AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
WINTER 1985

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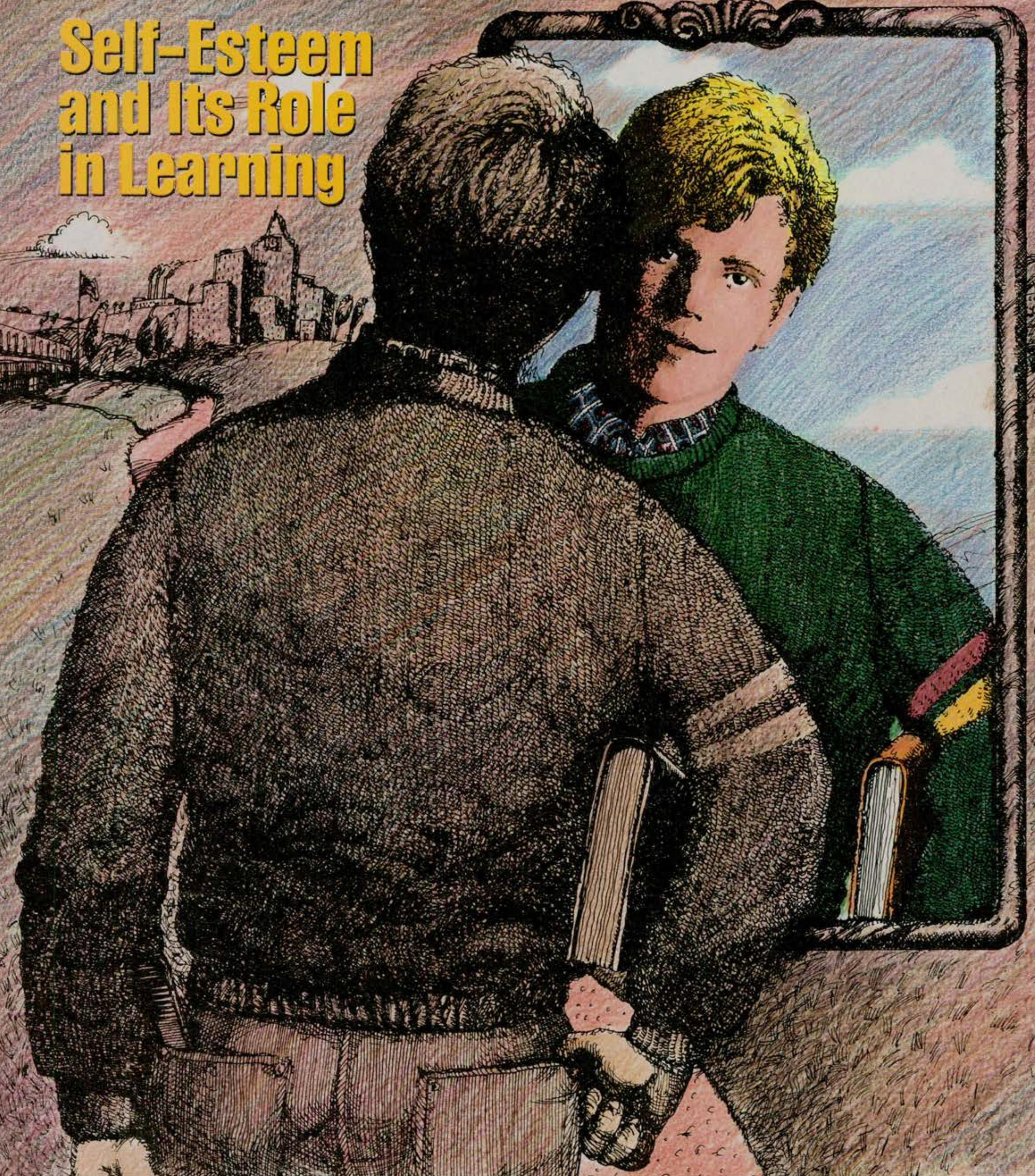
Self-Esteem and Its Role in Learning



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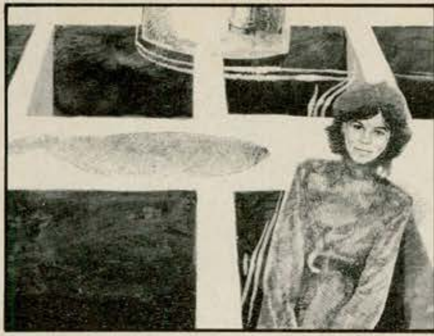

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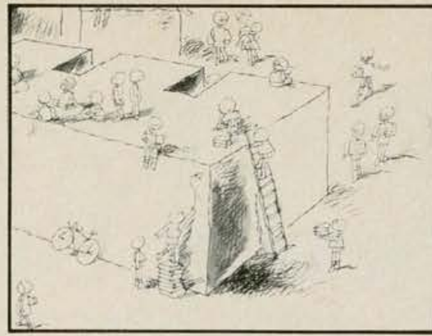

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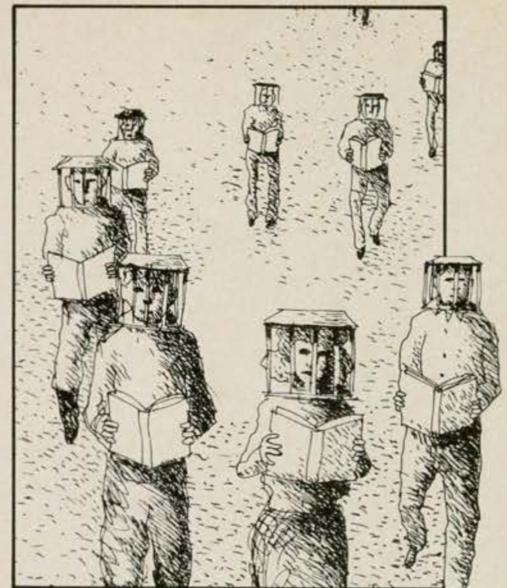

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AMERICAN Educator

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SELF-ESTEEM AND EXCELLENCE: THE CHOICE AND THE PARADOX 10
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Which is the better approach to achieving academic excellence: the one that stresses the importance of self-esteem and the need to protect and bolster it, or the one that calls for helping children overcome their natural egotism through the enforcement of standards? In deciding, are we forced to choose between our students' intellectual development and their happiness?

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Can children's fascination with science fiction films serve as a takeoff point for serious discussion of scientific principles? Yes, say the authors, who have written a teacher's guide detailing the science lessons that can be derived from nine such films.

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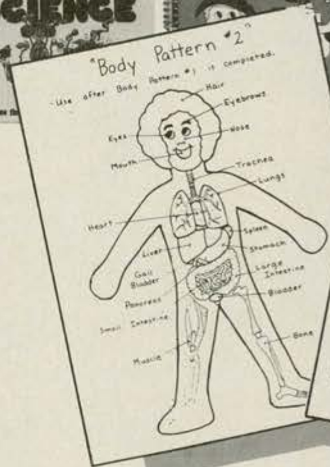

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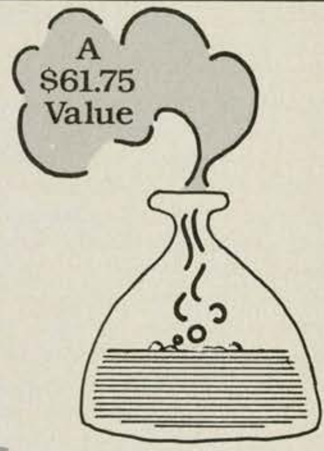

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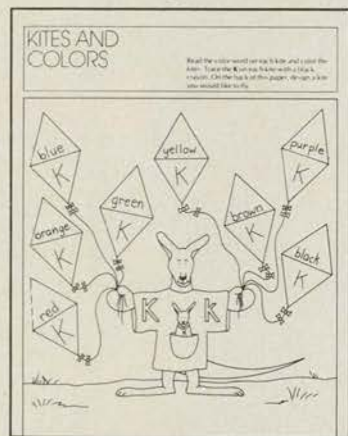

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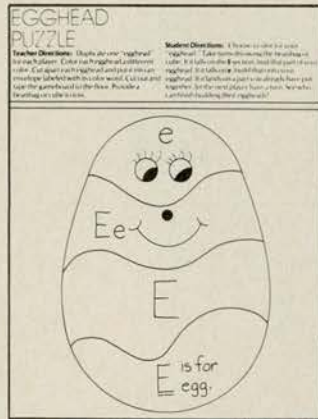

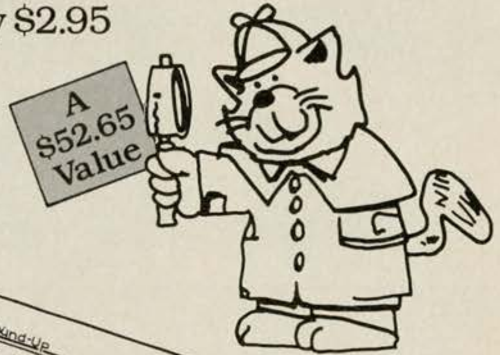

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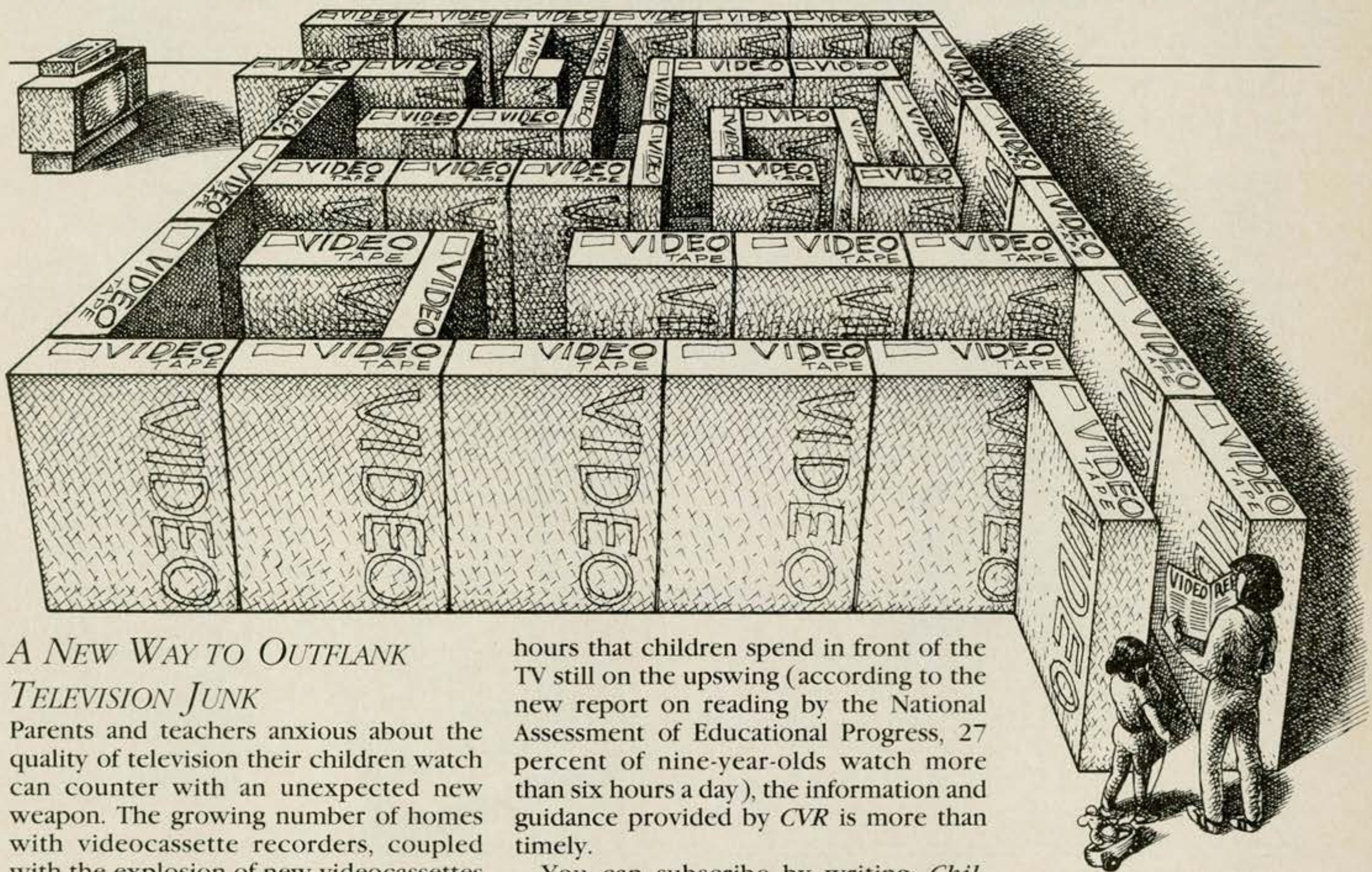

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A New Way to Outflank Television Junk

Parents and teachers anxious about the quality of television their children watch can counter with an unexpected new weapon. The growing number of homes with videocassette recorders, coupled with the explosion of new videocassettes for children, offers parents a new way to control their children's TV diet. Fantasy classics such as *The Hobbit,* wildlife favorites such as *Born Free* and a wide selection of timeless fairy tales give VCR owners a clear choice over commercial TV's limited fare.

But with thousands of lesser-known children's titles now available and more in the works, it's becoming a challenge for parents to screen and select desirable programs. Now, the *Children's Video Report (CVR)* offers a path through the maze. Each bimonthly issue reviews about a dozen video titles in-depth, noting worthwhile values and messages transmitted, sensitive issues addressed, and age group for which the tape is most appropriate. The newsletter also provides capsule reviews of another dozen videos plus activity ideas designed to help children become more discerning viewers.

With the number of VCRs growing by the day (in January of this year there were 17 million VCRs — by October that number had climbed to 24.5 million), and the hours that children spend in front of the TV still on the upswing (according to the new report on reading by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, 27 percent of nine-year-olds watch more than six hours a day), the information and guidance provided by *CVR* is more than timely.

You can subscribe by writing: *Children's Video Report,* Suite 3715, 233 Broadway, New York, New York 10279. A one-year subscription costs $35 and brings you six issues.

Summer Renewal with the Humanities

"Arthurian Literature," "American Ethnic and Racial History," "Great Issues of Africa," and "Nietzche's Individual": These are just a few of the topics offered in the upcoming series of summer seminars for secondary school teachers sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The 50 seminars, with subject matter ranging from the arts to literature, and from history, philosophy and religion to political theory, enroll 15 teachers each. Jointly led by a distinguished teacher and an active scholar in the field, the seminars are a chance for otherwise too-busy teachers to immerse themselves in rigorous study and lively discussion of the humanities — a pursuit forced out of most teachers' schedules between September and June.

The seminars last four, five or six weeks, and participants receive stipends of $1,700 to $2,350. To be eligible for the program, you must be a full-time or regular part-time teacher in grades 7-12. For a complete list of classes and an application form, write to the National Endowment for the Humanities, Division of Fellowships and Seminars, Room 316, 1100 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W. Washington, D.C. 20506.

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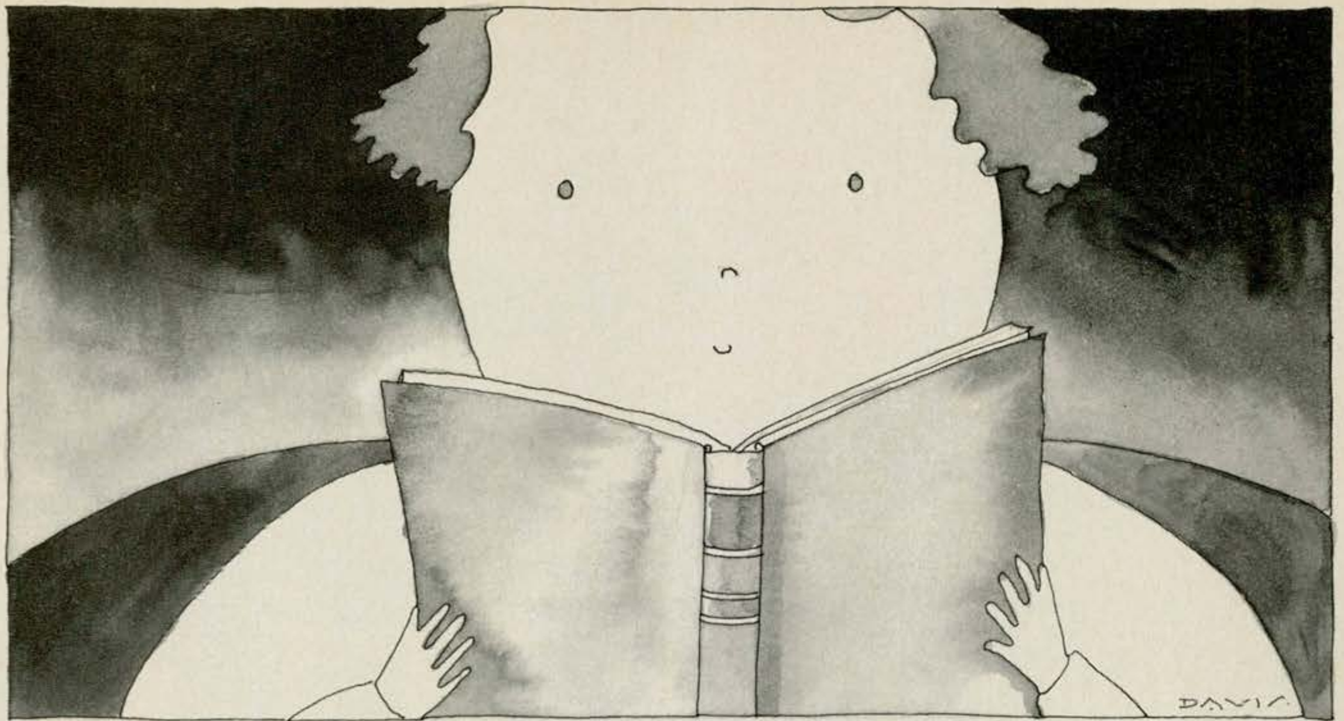

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Who's Reading Better?

Most students are reading better today than they were in 1971, says *The Reading Report Card,* a new study from the National Assessment of Educational Progress. According to the study, disproportionate gains were made by traditionally low-scoring students: blacks, Hispanics, Southerners, Westerners and students from rural and disadvantaged urban areas.

That, of course, is good news. But, as the report observes, two problems remain: The disadvantaged, despite their gains, still lag far behind (for example, 17-year-old blacks still score only slightly higher than 13-year-old whites), and top-scoring students are failing to progress further, suggesting that schools are not adequately stressing higher-order reading skills, including the background knowledge essential to comprehension.

Why the upward trend, particularly among the traditionally disadvantaged? NAEP points out that each of these groups benefited from the creation and expansion of Head Start, other pre-primary programs and Title I. It appears that the benefits of an early educational boost last through the years.

