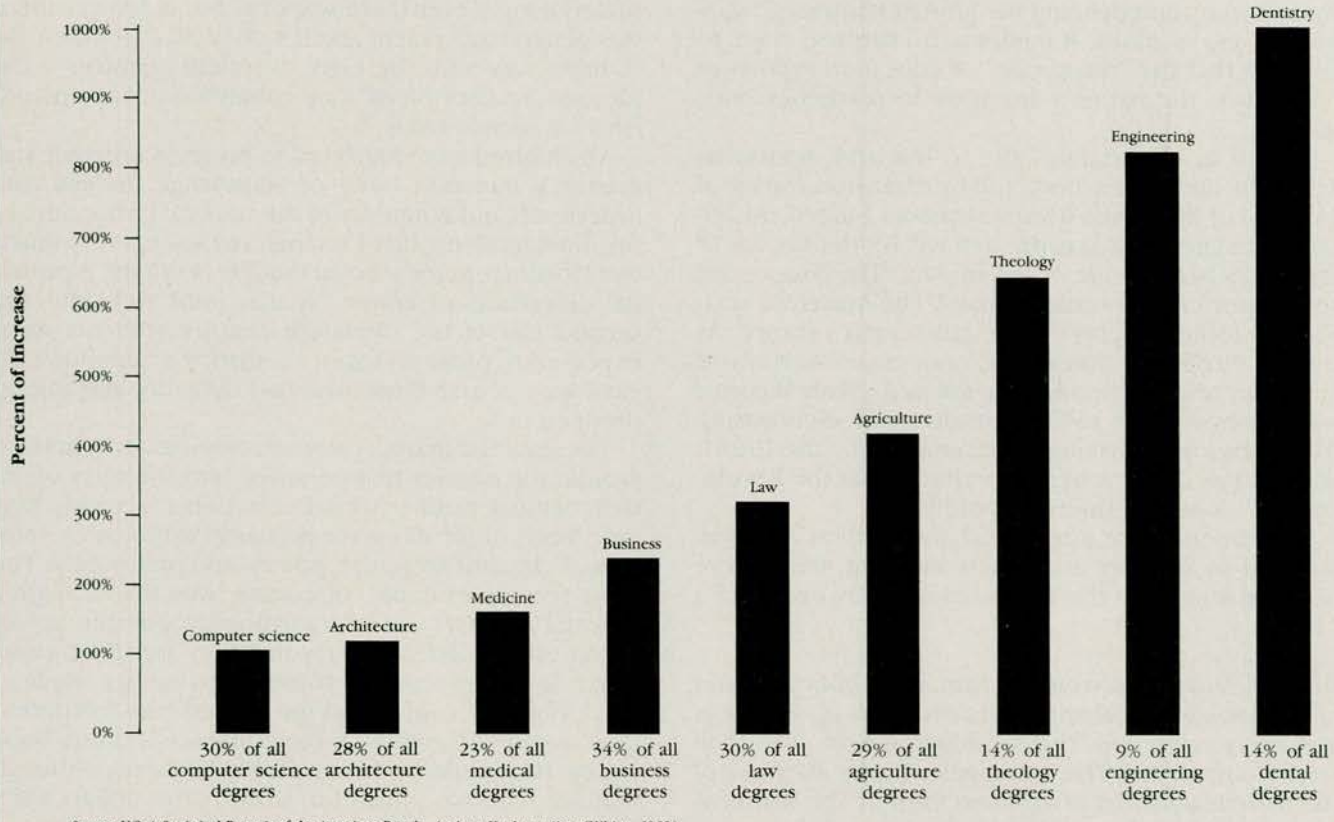
● *Getting Published: The Educators' Resource Book.* Everyone with "unsolicited manuscripts" will find this book useful. Aimed at educators who wish to sell educational material or contribute articles to educational journals, it describes over five hundred educational publishers and periodicals. Available for $9.95 paperback from local bookstores or Arco Publishing, 215 Park Avenue South, New York, New York 10003.

● Getting It On Tape: Guarionex Press has published *How to Tape Instant Oral Biography,* a little book that shows youngsters and adults how to interview relatives and use an audio or video tape recorder to preserve their oral history. It offers interviewing tips, about one hundred questions to use in interviewing people, blank family history sheets, as well as a special educator's guide for use in all grade levels. Many schools already have adopted "instant oral biographies" as part of Grandparent Day programs, in which students invite relatives and neighbors to school to tape their life stories and memories. This can be a great way to bring generations together and have children learn in a "living" way their social studies and history, as well as improve verbal and listening skills. Some schools incorporate the book with visits to nursing home residents to capture local history and draw the elderly out of their silences. The book is available by mail order for $5.95 from Guarionex Press, 201 West 77 Street, New York, New York 10024.

● *Your Reading: A Booklist for Junior High and Middle School Students.* This new, 764-page edition of a popular booklist is designed to help youngsters discover the pleasures of reading. Describes more than three thousand books published since 1975. $12 ($10 for NCTE members) from National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, Illinois 61801. Specify stock no. 59389.

GAINS IN UNDERGRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL DEGREES AWARDED TO WOMEN

Between 1971-72 and 1979-80, women significantly increased their share of the degrees awarded in the following fields:



Source: U/S: A Statistical Portrait of the American People. *Andrew Hacker, editor (Viking, 1983).*

THE 'UNSACRED' TEXTS

Market Forces That Work Too Well

BY DENIS P. DOYLE

AMERICAN TEXTBOOKS are once again the subject of heated debate. Today the issue is quality, yesterday it was patriotism, tomorrow it will be values. It is an old story in American education: As the academic centerpiece of the school, textbooks are a convenient target. This is as it should be. Textbooks are the source of most of the systematic information acquired by children, shaping and defining the limited knowledge they will possess as adults. It comes as no surprise, then, to discover that the "rising tide" of education reports of 1983 turns the nation's attention to textbooks once again.

Second in importance only to teachers, textbooks define the life of the school, and by extension, the life of the mind of those who dwell in schools. Indeed, the life of the teacher is as sharply defined by the choice of textbooks as is the life of the student. The reasons are both historical and contemporary. The American textbook is rooted deeply in the nineteenth century. As Frances FitzGerald notes in her incomparable study of American textbooks, *America Revised,* Noah Webster was possessed with spellers, readers, and dictionaries: "His ambition in making replacements for the British texts was to do for American culture what the Revolution had done for American politics."

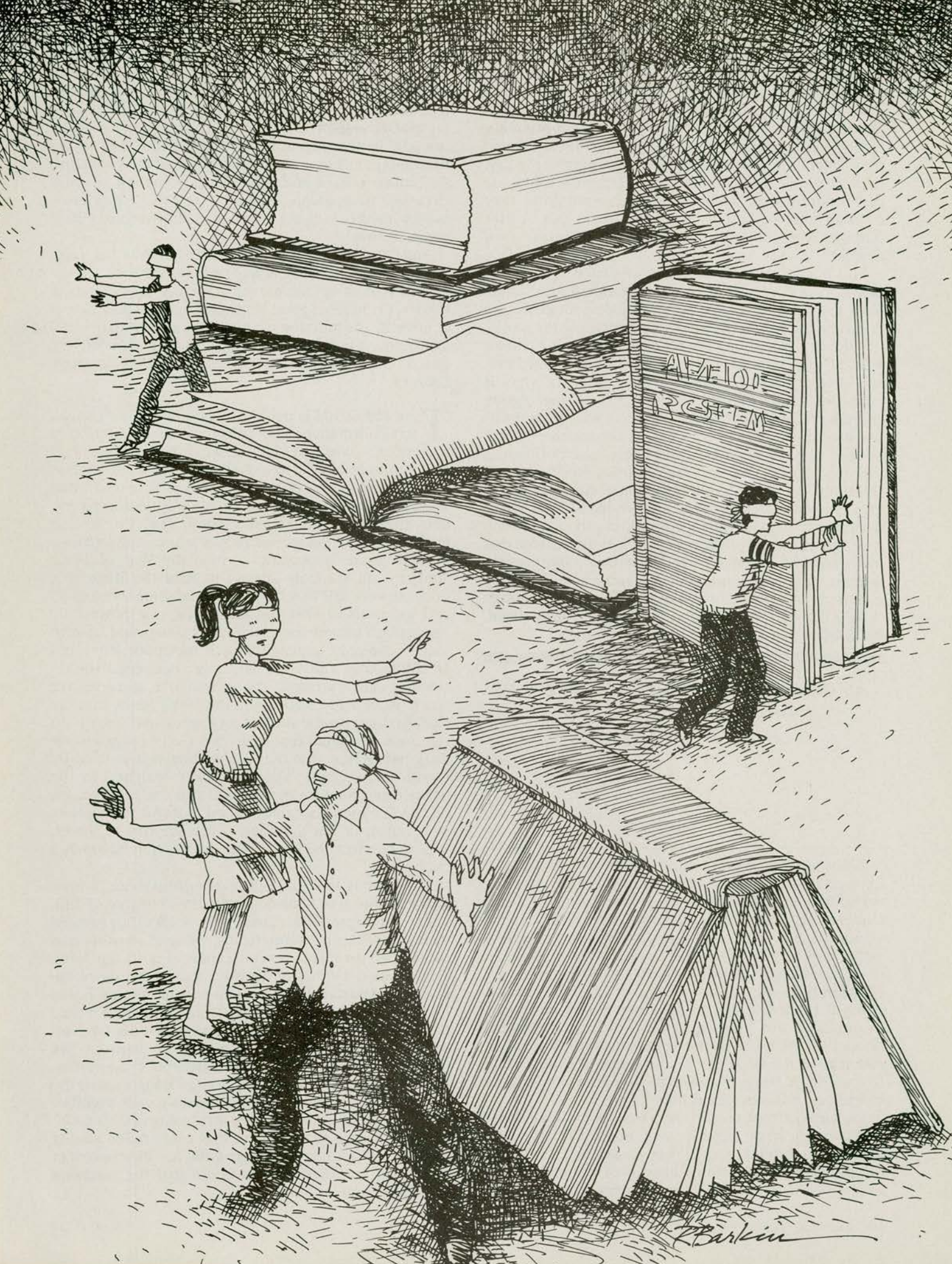
In addition to the intellectual and cultural ambition revealed in Webster and others like him, there were practical aspects to the education of a new people in a new land. The pressures of Western expansion, together with the explosive growth of public schooling, meant that frequently the one-room schoolhouse teacher was little more than the oldest student. The frontier teacher's temerity was equalled only by his or her lack of rigorous preparation. Enter the textbook — it was designed to "teacher proof" the classroom, an ambitious undertaking if ever there was one. But as long as there was general agreement about a classical curriculum — as there was until the early twentieth century — the idea of a "teacher-proof" curriculum was not as outlandish as it sounds today.

All children were expected to progress together and master a common body of knowledge. Indeed, the orderliness and symmetry of the classical curriculum of the nineteenth century (and before) sounds very much like Mortimer Adler's recent *Paideia Proposal.* A principal difference, of course, is that until well into the second half of the twentieth century students were expected to progress together, sharing a common curriculum, because those who had difficulty keeping up dropped out.

The idea of a shared, common curriculum organized around the classics that persisted into the early twentieth century made textbook selection a relatively easy task. Texts of the day were primarily anthologies, snippets of classical literature, poetry, and philosophy. The most famous example, of course, was the *McGuffey Eclectic Readers,* an extraordinarily durable set of books. So popular were they that they are still popular today. Sales this year are estimated to number one hundred thousand copies, and the Smithsonian Institution does a steady business in the edition sold in its book stores. Its popularity is not simple nostalgia, although that accounts for some of it; at thirty-five dollars a set, there is, one presumes, a more serious dimension.

ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERT BARKIN

Denis P. Doyle is director of education policy studies of the American Enterprise Institute. His op-ed pieces appear regularly in The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, *and* The Los Angeles Times. *Portions of this article appeared in different form in* The Washington Post "Education Review."


R Barkin

FIRST, AND perhaps most important, the *McGuffey Reader* provided real literature. Second, it offered a serious phonics approach to reading instruction. At first glance, the sophisticated reader may think the *McGuffey* books are so much Babbitry. Filled with homilies, entreaties to virtue and patriotism, justice and duty, they reflect the dominant Protestant culture of the day, jingoist, pietist, and commercial. But they did one thing that modern texts would do well to emulate — they defined and defended points of view. No reader doubted where the author stood on important issues of morality, civility, or civic duty.

This is, of course, the hallmark of great literature and philosophy. The author is not a disembodied "objective" spirit providing "equal time" for all ideas. To the contrary, the author has a point of view about the world, the author cares enough to write, and in writing reveals a set of values about what is good and bad, important and unimportant. Literature with a point of view is particularly important for children, who find ambiguity and uncertainty more difficult to deal with than adults do. Indeed, as anyone who has worked with children knows, they tend to be doctrinaire and puritanical, thriving on the give and take implicit in firmly held positions. As much as young people enjoy agreeing, they enjoy disagreeing more, and the bland book that is designed to provide balance provides grounds for neither agreement nor disagreement. It is no wonder that many students greet a textbook with a mighty yawn. The assurance and confidence characteristic of literary classics is as important to young readers as the message they convey. Think only of *David Copperfield, Huckleberry Finn,* or *The Grapes of Wrath.*

"As a society, we have lost sight of what it is we want our children to learn."

While space does not permit a discussion of the legal implications of textbook censorship, there are intellectual inferences to be drawn from a recent attempt to ban *Huckleberry Finn* from a school library in a Virginia suburb. However wrong headed the would-be censors were (they accused Twain of racism, a pathetic misreading of *Huckleberry Finn),* they at least had identified the right kind of issue. Twain was at heart a moralist, and his story of Huck and Jim on the river is a morality tale. Twain does not give equal time to slavery: He denounces it with conviction. But just as Twain's moral vision gives the book power and scope, it exposes him to the critical barbs of those who disagree with him, or worse yet, misunderstand him.

In sharp contrast stand today's textbooks — weak and pallid intellectual imitations of literary classics. Attempting to offend no one, they do not take positions. Adopting moral platitudes instead of a moral vision, they emerge as amoral. One wonders why. What accounts for the relentless mediocrity? It is not a function of technology — textbooks have never looked more inviting. Printed on heavy stock, lavishly illustrated in four colors, employing all the refinements of contemporary graphic art, the modern textbook looks like it would be as much at home on the coffee table as on the student's desk. Indeed, that is one of the problems. As Nathan Glazer and Reed Ueda point out in their excellent monograph, *Ethnic Groups in History Textbooks,* it is rare to find a textbook with two consecutive pages of text.

And if technology is not the culprit, it is not that today we know less and have less to put in textbooks. On the contrary, if there were ever a society that could, in theory, profit from good texts, it is modern America. It is, after all, the function of a textbook to summarize and synthesize a body of knowledge, to provide a survey, based on original scholarship, of the world of primary sources.

THE PROBLEM is neither technological nor factual. It is normative. The culprit is uncertainty. As a society, we have lost sight of what it is we want our children to learn; We have forgotten that values imbue facts with meaning. As long as there was agreement that all high school students would study Latin and Greek, that meant that all students would read Cicero and Herodotus. The Pelopenesian War was as important — perhaps more important — than the War of 1812. Similarly, all students knew and read the Bible. For nonbelievers, this may have produced some theological and social discomfort, but it did have one powerfully important cultural and intellectual dimension. It provided a common language of myth, metaphor, story, and anecdote that enlivened language, deepened understanding and extended the imaginative and creative reach. How many students in the 1980s know that the "handwriting on the wall" is an expression taken from the Book of Daniel that describes God's judgment on King Belshazzar; that the handwriting is translated by David; that it says, "You have been weighed in the balance and found wanting," and that the price paid is death? The metaphor understood in its full richness — as literature if not theology — has enormous power. Without contextual knowledge, however, it becomes a cliché.

The issue is an important one because there is more to the question of textbooks than their "degree of difficulty"; the heart of the matter is the values they present or fail to present. As Americans, we tend to think that there is no problem for which there is not a quick fix. Textbooks declining in quality? Make them more demanding. A part of the problem is just that simple, but as I will try to suggest in this essay, there is more to it than that. For example, Florida's governor Bob Graham issued a clarion call in March 1984 to improve the quality of textbooks. Joined by California's superintendent of public instruction Bill Honig, Graham asked the governors of the nation's largest states to join together to force publishers to improve the quality of their product. And it is, in fact, the case that cooperation among only a few states could strongly influence the content of textbooks. But the problem is not that the textbook makers are unresponsive.

If anything, they are too responsive. They respond to the slightest change in market conditions with breathtaking alacrity. Indeed, it is precisely the responsiveness of publishers that has permitted standards to plummet so rapidly and decisively.