Two disturbing trends were also cited. The report notes that more students now claim that only a "few" reading materials are available in their homes. This is disturbing because there is a strong connection between the availability of home reading material and reading performance. The number of students reporting "few" home reading materials jumped in all three age categories examined, but the jump was most pronounced among 9-year-olds: 35 percent of them say there are few items to read in their home, up from 28 percent in 1971.

The report also finds a relationship between excessive television viewing and poor reading scores. Students who watch up to two hours of television per day maintain average reading scores, but once a student watches six or more hours of TV a day, scores sink dramatically. NAEP also reports that the proportion of students who watch TV excessively is going way up: 27 percent of the 9-year olds say they watch more than six hours of TV per day, up from 18 percent in 1980. Eleven percent of the 13-year-olds and 6 percent of the 17-year olds watch that much television.

The Reading Report Card compares scores of 9-, 13- and 17-year-olds in 1970-71, 1974-75, 1979-80 and 1983-84.

LETTERS

We welcome comments on *American Educator* articles. Address letters to: Editor, American Educator, 555 New Jersey Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. Letters selected may be edited for space and clarity.

Unhappy College Faculty

The same kinds of morale problems that have been plaguing public school teachers have moved to the university, according to a new poll from the Princeton-based Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Thanks to low salary, declining student quality, increased competition for jobs and tenure, and the conflicting priorities of research, teaching and administrative responsibilities, nearly 20 percent of all college faculty say that if they had to do it again, they would choose different careers. Nearly 40 percent of those surveyed say they might leave the profession in the next five years.

The full results of the 5,000-person survey appear in the September-October issue of *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning.*

THIS IS HOW TODAY'S KIDS STAY HEALTHY.

In fact, our kids' health is declining.

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These are our kids and they're our future. What could be more important?

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Self-Esteem and Excellence: The Choice and the Paradox

By Barbara Lerner

THE 1985-86 school year is likely to be a tense one for teachers. The Excellence Commission has spoken. The states have responded. Intellectual accountability is the order of the day. Mandated tests are mushrooming, and results are being demanded. Standards must be raised, and test scores with them. The pressure is on. Everyone must know more, learn faster, be smarter. And teachers must make it all happen.

Most teachers would like to do just that — there is no conspiracy against excellence — but it is one thing to say it, another to do it. How, after all, does a child's intelligence develop? How can teachers help each child to stretch and grow, and reach for excellence?

Today's teachers have been taught that self-esteem is the answer, and many believe that it is. Others, who don't, often face great pressure to conform to the prevailing view. Some have been effectively silenced, or driven out of the profession altogether. The result is that the role of self-esteem in learning has a special status. On a host of other pedagogical questions, teachers have varying viewpoints, and express them freely. On this one, the settled answer goes largely unchallenged. Teachers generally seem to accept the modern dogma that self-esteem is the critical variable for intellectual development — the master key to learning. According to this view, children with high self-esteem forge ahead, academically, easily and naturally; children with low self-esteem fall behind. They cannot achieve excellence, or even competence, in many cases, until their self-esteem is raised. That, at any rate, is assumption one in what I call the self-esteem theory of intellectual development.

Assumption two is that many children are in this boat because low self-esteem is common in childhood. It prevents many youngsters from learning and achieving and striving for excellence.

Two main implications follow from these assumptions. First, teachers must give priority to the task of raising children's self-esteem. To do this, they must accept each child just as he is, and provide him with constant praise and encouragement, seeing to it that he experiences a feeling of success in school, as often and as immediately as possible. This is assumed to be helpful for all children and especially critical for children who are doing badly in school. If they can be taught to think

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Barbara Lerner, a psychologist and an attorney, is president of Lerner Associates, a research and consulting firm in Princeton, New Jersey. *Copyright © 1985 by Barbara Lerner.*

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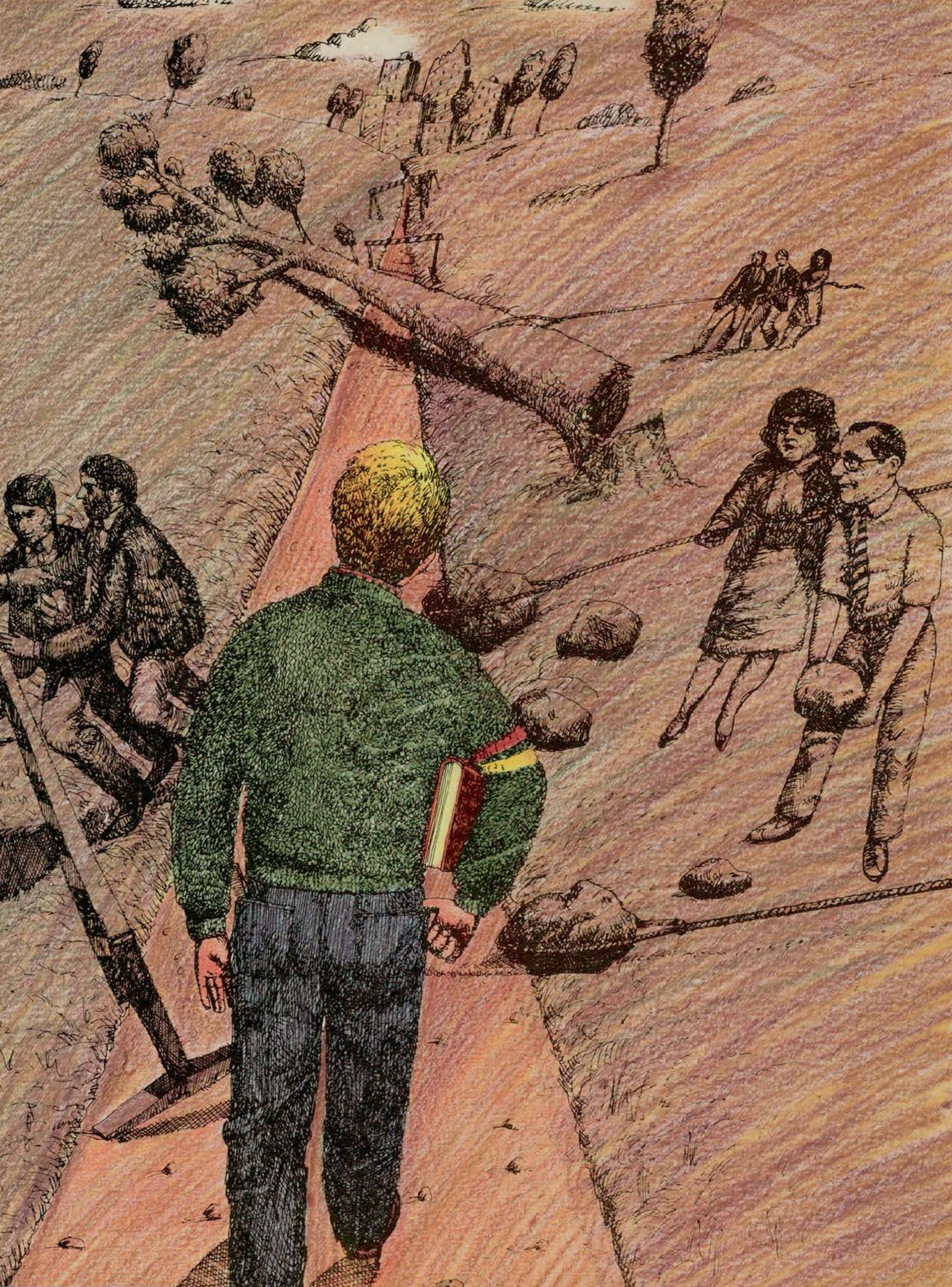
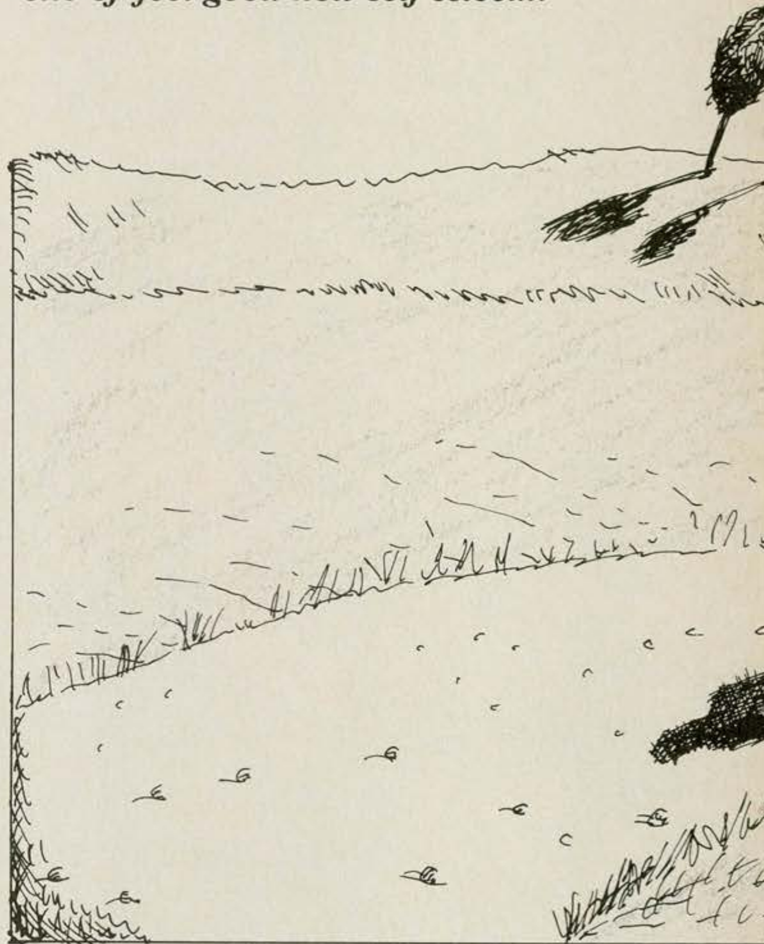


better of themselves, their classroom work and behavior will improve, the theory tells us.

Implication two — that teachers must always act to protect children's self-esteem from injury — is the flip side of the coin, and just as important as promoting self-esteem. After all, if high self-esteem is the essential ingredient in superior intellectual peformance, then anything and everything that could damage a child's self-esteem, however slight and transient the injury, is educationally counterproductive and should be eliminated from the classroom. Criticism always hurts self-esteem and should be avoided at all costs, and the same is true for academic and disciplinary standards. After all, children who fail to meet them are likely to feel badly about it, and about themselves as a result of it. That will lower their self-esteem, and increase the odds on future failures, the theory tells us.

Earned self-esteem is not a precondition for learning but a product of it. In this, and in a host of other ways, it is the polar opposite of feel-good-now self-esteem.



IS IT a good theory? Will it really help today's teachers to develop excellence in their students? There are two main ways for teachers to judge. One way is to compare it to some contrasting theory to see which is more helpful in making sense of their own experiences with students in today's classrooms. The other way is to look at what has happened to American education as a whole over the last few decades, and then assess both theories in light of it.

Many teachers will be hard-pressed to think of a contrasting theory. The self-esteem theory of educational development has been the reigning orthodoxy for so long — a quarter of a century, now — that they were never taught anything else. Let me, then, offer two contrasts: the views of Alfred Binet, the father of intelligence testing, on the development of intelligence; and the views of Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, on self-esteem in childhood.

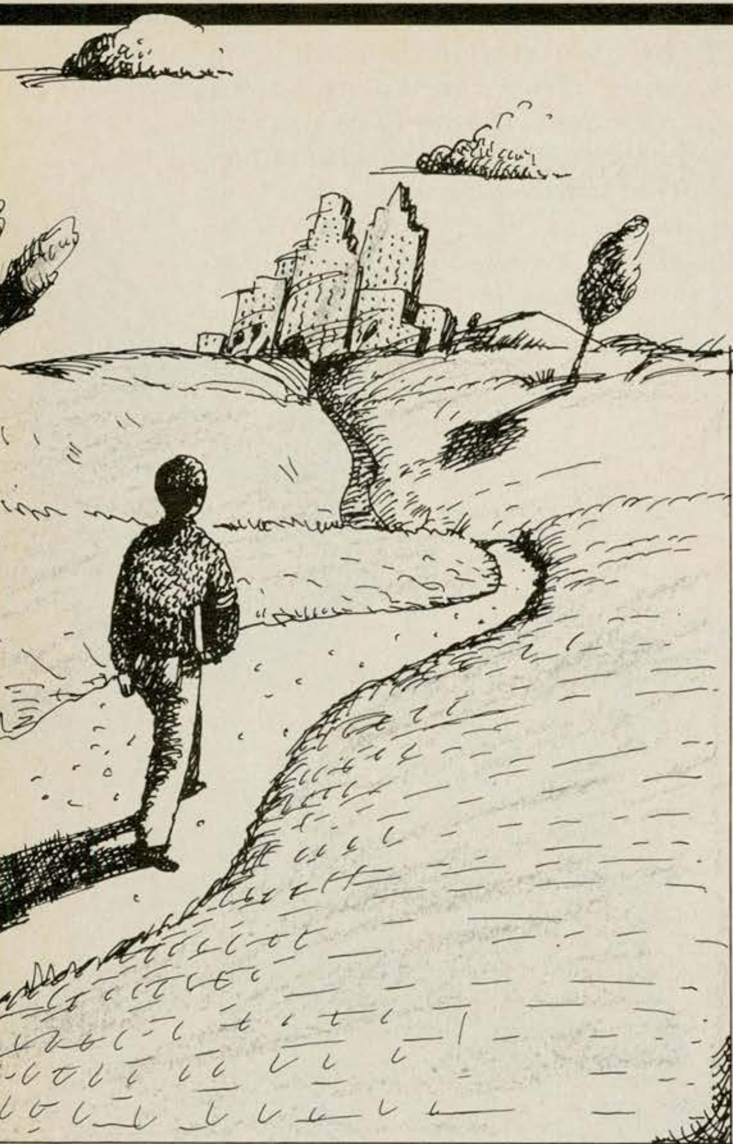
Writing in the first decade of this century, Alfred Binet gave a very different answer to questions about what intelligence is and how it develops. He thought that a self-critical stance was at the very core of intelligence, its sine qua non and seminal essence. Not just a critical stance, which is quite compatible with the highest possible levels of self-esteem, but a *self*-critical stance, which is not.

He did not see self-criticism as an inborn trait, either. He thought children needed to be taught to engage in it, and to use it, habitually, to monitor and appraise their own performance, constantly looking for ways to improve it. He thought that was worth teaching, because children who learned to do it learned more about everything else as a result, and developed their intellectual powers more fully than children who didn't. That is why he saw self-criticism as the essence of intelligence, the master key that unlocked the doors to competence and excellence alike.

Binet thought self-criticism had to be taught precisely because it did not come naturally. Teachers, and the standards and discipline they imposed, were vital in his formulation. Without them, he thought children were likely to approach intellectual problems by accepting the first response that occurred to them, applauding their own performance quite uncritically, and then moving restlessly on, looking for more quick responses, more applause.

Binet's views on intelligence and its development were novel — he was a pioneer, there — but his views on the natural inclinations of children were not novel at all. They reflected a long-standing consensus among thoughtful adults who worked with children — teachers and others — that egotism is the natural state of childhood, high self-esteem the natural gift that accompanies it. Teachers who took this view saw it as their job to help children overcome their egotism, widening their view of the world, deepening their awareness of it, and learning to see themselves and their accomplishments in realistic perspective in order to take realistic steps towards excellence.

They thought that standards — and criticism of academic work and classroom behavior that did not meet them — were essential elements in this learning process, and they did not worry too much about their impact on a child's self-esteem because they saw it as naturally robust, not fragile and in imminent danger of collapse without constant reinforcement. Like all compassionate adults, they recognized exceptions when they saw them and treated them accordingly, but they saw them as just that — exceptions — not a disproof of the general rule that self-esteem comes naturally, self-criticism does not.



BINET'S CONTEMPORARY, Sigmund Freud, provided powerful reinforcement for this view of childhood, and gave it new depth and resonance with his vivid descriptions of the long struggle of each human individual to move beyond the exclusive self-love of childhood and develop into a fully functioning adult, capable of loving others and of doing productive work. The heart of the struggle, as Freud described it, was to get out from under the seductive domination of the pleasure principle, accepting the reality principle instead, and acting in accord with it. The point of the struggle was to learn to make good things happen in reality, instead of just wishing they would and fantasizing about them, or trying to coerce or manipulate others into doing it for you.

Learning to reject the impulse to seek immediate gratification — focusing only on what feels good now — is one key step in this process. What feels good now is success, instant and effortless, in a fantasy world where the self is omnipotent, and all things exist to serve it. It is pleasant to live in this fantasy world, and very enhancing to self-esteem, but Freud believed that children who did not move out of it could not be successful, in love or in work. To be successful in either, in the real world, Freud thought that each of us had to struggle to break out of the shell of self-absorption into which we were born. We had to learn to focus our attention, at least part of the time, on the world beyond the self, and to tolerate the frustration and delay that is an inevitable part of learning to deal with it — learning to care for others, to work hard, and to persevere in the face of obstacles.

Breaking out of that shell and learning all of these things is not easy. It is not immediately enhancing to self-esteem of the infantile variety that Freud called narcissism, and I call *feel-good-now* self-esteem, either. Often, the immediate effect is deflating, particularly to highly inflated narcissistic egos, but the ultimate results — caring relationships with others, the development of competence, and a shot at excellence — do tend to build self-esteem of another, more durable sort. I call it *earned* self-esteem.

Earned self-esteem is based on success in meeting the tests of reality — measuring up to standards — at home and in school. It is necessarily hard-won, and develops slowly, but it is stable and long-lasting, and provides a secure foundation for further growth and development. It is not a precondition for learning but a product of it. In this, and in a host of other ways, it is the polar opposite of feel-good-now self-esteem. Standards, and demands on students to keep working until they really succeed in meeting them, are critical steps forward on the road to earned self-esteem. They are, simultaneously, steps back from feel-good-now self-esteem.

Teachers who believed in the old theories did not mind. They were comfortable, in earlier decades, emphasizing earned self-esteem at the expense of feel-good-now self-esteem, especially for older children. They were comfortable, in part, because they were convinced that that was the right thing to do, to help their students stretch and grow, and reach for excellence. In addition, it helped a lot that they could generally count on the support of their professional and administrative colleagues, and of the wider community, too. Today's consensus is very different, and today's teachers get a very different — indeed an opposite — message. Feel-good-now self-esteem is the only kind of self-esteem that the modern self-esteem theory of educational development recognizes for children of all ages, and schools of education have been telling teachers for a quarter of a century now that their prime job is to maximize it, assuring them that if they succeeded, their students would not only have high self-esteem, but would also stretch and grow, and reach for excellence.

WHICH THEORY is closest to the truth? Which one will best help today's teachers in their struggle to develop excellence in their students, this year, and in the years ahead? As we noted at the outset, one good way for teachers to re-examine these questions is to go back over their own past experiences — with students, classrooms, and schools — to see which theory is most helpful in making sense of them. Teachers whose past experience is short might also want to consult with fellow teachers who have been at it longer.

One useful way to start is to think first about the ways in which the self-esteem theory has been implemented in your school, becaue it is being implemented in most American schools today, in one way or another. The

implementation process has been in motion for about a quarter of a century now, and it has made today's schools strikingly different from the schools of the 1950s, and of earlier decades. A recent book, *The Shopping Mall High School*, may be helpful here. In it, Arthur Powell, the senior author, provides as vivid, intimate and detailed a picture as I have yet seen in print, of what some American schools have come to look like under the domination of the Self-Esteem-Now theory of educational development. As such, it provides a useful reference point, a kind of academic photo album with which to compare your own school, and the classrooms in it. These comparisons are easiest for high school teachers to make, because all of the schools Powell and his colleagues studied were high schools. Still, I think his snapshots are candid enough to be evocative for grade school teachers too, and, with appropriate modifications, almost as relevant.

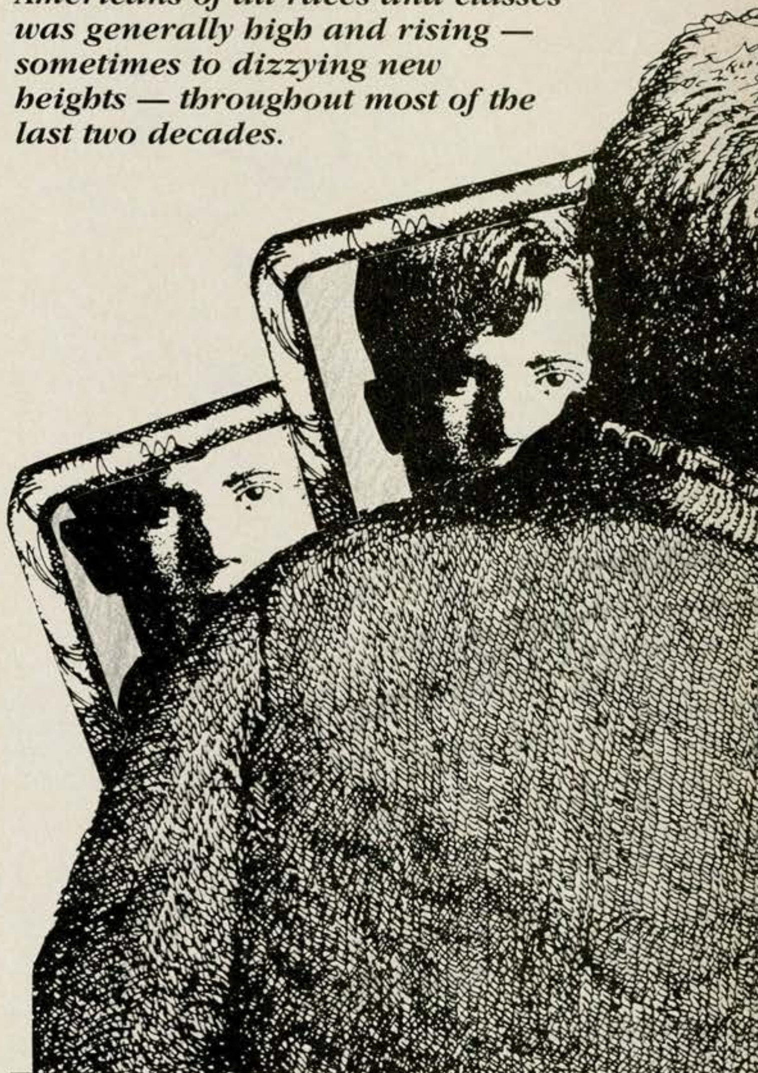
The Shopping Mall High School describes a system in which the concept of mastering an essential body of knowledge and skills gives way to the need to protect student self-esteem and to avoid discipline problems and dropouts. The vast array of courses — one school's catalog featured over 400 — "is seen as a way for students to avoid failure." The schools push "nobody beyond his or her preferences." Indeed, they are remarkably neutral about those preferences, about whether "Tall Flags" is as valid a course choice as "Beginning French," "Apartment and Income Properties Management" as essential as "Chemistry." What *is* seen as essential is "for teenagers 'to plug into something that gives them support,'" or as one student put it, "a curriculum that everybody can do."

Complementing the broad horizontal curriculum is a steep vertical one: courses with virtually identical titles but so staggeringly different in content, seriousness, and difficulty as to render their common name all but meaningless. Again, the purpose of this — and of similar latitude within as well as between classrooms in smaller schools, less able to specialize — is to avoid failure, to make sure no student is pushed to go any faster than he wishes to go.

> Failure is anathema because success — *feeling* success — is so deeply cherished as both a goal and a means to other goals. Many teachers seem preoccupied by the psychological costs of failure and the therapeutic benefits of success. That was what one teacher was talking about when she said, "If you don't get it done, you don't fail. You don't get credit, but you don't experience failure." "The most important thing to me is to make them feel they are human beings, that they are worthwhile," another teacher emphasized. Still another's primary goals were to "build confidence, to build trust . . . I try to affirm them as people." A math teacher prescribed "a daily dose of self-respect." And a social studies teacher explained why he didn't stress thinking skills: "I just encourage them to make the most of their ability to have pride in themselves." In all these instances, the need for students to feel success is disconnected from the idea of students mastering something taught. . . . Mastery and success are like ships that pass in the night.

In the schools examined by Powell and his colleagues, students who choose to work hard and to reach for excellence are accommodated, and praised and encouraged; students who choose to do little or no hard work, reaching only for what feels good now, are also

Public opinion poll data suggest the same thing, indicating, as they do, that the self-esteem of young Americans of all races and classes was generally high and rising — sometimes to dizzying new heights — throughout most of the last two decades.



accommodated, and praised and encouraged even more. The assumption, in the modern Shopping Mall School, is that they need more praise and encouragement because their self-esteem is lower — that is why they do not work as hard.

Will more praise and encouragement help them to work harder, eventually, and to learn more? The Self-Esteem-Now theory tells us that it will, and that the extraordinary accommodations many modern schools make to give all students a feeling of immediate success are fully justified — necessary steps on the road to self-esteem and excellence. The old theories — the ones that it replaced — make opposite assumptions, and opposite predictions. They assume that most students have high self-esteem to begin with, and they predict that in contemporary classrooms like those described by Powell and his cohorts, grandiosity will be more common than excessive modesty. They assume that in those classrooms, many students will be preoccupied with fantasies and dreams of excellence — the warm flow of constant positive feedback is thought to be

conducive to that, particularly in an atmosphere where few demands are made — but they predict that under these circumstances, few students will actually undertake the self-critical struggle necessary to achieve excellence in reality. Only their egos will swell and grow; their intellectual skills and abilities will atrophy, or fail to develop in the first place.

TEACHERS WHO are rethinking their own experiences in contemporary classrooms are left, then, with a series of professional judgment calls to ponder. First, what kind of a school do I teach in? Is the Self-Esteem-Now theory as fully implemented in my school as it is in the Shopping Mall High School? Is it as fully implemented but in a different way? Or do I teach in a different kind of a school altogether?

Second, which theory best describes the students who have passed through my classrooms? Was low self-esteem and excessive modesty really a common problem? Or were inflated egos more prevalent? How did students of each type fare, intellectually? Did the more modest and self-critical ones always learn less than those whose self-esteem was at peak levels? Or did the ones with the highest self-esteem often seem to exhibit a childish arrogance and impatience that actually stunted their intellectual growth and development?

Thoughtful teachers will want to start with their own experience, but they will not want to stop there. They will also want to take a look at what has happened to American education as a whole over the last few decades, and then reassess both theories in light of it. The Excellence Commission Report can help here. It provides a generally accurate summary of one-half of the story — the intellectual half. It tells us that on norm-referenced tests — the kinds of tests that make it possible to compare students from different decades and countries — American students fared very badly in the 1960s and 1970s. Few achieved excellence. Many did not even achieve competence.

It tells us, too, that this sad situation was a new one. In the 1950s, before the Self-Esteem-Now theory was widely implemented in American schools, competence was widespread, and excellence was common enough to make American students equal to those of any nation. In the 1970s, that was no longer so. Only our youngest students — those in grades K through 4 — were still doing well. All of our other students were learning less, much less. That is an important half of the story, but it is only half.

The other half of the story has to do with self-esteem and happiness, and it, too, is important, but you will not find it in the Excellence Commission Report, or in any of the other recent education reports that I know of. Much of the evidence is in, though; collected and presented in a variety of ways by a wide array of scholars, using very different approaches and techniques, but arriving at very similar conclusions. Look, for example, at the clinical literature, and at the literature on psychopathology in particular. Narcissism is to the 1960s and the 1970s what neuroticism was to earlier decades. Historians as diverse as Oscar Handlin and Christopher Lasch see it as a major contemporary social problem, too. Excessive self-esteem, it seems, can cause as much trouble as inadequate self-esteem, for individuals and for whole societies, too.

Low self-esteem is not as common in childhood as the self-esteem theorists assume it is, either, and it is no more common among black children than it is among white ones. These findings came as a great surprise to many of the self-esteem researchers who found them, staring back at them from their data, but the findings were no flukes: They turned up again and again, in study after study. Public opinion poll data suggest the same thing, indicating, as they do, that the self-esteem of young Americans of all races and classes was generally high and rising — sometimes to dizzying new heights — throughout most of the last two decades.

FOR AMERICAN education as a whole, then, it seems fair to conclude that while the Self-Esteem-Now theory of educational development failed to produce excellence and may even have retarded its development, it did succeed in raising the self-esteem of American students to a marked degree. What we are left with, it seems, is a choice, a forced choice. We cannot really

maximize intellectual development and self-esteem of the feel-good-now type at the same time. We must choose between them, giving one priority over the other.

For some teachers, and some parents, too, the choice will seem easy. They would prefer to have both simultaneously but, if forced to choose, they will opt for self-esteem on the grounds that students are whole human beings, not disembodied intellects, and their happiness is more important than their test scores. Alas, the choice is not as simple and straightforward as it looks, because we are confronted with a paradox as well as a choice.

The paradox is that by focusing only on children's happiness, we may end up with heart-breakingly high numbers of unhappy children.

The paradox is that by focusing only on children's happiness, we may end up with heart-breakingly high numbers of unhappy children. That, at any rate, is what happened in America in the 1960s and the 1970s. The evidence is in on that score, too, and it all points in the same paradoxical direction. High self-esteem notwithstanding, those were not happy decades for American youth. They were decades of trouble and tragedy.

Look, for example, at statistics on drug and alcohol abuse among young Americans. Addiction rates soared in the 1960s and the 1970s with tragic consequences for hundreds of thousands of young lives. Look, too, at teenage crime and venereal disease and suicide rates. They climbed, steeply, during those decades. And look, especially, at the number of out-of-wedlock births to teenaged girls. Those rates skyrocketed, and have not levelled off yet. Looking at all these statistics, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that high self-esteem of the feel-good-now type works no better as a guarantor of happiness than it does as a master key to intellectual development.

These statistics have been pulled together from multiple sources and meticulously reassembled in a single, slim volume that teachers who want to go beyond the Excellence Report will find useful. Its title is *Losing Ground,* its author is Charles Murray, and it was published by Basic Books in 1984. The statistics in it prove that the paradox exists, but they do not explain why.

The old theories of child development do. They tell us that despite all the momentary pleasures it provides, an exclusive focus on feel-good-now self-esteem, at home and at school, will not produce happiness. It will produce restlessness and dissatisfaction, a constant hunger to get more for less, and a life organized in search of it. In such a life, relationships with others will tend to be superficial and unstable, and the lure of drugs, alcohol, irresponsible sexuality, and crime will be powerful, and hard to resist. They promise the satisfactions that self-esteem seekers are looking for, and they promise them *now.* Instant pleasure. Instant relief. Instant success. They feel good now, the old theories tell us, but they will produce unhappiness as well as incompetence.

That could well be what happened to us in the 1960s and the 1970s. American parents, like American teachers, went to great lengths to ensure the happiness of American children in those decades, nurturing their self-esteem and protecting it from injury, discarding standards and discipline, at home and at school. They did it because establishment experts in schools of education and psychology convinced them that feel-good-now self-esteem was the master key that unlocked both doors, the one to intellectual development and the one to happiness, too. In truth, it seems to have unlocked neither, but many American parents and teachers are still its captives.

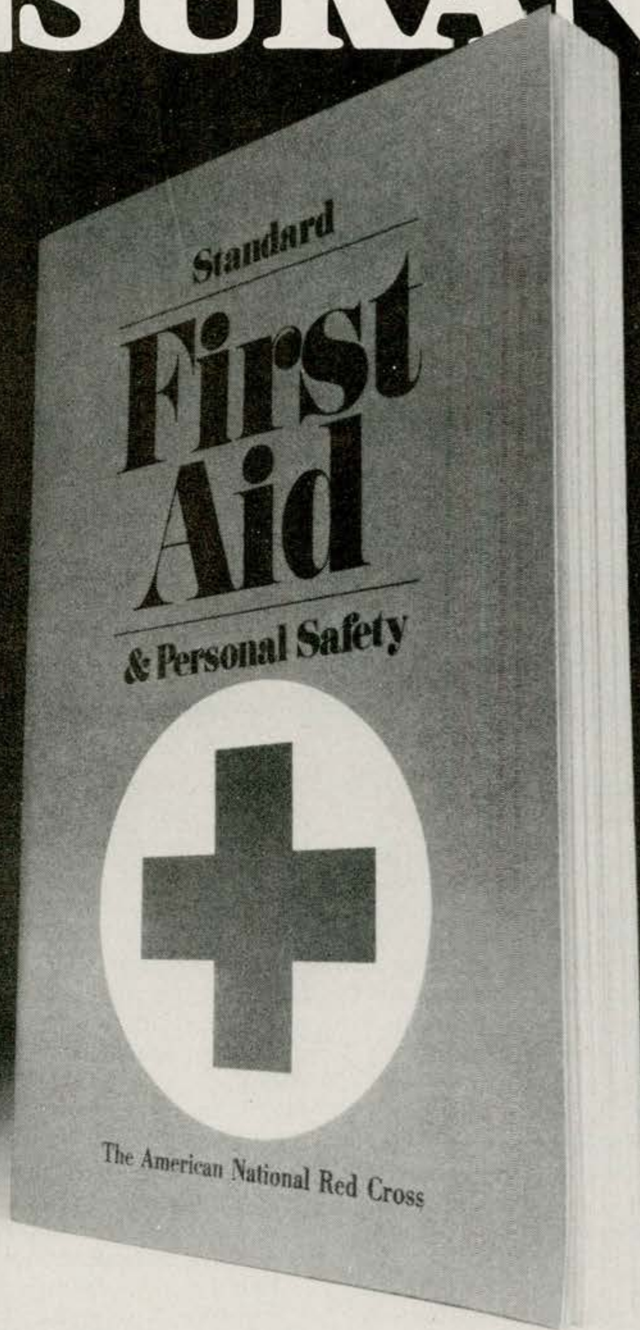
THERE WAS one great rebellion, though, in the late 1970s. It was called the minimum competence testing movement, and it gives us the best evidence we have about what parents and teachers can accomplish when they join together to insist that a standard must be met. The standard they chose was literacy, and they proved they were serious about it, in most states, by decreeing that no student could graduate from high school without passing a test designed to measure it.

Experts in the Self-Esteem-Now establishment were appalled. They were sure that the movement would damage students' self-esteem without helping them to learn, and that it would have especially devastating effects on black students. At first, it looked as if they might be right. In Florida, 80 to 90 percent of the black students who took that state's minimum competence test failed it on their first try, and a federal judge declared the whole program unconstitutional, issuing an injunction against it in 1979.

In 1983, he lifted it, permanently, and no wonder. The program's results were spectacular. The students who failed the test on their first try may have suffered a blow to their self-esteem, but they were not crushed, and they did not quit. They kept trying, bouncing back after each failure, and redoubling their efforts. By the fifth try, more than 90 pecent of them passed the test, and got their diplomas, along with a healthy dose of *earned* self-esteem.

Could the same thing happen again, if parents and teachers throw off the yoke of the Self-Esteem-Now theory once more, embracing excellence in the 1980s as they embraced competence in the late 1970s? All the evidence we have indicates that it could, and that it would be a great decade for American education if they did. □

HEALTH INSURANCE



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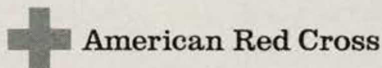

Out-of-Field Teaching: Barrier to Professionalism

By Virginia Robinson

THE PRINCIPAL can't tell the English teacher to teach algebra, or move the kindergarten teacher to middle school, can he? The state wouldn't allow it. The parents would scream. Maybe the school would lose its accreditation.

But yes he can, and yes he does, and the state doesn't mind, the parents don't know, the teachers assume he's acting within his discretionary power, and hardly any school ever loses its accreditation. Assignment of certified teachers to grade levels or subjects for which they are not certified is a well-established management technique in American schools, and as far as anyone can tell, it happens often.

During late 1984 and early 1985, in a study sponsored by the Council for Basic Education and later published in collaboration with the American Federation of Teachers, my associate Carol Pierce and I conducted a survey of all state departments of education. We wanted to learn what regulations, if any, control out-of-field teaching, and what statistics, if any, the individual states have gathered to show the actual numbers of teachers in classes for which they have no preparation. Although the practice of misassigning teachers is not new — James Bryant Conant wrote about it in 1963 in *The Education of American Teachers* — the results of our survey indicate that the problem has persisted and may be alarmingly widespread. It certainly deserves more than the scant attention it has received during the recent wave of educational reform.