CRITICISM OF textbooks, of course, is hardly new. Depending on the pendulum's swing, textbooks are too easy or they are too hard; too soft on communism or too jingoistic; too high WASP or too ethnic. They are written to be all things to all people, but as hard as publishers work to sanitize them, without fail they are able to offend some of the people all of the time.

In the fifties, when the "right wing" thought the State Department was tainted by fellow travelers, they thought textbooks were falling prey to the sinister influences of communism as well. In California, a photo of an early American folk art eagle graced the frontispiece of a state textbook. The John Birch Society was incensed because the eagle was "crouching," as un-American a rendering as one can imagine.

In the sixties and seventies, it became clear to a number of critics that American textbooks were racist and sexist. In books that had previously not included pictures of blacks, blacks appeared. And in those few books in which blacks had appeared all along, they were replaced by new blacks — no pictures of sharecroppers or freed slaves, but black professionals in lab coats or three-piece suits.

What was true for blacks quickly became true for Hispanics, and they too began to appear in American textbooks; the portrayals were serious and sober. In the photo archives of the nation's textbook publishers there was a furious rush to find pictures of Cesar Chavez, leader of the California Farm Workers, just as there had been a rush to find pictures of George Washington Carver for earlier texts that included blacks.

And as minority ethnic groups were to be displayed in a more favorable light, so too were women. To end role stereotyping, women were no longer to be relegated to "traditionally" female occupations and activities; Rosie the Riviter, famous in the second world war, came into her own in the late sixties and seventies.

Equally important, the language was purged of "sexist" references. A passion for epicene nouns — to replace gender-specific references — emerged in the nation's publishing houses. In some cases, the changes were barely noticeable if inaccurate — Founders for Founding Fathers; in others it was droll, chairperson for chairman.

Other currents of protest and social change echoed and reverberated in the world of the American textbook. In the hard disciplines, the new math appeared, much to the consternation of millions of parents, who found the homework assignments tough sledding. It is mercifully disappearing, even though no one demonstrated a link between new math and a lack of patriotism.

It is, not surprisingly, issues like patriotism — moral values, religion, social and economic justice — that elicit the strongest reactions to textbooks because these are the issues that stir passions. It is equally unsurprising that tastes and preferences about these matters are not stable over time: Indeed, on occasion, they will undergo a complete reversal in relatively short order.

"Textbook publishers are saying, 'Goodbye, Mr. Darwin,' because of their sense of the market."

For example, Frances FitzGerald describes the alacrity with which a textbook writer can respond to changes in demand for textbook emphasis. "Three times the British returned courageously to the attack." This generous characterization of the British in the Battle of Bunker Hill was a clear sign to the right wing that the author's patriotic ardor was insufficient. Responding to the demand of the day, the next edition read: "Three times the cowardly British returned to the attack."

TO SOPHISTICATED readers, much of the controversy surrounding textbooks has an *opera boufe* quality about it. But that is because better trade books are meant to be provocative and bold. Textbooks are meant to satisfy mass taste, and their detractors are frequently cultural if not political extremists, the living embodiment of H. L. Mencken's *boobus Americanus.* Indeed, it is easy to poke fun at the self-imposed textbook censors from Texas, or the Kanawha County, West Virginians, who opposed "cultural relativism" in the National Science Foundation-sponsored series *Man: A Course of Study.* That is, it is easy to poke fun at them until they begin to be successful.

The most striking example might best be labeled "Son of Scopes," today's so-called "creation science" debate. Religious fundamentalists argue that the "theory" of Darwinian evolution is just that, a theory. It offers one explanation for the nature of life. From a scientific standpoint, the creationist position is not wholly without merit — the scientist must admit that Darwin does not tell the whole story. Evolutionary theory will be subject to revision as new evidence accumulates. But this does not mean that all theories are equally valid.

Nevertheless, some textbook publishers are beginning to purge Charles Darwin from their pages. They are not required to do so by statute — on the contrary, so-called "equal-emphasis statutes" (Darwinism is only one theory) have been thrown out by the courts. Textbook publishers are saying, "Goodbye, Mr. Darwin," because of their sense of the market.

It is a market characterized by a curious phenomenon: the exaltation of the lowest common denominator. For decades, the public or its agents have been selecting books for the public schools. In some states, this is accomplished by statewide textbook commissions or agencies; In other states, the local school board, with the advice and recommendations of its staff, makes the decisions. No matter what the format, however, the process is always an intensely political one. By political I do not mean that it is always partisan, although that is

not unknown, but that it involves value judgments that are not scientifically derived.

It involves the exercise of judgment about what is appropriate and what is not. It involves decisions about issues as delicate and complex as race relations, the Vietnam War, and which photographs to include — should a fixed percentage of photos be of minority youngsters? Should half (or slightly more than half) be females? Should boys and girls appear in "gender-neutral" roles? These are neither easy nor trivial questions, and it is not surprising that they elicit strong reactions.

THIS, IN TURN, raises what is perhaps the most difficult issue of all. In a diverse nation with a population with differing values, what is the underlying reality that textbooks should present? The question is not meant to be a metaphysical exercise. In the hard sciences and mathematics the issue is almost moot — there is not liberal or conservative, Democratic or Republican chemistry or geometry. But if there is no well-defined ideological position on these subjects, there is one on the question of language, particularly the role and place of second language instruction. And if there are ideological possibilities surrounding a subject that is otherwise as innocuous as language instruction, can textbooks escape?

They cannot escape the vagaries of the political process, which we all know too well. McCarthyism is still a fresh enough memory to remind us of the dangers of political demagoguery. But there is a more subtle problem before us. On the surface, textbook writing and adoption appears to be straight forward; upon more careful examination, however, it is an extraordinarily complex task. What information should be included, what rejected, upon what philosophic basis can selectivity be supported at all? What areas should receive stress and emphasis, and what balance between didactic presentation and the author's point of view should be struck?

When we could believe in the eternal verities, an "objective" world of facts, the task of presenting information to students was more straight forward. But who any longer believes in the "Dragnet" world of the 1950s, in which the hero, Sgt. Joe Friday, has one comment: "Just the facts." As we all know, facts are embedded in contexts — historical, cultural, economic, political, psychological. Not even the hard sciences escape this dilemma, for they must select their objects of inquiry and examination on the basis of nonobjective criteria. A doctor tries to cure patients because both the doctor and patient prefer health to illness, but they are driven by no objective imperative in making that decision. The power of objectivity in science is as an element of methodology, to permit replication and assure accuracy. As Santayana observed, "Something not chosen must choose."

So it is with the material that finds its way into textbooks, and so it is with those whose job it is to adopt textbooks. With all the good will in the world, there is still the exercise of subjective judgment. And as long as no single point of view is paramount, the interest of each must be considered. It is interest-group politics at the level of the intellect. It is a logrolling of ideas. That selection of textbooks by committee leads to a lowest common denominator should itself be no surprise then. As each offending book is weeded out, the remaining books get progressively more bland. Textbook publishers know this and design books precisely with this in mind. But a textbook that is written to be all things to all people cannot satisfy the discerning reader.

THERE ARE, of course, other models of textbook selection. The oldest was advanced by Thracymicus, who in *The Republic* argues that "might is right." In this formulation, whoever is most powerful selects. It is precisely for this reason that compulsory school prayer is onerous to the religious as well as the irreligious. Submitting to the prayers of a religion in which you do not believe not only violates freedom of conscience, it demeans religion.

But there is a more important model of textbook selection that is used infrequently in elementary and secondary schools. Only rarely — in the best public and private schools — do teachers have the opportunity to select the books they use. Indeed, it is this lack of discretion in book selection that most sharply distinguishes the world of the high school teacher from that of the college teacher.

In part, this is a historic legacy — as textbooks in the nineteenth century were designed to "teacher proof" the school, teachers never developed the habit of textbook selection. There were financial reasons as well — economies of scale, real or imagined, encouraged centralized adoption and purchasing of textbooks, and to this day only more prosperous school districts enjoy much freedom in textbook selection.

Indeed, financial and administrative pressures — together with the imperatives of mass education — lead to mass textbook buying. It is convenient, cheaper than the alternative, and eminently practical. Unfortunately, it is eminently anti-intellectual as well. Textbooks designed to serve a heterogeneous audience of students — and a diverse array of teachers — gravitate quite naturally to the mean. What else would you expect? The market works: The texts supplied are the texts demanded. The problem with this market is that it works so well. For this reason, Jack Gordon, chairman of the Florida Senate Education Committee, has called for a "cartel for excellence." (A cartel's precise purpose is, of course, to end run the market, an irony presumably not lost on Gordon.)

Were publishers more closely bound to disciplinary traditions or were textbook selection bodies themselves closely tied to disciplinary traditions, it is unlike-

"As each offending book is weeded out, the remaining books get progressively more bland."

ly that textbook quality would have fallen so far so fast. But in neither case is disciplinary tradition of consequence. There is little connection between the academic disciplines of the university and the course of study in the high school. Similarly, there is little connection between the textbook and the testing and measurement tools used in most jurisdictions. One authority, for example, notes that it is not uncommon for a school district to use the Addison-Wesley reading series and the California Test for Basic Skills (CTBS), both of which, on their own, are reasonably well regarded. A problem emerges in their interaction, however, because half the items on the CTBS are not covered in the Addison-Wesley readers. The analogue would be to teach children basketball and test them in football. But it is a hard circle to break into. Elementary and secondary school textbooks have a life of their own, written by committees, to standards set by committees and finally selected by committees. That they are not grounded in disciplinary traditions and not "aligned" with the tests and examinations that "someone else" adopts is beyond the purview of the text selectors. It is a wonder that textbooks are not worse than they are.

"It is this lack of discretion in book selection that most sharply distinguishes the world of the high school teacher from that of the college teacher."

They are, of course, a state and local problem. Recognizing that discretion is the better part of valor, the federal government has spent many millions of dollars on curriculum development but has scrupulously avoided interfering in the adoption of textbooks or influencing local curriculum. To his credit, Secretary Bell has joined the chorus of public figures critical of the quality of textbooks. But it is only fair to observe that Secretary Bell and Governor Graham and California's Superintendent Honig are simply the newest actors in a long-playing American drama. Their fusillades are simply the latest shots across the publisher's bows. To observers of the passing scene, the rhetoric is familiar.

TO DETERMINE whether textbook quality has been a cause or casualty of the steady decline in public school standards may be a hen-and-egg problem. For nearly two decades, as student performance skidded downward, the quality of textbooks declined as well. It is now abundantly clear that they are not nearly as demanding in the 1980s as they were a decade ago.

For a long time, the decline in textbook quality has been common knowledge to those who follow these matters. Teachers, of course, have known about it the longest — they are the first to see the books in the classroom, and unlike the individual student, the professional teacher has reference points over time. As most teachers can compare this year's book to last, so senior teachers can make comparisons of a decade or more.

The most important contribution to the public's knowledge of textbook decline was a series by one of the best education writers in the nation, William Trombley of *The Los Angeles Times.* Writing in a multipart series two years ago he described, in chilling detail, the "dumbing" of American textbooks. And the "dumbing" occurred not just in elementary and secondary textbooks, but in college and university textbooks as well. In one of his most illuminating anecdotes, he describes the tribulations of an astronomer who is the author of a major text. Facing a publisher who insists that subsequent editions be written at progressively lower levels of difficulty, the author finds himself explaining that an astronomy text without math is a carriage without a horse. Some minimum knowledge of geometry is essential if a student is to get beyond astrology.

Particularly at the elementary level, "degree of difficulty" has become a sort of science. Editors and junior editors have at their disposal "indices" of the degree of difficulty, and they faithfully examine and count words, ever alert to the danger of introducing too many new or difficult words. As it turns out, difficulty indices produce difficulties of their own. Efforts to simplify a text, for example, led to the elimination of all complex sentences. Only simple, declarative sentences could be used. Ironically, the result is not easier reading material. Indeed, the result is less clarity — complex sentences, properly used, express complex ideas. Reducing them to simple sentences makes complex ideas harder, not easier, to understand.

This *reductio ad absurdum* reveals the principal problem with the American textbook. More important than how we read is what we read. As E. D. Hirsch Jr. has pointed out in a brilliant essay entitled *Cultural Literacy* (in the Spring 1983 *American Scholar),* obsessive concern with reading techniques obscures the important fact that "the decline in our literacy and the decline in the commonly shared knowledge that we acquire in schools are causally related facts."

A shared literary culture presupposes a common vocabulary of myth, metaphor, allusion, allegory, and fact, the real foundation of literacy.

IN THE world of high technology — microcomputers, instantaneous telecommunications, satellite relay stations in the backyards of private homes — it is easy to forget that the most important learning and teaching technology ever developed is still the book. It is still around books that serious learning is organized and presented. Indeed, so important are books to the life of the mind that we take them for granted.

But long before books came into widespread use their potential power was understood by Socrates. In *The Phaedrus* he expounds on the dangers of the written word: As it eliminates the need for memory the mind is weakened. Students ". . . will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing . . . they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality." We may be forgiven if we doubt Socrates' wisdom about written philosophy — *The Phaedrus* in particular — but about today's textbooks he was surely right. □

How Is a Turtle Like a Frog?

By Bonnie B. Armbruster

"Tap, tap, tap. See me work. I make good things. See the red ones. See the blue ones. See the yellow ones. No, no, no. I do not want big ones. I want little ones. No, no, no. I do not want little ones, I want big ones. . . ."*

Those who recall the charm of "The Shoemaker and the Elves" will be dismayed to learn that this excerpt from a first-grade basal reader is supposedly an adaptation of that classic. Note that the words "elves," "shoemaker," and even "shoes" never appear in this version. Such watered-down adaptations are not uncommon in beginning basal readers.

Colorless, artificial prose is not a new phenomenon in basal readers. As early as 1908, the educator Edmund Huey criticized the primers of the time for their "inanity." This criticism was echoed in 1981 by Bettelheim and Zelin in their book, *On Learning to Read.* In a chapter with the telling title "Empty Texts — Bored Children," the authors lambast the selections in basal readers for being unrealistic and repetitious and for failing to evoke emotional responses in children.

The stilted, lifeless stories in many basals lack essential literary ingredients such as conflict, an "inside view" of the characters' personalities, thoughts and feelings, and a high degree of narrator engagement in the events of the story. Recent research shows that over half of the stories from a sample of readers in the first three grades have little or no conflict, minimal character development, and no identifiable narrator. These stories are not likely to start children down a road of life-long reading. As Diane Ravitch recently wrote, "How can children be motivated to read at all if what they learn to read isn't worth the time it takes to decipher? What child won't plead to stay up 'just a little longer' if he or she is in the middle of an exciting story? . . . The dearth of literature in the elementary school may go far toward explaining some of the problems encountered by secondary school teachers, who complain that children don't like to read, don't read well, and can't apply what they read to their own lives."

Of course, children can hardly be expected to read Proust and Dostoyevsky as soon as they know their vowels and consonants. Some vocabulary control, simplified syntax, and repetition is surely helpful to the fledgling reader. However, as numerous examples in basal readers illustrate, simplification can be carried to the extreme.

NOT ALL of the selections in modern basal readers are stories. The basals also include poetry, plays, letters, journals, speeches, songs, advertisements, and factual articles. The increase in the variety of text genres is a good sign, for children need to learn to read different kinds of writing. The inclusion of factual text is particularly important, for that will comprise most of what children will read as they progress through school. Yet what children read in basal readers may not provide

Illustrated by Susan Davis

* The text excerpts cited in this article come from several widely used basal readers and content area textbooks. They are neither isolated examples nor are they the worst ones I and my colleagues at the Center for the Study of Reading have encountered over seven years of examining scores of books. These selections were chosen because they provide clear illustrations of problems that are typical of many, if not most, textbooks.

Bonnie B. Armbruster is visiting assistant professor at the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois. *The center is funded in part by the National Institute of Education.*

very good models of factual text, as the following example from a second-grade reader illustrates:

How is a turtle like a frog?
A frog and a turtle can live in the water and on the ground.
A new frog is like a fish.
He must stay in the water.
You may have seen a little frog as he hopped out of the water.
Then you may have seen him hop back in again.
This may be his very first time out of the pond.

The first sentence sets up an expectation for a comparison between turtles and frogs, but only one sentence actually compares turtles and frogs. Suddenly, a new comparison between frogs and fish is introduced, but this comparison, too, is quickly dropped. Having just learned that frogs are like fish because they must stay in the water, the reader will be perplexed when told in the next sentence that little frogs hop out of water — a decidedly unfishlike behavior. Such poorly written and confusing prose discourages children from reading factual text (and doesn't do much for their understanding of turtles, frogs, and fish).

If selections in many basal readers fail to promote a positive attitude toward reading, how do the reading programs fare in the second commonly agreed-upon goal of reading instruction: teaching students the skills they need to read with comprehension and critical insight?