Half a dozen states — Arizona, Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire, Nebraska and Utah — have no restrictions whatsoever on out-of-field teaching. However, what more typically helps principals to put English teachers in algebra classes is a state law or regulation that specifically allows assignment of certified teachers outside their fields of competence for *part* of the school day. Fifteen states allow this, though they are quiet about the option; there isn't much pointing with pride to the state

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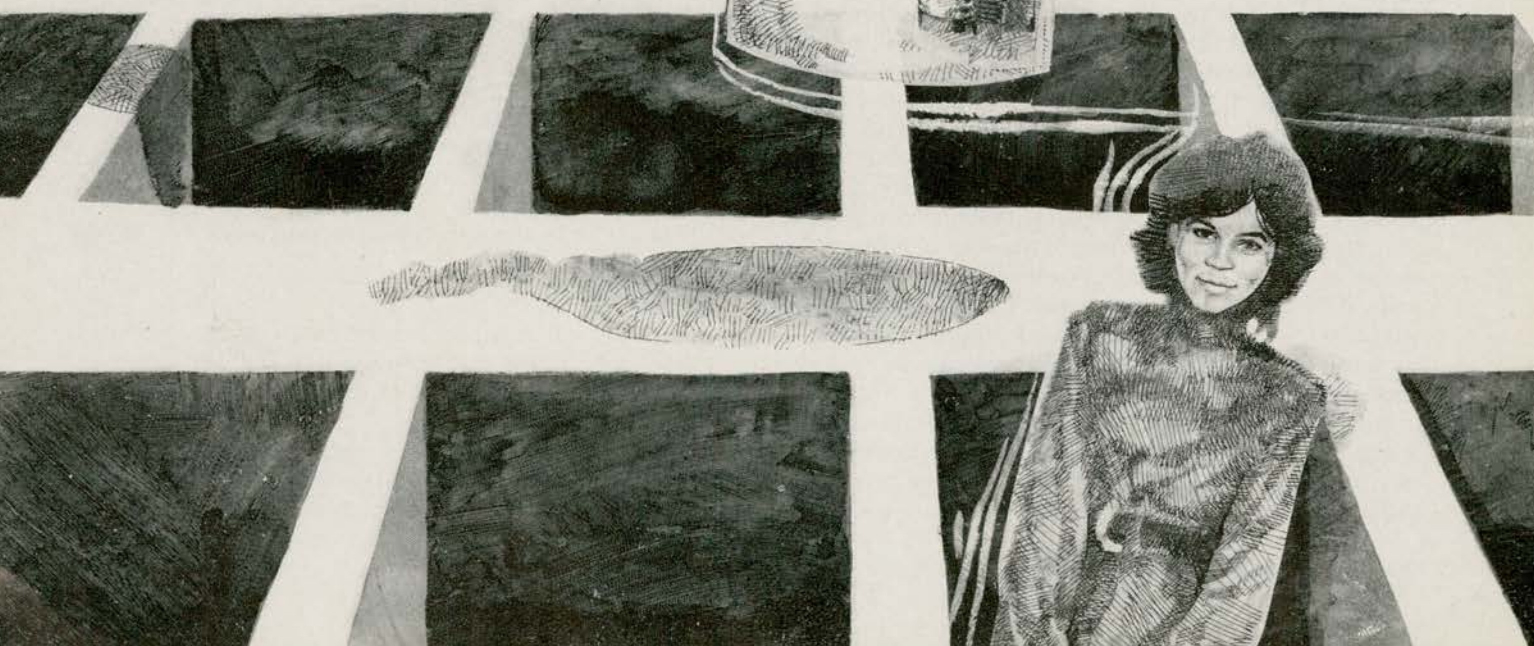
Virginia Robinson is the editor of Education Times, *a weekly newspaper focusing on policy issues in elementary and secondary education. She was the principal author of "Making Do in the Classroom: A Report on the Misassignment of Teachers," from which portions of this article are drawn. Single copies of the full report are available free from the Public Relations Department of the American Federation of Teachers.*

ILLUSTRATED BY MARK E. WILLIAMS



In Alabama, for example, state regulations allow teachers to spend up to 49 percent of their time teaching subjects in which they hold neither endorsements nor certificates.

education code on out-of-field assignment.

In Alabama, for example, teachers may spend 49 percent of their time teaching subjects in which they hold neither endorsements nor certificates. Up to two classes a day in Maryland may be taught by instructors outside their certified areas. The state of Massachusetts specifies that teachers may not teach more than 20 percent of their time out of the field of certification, but even this provision is not tightly monitored. For every teacher thus employed, the education of 50 or 60 children a day is affected.

So, in a large number of states, what looks like out-of-field assignment, feels like out-of-field assignment, and has the predictable consequences of out-of-field assignment for both the unfortunate students and the unhappy teacher, is legally not misassignment at all.

But the biggest problem is that, in most cases, out-of-field assignment doesn't have to be reported to anyone. Thus, it does not even become a matter of record, and the states can correctly claim ignorance of the extent to which local school districts are using the out-of-field option extended to them.

GENERALLY, WE found state officials defensive about their wide-open options for out-of-field assignment. "It doesn't happen as often as it used to" was a common reaction, though in no case did a state offer figures to support that assertion. Sometimes the certification office disclaimed knowledge of what was going on in the field, suggesting that the right people to talk to were the state accreditation officers.

Beyond the legal out-of-field teaching allowed by state codes and not required to be reported by or to anyone, we asked about illegal misassignment. What if schools assigned teachers out-of-field for more than the permissible one period a day, or half a day? Would anybody know, and if so, what would happen?

In every state in this country, as far as we could tell, schools are required to report teacher assignments sometime near the beginning of the school year. Also in every state, certification records are kept in the state education agency. Theoretically, then, teacher assignments could be checked at the state level against teacher training and background, the obvious way to detect misassignment.

But we found almost no states in which this actually happens. Many said they're planning to do it when they get their computers programmed; others cited great difficulties in keeping teacher credentials up-to-date (summer study or inservice credits aren't reported, for example); still others seemed surprised by the question.

Some states said we or anyone else could examine individual school records on file in the state agency, if we were so inclined. In virtually no case did the state itself aggregate the data it received from schools.

There were some notable exceptions, such as Rhode Island, which requires teachers themselves to report their assignments, checks them promptly against state certification records and issues an immediate "out-of-area report" requiring correction of a misassignment.

But in most states, the question "What happens if schools assign teachers out-of-field?" got a distinctly ambiguous response. Some states seemed offended to have been asked. This was true particularly in the Midwest, where states said simultaneously that they don't check misassignment and are sure it doesn't occur.

Other states said misassignment could cause a school to lose accreditation, or have its accreditation reduced to a less desirable level, but the time allowed to remedy the infraction was usually generous, and we got the impression that schools could escape loss of accreditation repeatedly if they were adroit about correcting one misassignment before proceeding to another. Some states acknowledged that many of their schools are simply not concerned about accreditation; for them the state appears to have no enforcement powers at all.

We were surprised at the division of responsibility for certification. It seems inevitable that if one office of the state department makes the rules and another office with substantially different objectives is supposed to enforce them, something will fall into the cracks. In some state education agencies, we had a strong sense that the certification and accreditation offices didn't communicate or were hostile to one another. If that is so, and a local superintendent or principal is reasonably clued to the situation, there doesn't seem to be much incentive to be scrupulously careful about teacher assignments.

THE LIBERAL policies of the states combined with their inability or reluctance to monitor school district practices certainly provide ample opportunity for teacher misassignment. But what is the actual extent of the practice? Since few or none of the states have reliable means of measurement, we don't have clear figures for the country as a whole. However, a few states and local districts either routinely collect statistics or have conducted special studies of their own. The results are disturbing. They provide immediate witness to the extent of the problem, at least in those areas; to the pressures leading administrators to misassign staff; to some of the results in classrooms; and to efforts to regulate and reform such practice.

Let's look at the situation as reported in four states.

North Carolina

In 1981, an independent research agency in North Carolina reported on the amount of out-of-field teaching by certificated teachers that was going on in the state.

Surprisingly, the greatest incidence of out-of-field teaching wasn't in mathematics and science, the "shortage" subjects, but in reading, where the researchers

found 60.1 percent of teachers out-of-field — meaning they were teaching a subject for which they were not certified, endorsed or possibly qualified.

After reading came math and science, at 37.3 percent and 30.4 percent, respectively, and then health (23.8 percent of teachers out-of-field), and English (22.5 percent).

When the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research published its findings, the reactions were swift. There was, first of all, denial, says project director Ran Coble.

"I don't know of anybody out-of-field," one county superintendent said.

There was also a good deal of argument about the validity of the data collected by the Center: for example, if a teacher certified in history also taught English, the Center counted her as both an English and a history teacher. The superintendent often saw the same person as only "a history teacher," and disputed the Center's count.

What was more relevant, the Center thought, was that to parents of the students in her classes, Ms. X certainly taught both English and history.

There were also disputes about whether certification means qualification, with some superintendents insisting that they knew some teachers were perfectly well able to teach subjects for which they were not certified.

"That raises an interesting question," one researcher said, "Why have certification at all if it doesn't mean a thing as far as qualifications are concerned?"

Surprisingly, the greatest incidence of out-of-field teaching [in North Carolina] wasn't in math and science, the 'shortage' subjects, but in reading.

Another North Carolina researcher described the reaction to the findings about out-of-field teaching this way: "The scenario went like this over a three-year period:

(1) Outright denial of the existence of the problem;

(2) Development by the Center of a data base showing the problem;

(3) Denial of the problem by ignoring the documentation;

(4) Publication of the data by the state's news media, on a district-by-district basis;

(5) Admission of the problem;

(6) Action to address the problem in a minimal way, by watering down certification standards."

Eventually, after considerable press attention and after the researchers presented their findings to the state board, North Carolina took some steps to remedy the problem.

In 1983, the state board of education adopted an out-of-field policy, which became effective in July of that year. In compliance with this policy, the state agency communicated with all school systems and required them to list all teachers who were teaching out of their certified fields.

It further required that the district request appropriate provisional *certification* for any teachers teaching out-of-field half-time or more, or provisional *endorsement* for teachers teaching out-of-field less than half time.

The state agency then informed each teacher of what he or she must do to become fully certified or endorsed by acquiring additional college hours in the field at the rate of six per year. A state official said that thousands of teachers were processed by the certification office.

As of the 1984-85 school year, the state had not yet implemented another provision of the new policy that requires that the state superintendent publish and make available to the public an annual statewide report of the number of teachers who are teaching subjects in which they do not have certification.

UTAH

The state of Utah, which concedes that it operates "under a very lax system" on out-of-field teaching, is among a handful of states that compiles statistics to support its position.

Those statistics "make it very easy for anyone to grasp the magnitude of the problem," according to state certification chief Vere McHenry.

Utah issues a general certificate based on a major and minor studied in college, but currently, teachers are not required to teach the subjects for which they are prepared.

According to a report on Status of Teacher Personnel in Utah for 1983-84, for example, the following percentages of teachers with "major" teaching assignments in the subjects listed reported that they had neither a college major nor a college minor in those subjects:

General science: 75.8 percent
Science, earth/space: 82.1 percent
Physical science: 43.1 percent
Biology: 25.1 percent
Mathematics: 28.3 percent
Language arts: 10.8 percent
Foreign language: 14.8 percent
Social studies: 7.9 percent

For teachers with *minor* teaching assignments in the subjects listed who said they had neither majors nor minors in those subjects in college, the figures are as follows:

General science: 78 percent
Science, earth/space: 88.8 percent
Physical science: 64.6 percent
Biology: 49.2 percent
Mathematics: 70.6 percent
Language arts: 29.8 percent
Foreign language: 25.2 percent
Social studies: 24.1 percent

A "major teaching assignment" in Utah is defined as the subject the teacher teaches more than any other.

That is complicated, according to research analyst Camille Beckstrom, by the fact that "some teachers may teach six different subjects. In that case, the teacher may list as his major assignment the class he teaches the first period of the day, and list all other classes as minor assignments."

Under a new state board policy adopted last year and scheduled to go into effect in the 1988-89 school year, "teachers will not be assigned to teach any required course unless they hold a current Utah teaching certificate, have completed an undergraduate or graduate major or minor, have completed a State Board of Education approved inservice program, or have demonstrated competency in the subject area."

Asked how the teacher will "demonstrate competency," McHenry said Utah has in mind a subject matter test.

"We're looking at the subject portions of the NTE [National Teacher Examination], but we may decide to develop our own tests," he said.

Utah state officials also point out that the annual survey of primary and additional teaching assignments has now been changed to reflect credits teachers have earned through inservice or other supplemental training beyond their college majors and minors, and this "equivalency" will be taken into account in new statistics.

McHenry urges that in viewing the Utah misassignment figures, one should be aware of the possibilities of "miscommunication" between the state office and the teachers who were asked to report their assignments and preparation.

Like many other states, Utah believes that it will soon have a much more sophisticated data base for checking assignment against transcripts, thanks to computerization of records.

Meanwhile, "the data are rough," McHenry said.

The state concedes that under the new board policy, "A massive effort will be required to assure that all students in Utah are taught by educators who are competent in the subject areas they are assigned to teach."

In 1983, the legislature "got a little nervous" and appropriated a small amount of money — $300,000 — for inservice programs to begin the catching-up process that apparently lies ahead for the state.

McHenry says Utah is eager to avoid "grandparenting" existing misassignments, a prospect he believes can be avoided only by retraining teachers.

"Extensive misassignment has important implications for inservice education," he said.

MISSISSIPPI

An Education Reform Act passed by the state legislature in 1982 required the Mississippi State Department of Education to conduct a study of the extent to which teachers were teaching out of their fields of certification. The legislature also wanted to know what conditions promote the practice of out-of-field teaching, and what solutions there are to the problem.

In a study completed in June 1984, the Office of Teacher Certification of the state agency surveyed 40 randomly selected schools in Mississippi concerning their teacher assignments during the 1983-84 school year.

In framing its questions to school administrators, the study specified that data were sought on *all* out-of-certification teaching, though it is perfectly legal in Mississippi for a teacher to teach as many as two periods a day in an uncertified field, provided he or she has at least 12 semester hours of preparation in the uncertified subject (changed this year to 18 hours).

On the basis of reports from the 40 schools, the certification office extrapolated that 1,319 high school teachers in Mississippi were assigned out of their field of certification for some part of the school day in 1983-84.

A lot of out-of-field teaching is the result of sloppy administration; it is an easier way out of a personnel pinch than more creative remedies.

The study found that:

- Most out-of-field teaching was not illegal, since the teachers had at least 12 semester hours of preparation in the misassigned fields.
- The amount of out-of-field teaching is three times greater in secondary schools having 20 or fewer teachers than in those with 40 or more teachers.
- Out-of-field teaching was most common in the social sciences, followed by general science, mathematics and English, in that order.

According to the survey, teachers were assigned out of their fields for the following reasons:

- Overload (meaning a school has too many sections of the subject for one teacher, but not enough for two teachers) — 39 percent.
- The desire to offer the maximum possible Carnegie units (the school desires to provide a wide range of courses but does not have fully certificated teachers for all of them) — 24 percent.
- Certified teachers not available for employment — 12 percent.
- Underload (meaning a specialized teacher is on the faculty but does not have a full class load; other subjects are assigned to fill the teacher's day) — 11 percent.
- Administrative decision — 8 percent.
- Extracurricular activities scheduled during the school day — 5 percent.

Fifty-five percent of the school administrators who responded to the Mississippi survey suggested that the best remedy for out-of-field teaching would be to require all secondary teachers to hold dual certification.

Eighteen percent recommended changing certification requirements; 15 percent suggested teachers should be retrained in needed areas; 8 percent voted for transporting students to other schools for special classes; 2 percent recommended flexible scheduling; and 1 percent suggested consolidation. In a step toward dual certification, Mississippi will now require every

student graduating from a program of teacher education to have completed a minor consisting of two-thirds of the hours required for a major.

Washington

Nearly half of the middle school classes in Washington state were covered by teachers "without preparation" in subjects they were teaching during the 1983-1984 school year, according to a report released in May 1984 by the Washington state education agency.

Forty-two percent of the 2,988 middle school class assignments examined in a survey of 31 school districts were taught by teachers who did not hold a major, a minor, or 20 quarter hours of academic preparation in the subject being taught. These teachers were considered by the report to be teaching "without preparation."

In addition, the report found that 28 percent of the 3,782 high school class assignments were covered by teachers without preparation.

"Converted to student class hours, this means that approximately 21,160 student class hours were taught by teachers with fewer than 20 quarter hours of preparation in the subject," the report concluded.

At the elementary level, 14 percent of assignments were covered by teachers without preparation. The report made no effort to distinguish between misassignments involving self-contained elementary classrooms and those that involved inadequately prepared special teachers of elementary subjects such as music, art, physical education, or remedial reading or mathematics.

In preparing the report, "Teacher Assignment Study in Relation to Subject Matter Preparation 1983-84," Washington state education agency researchers visited 10 percent of the state's 299 school districts and collected assignment and subject matter preparation data from district certification files for 27,865 of the state's 35,937 teachers.

IN THE course of our survey, it became clear to us that no one escapes blame in this tangled web educators have spun. We wondered if the subject content of courses in schools of education is so poor that the teachers do not *feel* like experts when they emerge as graduates, and so are not likely to challenge whatever assignments they are given. Schools of teacher training are, rightly, very critical of out-of-field assignment, which they describe as a "hole in the quality pipeline."

No poll of teacher opinion ever asks, 'Are you teaching the subject that you devoted yourself to mastering, the subject that you know and love?'

They say the current emphasis on upgrading teacher education and certification requirements will avail nothing if misassignment remains a respectable solution to staffing problems for school administrators. We are less clear as to how deeply teacher colleges inquire into the subject knowledge of a candidate in the certification for which he applies.

State legislatures and state boards have a lot to answer for, since they put into place the incredibly complex certification requirements that hide broad dispensation for out-of-field teaching. Currently, the same legislatures and state boards are increasing the number of courses required for high school graduation, and reducing class size in the early grades. This puts school administrators between a rock and a hard place, and it would be foolish to believe that pressures for expediencies such as out-of-field assignment will not increase.

And of course there is the local superintendent or principal, trained in a school of education administration, who realizes that the one thing parents won't forgive is failure to cover a classroom. When administrators were asked to list their reasons for out-of-field assignments, they included need to free up a seventh period teacher to coach basketball; inability to find a qualified teacher; and the need to cover a "leftover course," meaning one more than the regular teacher has room for but not enough to justify hiring an additional teacher. Others said a lot of out-of-field teaching is the result of sloppy administration; it is an easier way out of a personnel pinch than more creative remedies such as interschool or interdistrict cooperation, use of technology or skillful recruiting.

Whatever the specific reason or justification, the message sent, as Al Shanker has pointed out, "is that bureaucratic convenience takes precedence over academic standards and that the school's custodial role is more important than its intellectual mission."

OUT-OF-FIELD ASSIGNMENT is not a victimless crime. Its victims are students in some sections of some subjects who are provided instruction inferior to that being received by their peers in other sections or subjects.

After the children, of course, the people most disserved by out-of-field assignment are teachers. Given the fact, it is puzzling that no poll of teacher opinion ever asks, "Are you teaching what you are prepared and qualified to teach? Are you teaching the subject that you devoted yourself to mastering, the subject that you know and love?" To be doing so would seem to be the most important "condition of work."

It is also hard to see how teachers can achieve professional status under out-of-field assignment. Whatever disagreements there may be about what constitutes "a profession," in practice the distinguishing features of a profession are that its practitioners have special training and have been warranted by responsible authorities to use that training in performing a service. It is hard to think of anything that could do more harm to that definition than out-of-field assignment.