Evidence of the emphasis given to skills can be found in the "Scope and Sequence Charts" that accompany the programs. In recent years, these charts, which list the skills included in the program, have become glutted with as many as two thousand so-called reading skills! In short, we are witnessing a *reductio ad absurdum* of reading. Many of the skills are obscure even to reading experts (for example, "to recognize turned-lined sentences" and "differentiation"). Others, such as "imitating movements of fish and other sea animals," "performing a baseball mime," and "finger painting to music," seem to have no relationship whatsoever to learning to read.

While reading programs promise to teach a great many skills, including frivolous ones, how well do they succeed in the basic goal of developing comprehension and critical insight? From an extensive survey of teachers' manuals in five major reading programs, Dolores Durkin of the Center for the Study of Reading found very little attention devoted to the actual teaching of reading comprehension. Instead of assisting teachers in explaining to students the basic skills of comprehension, such as the nature of a main idea and how to go about finding it, the manuals offer mainly practice exercises. Furthermore, the skills are often treated as ends in themselves, with little or no attempt to show how mastering a particular skill will help pupils understand what they read.

Classroom observation studies have shown that pupils spend as much or more time in independent "seatwork" with the workbooks that accompany the reading programs than they do with their teachers. Yet, after an extensive review of reading workbooks, Jean Osborn, also of the Center for the Study of Reading, concluded that "a good proportion of workbook tasks are at best imperfect and not very efficient and at worst misleading and confusing." She found that workbook exercises are often irrelevant to what is going on in the rest of the reading lesson, fail to emphasize skills that have an obvious payoff in reading, and contain blatant inaccuracies and confusing directions.

SCIENCE AND social studies textbooks present no rosier a picture. The most common complaint about science, and especially social studies, textbooks is that the prose is deadly. The unfortunate result: Children may be "turned off" to reading about these subjects at an early age.

What the textbooks lack in interesting prose they make up for in lavish graphics. Textbooks are now *objets d'art* as much as repositories of knowledge. It's rare to see a page without an illustration, and some textbooks have more pictures than prose. Of course, many of the graphics are valuable and do much to enhance understanding and appreciation of the subject. Sometimes, however, they seem to be included more for show than enlightenment; other times they are downright distracting.

But the problems with science and social studies textbooks go much deeper: They can also give children an inaccurate, confusing, and distorted picture of the world.

Nobel Prize winner Linus Pauling has recently written about inaccuracies in introductory secondary and college-level chemistry textbooks, but inaccuracies exist in textbooks at every grade level in every discipline. They may be the result of deliberate pedagogical, political, or philosophical decisions, as Frances FitzGerald documents for American history textbooks in *America Revised.* But the discussion here centers on inaccuracies that stem from either ignorance or carelessness on the part of authors and editors.

Children are probably particularly confused and frustrated by careless inconsistencies of "fact." For example, an elementary science textbook contains the following glaring contradiction in an analogy comparing molecules and atoms to bricks in a wall:

"Molecules, like the bricks of the wall, are the smallest particles of any matter. Molecules, like the bricks in the wall, usually consist of even smaller particles. These smaller particles are called *atoms*. . . ."

In a section of a social studies textbook discussing the War of 1812, pupils read that "The leading 'War Hawks,' as they were called, were westerners and southerners, many of whom had never even seen the Atlantic Ocean . . ." but if pupils look in the glossary, they will see "War Hawks" defined as "People of the northeast who were bitterly opposed to the War of 1812."

Children will also be confused by the "inconsiderate" writing that characterizes many science and social studies textbooks. Choppy, disjointed sentences are one aspect of inconsiderateness. Consider this excerpt from a sixth-grade chapter on plants:

"In the evening, the light fades. Photosynthesis slows down. The amount of carbon dioxide in the air space builds up again. This buildup of carbon dioxide makes the guard cells relax. The openings are closed."

With the important causal connectives missing, the paragraph seems to be nothing more than a collection of unrelated sentences. The reader who cannot infer the missing relationships (and sixth-grade novices in photosynthesis probably can't) will be perplexed by the passage. Indeed, one sixth grader who read it complained, "They're not telling me what they're talking about!"

Part of the problem with the above passage — and with the lifeless adaptations of children's literature — stems from the simplistic application of readability formulas. Readability formulas were invented about sixty years ago as a means of estimating the level of reading difficulty of a particular text. They were intended to be a tool to help match reader with text so that the reader would not be frustrated by an overly difficult book. There are dozens of different readability formulas, but the standard ones yield a numerical index that basically reflects the length or familiarity of the words and the length of the sentences. Textbook adoption committees ask publishers for books appropriate for particular grade levels. For example, a committee may be looking for a U.S. history textbook that will be suitable for fifth graders. As proof of appropriate readability level, most consumers accept the number generated by a standard readability formula.

It is easy to see why these formulas are appealing. Their goal of matching readers and texts is laudable; they're easy to compute; and they yield a readily understood number. Unfortunately, they have some serious shortcomings. First, there isn't strong statistical evidence for their usefulness in predicting the difficulty of text. Second, readability formulas fail to take into account the many aspects other than word difficulty and sentence length that affect text comprehensibility, such as interest to the reader, familiarity of the topic, and complexity and density of ideas. Third, and most relevant to the point here, readability formulas are being inappropriately used as guidelines for simplifying existing texts.

Here's how it works: If the readability level of the text is calculated as being too high, the sentences are made shorter and the words simpler. The sentences are shortened by dividing them at clause boundaries and deleting the connectives; The words are simplified by watering down the vocabulary. The ironic result: The stories are drained of their life, and the factual texts become more, rather than less, difficult to understand.

ANOTHER TYPE of inconsiderate text flits from idea to idea, leaving the reader with a sense of vertigo and bewilderment:

"People worked hard to rebuild and unify America after the Civil War. It was time to move ahead. In 1790 the first census of the United States was taken. A census is an official count of people. Every 10 years a census is taken in the United States. In 1790 there were 4 million Americans. Most of them were living in small settlements or on farms. Today the United States has more than 220 million people. Most of these people live and work in or near cities."

Pity the child who is asked to identify the "main idea" of that paragraph!

Another frequent problem with science and social studies textbooks is the difficulty in distinguishing between what's important and what's not as important. Traditional indicators of importance such as titles and topic sentences are unreliable in many textbooks. Titles and subtitles are often ambiguous or misleading, and topic sentences are hard to find. Furthermore, the texts are sometimes so cluttered with minutiae that it is easy for the reader, particularly the younger or poorer reader, to get lost in a labyrinth of details. For example, in a chapter from a fifth-grade social studies textbook on the government of the United States, more space is devoted to the structure and decor of the White House than to the workings of the legislative branch, and more information is provided about the Capitol building than the responsibilities of the president! The text is replete with facts about the height of the Capitol, the thickness of the marble on the Washington Monument, the number of rooms in the White House, the number of guests who can be accommodated in the State Dining Room, and the dimensions of the East Room. Though some of these details add interest, this is hardly the kind of balance you'd expect to find in a chapter on our national government!

IN ALL fairness, textbooks are not uniformly bad, and there have been recent signs of improvement. Some basal readers have traditionally included "real" literature and well-crafted selections in other genres; more and more reading programs are following that lead. Many of the selections in recent editions are better written and seem more likely to capture the interest and imagination of young readers. And certainly many science and social studies textbooks are not guilty of the serious problems documented here. The point remains, however, that too many textbooks *are* poorly written.

When the market demands a different product, the publishers will deliver it. Those who hold the purse strings have to demand changes. Include more "real" literature in children's readers, use the informed judgment of good writers rather than readability formulas in writing text, and give us quality not quantity. These would be good places to begin. □

CHOOSING TEXTBOOKS

Reflections of a State Board President

BY MICHAEL W. KIRST

TWO NATIONAL surveys have confirmed that teachers use textbooks for more than 70 percent of their instructional time, while all commercially developed instructional materials, including such items as film strips, boost the figure to between 90 percent and 95 percent. Teacher-made materials account for a startlingly low percent of the instructional materials employed by classroom teachers. Obviously, the content, ease of use, and quality of texts is a very important part of teaching. But who determines the nature of these texts, and what processes are used to adopt them? This issue has been in the background for many years, largely relegated to media sensation issues like "creation science." Currently, however, there is concern that texts have been "dumbed down" over the past fifteen years, implying that textbooks are a main culprit in the decline in achievement. What is the relationship between textbook quality and the manner in which textbooks are selected? An account of the California experience may hold some clues.

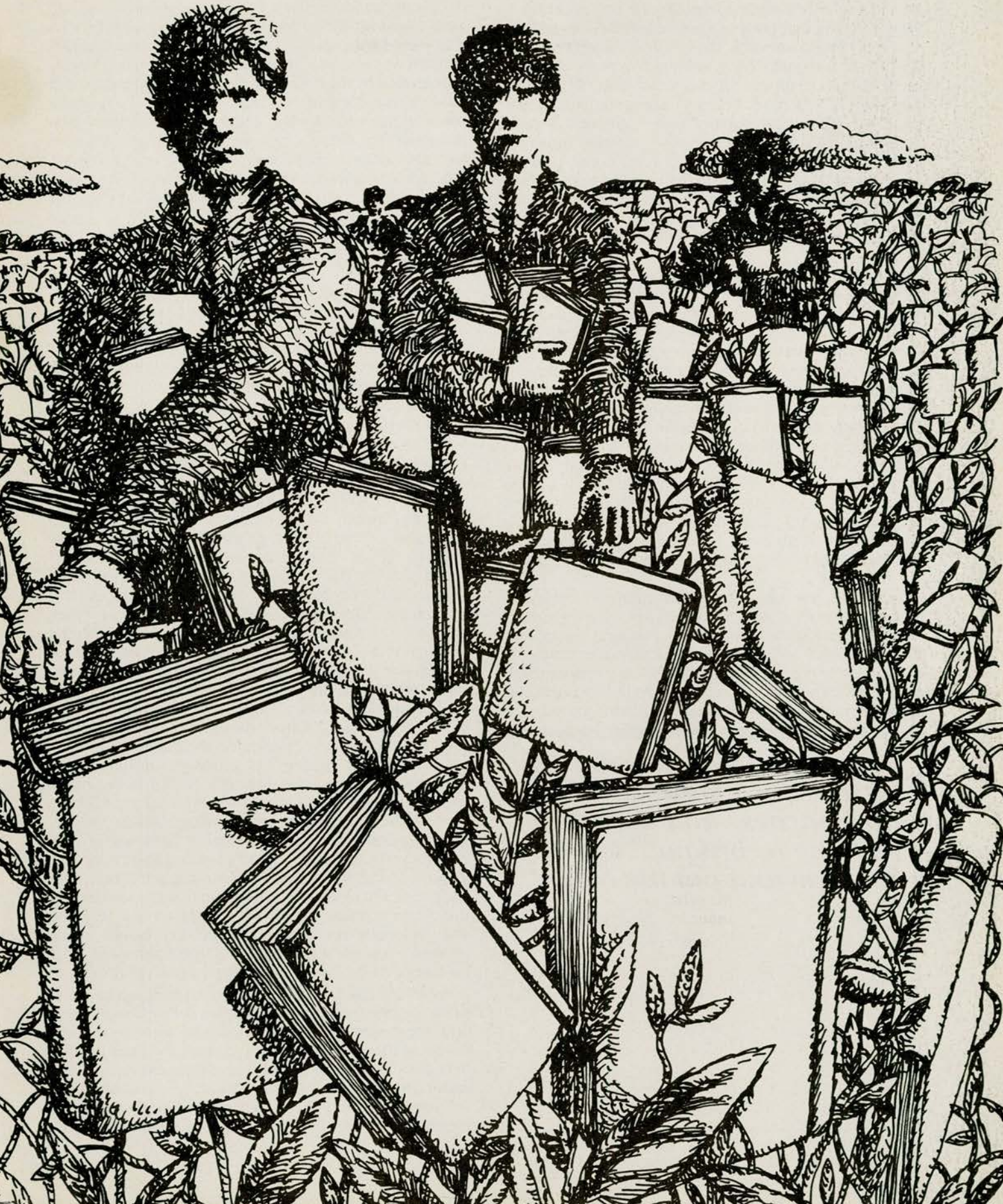
I served on the California state board of education from 1975 to 1981 and was its president from 1977 to 1981. Before I joined the board, I knew very little about the textbook adoption process, having focused on my specialty, school finance. I initially favored "open adoption" — i.e., let the local school districts choose any book they desired for the 4.25 million diverse pupils in California. However, by the end of my two terms on the board, I was leading the way for a new policy favoring a very small state list for each subject as a way of upgrading standards. Now I am not sure which approach I favor! What follows is the story of my learning process, including a recent interstate conference on textbooks convened by the governor of Florida.

California is one of twenty-two states that adopts texts in some manner on a statewide basis. The state provided $80.5 million for textbook purchase in 1983 and adopted about seven to ten books per subject. Most of the states that adopt books are in the Southeast and Southwest. These states exercise a disproportionate influence on the market, because not being on the state list rules out most sales opportunities for a publisher's subject series in an entire state. The size of Texas and its unique payment-in-advance financing formula provide that state with more influence than any other over what is published.

In California, the final authority for adoption is the ten-member state board, selected for four-year terms by the governor. Once books are on the state list, publishers still must convince local districts to buy them, using state money. The state board delegates the technical analysis of texts to a sixteen-person advisory curriculum commission. The curriculum appointments are

Michael W. Kirst is professor of education at Stanford University, Stanford, California. His most recent book is Schools in Conflict *(McCutchan Publishing Corporation).*

ILLUSTRATED BY GUY SCHUM



crucial because the (usually) two subject matter specialists selected for each field (science, reading, etc.) play a major role in defining the essential content of their disciplines. Given the limited time available, what should students learn and what are the best techniques for conveying that body of knowledge? Besides addressing this central question, these subject matter specialists also have considerable influence over the appointment of three regional "instructional materials evaluation panels," each of which is composed of twenty educators for every subject area. California rotates adoptions, with two or three subject fields approved each year. Each subject cycle of framework, criteria, review, and adoption takes up to two years to complete. The commission recommends specific books to the board, and it was at that point that I would glance over the books prior to our monthly meeting.

IN RETROSPECT, I should have spent a longer time finding and interviewing our curriculum commission appointees. I did not know much about elementary reading or science, so I did not know what questions to ask potential members. Often we relied on recommendations from someone whom board members knew in their geographic areas. In the 1975 to 1978 period, "creation science" dominated our meetings, so we did know where potential commission members stood on that issue. But on other key questions of content and pedagogy, we were not adequately prepared. As lay board members, we needed more orientation on the major issues and teaching concerns in each subject field as it came up for adoption. As it was, concepts like "questioning strategies," "multi-sensory approaches," and the "Cloze reading techniques" went in one ear and out the other.

Textbook publishers and curriculum commission members were guided by two types of standards: a curricular framework consisting of general statements about a subject, and more specific criteria for textbook bidders, such as print size and the quality of paper used. In 1975, the frameworks, which included such reading goal statements as "an imagination that is broadened beyond the confines of the pupil's world through exploring literature," were vague and not very useful. The criteria were not specific enough to screen out texts on the basis of content coverage. The board debated a few details of the framework, but in retrospect we should have asked for much more specificity and for criteria that would have clarified our view of what curriculum content was essential. In effect, this decision was largely determined by the two subject matter specialists on our curriculum commission. My successors have done some things to make the criteria for publishers' bids more content specific, but the focus remains on print size, appearance, and pedagogy rather than on content. In addition, during my tenure, nobody checked carefully to make sure the text content was aligned with our statewide testing questions.

"Concepts like 'questioning strategies,' 'multi-sensory approaches,' and the 'Cloze reading techniques' went in one ear and out the other."

The board's major focus in the 1970s was on "legal compliance" to ensure that all books on the state list would accurately "portray the cultural and racial diversity of American society." From 1979 to 1980, three hundred and fifty people volunteered between fifty to one hundred hours each to review 4,654 items (books plus audiovisuals) for such things as no demeaning labels or role stereotypes, equal representation of males and females in occupations, societal contributions, physical activities, and representation of older and disabled persons.

The books were displayed at twenty-nine centers around the state, but the board found it increasingly difficult to recruit compliance review volunteers. Publishers who were cited for being out of compliance could go through a multistage appeal process leading to the board as final arbiter. As pubishers began to show such things as females operating jackhammers and steam shovels, the number of citations dropped.

A persistent problem with the whole process was the lack of time and compensation for the difficult work done by the various evaluators. A single publisher's reading series for K-twelve can have 144 separate pieces, including text, workbooks, teacher manuals, supplementary audiovisuals, computer packages, and so on, yet our advisers received at best only $50 per day for expenses. Some educators must resort to the "eight-second thumb test" of skimming the pages for appearance, hardly an appropriate process considering the importance of the educational decisions being made and the fact that the final rank-order list adopted by the board would exclude publishers from millions of dollars in sales. Since the curricular frameworks and criteria were not very explicit, we had to rely on the informed judgments of people working at full-time jobs and pressured by tight adoption timelines. A member of the North Carolina state board reported that in 1984 she personally received seven hundred books in six weeks for just one subject area! At least California board members could insulate themselves from that deluge.