Maybe it is time for all of us to look very hard at a practice that can only hurt students and cause damage to the image of education and the professionalization of teachers. □

What We Know About Learning to Read

The Report of the Commission on Reading

Which approach to phonics works better — explicit phonics or implicit phonics? Is it possible to write interesting and natural-sounding selections for young readers while at the same time constraining the vocabulary on the basis of letter-sound relationships? What are the pluses and minuses of "round robin reading"? Is ability grouping an effective strategy to use with the slow child? How well do tests assess reading ability?

Under the auspices of the National Academy of Education's Commission on Reading, the country's leading experts on reading and language development have addressed these and related topics. The result: Becoming a Nation of Readers, *a 147-page booklet that, in clear, readable style, synthesizes a diverse and rich body of scientific information into a systematic account of what we know about learning to read. The report was funded by the National Institute of Education, and the research team was chaired by Richard C. Anderson of the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois. We are pleased to be able to present excerpts from this ambitious and comprehensive study.*

—Editor

How Are We Doing?

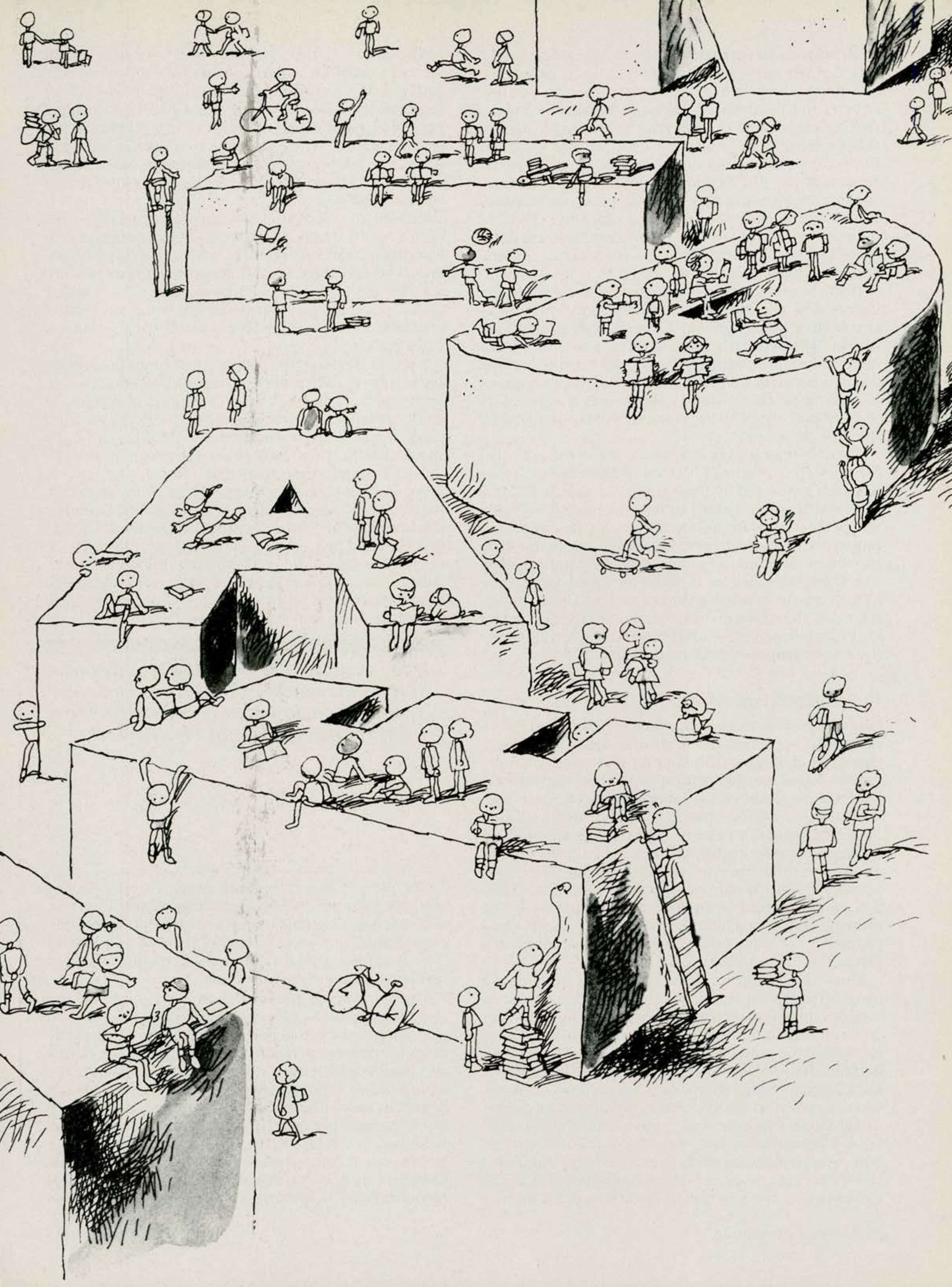
How well do American children and youth read? How well do American schools teach reading? These are difficult questions to answer objectively. Partial answers can be gleaned from historical trends in achievement test data. Studies dating back to the middle of the 19th century usually have shown that succeeding generations of students perform better than earlier generations. In one study, for example, 31,000 students in grades 2-6 representative of the United States at large were given a reading test in 1957 and the scores were compared to those of 107,000 students who had taken the same test in 1937. After adjusting for the fact that the 1937 sample was older by 4 to 6 months, because fewer children were promoted to the next grade at that time, the investigator concluded that children in 1957 had a reading ability advanced a half year over children of the same age and intelligence 20 years before.

Recent trends in test scores are mixed. With respect to basic reading skill, as gauged by ability to comprehend everyday reading material, results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress confirm that slight gains continued to be made during the 1970s. The largest gains were made by black children living in large cities. Probably these gains are attributable to the increasing aspirations and confidence of blacks and improvements in the quality of instruction that black children receive.

On the other hand, scores on tests that gauge advanced reading skill, among other abilities, showed small but steady declines from the early 1960s until the late '70s, at which point they leveled off and started to climb slightly. Declines were sharpest on the SAT and ACT, which are taken by high school seniors hoping to enter selective colleges and universities, but there were also declines on advanced tests given to all kinds of students in junior and senior high school. Reasons offered to explain the test score decline include erosion of educational standards, increases in TV viewing, changes in the size of families and spacing of children, shifts in young people's motivations and life goals, and the fact that larger numbers of youth from less advantaged families have been staying in school and taking the tests.

Another approach to evaluating the level of reading proficiency attained in this country is to compare our achievement with achievement in other countries. A survey of reading performance in 15 countries completed just over a decade ago showed that American

ILLUSTRATED BY SALVADOR BRU



students were never in first or second place on any test, and that on most tests they ranked at or below the international average. A more recent comparison between the United States, Taiwan, and Japan showed a much wider spread of achievement among children in this country; many American children did well, but disproportionate numbers were among the poorest readers in the three countries. International comparisons are tricky, depending, for instance, on the numbers of children in each age group that remain in school in different countries and the assumption that test items translated into different languages are really equivalent. Still, the figures offer no grounds for complacency.

How Americans have compared in the past is less urgent than the question of whether current generations will be literate enough to meet the demands of the future. The world is moving into a technological-information age in which full participation in education, science, business, industry, and the professions requires increasing levels of literacy. What was a satisfactory level of literacy in 1950 probably will be marginal by the year 2000.

There is reason to be optimistic about the potential for the improvement of literacy in this country. From research supported by the National Institute of Education, and to some extent other government agencies and private foundations, the last decade has witnessed unprecedented advances in knowledge about the basic processes involved in reading, teaching, and learning. The knowledge is now available to make worthwhile improvements in reading throughout the United States. If the practices seen in the classrooms of the best teachers in the best schools could be introduced everywhere, the improvements would be dramatic.

Word Recognition and Beginning Reading

One of the cornerstones of skilled reading is fast, accurate word identification. Well into the 20th century almost all children in this country were started on the road to skilled word identification by teaching them the letters of the alphabet, the sounds the letters make, and, using this knowledge, how to sound out words. During the first third of this century, educators such as William S. Gray were responsible for turning American schools away from what they perceived to be the "heartless drudgery" of the traditional approach. In its place, Gray and others advocated the look-and-say approach. The thinking was that children would make more rapid progress in reading if they identified whole words at a glance, as adults seem to do.

The look-say approach gradually came to dominate the teaching of beginning reading. Nonetheless, educators continued to debate the best way to introduce children to reading. Rudolph Flesch brought the debate forcibly to the public's attention in the mid-1950s with his book, *Why Johnny Can't Read,* in which he mounted a scathing attack against the look-say method and advocated a return to phonics. More influential in professional circles, though, was Jeanne Chall's now-classic book a decade later, *Learning to Read: The Great Debate.* Chall concluded on the basis of evidence available at the time that programs that included phonics as one component were superior to those that did not.

The question, then, is how should children be taught to read words? The answer given by most reading educators today is that phonics instruction is one of the essential ingredients. All the major published reading programs include material for teaching phonics to beginning readers. Thus, the issue is no longer, as it was several decades ago, whether children should be taught phonics. The issues now are specific ones of just how it should be done.

Classroom research shows that, on the average, children who are taught phonics get off to a better start in learning to read than children who are not taught phonics. The advantage is most apparent on tests of word identification, though children in programs in which phonics gets a heavy stress also do better on tests of sentence and story comprehension, particularly in the early grades.

Data on the long-term effects of phonics instruction are scanty. In one of the few longitudinal studies, children who had received intensive phonics instruction in kindergarten or first grade performed better in the third grade than a comparison group of children on both a word identification test and a comprehension test. By the sixth grade, the group that years earlier had received intensive phonics instruction still did better than the comparison group on a word identification test but the advantage in comprehension had vanished. The fact that an early phonics emphasis had less influence on comprehension as the years passed is probably attributable to the increasing importance of knowledge of the topic, vocabulary, and reasoning ability on advanced comprehension tests.

If the practices seen in the classrooms of the best teachers in the best schools could be introduced everywhere, the improvements would be dramatic.

The picture that emerges from the research is that phonics facilitates word identification and that fast, accurate word identification is a necessary but not sufficient condition for comprehension. More will be said later about the need for comprehension instruction in tandem with phonics instruction.

The purpose of phonics is to teach children the alphabetic principle. The goal is for this to become an *operating principle* so that young readers consistently use information about the relationship between letters and sounds and letters and meanings to assist in the identification of known words and to independently figure out unfamiliar words. Research evidence tends to favor explicit phonics [over the implicit approach]. However, the "ideal" phonics program would probably incorporate features from implicit phonics as well. The Commission believes that the approaches to phonics recommended in programs available today fall con-

siderably short of the ideal, and we call for renewed efforts to improve the quality of instructional design, materials, and teaching strategies.

The right maxims for phonics are: Do it early. Keep it simple. Except in cases of diagnosed individual need, phonics instruction should have been completed by the end of the second grade.

Comprehension and Beginning Reading

The heart of reading instruction in American classrooms is the small group reading lesson in which the teacher works with some children while the rest complete assignments at their seats. This is the usual arrangement in first, second, and third grade, and sometimes beyond. The small group lesson provides the opportunity for instruction and practice on all aspects of reading. For the beginning reader, it is a major opportunity to acquire insights into comprehension and to link word identification and comprehension.

The typical teacher's major resource on how to conduct this lesson is the manual that is part of the commercial reading program the school district has purchased. The teacher's manual contains detailed suggestions for conducting every lesson, often in as much detail as the script for a play. Presented in bold type within the manual is the exact wording of statements that the teacher can make to students. For example, to begin a lesson the manual may suggest that the teacher say, "Today we're going to read a story about polar bears. Have any of you ever seen a polar bear in a zoo?" Further directions will then be given in plain type such as "Give children several moments to discuss polar bears. After that, read the introductory statement about the story."

Some school districts afford teachers the option of using any of a variety of materials and approaches to teach reading. More typical, though, is the district that requires the use of the basal reading program that it has purchased. Even these districts usually give teachers flexibility in whether or not they follow the teacher's manual word for word. Classroom observation and interviews with teachers suggest that, whether by choice or not, most teachers do rely on manuals. The teachers' manuals that accompany the best-selling commercial reading programs suggest lessons with three basic parts: preparation, reading, and discussion.

PREPARATION. In the preparation phase, the teacher is supposed to introduce the new words that will be encountered in the day's basal reader selection and make sure the children possess the background knowledge required to understand the story. The preparation phase is one place where an aspect of comprehension may be explicitly taught or, in the primary grades, where phonics may be taught. The preparation phase may conclude with the teacher's stating a purpose or asking a question to guide reading.

Systematic classroom observation reveals that preparation for reading is the phase of the small group lesson that is most often slighted, or even skipped altogether. Thus, as a rule, little focused attention is given to developing the background knowledge that will be required to understand the day's story. This is a topic on which teachers' manuals do include specific recommendations. When asked why they neither follow the recommendations in the manuals nor substitute instruction of their own design, teachers say they don't have the time.

Several studies indicate that using instructional time to build background knowledge pays dividends in reading comprehension. It must be warned, though, that there has been a rush of enthusiasm for this practice in professional circles. Teachers are receiving all manner of suggestions waving the banner of background knowledge, some of which may, indeed, be a waste of time. Teachers are being urged to engage children in activities and discussion that may range over too wide an array of topics.

The right maxims for phonics are: Do it early. Keep it simple.

Useful approaches to building background knowledge prior to a reading lesson focus on the concepts that will be central to understanding the upcoming story, concepts that children either do not possess or may not think of without prompting. The advice in teachers' manuals is often unfocused, as in the polar bear example at the beginning of this section. Unstructured preparation may wander away from the concepts of central importance.

The effect of preparation for reading on children's recall of a story was examined in a study which compared unfocused preparation with preparation that highlighted the central ideas of the story. The plot of the story involved a woman who wishes on a star, a raccoon who comes nightly to her doorstep to look for food, and some bandits. The raccoon's masked appearance frightens the bandits into dropping a bag of money, which the raccoon picks up and eventually drops at the woman's doorstep on his nightly search for food. Finding the money, the woman attributes it to her wish on a star.

The suggested steps for preparation in the teacher's manual led to a discussion of raccoons as clever, playful animals. Yet to understand the story, children must grasp the ideas of coincidence and habit, since the raccoon's habitual behavior allows the coincidences to occur. Children who received preparation that concentrated on these ideas did much better in remembering the central ideas of the story than children prepared according to the suggestions in the teacher's manual.

Much of the research showing that it is essential for children to learn to construct meaning based on background knowledge, as well as information in the text, has been conducted recently. This probably explains the low priority this aspect of reading receives in most classrooms today. Teachers, principals, and reading supervisors are just now getting the opportunity to learn about the research and adjust their priorities.

READING. The second phase of a typical lesson is reading the day's selection. A basic issue is the proper role for silent and oral reading considering the children's age and ability. Frequent opportunities to read aloud make sense for the beginning reader. In the first place, oral reading makes a tie with the experience children have had of reading in their homes, nursery schools, and kindergartens as adults have read to them. Further, oral reading makes observable aspects of an otherwise unobservable process, providing teachers with a means for checking progress, diagnosing problems and focusing instruction. Not to be underestimated is the function oral reading serves in providing young children a way to share their emerging ability with their parents and others.

Nor should oral reading be discarded altogether once children are fairly skilled readers. Opportunities to read aloud and listen to others read aloud are features of the literate environment, whatever the reader's level. There is no substitute for a teacher who reads children good stories. It whets the appetite of children for reading, and provides a model of skillful oral reading. It is a practice that should continue throughout the grades. Choral reading of poetry and reading plays also contribute to oral reading skill and help keep oral traditions alive. However, as the reader moves beyond the initial stages of literacy, more time will be devoted to silent reading, since that is the form that skilled reading most often takes.

Current observations of American classrooms indicate that teachers do differentiate the amount of oral and silent reading according to the reader's level. A study of 600 reading-group sessions found that low-ability readers at the first-grade level read orally during about 90% of the time allocated to the lesson, while high-ability first-graders read aloud about 40% of the time. By Grade 5, low-ability groups spent somewhat over 50% of lesson time reading aloud whereas high-ability groups averaged less than 20%.

A sensible rule of thumb is to ignore most mistakes unless the mistake disrupts the meaning of the text.

The way oral reading is handled in the typical classroom may not be optimum. Authorities recommend that children read a selection silently before they read it aloud. Research suggests that this practice improves oral reading fluency. However, classroom observations reveal that silent reading before oral reading is frequently omitted, which is like being asked to perform a play without having read the script beforehand. Consequently, unless the children are already rather good readers, the reading is unnecessarily slow and halting, and the experience may be needlessly stressful for some children.

The value of oral reading depends in part on the way the teacher deals with mistakes. If a child makes a large number of mistakes, this usually means that the selection is too difficult and that the child ought to be moved to an easier one. Otherwise, a sensible rule of thumb is to ignore most mistakes unless the mistake disrupts the meaning of the text. Even professional oral readers, such as radio and TV announcers, frequently deviate from the text in small ways. When a teacher is compulsive about always correcting small mistakes, the child's train of thought will be interrupted.

Some teachers pay too much attention to correcting what they judge to be imperfections in the pronunciation of children, and thereby may interfere with comprehension. Overemphasis on standard pronunciation can be a serious problem when the child is not a native speaker of English or the child speaks a different dialect of English than the teacher. For instance, in one study a lesson was observed in which the children were reading a selection that contained the word *garbage.* The white teacher interrupted a black child several times trying to get him to say /garrrbage/ insead of /gahbage/.

When a child makes an oral reading mistake that changes the meaning, the best technique is to first wait and see whether the child can come up with the right word without help. If not, the teacher should direct the child's attention to clues about the word's pronunciation or meaning, depending upon the nature of the error. When the word has been correctly identified, the child should be encouraged to reread the sentence. This helps to assure that the child assimilates the correction and can recover the meaning of the whole sentence. Research suggests that teachers who deal with oral reading errors in the manner that has just been outlined produce larger-than-average gains in reading achievement. Teachers who routinely supply the correct word, or permit other children in the group to call out the correct word, get children in the habit of waiting passively for help.

When children read orally, it is most often in a format called "round robin reading." Each child in a reading group takes a turn reading aloud several lines or a page of the story. An issue in round robin reading is equal distribution of turns for reading among the children. When a teacher always calls on volunteers, it has been shown that assertive children get more than their share of turns. This is undesirable because there is evidence that the child reading aloud and directly receiving instruction from the teacher is getting more from the lesson than the children who are following along. A simple method for equalizing opportunity is to move around the group giving each child a turn in order. This method has produced good results in several studies.

A problem with round robin reading is that the quality of practice is often poor. This problem is acute in the low-ability group where children hear only other poor readers stumbling over words. This problem can be lessened by having the children read the selection silently beforehand.

Even under the best of circumstances, round robin reading is not ideal for developing fluency and comprehension. An alternative technique that has proved successful in small-scale tryouts is to have children repeatedly read the same selections until an acceptable standard of fluency is attained. This can be done in several

ways: Small groups can read along with an adult or they can follow a tape-recorded version; they can practice silently and then read aloud to the teacher; pairs of children can take turns reading aloud to one another. Poor readers who engage in repeated reading show marked improvement in speed, accuracy, and expression during oral reading of new selections and, more important, improvement in comprehension during silent reading. Repeated reading deserves consideration as an alternative to the conventional practice of having children read aloud new material every day. No one would expect a novice pianist to sight read a new selection every day, but that is exactly what is expected of the beginning reader.

No one would expect a novice pianist to sight read a new selection every day.

In addition to oral reading, children of every age and ability ought to be doing more extended silent reading. The amount of time children spend reading silently in school is associated with year-to-year gains in reading achievement. Even young readers benefit from opportunities for silent reading. For instance, increased silent reading for beginners is one of the features of a very successful program for low-income Hawaiian children who are otherwise at risk for educational failure.

To summarize, classroom time spent on either oral or silent reading is time well spent. Even beginning readers should do more silent reading. They should usually read silently before they are asked to read aloud. Getting the most from the customary practice of round robin oral reading requires the teacher to distribute turns equally among the children, skillfully handle mistakes, and focus attention on meaning. But alternatives to round robin reading of new material, such as repeated reading, appear to hold more promise for promoting reading fluency and comprehension.

DISCUSSION. Following the reading of a selection, the final phase of a typical reading lesson is discussion. In the primary grades, there are brief discussions after each section of the selection and a longer discussion when the whole story has been completed. In the intermediate grades, the interspersed discussion periods are not usually present. The discussion phase is a place where the teacher may provide direct instruction in some aspect of reading comprehension, using the day's selection for illustration. In the primary grades, this is the point where phonics instruction is usually provided. The last thing the teacher does is explain the seatwork assignment and make sure the children understand what they are supposed to do before they return to their seats.

A clear finding from research of the past decade is that young readers, and poor readers of every age, do not consistently see relationships between what they are reading and what they already know. Research also establishes that questions asked during the discussion phase of a lesson are a useful tool for helping children see relationships. Questions that lead children to integrate information about the central points of a selection with their prior knowledge significantly enhance reading comprehension.

Classroom research indicates that teachers make heavy use of manuals when leading discussions. Manuals include a large number of questions for each story, and most of them are asked during a typical lesson. While research verifies that asking well-crafted questions can be an important means of promoting comprehension, analysis of the questions in manuals reveals many that are poorly crafted — too general, leading the children's thinking afield; or trivial, focusing their thinking on unimportant details.

Questions are a means of conveying to students the points they should be attempting to understand as they read future selections as well as a means for checking to see that they have understood the selection they have just read. Thus, questions following a story should probe the major elements of the plot. If the story has a moral, discussion should bring out this deeper meaning.

No piece of advice about questioning has been repeated more often than the proscription, "Don't ask too many detail questions." For instance, if a story were to say that Sally was wearing a red dress, teachers may be warned against asking about the color of her dress. This advice is incomplete, however. The question is perfectly sensible if the color of Sally's dress figures in the plot. A more complete statement about questions is that, as a general rule, they should be formulated to motivate children's higher-level thinking. When questions about details are asked, usually they should be links in a chain of questions that lead to an inference about a hard-to-understand part of the passage or an understanding of the selection as a whole.

While questions during the preparation and discussion phases of a reading lesson are important, these do not substitute for active, direct instruction. In direct instruction, the teacher explains, models, demonstrates, and illustrates reading skills and strategies that students ought to be using. There is evidence that direct instruction produces gains in reading achievement beyond those that are obtained with only less direct means such as questions.

The emphasis during reading lessons should be on understanding and appreciating the content of the story. Lessons in which the children do little else but take turns reading the story, and the teacher does little else but correct reading errors, are ineffective. Teachers should periodically ask students questions that lead them to understand the critical points of the story. As needed, the teacher should explain points that students have confused or demonstrate skills that students should be using. □

For a copy of the full report, send $4.50 in check or money order, payable to the University of Illinois, to: Becoming a Nation of Readers, *P.O. Box 2774, Station A, Champaign, Ill. 61820-8774. Bulk orders available at discount.*

COMPELLING BELIEF

Education in the Service of Ideology

BY ARCH PUDDINGTON

AMERICANS WOULD be startled to find John Wilkes Booth described as a "hireling of the slave-owning South, and, it is suspected, of the large Northern capitalists." Or to read that the American government practiced "bacteriological warfare" against the Indian population. Or that "under the conditions of capitalism, one-third of Americans are unable to buy necessary food." Yet these "facts" can be found in history books used by students throughout the Soviet Union, and they are typical of the Soviet treatment of American history.[1]

From the Russian Revolution onwards, education has served a special function in communist societies, one radically different from the role of education in the democratic world. While practically every society develops educational policies with an eye towards the inculcation of attitudes of responsible citizenship and respect for the national culture, communist regimes teach children to become productive and patriotic citizens in ways that vary sharply from the methods that a free society would find acceptable. Communist and democratic educational systems represent two fundamentally opposed philosophies, not simply different techniques for achieving similar goals, a fact that educational authorities in communist societies readily admit. In countries ruled by a single, monolithic communist party, the schools are expected to instill "socialist" values in children, promote unquestioning devotion towards the motherland and the communist system, encourage contempt for other, non-communist societies (the United States above all) and convince the younger generation that there is but one correct interpretation of history, that set down by the state. In other words, indoctrination — pure and simple — is perceived as a legitimate job of the schools.

To be sure, the intensity of the indoctrination process has been reduced over the years, especially in those countries where communist political control has been consolidated for some time. And ideology is much less likely to intrude into the teaching of languages and the hard sciences.* Nevertheless, indoctrination remains an important feature in history courses, the social sciences and the creative arts. Moreover, children throughout the communist world, including children of a very young age, are subject to heavy doses of military training as a normal part of the curriculum, a practice most Americans would find intolerable. Furthermore, while politics play a smaller role in the educational policies of

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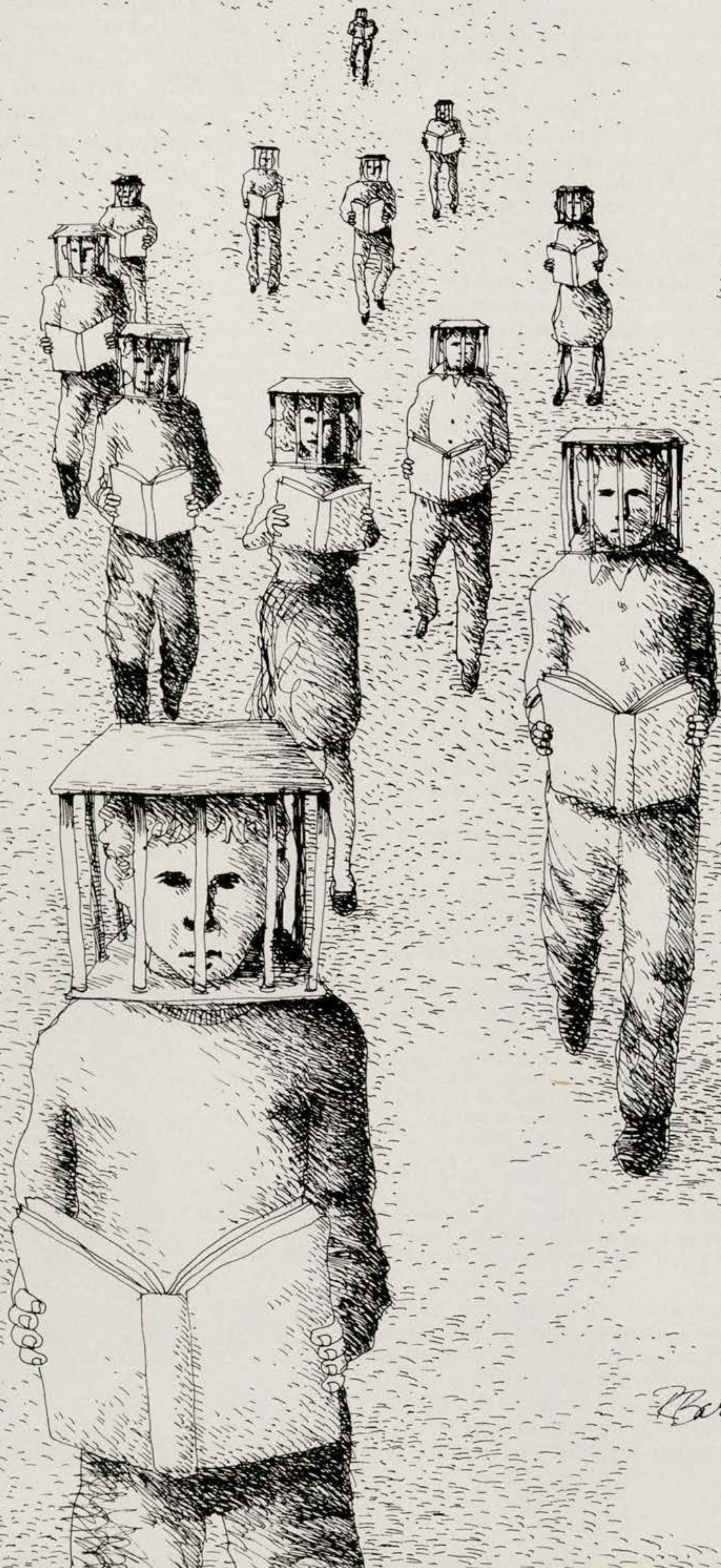
* Even in these subjects, content can be put in the service of ideology. Writing in the March 1984 issue of *Phi Delta Kappan*, Delbert H. Long gave this example of how Soviet science teachers are expected to use their disciplines to develop "appropriate attitudes" in their students: "Physics and chemistry teachers discuss the various forms of matter, its movements, and the impossibility of its existence outside time and space. Such scientific evidence is supposed to provide a basis for the formation of materialistic/atheistic views. Teachers of botany, zoology, anatomy, human physiology, and general biology are expected to enrich students with 'new ideas regarding the material foundations of the development of the natural world, [thus] providing a basis for destroying religious views.'"

ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERT BARKIN



older communist societies, this is not the case in those Third World nations where communist or quasi-communist regimes have but recently seized power. In Cuba, Vietnam, Afghanistan and similar Third World countries, education is first and foremost a political matter; the imparting of knowledge is a secondary consideration.

INDOCTRINATION CAN take a number of forms. Most frequently encountered is the glorification of communist achievements coupled with a denigration of the historic role of non-communist political figures or movements. Indoctrination may also be reflected in a distortion of the history of other nations. The chapters of Soviet history textbooks dealing with the United States are replete with inaccuracies, omissions and outright falsifications, as typified in the examples that opened this article.

The identification of Lincoln's assassin as a hired gun of the bourgeoisie would appear particularly ludicrous to Americans. Yet the idea that every historical event is somehow a reflection of a global class struggle is basic to the formulation of history in the USSR. The Soviets make no attempt to camouflage the biases of their curriculum. In an approved syllabus, *Program for Eighth-Year Schools and Secondary Schools: History,* the purpose of teaching history was described thusly:

> The teaching of history is given the task of forming in youth a Marxist-Leninist world-view, deep ideological convictions, a clear, class-oriented approach to phenomena of social life, Soviet patriotism, loyalty to proletarian internationalism, devotion to the Party's cause, the task of developing a Communist attitude towards work, a feeling of duty and discipline, and irreconcilability to bourgeois ideology.
>
> As a result of the study of historic materials these highly important ideas for the world-view of the student are formed:
>
> • the decisive role of the means of production in the life of a society as the basic factor of gradual development of a society.
> • the regularity of the changes in socio-economic formations, the inevitability of the victory of Communism which will give an unlimited progressive development to society.
> • the class struggle as the driving force for the development of every exploiting society.
> • the role of the popular masses as the genuine creators of history and the significance of the individual in history.
>
> An examination of the struggle and competition between the two co-existing, opposite social systems ought to be the main axis for the teaching of *Noveishaia Istoriia.* The task is to explain convincingly to students the basic contents of the modern epoch, using concrete materials to show them how socialism unswervingly gains strength during the competition of the two systems, how its international influence is growing, and, on the other hand, how the process of the weakening of capitalism and the deepening of its general crisis continue. All of this is proof of the unlimited opportunities of socialism, of its historical superiority over capitalism, that capitalism is a society without a future.

As the above passage would suggest, a Marxist-Leninist educational philosophy requires that the author of a history text write not history but propaganda. The dates may be accurate, the names spelled correctly and events placed in their proper chronological order. But problems arise in the interpretation of the facts. The United States and other capitalist societies are pre-

Reading texts are replete with stories of soldiers who killed American imperialists, and workers who over-fulfill the production norm. Art students are urged to draw grenades and other weapons, and to invent scenes where Americans are being slaughtered.

sented as mired in permanent economic crisis, beset by racial turmoil and crime, and pursuing an aggressive foreign policy (dictated by capitalism's incessant search for global economic domination) that poses a constant threat to world peace.

A REVEALING illustration of the slanted portrait of American society that can routinely be found in Soviet textbooks is the following passage on the conditions of blacks, which appeared in a sixth-grade geography text that was used in the Soviet Union until at least the late 1970s.

> Negroes live primarily in the South of the U.S.A. and islands of the Caribbean Sea. Although according to the laws of the U.S.A., Negroes are regarded as equal, in reality they are without rights. Negroes work on plantations as tenant farmers or they rent land for a share of the harvest. In the cities they perform primarily heavy or dirty work, ("Black work for the Blacks" — so say White racists). For one and the same labor, Negroes receive less pay than Whites. Negro children are not allowed in White schools nor on streetcars and buses, and in restaurants and cafes it is often possible to see the shameful sign "White only." In the cities, special blocks are designated for Negroes which lack elementary sanitary conditions and conveniences.

There are, of course, differences of opinion among Americans over the level of racial prejudice and inequality in their society, and even stronger differences over the proper role of government in promoting further progress for blacks. But there is no argument over the remarkable changes that black Americans have experienced since the civil rights revolution. Yet as far as this Soviet textbook is concerned, the civil rights movement was a non-event, and blacks in the 1970s were as culturally and economically deprived as in the worst days of Jim Crow.

Here it should be emphasized that the distorted treatment of American race relations cannot be ascribed to the ignorance of Soviet historians. If there is any aspect of American domestic life with which the Soviet intellectual elite is familiar, it is race. Soviet journalists assigned to the United States devote much of their attention to contemporary race relations, and while the stories they write are often biased, the correspondents themselves are surely aware of the changes that have taken place during the past three decades. Similarly well-informed are Soviet academics who specialize in the study of American society. Given the awareness of Soviet intellectuals to the realities of race relations here, one can only conclude that the depiction of blacks as consigned to a serf-life status is the result of a conscious decision to falsify history in the interest of advancing Soviet ideological objectives.

An even more outlandish example of rewriting history is the Soviet interpretation of what in America has come to be known as the Cuban missile crisis. Here is how that event is portrayed in a tenth-grade history textbook:

> In October 1962, the American imperialists declared a military blockade of Cuba and prepared for an invasion of the Island of Liberty. The USA had created in the vicinity of the Caribbean Sea a crisis which pushed the world to the brink of thermonuclear war. Thanks only to the hard line and decisive measures of the Soviet Union, a military conflict was avoided on the basis of a Soviet-American agreement between the two governments. The US government pledged before the whole world not to attack Cuba and to restrain its allies in the Western Hemisphere from doing so. However, the USA did organize a blockade of Cuba which caused economic difficulties in the country.

Leaving aside the issue of the tendentious phraseology, this passage is remarkable for what is left unstated. No reference — not one word — is made of the fact that the Soviet Union had placed offensive missiles in Cuba that threatened the security of the United States, or of the fact that the crisis was resolved only after Moscow agreed to remove the weapons from the island. We are left with a missile crisis without missiles.

VIETNAM AND Afghanistan provide revealing examples of the techniques employed by totalitarian regimes to enforce control over education. In postwar Vietnam,[2] the first step was the nationalization of the entire educational system, an important measure since a considerable portion of the schools were run by religious denominations. Next, massive purges of teachers were instituted, a policy that was enforced with special harshness against male teachers under age 45. Almost all teachers in this category were packed off to reeducation camps, where some languished for many years. Within the schools and universities, special vice-principals for political affairs were appointed. Most of these came from North Vietnam, and it was they who were given control over curricula. Each school also contains a "protection section," headed by a communist party member who directs a network of youthful informants. The purpose of this section is to report on students or teachers who criticize the regime or make politically unacceptable statements.

As for the curriculum, here again the dividing line between propaganda and education was effectively abolished. First-grade children were confronted with math problems such as:

> Our troops went to the battlefield and killed five American imperialists and three puppet troops. How many troops did our troops kill?

Needless to say, arithmetic is not the only subject burdened by such blatant propaganda. Reading texts are replete with stories of soldiers who killed American imperialists, and workers who over-fulfill the production norm. Art students are urged to draw grenades and other weapons, and to invent scenes where Americans are being slaughtered. The significance of all this was noted by a teacher who succeeded in fleeing the country:

> The purpose ... is to create and nurture hatred in the minds of children.... The insidious thing is that such stuff is made an integral part of every subject taught, and that children in the classroom must repeat it all the time, so that they get used to it.

In Afghanistan, a campaign to rewrite history and reshape the educational system was inaugurated under Soviet guidance shortly after the "April Revolution" of 1978. For example, a course on Moslem art that had been offered at Kabul University for many years was abolished; it was replaced by such subjects as dialectical materialism, the history of the international workers' movement and the history of Cuba. Since surviving Afghan scholars were ill-equipped to teach these sub-

jects, Soviet academics were imported to succeed those teachers who had been purged, executed or sent into exile. Emigré sources claim that 70 percent of the pre-1978 university faculty is no longer associated with the university, an estimate borne out by the government, which announced that by 1983, 60 percent of Kabul University positions were filled by teachers from "socialist countries." These visiting scholars have been joined on the faculties by patently unqualified Afghans — journalists, propagandists, and semi-literate relatives of the political leadership.

Many of the Soviet teachers are either unable or unwilling to address their classes in languages familiar to the Afghans; rather, they lecture in Russian through interpreters. The Soviets have also supplied new history textbooks, which stress that even under the czars, Russia was the only country Afghanistan could depend on for friendly relations, an arrant fabrication given that Russia had repeatedly invaded the country in the nineteenth century (and three additional times in this century).

WHILE THE politicization of education is endemic to the communist system, the degree and form of indoctrination can vary considerably from country to country. As we have seen, the subordination of fact to ideology in Soviet schools is often designed to stimulate a sense of contempt towards the American government. Significantly, the Soviet textbooks quoted above were all in use during the 1970s, the era of putative détente, a fact that gives weight to the view that détente did not produce any genuine lowering of ideological barriers by the Kremlin.