We found few reliable shortcuts for making our decisions. At first, readability formulas seemed useful but now are discredited as simplistic and sometimes contributing to reduced academic standards. Board members did not find any formula substitutes except general exhortations like "well written." Ideally, curriculum development of the type the National Science Foundation sponsored in the 1960s (new physics, etc.) should pre-

"A single publisher's reading series for K-twelve can have 144 separate pieces."

cede and guide textbook adoption. But after the flap over the federally funded series *Man: A Course of Study,* the federal government pulled out of curriculum development and no other agency entered. No single state government has the money to develop new curricula, and there are no interstate mechanisms.

AFTER I HAD signed purchase contracts for over $100 million, board member Bill Honig (now California chief state school officer) led an inquiry into our results. Most of our prior board deliberations had focused on creation science, legal compliance, and procedure. Now we concluded sadly that many new books were dull, drained of excitement, and diluted in content. The print was bigger with many more colorful pictures, and sentences were shorter with simpler words. But compare the 1971 version of Marshall's discovery of gold in California with its 1980 counterpart:

"THE STORY OF CALIFORNIA"
(1971)

The next morning he shut off the water and walked along beside the millrace, to learn whether the water had cleaned it out. The weather was clear and cold. It was probably January 24, although no one was sure of the exact date.

"My eye was caught with the glimpse of something shining in the bottom of the ditch," Marshall said later. "I reached my hand down and picked it up. It made my heart thump, for I was certain that it was gold."

The piece was round and smaller than a pea. He put it on a flat rock and hammered it. It did not crumble or break. He was sure then that it was metal.

He showed it to the men. He made them promise to keep working until the sawmill was finished. "Then," he said, "we will all go hunting for gold."

As the men worked, they picked up a few more pieces of yellow metal. Marshall put the pieces into a tiny green glass bottle. On January 28 he rode through a hard rainstorm to the fort. He and Sutter went into Sutter's office and locked the door. They shook the yellow flakes from the bottle and weighed them carefully. They were heavy for their size. Gold is very heavy. They put a chemical called nitric acid on the flakes. Nothing happened. Gold will not dissolve in nitric acid.

Now Sutter was sure that Marshall had found gold. They rode back to the mill and asked the workers to keep the discovery a secret. Sutter feared that the men at the fort would leave their jobs to hunt gold if the news spread. Also, he and Marshall wanted time to form a mining company for digging up the gold in the Coloma Valley.

"CALIFORNIA!"
(1980)

Marshall hired some men to help build the mill. They found a place on the American River where the water ran swiftly. There they built the sawmill. When they put the waterwheel in place, they discovered that it did not turn properly. It was hitting the bottom of the river. They began to remove the dirt at the bottom of the river to make room for the turning wheel. As they worked, James Marshall noticed a shiny nugget on the riverbed. He picked it up.

Back at Sutter's Fort, Marshall and Sutter looked up the article on gold in the American Encyclopedia. They then tested the nugget Marshall had found according to what the article said. In a few hours, they were sure they had discovered gold!

Or consider these two descriptions of the San Francisco earthquake of 1906:

Just as the sun was rising on the morning of April 18, 1906, the land along the northern part of the San Andreas Fault began to shift. The ground on the west side of the fault moved north. The ground on the east side moved south. Posts that had once stood side by side ended up as much as sixteen feet apart.

Near Santa Cruz, trees five-feet thick were broken in two. Buildings collapsed in cities from Santa Rosa in the north to Hollister in the south. Many of the fine new buildings at Stanford University near Palo Alto tumbled to the ground. People were thrown violently off their feet.

The greatest damage was in San Francisco. The ground shivered twice. A grinding noised filled the air. And then, one newspaper report said, there was a "deep roar like heavy surf and a third great shudder ran through the peninsula."

Buildings twisted and fell. There were jangling crashes of glass. Bricks rained into the street, killing men and horses that were pulling delivery wagons. A man who saw the earthquake wrote, "In places the street sank three or four feet. In other places great humps appeared. The streetcar tracks were bent and twisted out of place."

(MORE RECENT TEXT)

San Francisco sits on top of a very long fault called the San Andreas Fault. This fault is more than 1,000 kilometers (650 miles) long. At 5:13 in the morning, April 18, 1906, the San Andreas Fault slipped and shifted. A two-minute earthquake shook San Francisco. Buildings fell apart. Chimneys were knocked over. Water pipes broke. In certain cases, entire buildings fell upon those inside, killing many people.

As these examples painfully demonstrate, all too many of the more recent textbooks have lost much of the excitement, the color, the interest, the *content* contained in the older books. What had gone wrong? Kent Gill, chairman of the California curriculum commission, reported to the board: "The theory behind the state's multiple adoption system is that it will provide different types of basic textbooks for different types of students. But one of the problems is that each publisher is looking at the broad market and feels the slightly easier book reaches a broader market. The whole trend has been to write them slightly below grade level."

An additional problem today, with money tight in school districts, is that it is not possible to purchase different basic texts, and districts are forced to buy lower-level books "accessible to all students in the classroom," Gill said.

Gill, a junior high school teacher in Davis, believes that supplementary text materials should be furnished abler students but acknowledges that this is not always

feasible because of costs. After Proposition 13, very few school districts had any funds to pay for texts that were not on the state-approved list. Consequently, California text expenditures dropped below the national average of about 1.5 percent of current expenditures.

Gill's point concerning lack of funding also impeded the text evaluation process because the board could not even pay expenses for some of its volunteer evaluators.

BY 1980, the board had become concerned about the inability of our texts to challenge the top third of students. We decided to earmark a specific amount of English text for high-achieving pupils. To our dismay, no publisher had a book that met our criteria except old books that could not pass sex and race legal compliance. The problem, it seemed, lay with the market forces that had preceded our request. In an interview with *The Los Angeles Times,* Barbara Howell, a former vice president of Silver Burdette Publishers, explained, "The books were downgraded at the request of the educational community. We were asked to produce books that were one or two years below grade level. When books were written at grade level, they were not selected by states, school districts, and the buyers."

Damaris Ames of Houghton Mifflin told the *Times,* "Publishers simply reflect the attitudes and demands of society." The state board's agenda from 1974 to 1979 had been dominated by concerns about the bottom third of the achievement band — the disadvantaged, handicapped, or limited-English-speaking pupils. Consequently, the publishers responded to market demand and were not the cause of our problems. It takes publishers, however, three or four years to develop a new text series for a specific subject. Moreover, the $1.2 billion-a-year industry is very competitive, and straying from the middle of the market can be dangerous. A half-dozen presidents of major educational publishers were replaced in 1981. "Top people are being fired like baseball managers," Donald Eklund, vice president of the Association of American Publishers, remarked to *The Los Angeles Times.*

Given this situation, the California board decided to reverse its policy of adopting ten to fifteen books per subject and to send the market a signal by restricting adoptions to five to eight books of "high standards." Our bidder criteria became more explicit by favoring "grade-level" materials. Previously, there had been no clear directive to the publishers to produce materials that matched the national average performance level of students in a particular grade. Again we found there were no explicit formulas for translating "grade level" into standards for judging a textbook. But we proceeded with the idea of restricting the number of adoptions.

"By 1980, the board had become concerned about the inability of our texts to challenge the top third of students."

As Bill Honig explained, "Our theory was that the only way we were going to get any improvement in the books was to narrow the gate." The publishers resisted this policy, claiming that it was unfair to set an arbitrary limit of eight series. Robert Bowen, a McGraw Hill vice president, told *The Los Angeles Times,* "We definitely have gotten the message from California and elsewhere. We know there is a demand now for grade-level material."

BUT THE board had difficulty "narrowing the gate." Some board members argued for the widest possible selection of materials to serve the enormous diversity in the state. Leaders of our own curriculum commission asserted that supplementary materials could be used for above-average students. The board became stalemated and was unable to implement a clear direction. In March 1982, we compromised and asked the curriculum commission to recommend a "balanced matrix" with most books at grade level, but some above and below grade level. In the 1983 history/social sciences adoption, the board carried out its directive and cut the state list to seven books for grade eight, a considerably lower number than the thirteen texts approved in the previous adoption cycle. In the 1982 reading adoption, the board eliminated four series that its curriculum commission had recommended. Textbook companies that were rejected hired lawyers and lobbyists and enlisted the support of satisfied customers from local school districts. The publishers' chief lobbyist had been the Department of Education's legislative relations chief and had close ties to the assembly speaker from prior positions in the legislative staff. One small publisher pressured board members outside meeting rooms, bars, and hotel lobbies. Board member Daniel Chernow told *The Los Angeles Times,* "I was afraid to open my shower door, for fear of seeing ____ and her lawyer in there." But the board voted the publisher down eight to two.

One of the four series vetoed by the board was rejected because it had been recommended by only one of the three twenty-person regional panels that advise the curriculum commission, and the board thought the teacher manual was too difficult. The split decision of the twenty-person regional panels was especially important. These panels, composed of classroom teachers, curriculum specialists, one superintendent, and one professor, reflected the conflicting views of the curriculum commission. Some evaluators thought they should only screen out the bad books and let the free market screen out the rest. Others contended that only the very best books should be recommended to the board. Some books were excluded on the basis that they lacked

"Textbook companies that were rejected hired lawyers and lobbyists and enlisted the support of satisfied customers from local school districts."

that are more explicit than simply a general mandate to be "well written."

• Board members should ensure that there is a close alignment between the curricular frameworks for a subject, the textbooks, and the standardized tests. In California, we found that some state test items were not covered in our state framework or state texts.

• Curriculum development should precede texts. In 1984, we are expanding secondary math and science course requirements for middle- and low-achieving students, but no one is developing the curriculum for these new courses. The feder

LET'S DANCE

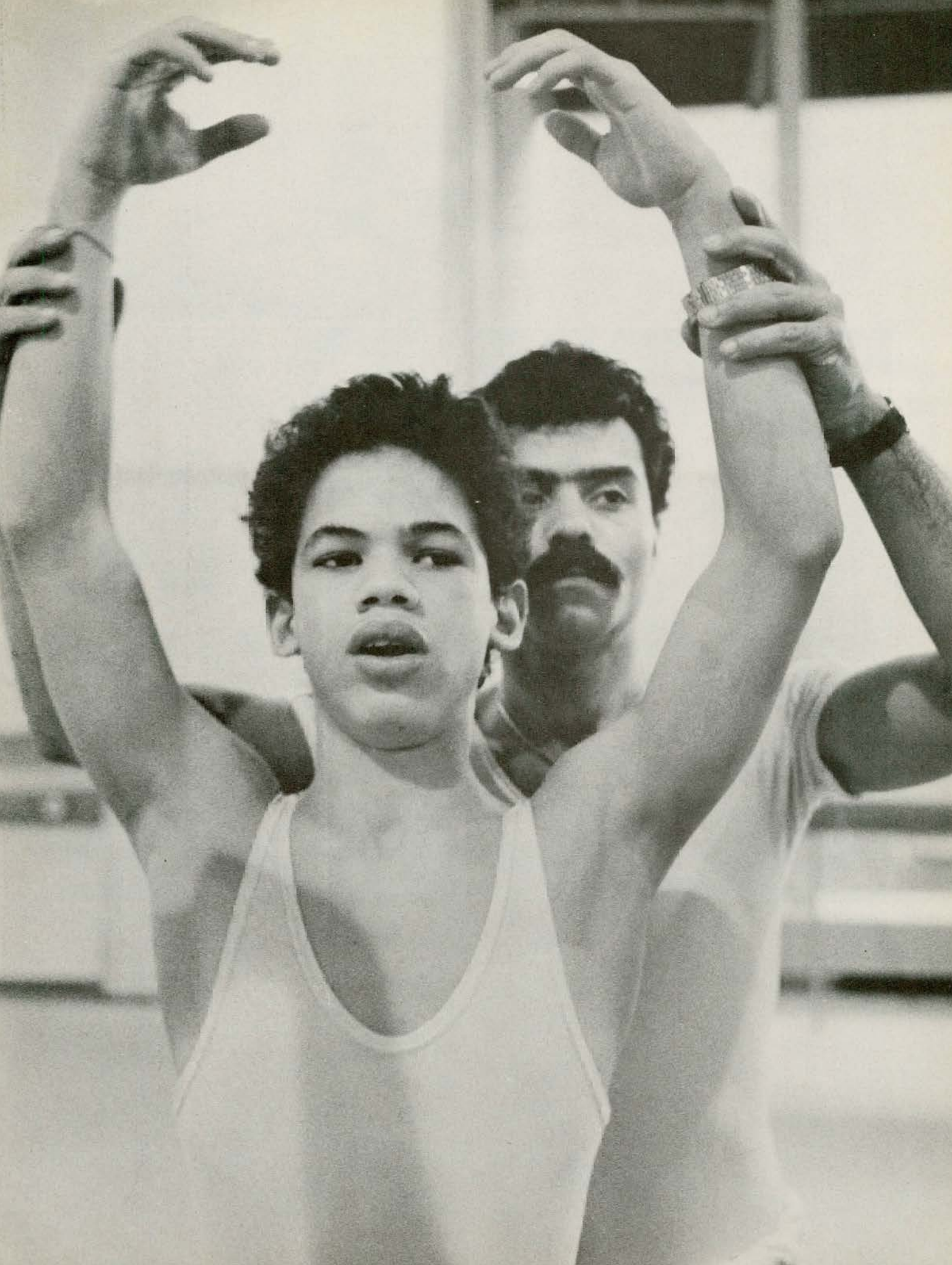
Alvin Ailey Leads the Way for Blind And Visually Impaired Youngsters

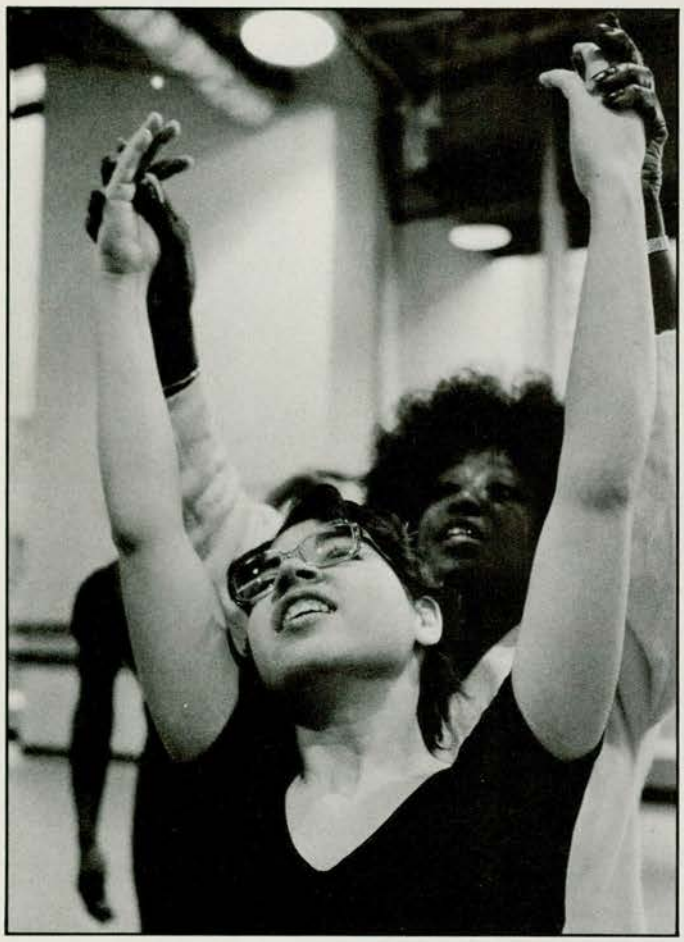
PHOTO ESSAY BY KAREN PREUSS

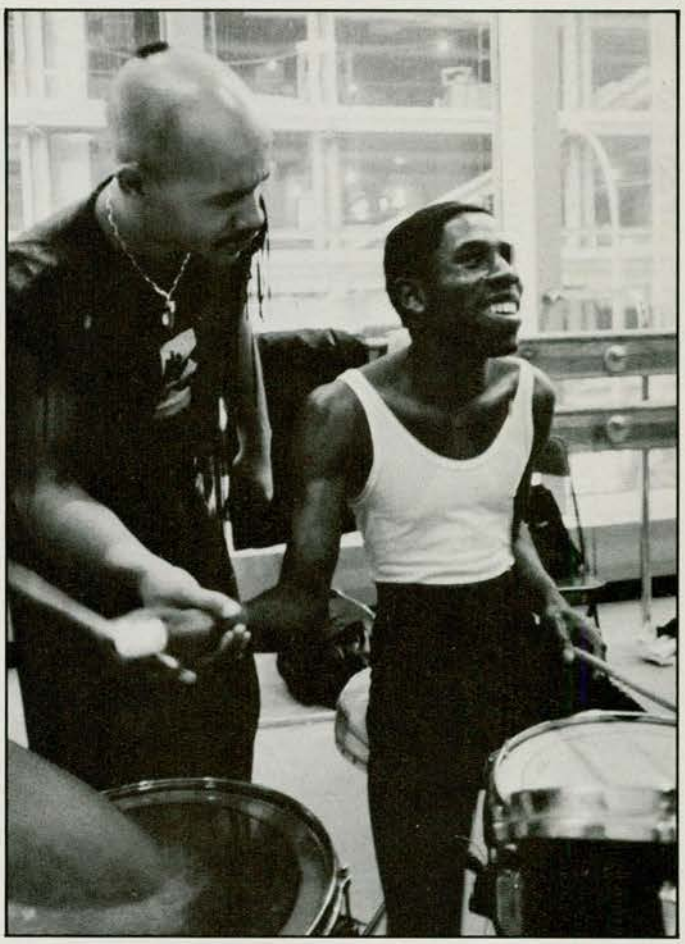
"RELEVEZ . . . pliez . . . first position, arms down . . . echappez." Twelve leotard-clad teenagers leap into the air and come down in second position, some smiling, some serious. A seemingly ordinary dance class, except that all the students are blind or otherwise visually impaired.