On the other hand, in Romania, a country that maintains a quasi-independent foreign policy, the history curriculum contains little in the way of negative propaganda — that is, the ritualistic denunciations of capitalism, imperialism and the United States frequently encountered in Soviet schools. The purpose of political training in Romania is rather to glorify the fatherland, the Communist Party and most of all, the party leader, Nicolae Ceausescu.

While the political content of Romanian education is considerably less anti-Western than in the Soviet Union, we still encounter substantial distortions in the way Romanian and world history are presented. The indoctrination process is initiated at the elementary school level, with the homeroom teacher given responsibility for ensuring that students learn the approved political line on whatever issue is under discussion.

A Western scholar who conducted a lengthy study of political training in Romania provided this illuminating example of the kind of ideological supervision that is expected of the homeroom teacher. A seventh-grade student told his history teacher that the reason why Romania failed to join the Allies during World War II was the Stalin-Hitler pact. While there was a good deal of merit in this observation, to publicly refer to the Soviet alliance with Hitler was considered unacceptable, and the student was sent to the homeroom teacher for disciplinary purposes.

> The home-room teacher told me she talked to the parents of the student explaining how their child's behavior could lead to visitation of the school by the district inspectorate and possibly a check of the whole school by the Ministry of Education and the Central Committee of the Party. Every person in Romania over the grade school age knew about the Russian pact with Hitler and the student was not incorrect, the home-room teacher said. But the history teacher, the home-room teacher, the Party Secretary, the Party Committee in the school, the Director of the school and the school district would be under investigation if the one instance was not confined to the one instance. The student was kept at home for one week by his parents in an unofficial suspension by the school. The home-room teacher had told the parents that one other such instance could jeopardize the student's chance of going to a university. The Party Committee had probably entered the incorrect behavior in the student's dossier, which was no longer with the rest of the students' files.[3]

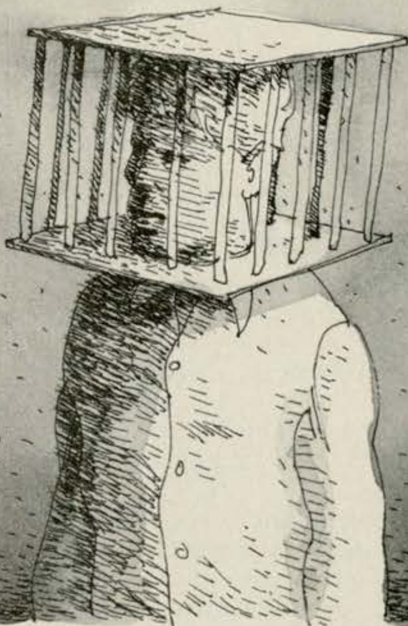
This incident reveals a great deal about education in the communist world, especially those communist countries where access to information from Western sources is greater than it is in the Soviet Union or Third World communist countries. On the one hand, this single indiscretion was regarded as a minor crisis, and the student dealt with much as a chronically disruptive student would be in an American school. Indeed, this account suggests that an ideologically disruptive student is considered a more serious problem by Romanian authorities than a physically disruptive student would be regarded by school officials in America. Where the American student would be given numerous chances to reform, the Romanian student would be prohibited from attending a university should he publicly utter further politically incorrect statements. On the other hand, both students and teachers in Romania are aware that much of what they are taught about history and world affairs is sheer nonsense. This results in a kind of intellectual double-bookkeeping. University students report that by the fifth or sixth grade it is tacitly understood what can and cannot be stated in public, what the "correct" interpretation of events is, and what can be said only privately, among family members or close friends.

WHILE IT is generally the case that the politicization of the classroom has declined since the death of Stalin, events have demonstrated that a deemphasis on ideology is not an irreversible process.

An ideological re-Stalinization has been underway in Czechoslovakia since 1968, when the liberalizing impulse known as the Prague Spring was snuffed out by a Soviet invasion. Teachers who had sympathized with the reformist program were dismissed, to be replaced by those whose obedience to the post-reform, dogmatic party leadership could not be questioned. A renewed stress on indoctrination was decreed, a process that ultimately was to reach down to the pre-kindergarten level. Three- to five-year-olds were familiarized with what were labeled "key concepts" — politically loaded words such as "Lenin," "party," "Red Army," "October Revolution." These words were to be repeated until children drew the politically correct association.[4]

The Ministry of Education also decided to introduce pre-military training into the kindergarten curriculum. The children were supplied with toy tanks, rockets and rifles, while their teachers explained the importance of socialist military preparedness. Previously, the Czechoslovak government had discouraged the use of

While there was a good deal of merit in the student's observation, to publicly refer to the Soviet alliance with Hitler was considered unacceptable, and the student was sent to the homeroom teacher for disciplinary purposes.



war-toys by young children; this policy was now reversed, and the use of war-toys given an ideological justification. As one writer put it:

> This (the use of war toys) goes beyond the negativist attitude as characterized by the non-class and non-historic statement in the *Educational Dictionary of 1965* which said that children educated in socialism and communism shall not be given toys simulating devices designed for destruction.*

ANOTHER MISTAKEN assumption frequently encountered in the West is the idea that indoctrination really has little effect on children in communist countries. The impact of communist political training differs from country to country, again depending on such factors as access to Western radio broadcasts, the intensity of the indoctrination, the use of terror as a means of compelling belief and, among the nations of Eastern Europe, the level of anti-Russian feelings. It is certainly true that the effect of propagandistic political training has been seriously eroded in the countries of Eastern Europe, whose people value their historic ties to Western culture and who listen attentively to Western radio broadcasts. Moreover, after having experienced communism for many decades, the people of Eastern Europe have grown cynical about the system's claims to economic superiority, a cynicism shared to a degree even by party members. This absence of ideological conviction is duly reflected in the educational system; teachers convey the party line, but without really believing it. Students repeat what is expected, again without conviction, and draw conclusions about the world from whatever non-official sources of information are available.

A different atmosphere, however, prevails in the Soviet Union and in communist countries of the Third World. In the Soviet Union, communism and nationalism are closely intertwined; the shortcomings of the system's economic performance are balanced by the unprecedented expansion of the Russian empire that has occurred since the October Revolution. And in the Third World, communist leaders retain utopian expectations about the ability of Marxism to forge an entirely new kind of society and a new kind of human being. The Cubans and Vietnamese continue to believe that, through heroic sacrifice — and considerable repression — communism can transform man's consciousness. The shaping and reshaping of young minds plays a central part in this millenarian endeavor, and the schools are invested with an importance second only to the security apparatus in the building of communism.

Although newly installed communist regimes do not necessarily ignore the challenge of re-educating the adult population, they pay far more attention to shaping the opinions of the young. Those who have reached maturity under a non-communist system, it is assumed,

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* In Nicaragua, the Sandinistas have taken this advice to heart. Writing in the *Washington Post* (August 18, 1985), David N. Dorn and Xavier Zavala Cuadra report the following examples from Sandinistan textbooks. In one addition exercise, hand grenades are used for illustrations while another exercise asks the student: "If the magazine of a gun holds eight bullets, how many bullets would it take to fill two magazines?"

STORYTELLING: REVIVAL OF AN AGE-OLD ART

BY MARILYN BERG IARUSSO

STORYTELLING PROGRAMS have a long history in public libraries. They were already being instituted by 1900, at the time when children's library services were first being systematically established. Librarians had been looking for a more artistic approach to interpreting literature for children, one less didactic than those used in schools of the day. Storytelling was the approach they found.

Many of these early programs were inspired by teachers who had already fallen under the spell of storytelling. Marie Shedlock, whose *The Art of the Storyteller* remains a classic, had been a teacher in one of London's most successful public day schools for girls. She became a lecturer and launched a series of speaking engagements that eventually brought her to the United States, where her values were embraced and passed on.

Shedlock's natural, understated but highly artful style won many adherents, as well as critical favor from the popular press of the time. Her style was seen as a welcome break from the highly sentimental mannerisms of elocutionists who performed in the 1800s.

Ruth Sawyer was one of those inspired by hearing Marie Shedlock. Trained as a kindergarten teacher, Sawyer began to tell stories and collect folklore on a trip to Cuba in 1900 to organize kindergartens. She studied folklore at Columbia University, and later authored the other major classic in the field, *The Way of the Storyteller.*

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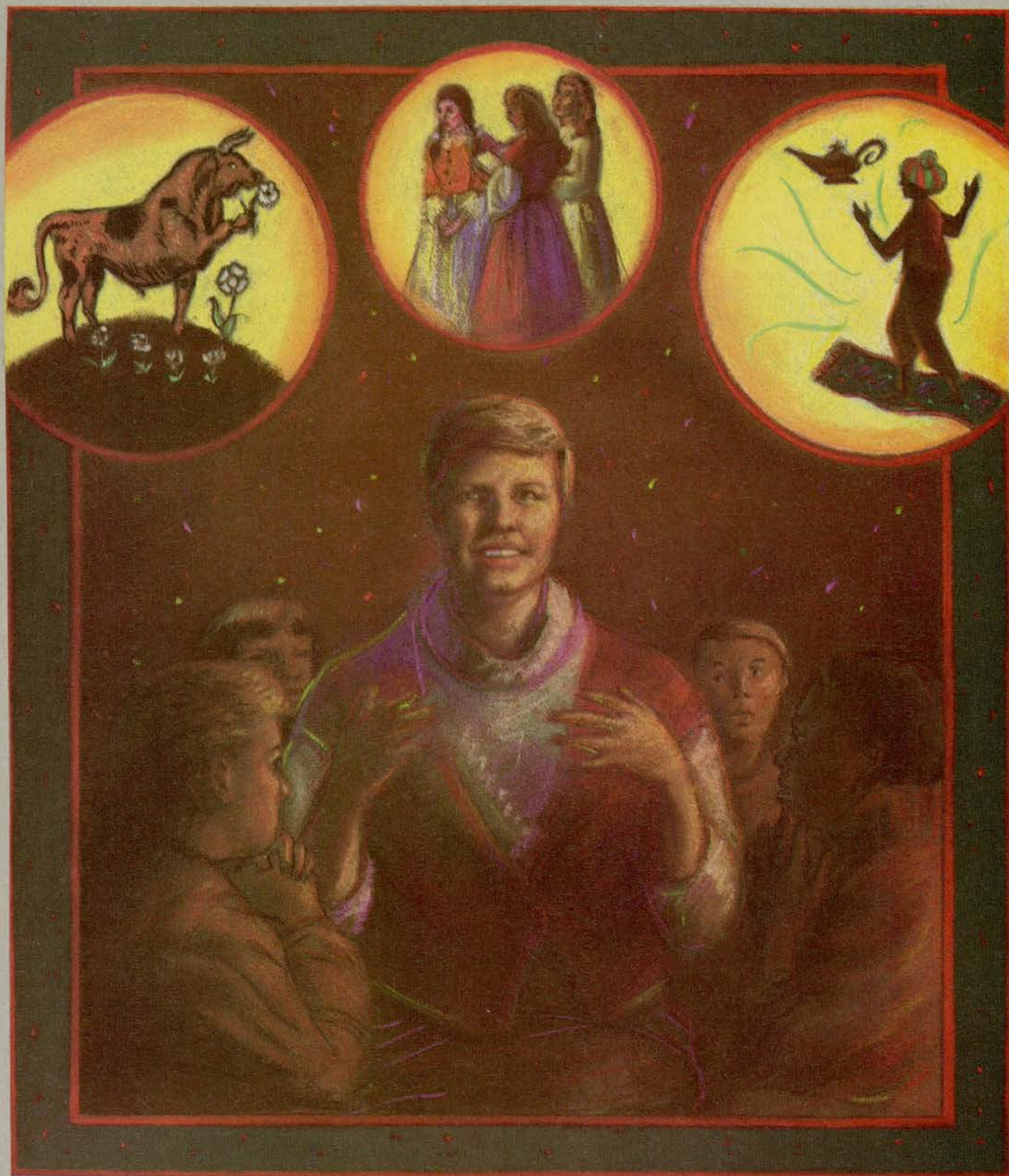
STORYTELLING AS practiced by Shedlock, Sawyer and other masters throughout the ages is an art. The tale is not read from a printed page, but told from memory. Thus the storyteller can respond fluidly to the audience — to their mood, age, interests and level of understanding. With nothing between audience and storyteller, the experience is alive and intimate, a powerful form of communication.

I know from 20 years of experience of telling stories in The New York Public Library that storytelling creates a warm and rewarding bond between storyteller and children. There is something generous and defenseless about telling a story. It is actually a gift of love and children immediately understand it that way. Children love folk and fairy tales and respond with touching warmth to an adult who shows enough regard for what they value to share stories with them. As Bruno Bettelheim explains in *The Uses of Enchantment,* "if the parent tells his child fairy tales in the right spirit . . . the child feels understood in his most tender longings, his most ardent wishes, his most severe anxieties and feelings of misery, as well as in his highest hopes. . . . This shows the child that he is not alone in his fantasy life, that it is shared by the person he needs and loves most." Bettelheim addresses his book to parents, but the power of reaching children through stories is there for any caring adult.

Many of the children we see in public libraries have a hard time sitting quietly, concentrating, absorbing what they're reading or hearing. Listening to stories helps children organize their thinking, develop their language

ILLUSTRATED BY DANA VERKOUTEREN



skills and increase their appreciation of literature and drama. I remember a fourth-grade hyperactive girl who spent many of her after-school hours wandering about the library without ever becoming engaged with the books. One week, as a guest storyteller, I told a story about a little girl whose mothering of a magic doll led to riches and to her marriage to the king of the country. The next month I came back for another story hour. The same little girl was there and she offered to tell my story to me. To my utter amazement she told it perfectly, staring at the ceiling the whole time, but leaving out not one part of the story except the one element that was evidently not important to her, that the girl grew up and was not a little girl anymore but a maiden "who was too old to play with dolls." To her, the adventure and the reward could happen to a child like herself and she remembered it verbatim a month later.

Other proof I've had of the impact of storytelling comes from the adoration it inspires. Children always want to know if you're coming back tomorrow and every other day forever. They want to touch you, hold your hand. Sometimes they dash past you on the sidewalks afterwards, murmuring "you're nice." If you can tell stories you become almost a magical person. I'm reminded of a question an awestruck little girl asked about Marie Shedlock some 85 years ago: After Shedlock told a story in the children's room of Brooklyn's Pratt Institute, the little girl asked, "Is she a fairy, or just a lady?"

Stories can overcome the self absorption of children by giving them an opportunity to identify with heroes and heroines who triumph over problems. Folk and fairy tales introduce world cultures and values of people in other lands. Folk tales coincide dramatically with the values children are learning to believe in: the importance of justice, kindliness, courage, honor, steadfastness. (An interesting discussion of why fairy tales appeal so strongly to children is given in a research report from the National Council of Teachers of English, "Child and Tale: The Origins of Interest." Stories can also provide an opportunity for children to explore family traditions and values, as in the oral tradition projects conducted at the Smithsonian Institute and documented in the book *A Celebration of American Family Folklore,* by Steven Zeitlin.) Finally, storytelling introduces children to timeless literature and motivates them to read.

For the storyteller, it provides a chance to see things anew through the way children give themselves to stories. The storyteller is refreshed by the experience of being inside a story with children, and reminded once again of the constancy of childhood. As each group of children finds new delight in the old stories and shares the triumph, the storyteller finds delight too, and that's a rare commodity these days.

THERE ARE many ways to tie storytelling into the curriculum — through language arts, reading, writing, social studies, oral speaking and research skills. The storytelling can be done by the students or by the teacher. If children are to tell stories, teachers must provide a pattern for what storytelling is, either through their preparation of appropriate stories or through local storytellers or children's librarians in public and school libraries who have some expertise.

I urge teachers who want children to tell stories to first let children hear and enjoy stories so that they will come to want to share them. If storytelling is introduced as a lesson or assignment, it can become a burden and the joy of storytelling lost.

In selecting stories, it is wise to get advice from experienced storytellers or those who know folklore. Perhaps a school or public librarian can provide guidance. Listening to recordings of storytellers helps some people find stories they like. Others may find that they are overly influenced by the style of the storyteller in these recordings, or even intimidated by their expertise.

A good anthology such as *The Scott Foresman Anthology of Children's Literature* is an excellent source for outstanding versions of folk tale classics. Folktale collections provide rich material for classroom storytelling. Folktales are perfect for storytelling because of their strong story lines. They are direct and full of action. They begin simply, move along in vivid word pictures, achieve a dramatic resolution and end in a satisfying way. Their use of recurring patterns can facilitate the learning of the story. And above all they deal with universal concerns of human beings.

Also, read in collections put together by people who have actually told stories. Virginia Tashjian, Jeanne Hardendorff, Richard Chase, Philip Sherlock, Eulalie Steinmetz Ross, Pura Belpré, Harold Courlander, Gudrun Thorne-Thomsen and Diane Wolkstein have all created collections in which the re-tellings are colorful, lively and accessible to a neophyte storyteller.

Do not learn a story from a re-teller who has the wolf and Little Red Riding Hood become friends and learn to cooperate, or one who has the witch reform and attend Snow White's wedding. As Bettelheim observes, "The true meaning and impact of a fairy tale can be appreciated, its enchantment can be experienced, only from the story in its original form." Most folk and fairy tales are symbolic and frequently lose their meaning and power if they are diluted or reconstructed — which is sometimes done by someone determined to convey a more "positive" message. If a particular story distresses you, don't change its basic elements. Choose another.

Another source for story ideas is lists of stories that have been used successfully in public library programs with children. Several have been compiled by the children's services departments of large public libraries. Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh and The New York Public Library have assembled and published lists based on years of storytelling. The New York list is the only one that is still in print but the others may be found in libraries. (Publication facts about these lists appear at the end of this article.)

As a beginner, it is best not to venture into literary materials by Kipling, Sandburg, Oscar Wilde or modern writers like Natalie Babbitt in which the style of storytelling is integral to the final effect. Some storytellers, such as Walter de la Mare, Ruth Sawyer and Hans Christian Andersen have done wonderful tales based on folklore but their love for the beauty of words has stamped their re-tellings with such a distinctive style that their selections can daunt a beginning storyteller. Stories like these are better faithfully read aloud or

learned carefully by experienced tellers.

Two popular sources for storytelling are the collections of the Brothers Grimm and Joseph Jacobs. In these stories the language is vigorous and memorable, but more natural and more easily integrated into your own voice without doing violence to the story. One could not convey the magic of Kipling's "The Elephant Child" without phrases such as "In the High and Far Off Times, O Best Beloved ..." but one *could* tell magical and deeply meaningful stories in conversational language working from folklore collections.

The most important consideration in finding a story that is good to tell is that you must like it. You must want to share it with others. A story you love grows inside you and is told better and better with each passing year.