These special students are enrolled in the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center's Visually Impaired Program (VIP), a project of the National Committee, Arts with the Handicapped (NCAH). With the encouragement and skill of the Alvin Ailey teachers, these twelve New York City public school students are preparing to perform this spring at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., as part of the National Very Special Arts Festival, sponsored by the NCAH in celebration of its tenth anniversary.

The goal of the two-year VIP program is to develop a model of teaching dance to visually impaired and blind students. Ralph Nappi, associate director of the NCAH, says that the National Committee recognizes that although "this approach is not entirely new to the field of arts for the disabled, it has never before been piloted with such a presti-







gious dance company as the Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre." The hope is that such national recognition will encourage other dance groups to develop similar programs.

Once every week for the last two school years, the students, accompanied by their teachers from P.S. 199 in Manhattan and the Queens School for Career Development, have journeyed to the Dance Center at Broadway and 45th Street in Manhattan for their hour-and-a-half dance lesson.

Slipping quickly into leotards and tights, the eight boys and four girls join Monti Ellison and his musicians in the large, airy dance studio, encased in glass overlooking Shubert Alley, the Broadway theatres and the busy construction site of Marriott's new Times Square hotel. A few students stretch at the barre, but most cluster around Ellison, talking and touching the varied percussion instruments whose magic and rhythms they have studied during their year at the school.

Class begins when dance teacher Wendy Amos, who is also the program coordinator, claps her hands and the youngsters move to form two rows, those with better sight taking

"The program grew out of a dream that choreographer Alvin Ailey had from his boyhood days in the thirties, watching itinerant, blind, black folk singers pass through his home town."

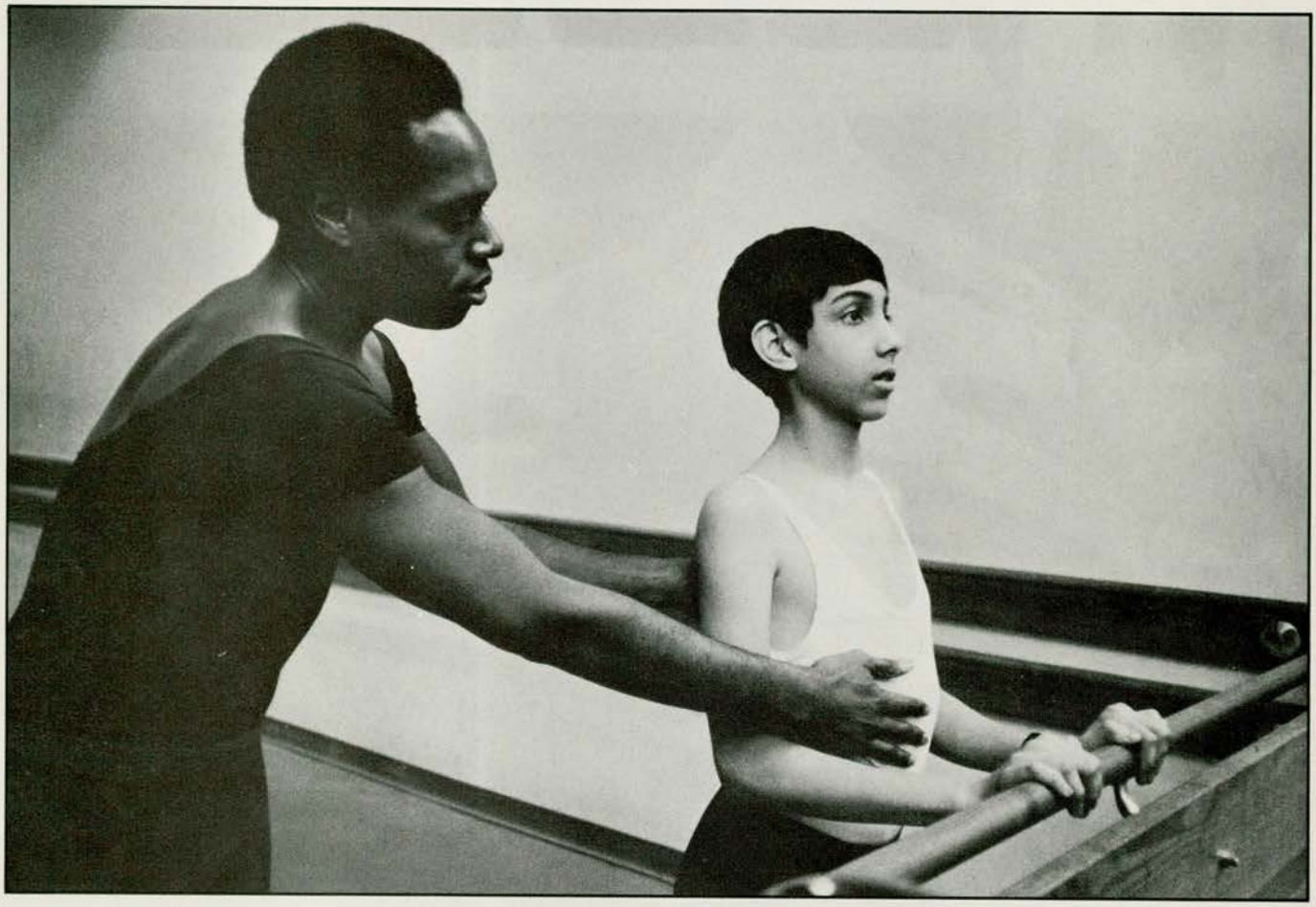
the hands of the blind, all guided safely by the three dance teachers in the class. The musicians strike up a bouncy *bossa nova* and the whole room comes alive with bodies stretching and bobbing to Amos's spirited directions.

"We rely on verbal instruction rather than demonstration," Amos explains, "so I also teach the class anatomy. The students know where their deltoid muscles and sternums are, how to hold their heads and shoulders, and as a result, their posture and balance have improved, as has their self-confidence. When I go into their schools now for auditions, these students take the lead; They've overcome their shyness and urge their friends to try out ... because it's fun."

The program grew out of a dream that choreographer Alvin Ailey had from his boyhood days in the thirties, watching itinerant, blind, black folk singers pass through his home town of Navasota, Texas. The program became a reality when he discussed his ideas with Jean Kennedy Smith, founder of the National Committee, Arts with the Handicapped, which agreed to sponsor the pilot project.

The program got under way in 1982 with

"The third-year goal will be to develop an audiocassette and lesson plans, which NCAH will make available to teachers of the visually impaired and to dance companies."



the cooperation of two New York City public schools. Alvin Ailey teachers held auditions, looking for students with "enthusiasm." Teachers Marilyn Lambright, Susan McGrath and Louise Silverman from P.S. 199 and Phyllis Sickerman from the Queens School for Career Development prepped the students and now accompany them on a rotating basis each week. The teachers are enthusiastic about the program's contribution to the children's self-esteem and confidence. As proof, one child who transferred to a junior high school in the Bronx requested special dispensation to continue in the program — and now travels a considerable distance from his new school to the class each week.

The third-year goal of the program will be to develop an audiocassette and lesson plans, which NCAH will make available to teachers of

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Karen Preuss is a freelance photographer living in San Francisco. Naomi Spatz is assistant director of public relations for the United Federation of Teachers in New York City.

the visually impaired and to dance companies. The American Federation of Teachers will assist in the dissemination of these materials.

The AFT is already collaborating with the National Committee on a volunteer program for retired teachers — Project REAP — Retirement with Enrichment, the Arts, and Purpose. Together, the AFT and NCAH have enlisted the talents of retired teachers and others to work as volunteers with the Very Special Arts Festival Programs, which provide quality year-round programs integrating the arts into the education of disabled children, youth, and adults. Last year, AFT president Albert Shanker was presented with an NCAH award in recognition of the AFT's contribution to arts for the handicapped.

This spring, teachers of the handicapped will accompany disabled and other youngsters from all fifty states to the Very Special Arts Festival in Washington, D.C., to participate in workshops, demonstrations, exhibitions and performances, including, of course, the performance of the NCAH/Alvin Ailey VIP dancers.

—Naomi Spatz

YOUR CASTLE FOR OURS

Finding a Home across the Atlantic

By William Sanders

OUR CHILDREN were quite young — Siobhan was one and Brendan was four — when my wife and I decided we would like to get away from Rochester, New York, for the summer. Traveling with children, especially to the faraway places we dreamed about, takes time, money, and patience. Teaching gives us the time. The money and patience are another matter. We knew we couldn't do without the conveniences and privacy of a home. We needed a house but couldn't afford to rent one. It all seemed impossible until we realized that someone in Ireland might just feel the same way. Thus began our search for a house exchange.

Our first job was to run advertisements in the Dublin papers. We found the names and addresses of the newspapers by calling our local library. We decided to try to arrange an exchange on our own instead of joining an organization of "house exchangers" for a number of reasons: We thought we would have the greatest number of choices if we focused our ads on a specific city; We felt it would be more adventuresome; And lastly, we thought we would hear from a greater variety of people, some of whom might never have thought of joining an exchange club.

The ad itself was intentionally vague: "Teacher couple, two young children wish to exchange houses in summer 1983. More information write. . . ." We were not tied down to a special time, and we didn't want to filter out any inquiry that might prove interesting. The ad ran in early November and by Thanksgiving we were receiving responses.

The letters came flowing in like presents around a Christmas tree. Opening the mail each day took on a whole new meaning. We anxiously awaited the postman who would bring the pictures, wit, and hopes of another family across the ocean. Each of us sharing an ambition, each bargaining with an unknown, we attempted to capture for each other in words and photographs what we longed for and what we could trade in return.

The thirteen responses we received ranged from the extravagant (the "Main House" with sauna, drawing room, and four bedrooms, plus a "summer home" in the country, with a BMW and a Fiat Mirafiori) to the simple (a young soldier with a studio apartment).

At this stage we learned how important good preparation is. In order to capitalize on each other's excitement, a response should be written as quickly as possible. This first correspondence, even though it is a form letter, should be personal, precise, and prompt. We sent each respondent a prewritten letter describing our family, our city, our neighborhood, and our geographical area. We listed various driving distances to other cities, important sites to visit, and something about our interests. We also included a nice pamphlet from the Chamber of Commerce. If what we wrote matched the needs of our potential exchange families, we asked that they write again and give us the answers to some of our questions: What time limitations do you have? Do you have a phone and washing machine? How far are shop-

ILLUSTRATED BY LIANNE LIANG / PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

William Sanders teaches reading and English at East High School in Rochester, New York.

ping and the pub? Are there plenty of children in the neighborhood? Is there a local library? The "serious" families quickly wrote back and began their "lobbying."

What a delightful problem we soon had: Six of the original thirteen families were clearly good possibilities. We now faced the "how will we decide?" question. For us the process was simple. Both my wife and I re-read and graded each letter, which, as teachers, seemed the natural thing to do. By doing this separately and silently we attempted not to influence each other's choices. With an agreed-upon grading standard of "possible," "probable," and "excellent," the happy result was that we both selected the same family as our top choice.

What were our criteria? First, we required someone who had the essentials: washing machine, car, adequate space, easy access. Perhaps even more important was finding a family with the somewhat intangible quality of being people we were comfortable with. When we later discussed our choices, we discovered we agreed on the top three selections. One family had a lovely, modern home in the Wicklow mountains, near the shoreline, just south of Dublin. They wrote personal, charming, and sincere letters. Their "snaps" (as they called them) were full of grandeur and beauty; they were proud of their home and community. We decided, however, that we wanted to be a bit closer to the city center. Another family had more to offer us than we could have possibly offered them. They owned two businesses, two cars, and two homes. They typed neat, detailed, efficient letters on official company stationery. We realized they were probably not "our style," and we thought they could easily afford to see the States without an exchange with us. We felt that such an unequal trade would have been unfair not only to them but also to another family at home in Ireland who really needed an exchange in order to travel.

OUR TOP choice had a lovely, modern, four-bedroom house just minutes from Dublin and within walking distance to pubs, stores, and the library. The family had lived in the United States previously and was anxious to come back for a visit. He was a college instructor (that probably scored a point) and so had a reasonably flexible summer schedule. It was he, in fact, who suggested six weeks instead of our first offer of three or four. They were seasoned travelers. They had a nice car and sent lovely pictures of the family.

There was something else about their letters that came through subtlely but clearly: They seemed to be at about our level. They sounded very practical; They were very concerned about our children's well-being (a sure way to a parent's heart); They were interested in helping us have a good time; Their letters were personal and considerate; They seemed to be people we would like to know. And, most importantly, they seemed to be people we could trust.

After deciding on the exchange family and confirming it with them, there was still much to do. We gathered information from every source that might be interesting to our guests: from the "I Love New York Campaign," from the local Rochester museums, from the local college catalogues, from brochures for wineries to camping maps from the state parks, from tourist information for Niagara Falls and Toronto, Hershey Park, and historic Philadelphia. The list went on and the literature kept pouring in. The mail became interesting once again.

We knew they were interested in camping, so we borrowed sleeping bags, tents, and tools for their use. I also had some of my students write to the children of our exchange family so that they would have some "friends" to meet when they arrived in Rochester.

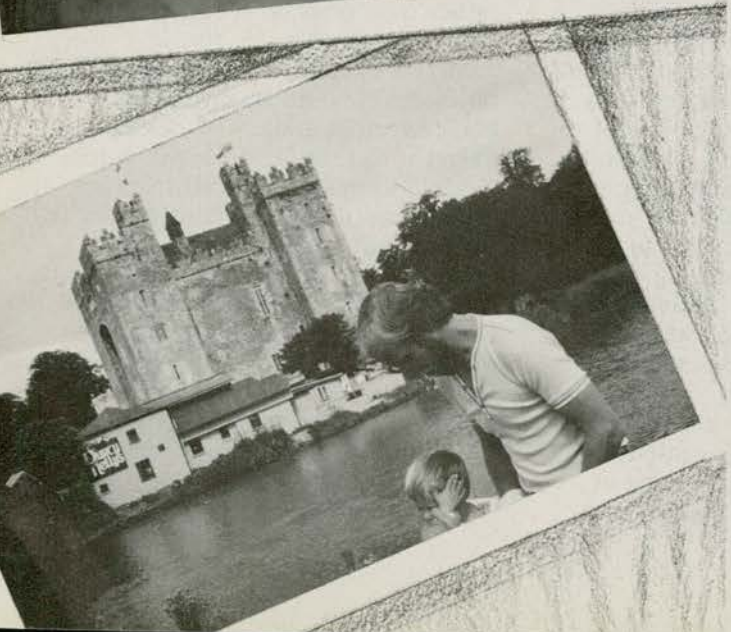
On the other side of the Atlantic our Irish counterparts were doing the same sort of thing. They were also responding to our most pressing concern for safety belts for the children in the back seat of their car. Because European cars do not normally have safety belts in the rear seats, our host family ultimately drilled holes in the frame of their car and bolted a car chair for Siobhan and arms and shoulder restraints for Brendan. This was the kind of gesture that confirmed to us that we were dealing with the right people.

We also had to agree upon and book our exact times of departure and return with the air lines, check with our insurance companies about the cars (neither of us had much trouble), and make ready our homes for the other.

The timing worked out wonderfully. We met each other in New York City before we left for Ireland, and on our return trip we met at Shannon Airport. At each location we exchanged keys, drank to each other's good fortune, gave last-minute tips, and wished each other the best of luck. Both of us also left detailed, written instructions on the use of appliances, locations of the essentials inside the house and in the neighborhood, and friends who would be willing to help out.

After the long plane and car ride, we were tired but full of excitement as we entered our new neighborhood. The development (or "estate" as they call it) was about ten years old, and the houses were all side by side, neat, and attractive duplexes. The homes were built along the outside of a U-shaped drive, and each faced the common "green" in the middle. This traffic pattern meant that few cars went down the street and plenty of children were always ready to play on the football-sized front lot. The house itself was a pleasant stucco with lovely inlaid stone work across the front.

As we entered, we found numerous signs of our hosts' consideration. The house had been "child proofed" and well cleaned. There were children's safety gates at the stairways and a portable stroller in the foyer. In the children's room were bags of toys, and on Siobhan's bed was a rubber mattress cover. (Siobhan had just finished the "training" period, but better safe than sorry.) Inside the refrigerator were all of the ingredients for the popular, eat-anytime Irish fry: rashers of bacon, sausages, eggs, brown bread, butter, marmalade, and frozen potatoes for chips. Knowing we would arrive on Sunday, when all of the stores (but none of the pubs) are closed, this gesture was heartily appreciated. The back garden, as it is called, had just been enclosed the week prior to our arrival with a wrought-iron and lattice-wood gate. The frame for the swing set was standing, and after inserting a bolt and hanging the chains and chairs, it was ready for use. Everything about the house and the setting said, "Welcome, enjoy yourself." It proved, thank God, to be just what we were hoping for.



LOOKING BACK, we realize we were lucky. We discovered even more advantages of a house exchange than we had originally anticipated. The first plus, the financial difference, was obvious. Other than our air travel, we spent no more than we would have if we had stayed home.

The next bonus involves traveling with your children and surviving it, more or less, gracefully. If you have young children, vacations can become more work than they are worth. Too much travel (When are we going to get there?), too many things to see (How many more churches today?), too great a difference in interests (Who is Yeats and why did he want to live here?), and too much commotion can mean irritable children and tense parents. Having a house means having a base; traveling time can be reduced and flexibility can handle the unforeseen.

While we were touring the Wexford area, Brendan had to see the doctor. She knew we came to her from a "bed and breakfast house" and recommended a few days bed rest for Brendan. "I want to go home," he sobbed. Before I could respond, he added, "I mean, to our house back in Castleknock." The house in Castleknock had become our home. With a sick child, a sense of home is important. The cards that arrived from the neighborhood kids the next day made us all feel much better, too.

There are less obvious advantages also. Many of the friendships we formed while in Ireland were made possible by the exchange. It turned out that we had much in common with a brother and sister-in-law of our exchange family's wife, and so we spent many afternoons and evenings together. One woman who saw our ad wrote that although she did not wish to exchange she did want us to visit her and her three-hundred-acre farm for, as she put it, "every child should experience a farm while in Ireland." That relationship continues to develop: Her son now runs around in Buffalo Bills and Notre Dame sweatshirts, while Brendan sports a lovely Aran sweater made by her. Such experiences are not guaranteed, but they certainly are made more likely by the personal dynamics of a house exchange. Often we take vacations to get away and to experience the people and places of a different culture or new part of the country, only to find ourselves surrounded by other tourists. If that situation troubles you, an exchange might be just the answer.

Living in a neighborhood is a good way to break out of the tourist mold. We found groups of children ever present in the yard with our two gathered around the swing set. We enjoyed dinners with the neighbors; leisurely walks to the local library where we were granted library cards; Sundays at the local parish picnic, complete with ice cream and donkey rides; afternoons at the Gaelic Athletic Games and then a stop at the local pub because, winked my friend, "the traffic is so terrible." Thus we were able to balance our "touring" with our need to be treated as individuals and as a family.

Sure there were terrible things that might have happened. But they didn't. Sure we could have traded with a disreputable family. But we didn't. What did happen drew us closer to a country and a people we wanted to know. Now we can't wait for 1985. We're planning another exchange: This time it's Edinburgh, Scotland. Bonnie Bon Voyage! □

THE NEW RESEARCH

How Effective Teachers Teach

BY LOVELY H. BILLUPS AND MARILYN RAUTH

YOU CAN see it. The very mention of educational research can produce shudders in the most steel-nerved teachers. Most likely, they are conjuring up dreaded images of supposedly infallible teaching machines, two-hundred-page lists of behavioral objectives, the mammoth sentence diagrams of transformational generative grammar, or the esoteric quagmires of new math. These flashbacks to the '60s and '70s remain etched in teachers' memories of research-based promises of new educational panaceas, most of which were dismal failures. The lingering resentment felt by many teachers is easily explained by the conditions under which they first experienced major confrontations with research. As research rushed in to meet demands for innovation, teachers had no input into its design or implementation. They were told to discard time-tested strategies in favor of theoretical constructs produced by people who knew little of the classroom and felt it necessary to involve teachers in teaching as little as possible. Consequently, teachers were often forced into programs that wasted the instructional time of students, time for which they felt personally responsible.

Few teachers today are aware that the once-malevolent research entity has taken on a new face. Sometime around 1970, researchers adopted new methods of defining effective teaching practices. Instead of imagining what ought to work, they went into classrooms and looked at what effective teachers actually did. "Effective" teachers were usually defined as those who produced significant student achievement gains. Teachers themselves were now providing the basis for the new "science of teaching."

During this same period, Albert Shanker, now AFT president, advised teachers that it was in their interest not to rely on art alone but to encourage the development of this science of teaching. If teaching were solely an art — unable to be taught, learned, or measured — how was certification to be defended? What arguments could be used to counter the common misconception that "anyone can teach"? Didn't it make sense that some strategies would be more effective than others in producing certain results? Would teachers be regarded as professionals if forced to develop their practice only through trial and error rather than from an accepted knowledge base?

After a decade of teacher observation-based research had been developed, the AFT decided to put it to the test. In 1980, with funding from the National Institute of Education, the AFT Educational Research and Dissemination Program "translated" research on classroom management and effective teaching into an easily understandable form, trained teachers in the research, and asked them to test it in their own classrooms and share the results of these experiments with their colleagues. Teachers who applied the research

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Marilyn Rauth is executive director and Lovely H. Billups is field director of the educational issues department of the American Federation of Teachers. Details on the Educational Research and Dissemination Program can be obtained by writing the authors at the AFT.

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN HENLY

found that, with some adaptation, it worked across grade levels. The new concepts not only provided many teachers with more effective classroom strategies but also gave them the assurance of knowing that the techniques they were using had been proven successful in well-documented observations.

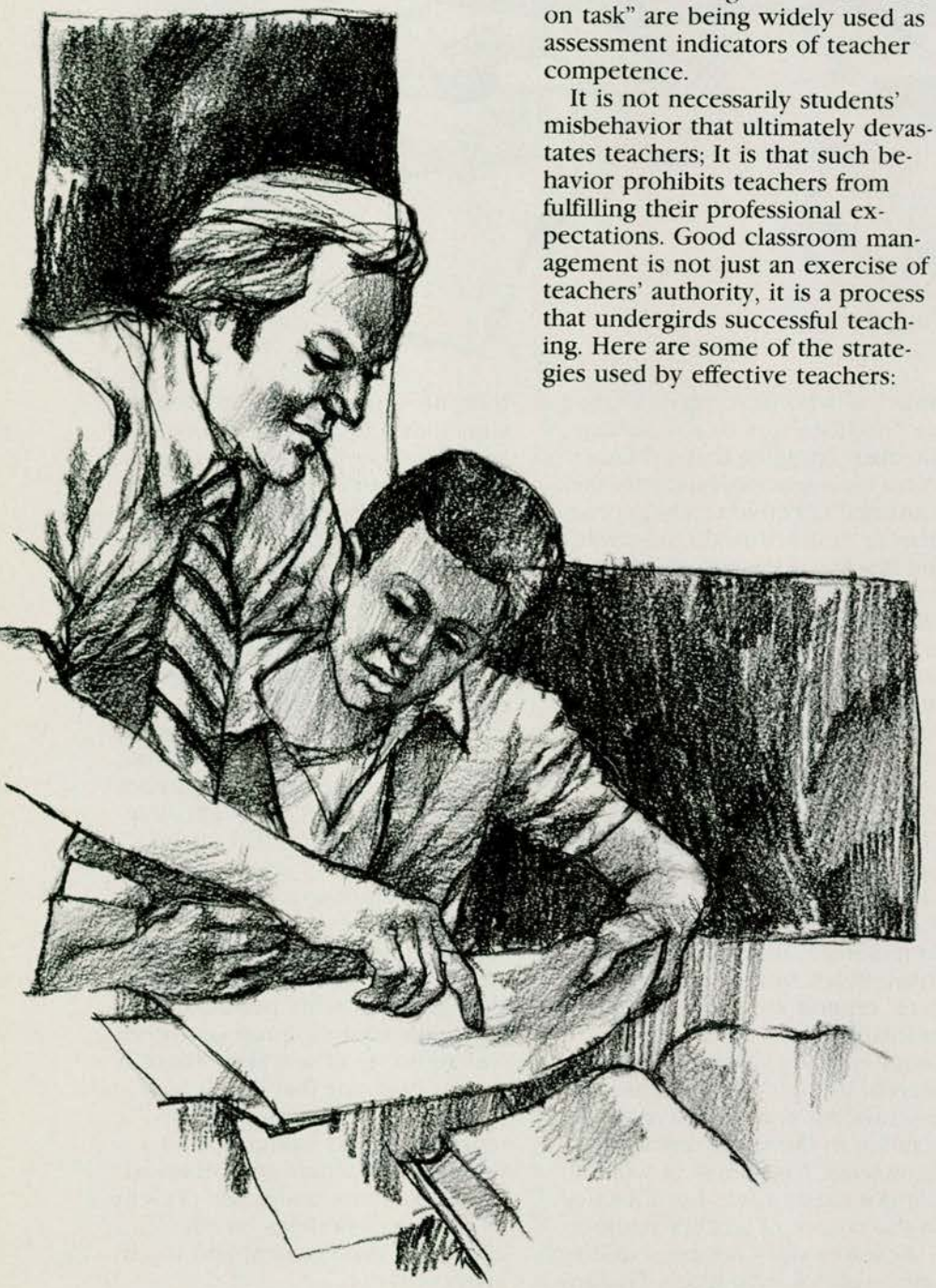
Many whims and mandates have been foisted upon teachers. Often, when someone in authority promoted unsound practices, the teacher's only defense was, "Well, what I'm now doing has worked very well for me." Teachers could describe what they were doing and how, but seldom why. In the "your-judgment-against-mine" game, teachers consistently lost. But familiarity with the recent research can bring a better balance of power. Consider two examples: One teacher trained in classroom management and effective teaching research received a negative evaluation from a capricious administrator. The teacher, however, was able to document what she was doing and why on the basis of the research and, as a result, had the negative evaluation overturned. Another teacher worked with a principal who never gave a rating above satisfactory to any faculty member. Noticing that a number of his colleagues consistently demonstrated effective teaching practices as outlined in the research, the teacher documented their work in his capacity as department chair. For the first time under this principal, five teachers received outstanding ratings. Research, in these instances, proved to be a useful tool for teachers in achieving support for and recognition of competent practice.

Without exception, current discussions of education reform focus on teacher competence. In many places, one positive outcome is the redesign of evaluation systems to minimize subjectivity and favoritism. When such attempts are sincere, criteria used for traditional evaluation and career ladder promotions are based upon research. It, therefore, becomes essential for teachers to receive training in the latest research knowledge base, most of which did not exist or was not included in the course of teacher training.

Research does not prescribe any one "right" way to teach. Findings indicate, however, that in certain situations with certain groups of students some strategies are more effective than others in producing specific results. Within the range of effective practice, teachers can exercise wide latitude in style and method. Many of the findings will not tell the effective teacher anything he or she did not already know but will serve as an important verification of practice. Others remind teachers of things forgotten or perhaps never known. The most useful function of research is to provide a checklist of effective teaching techniques that allows teachers to reflect upon their performance and expand their repertoire of choices.

The "new research," in our opinion, does have positive implications for improving performance and enhancing the professionalism and authority of teachers. There is no question but that it will form the basis of new evaluation systems and career ladder promotions. In this article and others to follow in future issues, we present an outline of findings on effective classroom management and teaching practices.

Effective Classroom Management Means More Time for Learning



MUCH OF the research on classroom management appears, at first glance, to be "old hat." The temptation is to say, "Doesn't everybody know that?" The answer is that everybody may know it, to varying degrees, but everybody isn't practicing it. Does a twenty-minute math lesson shrink to a ten-minute math lesson because materials aren't available or students are out of control? This "off-task" student behavior contributes significantly to teacher stress and negative evaluations. Concepts from the research on classroom management and "time on task" are being widely used as assessment indicators of teacher competence.

It is not necessarily students' misbehavior that ultimately devastates teachers; It is that such behavior prohibits teachers from fulfilling their professional expectations. Good classroom management is not just an exercise of teachers' authority, it is a process that undergirds successful teaching. Here are some of the strategies used by effective teachers:

- Keep your eye on the ball: Research on time on task emanates from an early premise by John Carroll (*A Model of School Learning,* 1963) that identified time as an essential factor in the learning process. More recent time-on-task studies show a critical link to effective classroom management. This is a very important contribution because many school people frequently misapply the connection between classroom control and student achievement. Often, certain classroom behaviors that are emphasized may achieve only limited goals and may actually reduce the time spent "on task." The widely used expectation of "silence" in the classroom is a good example. Because schools necessarily comprise large groups of people, the need for reduced noise levels frequently becomes a focus. Principals may require "silence" in the school and prize that behavior above all others as a mark of teacher competence in classroom management. Under the threat of negative evaluation, teachers respond by devising ways to ensure silence. Class time may be spent with the teacher engaged in constant student reprimands or assigning "busy work" to keep students occupied. An effective management system to support efficient learning has not been carefully thought out.

- An early start: One of the more substantial studies on classroom management was done by researchers Carolyn Evertson, Edwin Emmer, and Linda Anderson *(Beginning of the Year Classroom Management Study,* 1979). They found that teachers who devote three weeks at the beginning of the school year to establishing the procedures they deem necessary for smooth operations in their classrooms can thereby gain thirty-three weeks of efficient teaching. Starting the first day of the school year, teachers should put their management systems into place. They should spell out the rules of the road for their classrooms, including expectations for appropriate behavior during class, provisions for students' personal needs, provisions for instructional activities, and designs for a reinforcement system. It is important to

note that while these procedures are most effective when initiated at the beginning of the year, they can be utilized whenever the teacher feels the necessity.

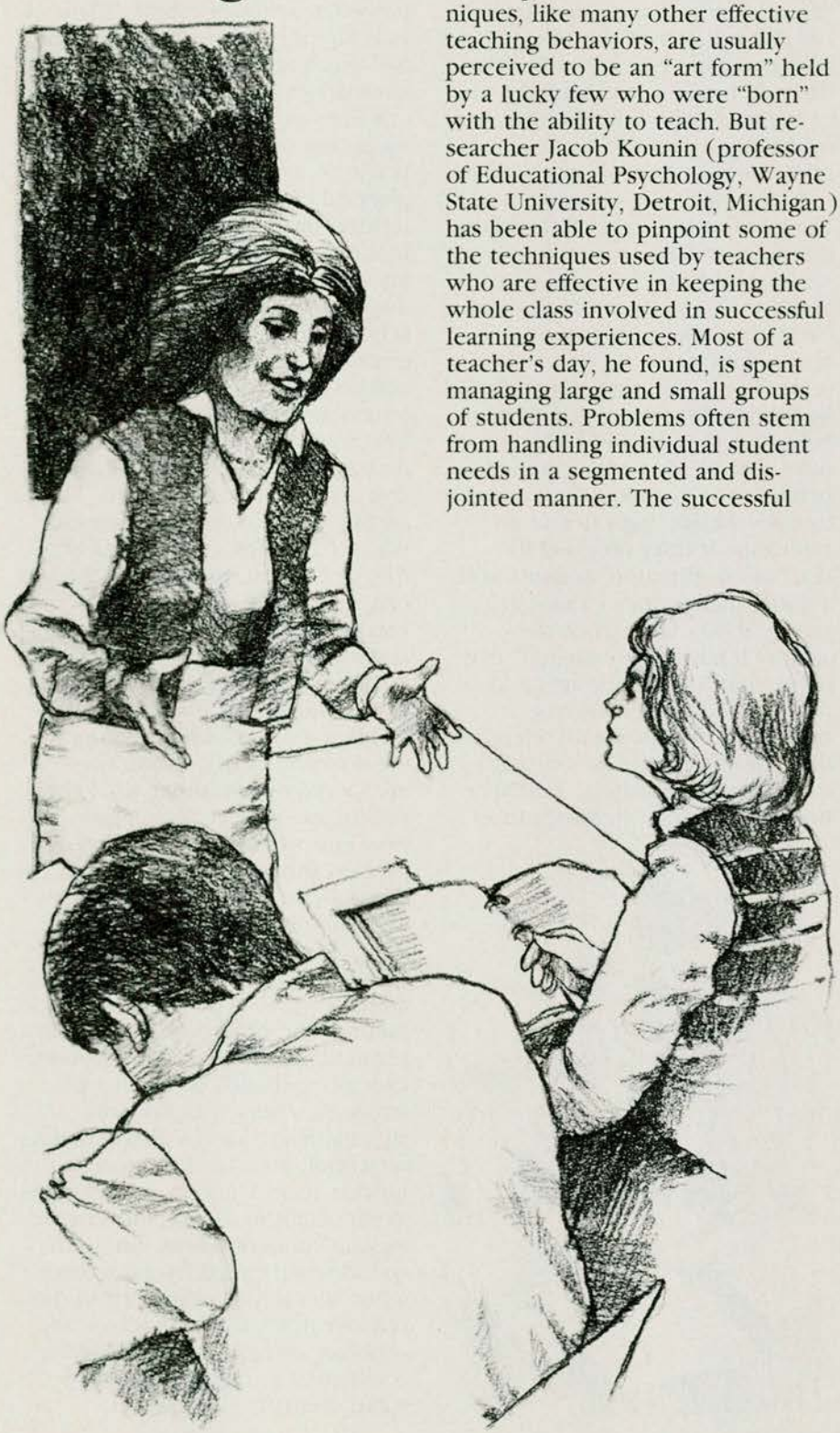
When students know what is expected of them, they move quickly and smoothly from one activity to another, losing very little academic learning time. Students should know where to put their personal belongings, where to put their homework assignments, where to find their daily assignments, when to sharpen their pencils, how they will be graded, etc. These are called classroom procedures, of which there are an average of thirty to fifty, depending on class process. Classroom rules, on the other hand, are fewer in number, generally ranging from three to six. They provide overall governance of student behavior and routine activities. Generally, rules provide guidelines for noise levels and interpersonal respect (no fighting, fair turntaking, personal property rights).

- Teaching the rules: More often than not, classroom rules are stated rather than taught. Teaching the rules means that teachers should go through the same exercises to get rule concepts across that they would employ to teach a curriculum subject. This requires vocabulary definitions (What does the word "courtesy" mean to a primary school child?); teacher explanations; student demonstrations; and teacher questioning to ensure that all students understand the rule. Students should not be held accountable if they do not understand what it is they are supposed to be doing. Administrators state that they will not support teachers with discipline problems if the student is not aware of the reason his actions were inappropriate or if it is clear that the application of the rule was arbitrary and inconsistent. In classrooms where rules are posted and taught, this is not a problem. Rules as well as procedures should be taught and emphasized until they become automatic. When the management process becomes routine, students can devote more time and energy to academic subjects.
- Lest they forget: Good classroom managers consistently enforce their expectations for students by monitoring student actions and applying appropriate reinforcements. Because classroom rules are few in number and provide "umbrella" guidance for many classroom routines, researchers suggest that they be prominantly posted in the classroom as ready reminders for students. Teachers who have posted and numbered the rules report that they simply call the number of the rule and get positive responses not only from the rule breaker, but from the rest of the class who witness both the misbehavior and the fairness and immediacy of the rule application.
- A hierarchy of consequences: In the natural course of classroom life, rules will be broken by some students. A good manager plans ahead for these eventualities and builds into the management system a "hierarchy of consequences." Just as students should be aware of rules governing their behavior, they should be aware of what will happen when they misbehave. The consequences should be appropriate, logical, and enforceable. It does no good for teachers to threaten students with a consequence they cannot enforce. "If you talk out of turn again, I'll have you expelled" may be neither logical nor appropriate nor enforceable. Furthermore, remedies that too readily eject students from class are self-defeating to the goal of teaching. Teachers need to consider measures that graduate in severity and that allow them to maintain contact with students as long as possible. Students who are constantly removed from class are inaccessible to learning. Time on task is lost.

When, however, it can be demonstrated that multiple attempts have been made to modify the student's behavior *before* extreme measures like suspension are employed, teachers are more likely to rally support from administrators and guidance personnel in seeking alternatives for student placement.

- Physical classroom arrangement: For many secondary school teachers, arrangement of the physical classroom environment is of little interest. The common mode is seating by rows with little attention paid to wall and board displays. In some elementary school classrooms, the physical environment receives considerable aesthetic attention: Colors match, letters are even, borders are neat. The research indicates that room arrangement is essential to effective classroom management. The arrangement of the room should ensure that high traffic areas are free of congestion; that all students can see and be seen by the teacher; that materials are readily accessible; and that instructional displays are visible to students. It is not efficient to have an elementary class reading group meet in one corner while books are stored on the other side. High school students are gaining no new information from outdated posters and notices that remain on the bulletin boards. Teachers cannot maintain control over potentially disruptive students who are seated out of the teacher's immediate view. When the arrangement of the classroom is carefully planned, less time is spent in nonacademic pursuits. When, for example, teachers seat students alphabetically for the first few days of school, they tend to more quickly learn students' names. This is important in identifying troublemakers. Students more readily respond when called by name than when identified as "the girl in the red sweater." The immediacy and accuracy of targeted misbehavior is essential in maintaining classroom control.

Group Management: Holding It All Together



FOR YEARS, experienced teachers have prided themselves on their ability to produce "eyes in the back of their heads" as a means of keeping abreast of goings-on in every corner of the classroom. Their students as well as beginning practitioners marvel at the "mystique" of this behavior and wonder how teachers obtain these powers.

The problem is that these techniques, like many other effective teaching behaviors, are usually perceived to be an "art form" held by a lucky few who were "born" with the ability to teach. But researcher Jacob Kounin (professor of Educational Psychology, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan) has been able to pinpoint some of the techniques used by teachers who are effective in keeping the whole class involved in successful learning experiences. Most of a teacher's day, he found, is spent managing large and small groups of students. Problems often stem from handling individual student needs in a segmented and disjointed manner. The successful teacher understands and masters the group dynamics that are a natural part of having twenty to forty students together in a room.

The techniques that Kounin found to work well flow from two general observations: Effective teachers prevent or discourage behavior problems *before* they occur, and the maintenance of high levels of student work involvement is key to warding off misbehavior.

Here are some of the group-management strategies Kounin documented by observing successful teachers:

- Teacher with-it-ness: Since no one person can be everywhere at once, this is part "bluff." But giving the impression of being "with" every student is an effective strategy. This may require the teacher to frequently scan the entire class and "spot check" interactions with individual students. Often this early action sends cut-off signals to others who may want to disrupt class.

  Hence, a teacher who is focused on a group at the front of the room occasionally interacts with students at the back of the room by asking, "Johnny are you finished with your assignment?" or "Susan," (who has just left her seat) "do you need something?" Or, the teacher simply stands or lifts her head occasionally to let students know she is in constant contact. The end result is that potential class disrupters tend to abandon any plans for misbehavior with the attitude "What's the use? She'll catch us!"

- Accurate targeting: Successful teachers make certain that the "guilty" student has been targeted. Blaming the wrong student for a rule infraction can result in students' sensing that the teacher does not know what's going on.

- Fair consequences: Once teachers have singled out disrupters, they must be sure to enforce established consequences fairly. Students state that they respect teachers who apply rules and consequences equitably, regardless of who misbehaves.

- Overlapping skills: Much of the teacher's day is spent in managing more than one classroom activity at a time, which Kounin calls

"overlapping." Often the second activity is unexpected. While the teacher is instructing one group of students, another student needs help with an independent work assignment or two students engage in a dispute over materials. Effective group managers have built-in strategies that allow the group process to continue while the teacher handles interruptions and emergencies. Established guidelines or procedures should be in place so that the group knows what to do when the teacher is called away. This may mean the appointment of a student monitor to keep things going, or it may require that students continue the assignment in patterned, turn-taking order. Students may be instructed to go back to their seats, or there may be an established class rule requiring that students not interrupt other groups. The point is that each group of students should know what to do, thereby freeing the teacher to handle overlapping situations.

- Smoothness and momentum: Kounin also describes the importance of making smooth transitions from one activity to another. When unnecessary lapses are tolerated, students become disinterested and disruptive. Smoothness also means the teacher's ability to move through a lesson without undue distraction. Effective managers make sure that materials are carefully planned and readily accessible. Students are told exactly what they are expected to do during each step of the learning activity. Lessons that run smoothly have a momentum that maintains good pacing and high interest level. Teachers plan ahead to avoid "dead spots" and long, dull assignments. When student interest wanes, misbehavior sets in.

Describing the kinds of actions that are counterproductive to smoothness, Kounin warns teachers against unwitting behavior that tends to disrupt the instructional flow. For example, a teacher may give directions to the class, but then as students proceed with their assignments, the teacher discovers that she has forgotten to collect the homework. Suddenly she commands the class to "turn in the homework." Bedlam ensues: Students run back to their desks to look for their homework; papers are thrust into teacher's hand, on teacher's desk, wherever! In the confusion, those who didn't do the homework get away scott free, while precious time and momentum are lost in settling the group back down again. As is obvious in theory but often not in practice, good classroom management includes setting a consistent time and place for turning in homework.

- Group focus and format: Group focus (keeping all students actively involved in the lesson) and group format (the organizational setup of activity) are areas that often deserve more specific attention from teachers. Effective managers think about the subject they plan to cover, the composition of the student group, and the kinds of interaction they expect during the lesson. If the activity is a high participation discussion, the management procedures should be consistent with that format. Often teachers conduct sessions that are highly excitable to students, yet wind up spending the whole lesson trying to "keep students quiet." Good planning allows teachers to vary group focus and format by making special arrangements, such as conducting class debates on the playground or in the gym so that students are free to speak out and cheer for their team.

- Student accountability: Kounin suggests that teachers devise ways of checking to see that individual students are actually participating in the group process. The more students expect that they will be called on to answer questions and produce results, the more likely they are to remain attentive to goings-on within the group and the less likely they are to disrupt the lesson. Many teachers work with one student at the board while the rest of the class is expected to pay attention. Most often, students at the back of the room remain uninvolved. A better group-management technique would enlist all students in working on the board problem at their seats, holding up a "cue card" when they have arrived at an answer. Everyone keeps busy, and the teacher can quickly scan the cue cards to find correct and incorrect answers. Immediate feedback!

- Avoiding student boredom: Teachers who are able to some degree to vary presentation techniques in their day-to-day teaching are better able to hold students' interest. Students frequently tell researchers that they are weary of teachers who invariably stick to the "lecture — notes — test-on-Friday" sequence. Kounin refers to this as "satiation": coming to dislike an activity because one has had too much of it. More than boredom, Kounin suggests that repetition of an activity often causes less work involvement. While this finding is not meant to imply that teachers must run a daily "dog-and-pony show," it does show the need to focus more consciously on developing more than one approach to teaching.

Effective teachers manage the group process in a way that makes effective use of *all* the time the student spends in class, not just the period of time that he is personally interacting with the teacher. Since findings from the "time-on-task" research have shown extensive use of seatwork to be negatively correlated to student achievement, special attention must be paid to see that such work has enough programmed variety to maintain high levels of student involvement. □

ARISTIDES' LIFETIME READING PLAN

BY ARISTIDES

ONE DAY not long ago, over coffee, an earnest and likeable student about to graduate from the university where I teach allowed as how he would like to do a second draft on his education. There was so much he hadn't read, he said, so many enormous gaps in his education. To make up for all he had missed he was now going about asking people whom he thought well read to make lists of books that he ought to read. I was pleased to have been asked. Being asked meant that this young student took me to be an educated man. Splendid. A little shallow learning lightly carried goes a long way, at least with the young; my genial pose seems to have worked yet again.

When someone asks you to make a list of books for him to read he is, whether he knows it or not, really asking, "How do I become an educated person?" Now that is a tricky question. It presupposes that one knows what an educated person looks like. While not for a moment claiming myself to be educated, I do think I have an inkling — perhaps a touch more than an inkling — of what this particular rare beast looks like. I say "rare" because, even though I travel in intellectual circles (are they called circles because so many of the people who travel in them usually end up back where they started?), I meet remarkably few people whom I consider educated.

I know a good many smart people, I know some highly intelligent people, I know a small number of people who know a vast amount about a few things, I am not sure I know anyone who is consistently wise, but I do know two beautifully educated men. I shall not go into semantical back flips about what constitutes an educated person. Of these two men I shall say merely that I think they are educated because they have read lots of books in lots of languages and because they have kept their eyes open to the world around them and because they have made lots of extremely interesting connections between books and the world. If one were to ask either of them to make a list of books for one to read, I cannot imagine them doing other than exclaiming, in a more refined way than I am now about to put it, "Whaddaya, kidding me?"

Yet my student was awaiting his list and, in his earnestness, was not to be put off. "Have you read the Greek philosophers?" I began, taking what seemed to me a safe road to start upon. "Plato, for example?" He answered that he hadn't, and here I inwardly sighed, recognizing that his university had let this young man down. I was luckier than he, for I had gone to a school — the University of Chicago in the middle 1950s — that had a firm idea of what the young should read, which was chiefly great writers. Aristotle and Plato were, in those days, most prominent among them. We also read Thucydides, Tacitus, Rousseau, Tocqueville, and Dostoyevsky; dribs of Marx and Freud, and Max Weber; drabs of some contemporary writers, chiefly in the social sciences. If you weren't a clever student — and I wasn't, particularly — at eighteen or twenty years of age doubtless anywhere from 30 to 70 percent of what

Aristides is the pseudonym of Joseph Epstein, editor of the American Scholar, *from which this essay is condensed (Volume 52, No. 2, Spring 1983).*

ILLUSTRATED BY GUY SCHUM

these great writers had to say sailed blithely over your head. Yet such reading did establish a few essential things: It taught you who the important writers are; It gave you some notion of what is important about them, which is chiefly the questions they deal with; And it lent you a certain animal confidence, so that you were never afraid of taking on the most serious of books. This, I have since come to think, was a great deal, and the best reason I have for sending the University of Chicago a modest annual alumni check.

Not that anyone could claim to be educated in four years, even at the most serious of schools, which the young man sitting across from me knew. Still, one had to start somewhere; and where, he wanted to know, ought he to start? An obvious answer would have been to tell him to read the Bible straight through — something I myself have never done — and then proceed to read the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* back to back. Yet this advice, I felt, would only have depressed him; and contemplating it briefly, sound though it was as advice, I had to admit that it depressed me a little, too. Instead I said, "You know, Jim, the main thing is to have some time-tested and officially great book going at all times — Gibbon, perhaps, or Cervantes — alongside which you can read less thumpingly significant books." Checking to see if I was following my own sensible advice, I recalled that I at least had bookmarks currently in Montaigne's *Essays* and Tocqueville's *Old Regime and the French Revolution,* although I hadn't read in either one for a good while. "As for the rest," I continued, "the important books will come to you when you need them. Or so in my life I have always found." Even as I said it I felt that this piece of what must have sounded like mystical wisdom did not go down too well, so I availed myself of the prerogative available to teachers through the centuries — I quickly changed the subject.

***"To make amends, and to reform through public confession, I should now like everyone to know that I never read* The Brothers Karamazov."**

YET I felt sympathetic to this young man and his hunger for a list, for anyone even moderately aware of the vast number of books in the world and of the quite pitiful dent any man or woman can hope to make in it is likely, as a first response, to cry out for help. Small wonder that people feel they require a list, a map, a guide to find their way. Smaller wonder that so many other people over the years have been ready to supply lists catering to this demand. In this century alone, to cite only those lists and collections of books that come to mind, there have been the Harvard Classics, the Great Books of the Western World, *The Lifetime Reading Plan, The List of Books* (edited by Frederic Raphael and Kenneth McLeish), and, most recently, a listing of nine thousand books in a book entitled *Good Books* (edited by Steven Gilbar, who also produced *The Book Book*). When it comes to books, it becomes clear, one could make a list of lists.

In my youth I had planned to read systematically through all the important writers — Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Dickens, George Eliot, Balzac, James, Mann, Proust, etc. — each in his or her full corpus. I would knock them off, one after another, and when I was finished there I would be — *voila!* — an educated gent. It didn't quite work out that way, and I am able to stand here today and say that I have not read all the works of any of the above-mentioned writers, not to mention those of that prolific author Etc. I am embraced by shame, covered with the blush of my own inadequacy. When it comes to reading, though, nearly everyone feels, or ought to feel, inadequate in one way or another. For in one way or another, nearly everyone is inadequate. One simply cannot have read everything; If one tried to read most of the world's good books, there would be scarcely any time to read many of the world's interesting books, for, as any veteran reader will tell you, good and interesting books are sometimes but not always the same.

How much better just to relax in one's inadequacy, to enjoy it or, at any rate, to accept it. Yet this appears to be a difficult thing to do; It is difficult to admit one's own limitations to oneself and perhaps even more difficult to admit them to others. Among academics and intellectuals, one of the most troublesome sentences to pronounce is, "I haven't read it." I have not myself actually lied by claiming to have read a book I have not in fact read, but I have stood by allowing others to think I have. To make amends, and to reform through public confession, I should now like everyone to know that I have never read *The Brothers Karamazov.*

This abject confession reminds me of a game I heard about not long ago, one supposedly played at academic parties. In this game, academics — one has to imagine them slightly fried — admit to the great books they ought to have but indeed have not read. I gather that the rhythm of the game is such that it begins with small admissions, but soon a competitive edge cuts in — a kind of one-downmanship — and the admissions get larger and larger. At a party of English department academics, for example, someone might begin by confessing that he has never read a novel by Norman Douglas. The next person might claim never to have read, say, *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table.* Someone then chimes in with the admission that she has never read the poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins. "Hopkins hell," someone else says, "I've never read a poem by Yeats." Everyone agrees that this is fairly impressive, until a full professor says, "Yeats, Schmeats, I've never read the *Faerie Queene."* A sucking in of breath is heard round the room. Then a woman off in the corner, the department's resident Marxist, admits that not only has she never read Chaucer, but she isn't even certain of the century in which he lived. Suddenly a quiet man, the head of the school's American studies program, strides forth, obvious pride in his posture, to announce, "I hate to break up these festivities, but I'm afraid that's just

what I'm about to do. You ready for this? I have never read a play by Shakespeare — and that includes your bloody *Hamlet.*"

ONE OF THE reasons that most people feel inadequate about reading is the ideal — an ideal that is difficult to shake off — of well roundedness. Being well read generally implies being well-roundedly-read. Well roundedness remains an ideal, even though taste and temperament make it an ideal impossible for almost all of us to achieve. Thus the other day I almost bought a ten-dollar paperback entitled *The Experience of Mathematics.* It looked to me a fascinating book — so fascinating that I nearly forgot that I barely have the mathematical concentration to do long division. I need to read a longish book on mathematics the way a couple living in a Manhattan high rise needs a Brahman bull; and I have about as much chance of making headway in such a book as that couple does of sneaking the Brahman bull past the doorman. Yet, as the old pop tune has it, I can dream, can't I?

Because minds do so differ in degree, it can be a bit hopeless to instruct people about what they ought to read. I, for example, have discovered in myself a powerful feeling for fantastical literature — this feeling is one of powerful apathy. A decade or so ago many friends advised me to read J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings,* but it was no go. Neither have I ever wished to read William Golding's *Lord of the Flies.* The real is fantastical enough, and so I eschew fantastical books. Some quite intelligent people, similarly, have no taste for reading philosophy, and not only contemporary technical philosophy but philosophy of the kind Santayana and F. H. Bradley wrote. Others find nothing for themselves in even the most intelligible poetry. How many first-class physicists have had a serious interest in modern painting; and how many first-class modern painters have had a serious interest in physics? Would they have been better physicists and painters if they had? Or would they simply have gotten less physics and painting done?

A MOST ungentle breeze — a small typhoon, really — on the subject of what and what not to read blew in some years ago in the form of a book entitled *Fifty Works of English and American Literature We Could Do Without* by Brigid Brophy, Michael Levey, and Charles Osborne. Sound advice on what not to read would be a boon to humankind, or so one might think. Every book one doesn't need to read, after all, represents one book more one will have time to read. Few negative pleasures are as exhilarating to the bookish as reading a persuasive review whose gravamen is that one needn't bother reading a prolific writer whose many works one has had a bad conscience about not hitherto having read. But the authors of *Fifty Works* aren't kidding around. Among the works they tell us they could do without — and, by implication, so ought we to do without them — are *Tom Jones, Moby-Dick, Leaves of Grass, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Pickwick Papers,* and, yes, that old game-ender, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.* Iconoclasm can be a fine thing; many an icon is worth shattering; but *Fifty Works* is an attempt to blow up the church. Reading down the list of classics condemned by the authors of *Fifty Works,* I can only report my personal conclusion that here three people's poison more often than not turns out to be another man's meat.

"Is it possible, though, that it is I and not John Locke who is boring? I don't think I care to answer that question . . . ."

Behind the condemnation proceedings of *Fifty Works of English and American Literature We Could Do Without* is the charge that, in one way or another, these works are boring. I do not happen to agree, for example, that *Pickwick Papers* is boring. ("It does not develop," the authors write, "it simply goes on. And on.") But a question that arises is: How many boring books need to be read by a person seeking to become educated? I should guess that the figure might be between two and three hundred. Such a book for me was John Locke's *Two Treatises on Civil Government,* which as a young man I read somewhere in the middle of Texas. Time never hung so heavy as when I clumped my way through that work. I have thought since that, were I given a limited time to live, I might return to Texas with the collected writings of John Locke. Under the Texas sun, with John Locke's text before me, each day would seem a decade.

Is it possible, though, that it is I and not John Locke who is boring? I don't think I care to answer that question, for I have noticed that people who are easily and therefore regularly bored are frequently themselves quite boring. What is boring and what is not boring is a question that puts one on tricky terrain. The ground often shifts with age. I have read many writers that, though they seemed to be dull when I was young, seem splendid in middle age (Matthew Arnold, for example). The reverse also sometimes obtains: Books I adored when young I can barely read now that I am older. (When, a few years ago, I tried to reread Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* I found myself, so hokey did much of this once-loved book seem to me, counting the drinks its characters imbibed.) Interest in bookish matters is all very well, but it seems to me that it cannot be allowed to count for everything, especially among the young. A freshman student, in a course I teach in American novels, recently told me that, so interesting has he found Arthur Hailey's *Airport,* he has now read it four times. As I heard this, I winced and hung a flag with a star on the window of my heart for all that killed time.

UNFORTUNATELY, GIVING people advice about what they ought to read invariably makes the person giving the advice sound stuffy. In his introduction to *The Lifetime Reading Plan,* Clifton Fadiman, who is very well read indeed and who can write well about

books when he is criticizing or reviewing them, sounds the dread note of stuffiness when extolling the virtues of reading the most serious books: "They can be a major experience, a source of continuous internal growth. . . . Once part of you, they work in and on and with you until you die." He is talking about books, I know, yet what he is describing sounds curiously like fungus. Once you start talking about the delights of reading, funny things happen. Some years ago, discovering that a fairly bookish friend had never read any of the books of Isaac Bashevis Singer, I said to him, in what I thought was complete sincerity: "You're lucky, really. I envy you all the pleasures in store for you." He looked at me strangely. "You know," he said, "I never realized how damned condescending you can be when you put your mind to it."

Since that little exchange I have been chary of offering advice about books, except in print (when paid to do so) and except to the occasional student who asks for it. Not only is there the danger in doing so of sounding like a stuffed shirt, but in my case there is the additional danger of hypocrisy. When it comes to reading, I am unable to follow any system whatsoever; the word desultory may have been invented to describe my reading habits. The phrase "full of fine but finally fickle intentions" would not be misapplied either. Thus on a recent Sunday I resolved to finish the last seventy or so pages of a book I had been reading in five- or ten-page snatches, Herbert R. Lotman's *The Left Bank*, a study of French literary intellectuals in the middle third of the current century. I didn't finish it, of course. Instead I began *Aunt Julia and the Scripturiter* by the Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa and *Goodbye to All That* by Robert Graves, a book I should have read before now but for one reason or another haven't. This, if I may say so, is a typical performance. I have only to declare that I shall finish a book to be certain of starting two others.

In one of his letters, Justice Holmes speaks of his inability *not* to finish reading a book once he has begun it — an inability that plagued him until his seventy-fifth year. Here is the one instance where I think of myself having the advantage over Justice Holmes. I learned not to finish books by the time I was forty. I do not, it is true, set out not to finish books but neatly accomplish this task all the same. I could put together an impressively long shelf of books with my bookmarks in them, which have had bookmarks in them for some time and which in all likelihood will continue to have bookmarks in them. Many of these are books of the kind I think of as dippable — books not to be read straight through or even straight across but instead to be dipped into from time to time: collections of letters, books of stories or poems, an author's collected writings, diaries and journals, essays, an occasional ambitious novel begun in a fever of cultural ambition but put aside for more pressing business.

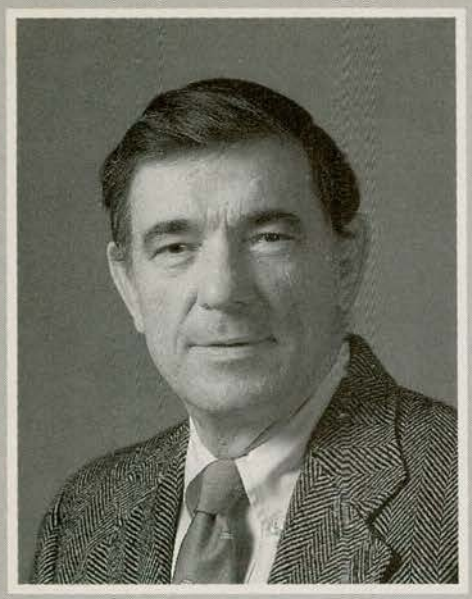
BECAUSE OF such erratic behavior I am all the more hesitant to give advice to others about what they ought to read. The intellectual world is, besides, much divided on this question. I happen to be someone greedy to read all the world's interesting books. But there are other views. The students of the great yeshivas of Eastern Europe spent lifetimes poring over a few basic texts. The disciples of the political philosopher Leo Strauss read and teach the same twenty or twenty-five books to the exclusion of almost all others. Vladimir Nabokov had a similar diet of twenty-five or so main books, which he read over and over, though these were of course very different books from those Leo Strauss chose to concentrate on. But Strauss, I think, would have agreed with Nabokov when the latter wrote: "Curiously enough one cannot read a book: one can only reread it."

Rereading presents yet another immense complication. Every serious reader knows that he has read significant books at the wrong times in his life — usually when he was too young and hence not prepared for them — and would like to have another go at them. Then there are those books that gave one so much pleasure that one wishes to recapture the pleasure by the only known way — by, that is, rereading them.

Although theoretically I approve of rereading, I must confess that I have not done a great deal of it. The problem is my ardor to read at least once all the books I wish to read. What is more, I continue to buy books all the while: three books by F. H. Bradley; four of the five volumes of Osbert Sitwell's autobiography, *Left Hand, Right Hand!; The Letters of Gustave Flaubert; The Noël Coward Diaries* — in short, the usual mishmash. The likelihood of my finishing these books soon — or, possibly, ever — is not large, for I also have a good deal of reading to do in connection with my own writing and teaching. Yet I remain, like a man holding a quinella ticket at the racetrack, ever hopeful.

What complicates this even further is the almost continuous discovery of new writers — or, more precisely, older writers who are new to me. I had thought, for example, that I had read nearly all the interesting Yiddish fiction that had been published in English and therefore had that subject — to revert to a phrase I used earlier — under my belt. Alas (or hurrah?), in the book *Rabbis and Wives* by Chaim Grade, I recently discovered another master in this line. Worse (better?) news: Grade has a chunky oeuvre. I am currently reading his two-volume novel, running to nearly eight hundred pages, *The Yeshiva*. Worse (better?) news still: It knocks me out. How many more hidden Chaim Grades — fine writers I ought to have known about but didn't — are out there?

All this could only have thoroughly depressed my student, who came to me for a little sensible advice about what he ought to read, and who, if I had gone through this megillah with him, would only have departed with a headache. What I did tell him, finally, was to read no junky books, to haunt used-book stores, and to let one book lead him to another. And I tried to make clear to him that amusement, beauty, and, with a bit of luck, wisdom are picked up along the way in a reading life. But there is no systematic way to go about it, no list, no key to the kingdom of the educated. There is also a danger: Once begun, there is no end. I myself would rather be well read than dead, but I have a strong hunch about which will come first. Even that, though, is fair enough and fine with me. Meanwhile, if you hear of any good books, or writers whose works you think I ought to look into, I shall thank you, if you please, kindly to keep them to yourself. □



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But other safety experts, including NHTSA, present a different view. They question the safety and practicality of mandatory seat belts on school buses.

No one seems to know the best answer to this question. We at Thomas know that there are a lot of questions that should be answered before any legislation is passed.

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Letters

Parental Attitudes Vital

As a nonprofessional in the field of education, I have little contact with literature dealing with education. The one exception to this is the *American Educator,* which comes into our home for my teaching husband. I was struck by a short article in your Spring 1984 issue discussing the relative quality of Catholic vs. public education. Has anyone studied the effect on students of parental attitudes toward education in relation to public vs. private education?

Virtually every child whose parents are willing to pay for their private education comes from a home background that respects and admires education itself. There are no students in Catholic (or other private) schools who go home to dinner to listen to parents denigrate the school, ridicule the teachers, and denounce the benefits of having a good education. Every one of those unfortunate children goes to public school. And if their attitude toward school is negative, it may in turn be transmitted to their peers. (Every parent of a junior high school student has a healthy respect for the power of peer attitudes and pressure.)

While James Coleman thinks credit is due to the Catholic school system, and Alexander and Pallas think credit is due to the inherent intellectual abilities of the students, I would be interested in knowing if the credit may be due to involved parents who make education a high priority for their children.

Studies that don't take parental involvement and attitudes into consideration are surely omitting a major factor.

—Marita Straffin
Cranberry, PA

Overcrowded Classes

"The Teacher's Predicament" in the spring 1984 issue gave me the comfort of knowing that other teachers are also overwhelmed by children's "emotional demands and needs," but it was disappointing as well.

It is surprising that no one ever suggests the obvious, and relatively uncomplicated, solution to today's teacher-pupil-education problems: smaller classes.

With political willingness to "restructure the teaching profession and place it on a more attractive financial base," why not put the investment into more classes with fewer children in each? That could be nothing but attractive to teachers. Everyone knows small classes (sixteen each) are a great drawing card for private schools. This solution might even be an answer to tuition tax credits.

A colleague states that a study showed no difference in reading scores resulting from class size. I find that difficult to accept. But, the question in your article is not maintaining reading scores but maintaining teachers. Believe me, as a teacher in overcrowded city classes (and anything over twenty-five in the elementary grades is overcrowded today), it is the only feasible solution to our problems.

Teachers want to give of themselves, but they are only "spinning," unable even to know all thirty to forty-four (!) students well enough to grade them honestly.

It's so simple no one will get any credit for it, but everyone benefits.

—Ferol Montgomery
New York, NY

Help or Hindrance?

Lane Jennings' far-ranging article in the Spring 1984 issue of *American Educator* ("Transportation for the Mind: Computers in the World of 1985") does not range far enough. It covers many of the pros and cons, but it does not address itself to the main problem that teachers have with excessive computer orientation in our education bureaucracies today.

I am referring particularly to the tendency to overburden teachers with mountains of new paperwork in order to demonstrate the computer's efficiency. Precisely because these computers can digest huge amounts of quantitative information easily, there is a move to compel teachers and guidance counselors to spend much of their time feeding these machines instead of devoting their energies to their students. Very

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often the information being fed into those machines is only of marginal interest or importance.

In our haste to enjoy playing with these sophisticated toys, we may be creating a situation in which the teacher may degenerate into a mere pack animal dragging huge loads of paperwork to the super-efficient machine so that *it* can justify *its* existence. The more efficient the computer becomes, the more work will be required of the pack animals to "maximize" the use of the computer.

We may end up with huge files of facts of dubious value that will enable bureaucrats to have access to masses of gossip at the touch of a finger but that will deflect teachers from that confrontation of being that is true education. The computer, in that case, will not have produced Big Brother, but Big "Yenta" (gossip).

—MARTIN OBRENTZ
Miami, FL

READING DEBATE CONTINUES

I was startled by the article "Reading: The New Debate" in the Winter 1983 *American Educator,* which claims overwhelming research confirmation of Jeanne Chall's position supporting the phonic, decoding approach to learning reading. It was written as though the work of the last twenty years in psycholinguistics — Barnes, Rosen, Britton, Clay, Holdaway, Goodman, King, Strickland, Smith, Spencer, Mayher, Jaggers — was nonexistent. By relating to only one counterforce to Chall's focus — Bettelheim — the author bypasses all Smith's work on information processing, on context, on meaning, as significant to what happens in learning reading.

Such global claims in the AFT journal that seem to give no place to work differing with Chall's view on phonics can result in seriously increasing the constraints of prescriptive decoding programs on the many teachers who have begun to respond in their reading programs to the child's search for meaning.

I hope you will use the AFT journal for *discussion* and the presentation of the many and various views on beginning reading.

—LILLIAN WEBER, DIRECTOR
The Workshop Center
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New York, NY

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