(Continued on next page)

Storytelling Contests and Clubs Flourish

THESE DAYS storytelling is enjoying a grand renaissance, and teachers again are playing an active part. Some have organized storytelling contests, such as the hugely successful program of the New York City Board of Education started by Lucille Thomas of the Bureau of School Libraries in 1978. The program focuses on the telling of folk tales in which elementary-age children compete in three grade-level categories. Teachers and school librarians oversee most of the contest, which begins in local schools, advances through semi-finals at the borough level and culminates in a city-wide competition. Rewards are trophies and, recently, financial awards donated by corporations.

The program has proved so popular with the children that it had to be expanded to accommodate eighth graders. But now the ninth graders complain when they are forced into "early retirement." Contest coordinator Claire Rudin estimates that last year 50,000 children participated.

Most programs are more modest in size. The librarians at the Brearly School, a prestigious private school for girls in New York City, have worked with the language arts teachers to institute a storytelling program as a way of adding interest to sixth-grade studies of Roman and Greek Mythology, Genesis and creation myths. Last year, the girls not only told folk tales to each other in class, but the most enthusiastic among them were given an opportunity to tell their stories to younger children. The librarians saw the program as a way of not only adding interest to language arts, but of motivating students to read the outstanding but underutilized collection of folklore in the library. This year, the program continues with the addition of a guest storyteller from the public library to provide a model for storytelling style.

At *Every Child,* this summer's national conference sponsored by the Children's Book Council of New York City, full houses greeted the leaders of storytelling workshops, and many of the enthusiastic participants were teachers from all over the country. In one workshop, Kathryn Farnsworth discussed her experiences as a guest storyteller in New Jersey schools. In another, Kaye Lindauer described the after-school storytelling club she runs at Eagle Hill Middle School, in the suburbs of Syracuse, New York.

In Lindauer's club, approximately 14 students who are good readers are given an opportunity to polish their public speaking and performance skills. They select and learn stories from a collection of tales Lindauer has assembled that hold particular appeal for fifth- to eighth-graders. Students can choose from a selection of Native American tales, myths and ghost stories in the oral tradition as well as from contemporary works by authors such as Shirley Jackson, Jane Yolen, Natalie Babbit and others. Lindauer explains that choosing the story is the most difficult part of being a successful storyteller. Children tell their stories at assemblies for other grades and at evening programs for parents.

Lindauer finds that children of this age love to perform. However, she doesn't run a contest because, she says, the children are already so competitive. Each year the club starts out by working on a program of "scary stories," which results in an extremely popular Halloween program. Lindauer also uses storytelling with the reading classes in her school. She believes that the interest and support of the reading teachers has led to the acceptance and popularity of the storytelling club in her school. Lindauer, a talented storyteller herself and the creative force behind the annual Clever Gretchen Storytelling Conference in Syracuse, provides an excellent model for students. She prefaces her stories with the phrase, "I hope you know this story," which heads off the awkwardness that could result if one of them actually did know it.

It is impossible to guess how many storytelling programs are going on in schools, but from the number of storytellers who volunteer their time in inner city public schools, the others who are actually supporting themselves through storytelling — much of it in schools, from phone calls from schools looking for storytellers, articles in library and education journals and letters to the *National Storytelling Journal,* obviously many teachers are becoming increasingly involved in this age-old art. □

THE PREPARATION of stories to tell requires reading, re-reading and then visualizing the story in images that not only allow you to tell the tale richly with all that you have felt about it coming through, but also hold the structure of the story clearly in your mind so that you will not lose your place at an unexpected distraction. I learn my stories by becoming so familiar with them that the words flow effortlessly. I find however that it is vital to develop a clear picture of the *structure* of the story — a picture that locks the separate pieces in place. (Also, as a librarian I try to be as faithful as possible to the stories so children will borrow and read the books from which they are taken.)

Most experts say one should not memorize a story but should become so comfortable with it that it can be told as if it happened to you. The famous storyteller Gudrun Thorne-Thomsen once said that the greatest compliment she ever received from a child was the question, "Were you there?" The storyteller should try to convey the style of the story and its flavor. Colorful words, formula beginnings and endings, and recurring rhymes or phrases should be mastered. One well known storytelling expert, Eulalie Steinmetz Ross, believed that beginners should adhere to the words of the folk tale just as they would to the words of a literary story, both for security and to avoid introducing words that would violate the spirit of the story.

The last step in learning, of course, is practicing out loud, over and over to family, friends, neighbors. Some people find telling the story into a mirror helps, or listening to a tape of themselves.

An excellent discussion of other techniques used in learning stories, philosophy and answers to questions new storytellers ask is in *Storytelling: Art and Technique* by Augusta Baker and Ellin Greene.

WHEN YOU tell your story you and the children should be comfortable and relaxed. They should all be able to see you and you will need to be able to make eye contact with them to draw them into the story. Arrange them so that you can stand relaxed and still see all of their faces. If you choose to sit, sit on the edge of your chair so that your body is not trapped in a rigid position. Let yourself go into the story. Hold it firmly in your head and follow its path but keep looking from face to face and into the eyes of the children. Speak slowly, clearly, naturally and in a voice loud enough to reach to the back rows of the audience. The most common weaknesses in new storytellers are speaking too quickly or not loudly enough. Listening and concentrating can be hard work for children. If they can't easily hear the storyteller or follow the story sequence, their attention will be lost. Use gestures, if it is natural for you to do so and if they suit the story. But above all, use a simple and natural approach. Avoid assuming a witch's voice, flailing your arms or leaping around the room. You will discover that a good story can hold the children on its own and that a pause or a softly spoken word is often more dramatically powerful than a shriek. If, as an inexperienced storyteller, you aim at grand drama, you may only look foolish to the children and may distract them from the story. As you gain experience, you will learn the subtle art of using pacing and pitch to add variety to the telling. You'll know when to pause, when to speed up, when to whisper.

If you have storytelling performances in your community you may enjoy seeing how other people tell stories, and you may pick up some valuable ideas and techniques. *The National Storytelling Journal,* available in many libraries, lists events all across the country. Don't, however, be intimidated by the virtuoso performances of professional storytellers who sing, dance, play the guitar and mime their stories. Some of them are wonderful, some are not. Simple storytelling in the classroom can be just as involving as storytelling performances by tellers with such dramatic skills.

If you are anxious about actually learning stories to tell from memory, start out by reading aloud to your students. Read the best stories you can find. Read folklore, literary fairy tales or classic novels like *Charlotte's Web, Mr. Popper's Penguins* and *The Enormous Egg.* Jim Trelease's *The Read-Aloud Handbook* will give you inspiration, justification and suggestions of books to use.

When you see how much children enjoy and respond to your reading-aloud sessions, you will want to try your hand at the real magic, the storytelling. It's a little like "Look ma, no hands!" when a story comes out of your head with no book and no page turning to distract you from your eye contact with the audience. Children will think you're magic, and you will be! □

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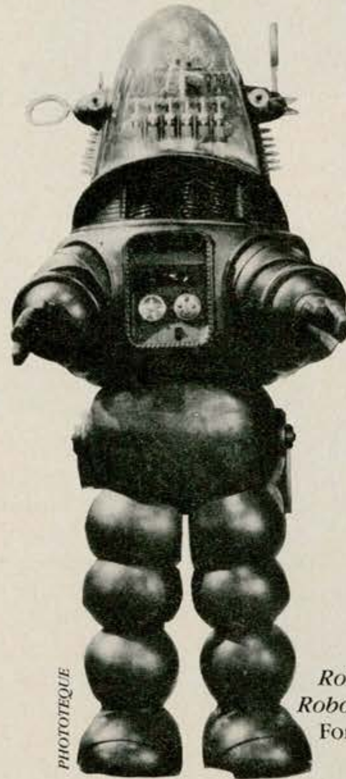
TEACHING FACT WITH FICTION

Star Trek Goes to School


PHOTOTEQUE

Robby the Robot, from Forbidden Planet.

BY LEROY W. DUBECK AND SUZANNE E. MOSHIER

THE FINAL *Star Wars* battle scene, in which Luke Skywalker and the forces of the rebellion attack the dreaded Death Star, seems startlingly real. The attacking starfighters have wings and make banked curves as they swoop down to attack the enemy space station, much as in a World War II aerial dogfight of the sort we've seen in many movies past.

But consider carefully the banked curves executed by the starfighters. These maneuvers supposedly occur in outer space — a near-perfect vacuum — and banking of airplanes can occur only because of the effect of an atmosphere on their wings. In the absence of an atmosphere, a space vehicle couldn't make a banked turn, even if it did have wings, unless it used auxiliary reaction rockets. Thus *Star Wars* illustrates the violation of a basic physical principle and could be used in the classroom as a takeoff point for discussing the scientific principles involved.

There are many science fiction films that can be used to illustrate scientific principles (or their violation), and our experiences in the classroom show strong promise for their more widespread use educationally. In 1978, one of us was awarded a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant to develop a college-level course for adults that would use science fiction films to introduce the principles of physics. This four-semester-hour, non-calculus course for non-science majors has now been taught successfully at Temple University eight times, to over 300 students.

During the class periods, we screen thirteen science fiction films in their entirety. Since the screening of the films takes about 40 percent of each 3-1/3-hour class,

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Leroy W. Dubeck is professor of physics at Temple University in Philadelphia. Past president of the U.S. Chess Federation, he writes a weekly syndicated chess column. Suzanne E. Moshier is associate professor of biology at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Her current focus of study is marine sponges and their associated photosynthetic bacteria.

UNIVERSAL PICTURES

The Andromeda Strain *suggests discussions of microbial organisms. Above, the research team works feverishly to identify the pathogen from space. Below, a team member's elaborate garb shields her from contamination.*

PHOTOTEQUE

obviously less material can be covered than in a standard introductory-level physics course. However, on the basis of test grades and class interaction, the students master the material covered better than a typical class of non-science majors. Many students say they would never have enrolled in a traditional science course, but that after exploring scientific concepts through science fiction films, they are now interested enough to sign up for additional science courses.

The popularity of science fiction films with our youth has been convincingly demonstrated at the box office by the success of *Star Wars, The Empire Strikes Back, Return of the Jedi, E.T.* and numerous other science fiction films. The *Star Trek* series, the TV show and the movie sequels, has millions of devotees. At *Star Trek* conventions, hundreds of "Trekkies" sit enraptured by discussions of the "technical" aspects of (among other things) a Klingon battle cruiser.

Our goal is to tap this great attraction that science fiction films hold for young people, and to use the films as educational tools to build interest in and knowledge of science. We believe that science fiction films, with appropriate supporting materials, can help reverse the negative attitudes that many students have toward science by moving them from familiar experiences that they find interesting to unfamiliar experiences that they anticipate to be dull and difficult — like learning physics, astronomy, biology and chemistry.

We find that, frequently, the scientific principles illustrated (or violated) in the films are better understood by the student than when they are encountered solely through more traditional approaches. In film form, abstract principles of physical science are directly visualized and therefore, for most students, easier to understand than any mathematical formulation of them could ever be. This is especially helpful to inexperienced science students, who often find it difficult to visualize the real applications of the subjects studied. In addition, since scientific principles are often misrepresented in the films, students learn to evaluate video material with a critical eye as they are assisted by their teachers in determining the validity of the film presentations. Given the fact that pre-college students get much of their information from the visual media, this process of video criticism should help them become more discerning viewers.

AS A result of the initial success, in 1984 NSF awarded us a second grant — this time to develop materials to assist teachers in a ninth- or tenth-grade general science course to use science fiction films to

Dr. Morbius discovers he is guilty of murder in Forbidden Planet, *a film that invites examination of relativity, radiation, gravity, and other scientific principles.*

enrich their regular curriculum. In collaboration with six science teachers from greater Philadelphia, we wrote teachers' guides for nine films, each of which we analyzed in great detail. The guides provide a narrative summary of each film and a discussion of the focal science lesson or lessons. For example, the teacher's guide for the film *Destination Moon* discusses gravity and Newton's laws and their relationship to outer-space travel; the concept of momentum and how it applies to the firing of a rocket; the topographic character of the Moon's surface; and the tracking powers of radar.

The teachers involved in the project believe that, if films are shown in toto in class, only one can be analyzed per month. However, there are other ways to handle the viewing of the films. One modification is to screen only segments of a film in class. The advantage is that no time will be spent viewing portions not directly connected to the illustration of a given physical principle. The disadvantage is a reduction in the positive emotional impact that comes from watching the entire film.

Another option that is becoming increasingly feasible is to have students screen the films individually, using videocassette recorders in the school or at home. Approximately 20 percent of American homes had a VCR by December of last year, double the number of the previous year. Estimates this year have already raised that figure to about 30 percent, and with the cost of the machines dropping, the percentage may increase substantially by the end of 1985.

The advantage of screening films in this manner is that it does not usurp precious class time. Also, students may replay specific segments until they fully understand the principles under study.

The cost of purchasing five or ten videocassette copies of a film so that students may take them home is modest. A school system buying in quantity, directly from a distributor, should probably pay less than $30 per copy. Such purchases compare favorably with the cost of renting a 16-millimeter film for a few days.

TO GIVE you a clearer idea of how one might use a science fiction film in the classroom, let's take a brief look at just a few of the many discussion topics suggested by two well-known films, *Forbidden Planet* and *The Andromeda Strain.* For those of you who aren't science fiction buffs, we'll start each discussion with a brief plot summary.

Forbidden Planet, a 1956 MGM film, takes place on the distant planet Altair 4, in the year 2200. A rescue expedition from Earth finds only two survivors of an earlier landing party, Dr. Morbius and his daughter, along with the remnants of a long-extinct super-civilization, the Krell.

An 8,000-cubic-mile power plant has continued to maintain itself for the 200,000 years since the Krell race vanished. We are shown the inside of the plant, which is powered by 9,200 nuclear reactors, and the Krell laboratory, which monitors the power being drawn from the plant. Row after row of dials line the laboratory walls, with each dial registering ten times the power consumption of the previous dial. We learn that the plant can project energy to any point on the planet and convert that energy directly into matter.

We also meet Robby the Robot, who also does some converting of energy into matter, producing everything from chic clothes to food to expensive jewelry!

From the time of their arrival, the rescue expedition is attacked repeatedly by an invisible monster. Some shrewd investigation by the expedition's commander reveals that the "monster" is in fact an energy force being amplified and projected by the Krell machine. The source of the force proves to be Dr. Morbius himself, whose repressed subconscious (his "id") has been fueling the machine's murderous intent. We learn that the Krell, despite their awesome scientific genius, had similarly fallen victim to the device.

Morbius, consumed with the guilty realization that his own subconscious has murdered the other members of his party, sacrifices himself to destroy the Krell device. The rescue party escapes in the nick of time as the planet is destroyed by an explosive chain reaction in the thermonuclear furnaces.

Using the film as a takeoff point, there are numerous scientific concepts that can be explored and developed with the students. Here are some examples.

Relativity: The opening of the film describes a spaceship traveling at greater than the speed of light. This is at present considered physically impossible. Light itself is the only entity that can travel at the speed of light. Any object with a non-zero rest mass cannot travel at the speed of light since its mass would become infinite according to Einstein's theory of relativity.

Gravity: The commander informs his crew that the planet's gravity is 89.7 percent that of earth's. He then instructs the crew members to adjust their equipment accordingly. This suggests that each crew member can

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Aliens in their spacecraft hover high above New Jersey in The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai, *a recent film that suggests consideration of how atoms are constructed.*

alter gravity in some way. We know of no mechanism for doing this; however, artificial "gravity" can be "created" by rotating an object. For example, someone standing on the edge of a rapidly turning merry-go-round will feel a "pull" toward the rim. With eyes shut, a person might mistake this sensation for the pull of gravity. But it is not really gravity. Furthermore, gravity could not be simulated in this way for an astronaut standing stationary on an alien planet.

Engineering: Dr. Morbius describes the Krell machine and power plants as a cube, 20 miles on each side, which occupies a volume of 8,000 cubic miles (20 x 20 x 20 = 8,000). Later, Morbius says that this great machine is powered by 9,200 thermonuclear reactors, which are buried 50 miles beneath the planet's surface. Is this 50-mile dimension inconsistent with the 20-mile dimension stated above, or does it mean that the power plants were all located below the 8,000-cubic-mile machine?

Radiation: Morbius cautions his visitors not to look directly into the thermonuclear furnace, but rather to view it indirectly with a mirror. He says that "man may not look on the Gorgon's face and live" — a reference to the Medusa legend. If looking directly into the furnace is fatal, presumably because of radiation, then turning one's back on the radiation to view the mirror image would be equally deadly.

Energy and Mass: The explosion of the entire planet is implausible. Since Altair 4's surface gravity nearly equals that of earth's, we may assume that the size of the planet is also similar. Even exploded simultaneously, 9,200 of our most powerful hydrogen bombs would not destroy a planet of earth's size. One can only infer that the Krell nuclear power plants are each immensely greater, if they are to explode, than any hydrogen bomb built by man. But why would the Krell build in a simple mechanism to destroy their entire planet? And why does the departing rescue expedition take 24 hours to travel 100,000,000 miles when a premise of the film is that they can travel faster than light? It takes light less than ten minutes to travel this distance.

Robotics: The rules of conduct programmed into Robby are virtually identical with the three laws of robotics suggested by Isaac Asimov, namely, 1) A robot may not injure a human being or through its inaction allow a human being to be injured; 2) A robot must obey an order given it by a human being except when obeying it would conflict with law number 1; 3) A robot must protect its own existence except when such action would violate laws number 1 and number 2. Should these rules be programmed into all robots?

IN THE *Andromeda Strain,* a 1970 Universal picture, an infectious agent from space threatens to consume earth in a deadly epidemic. A speck of space dust on a satellite returning to Earth is the source of the new pathogen that devastates humans.

The story tells how a special research team, working in an elaborate underground facility, works to identify the microbe and to find a way to destroy it. The facility has a mechanism for self-destructing with a nuclear bomb should there be any danger that the extraterrestrial microbe would escape. In the suspenseful climax, the race to learn to control the microbe is complicated by an inappropriate triggering of the nuclear self-destruct mechanism. In the nick of time, the detonation of the bomb is stopped. The scientists will be able to share their knowledge of the "Andromeda strain" organism with the world.

This film invites discussions of the biology of microbial organisms, especially viruses and other non-cellular forms. Direct use of radiant energy by organisms, the basis of pathogenicity, methods of isolation and identification, microbial physiology and ecology and

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safety procedures can all be fruitfully addressed. The premise of a pathogen coming to earth from space permits discussion also of exobiological topics that explore the mechanisms likely to account for life as it exists on Earth in terms of the chemical composition of the entire galaxy.

Various aspects of human physiology are touched on in the film, but since the salvation of humankind hinges largely on the pH-dependence of the space microbe, the film allows discussion of acid-base physiology, including its relationship to respiration. The Andromeda strain undergoes a mutation by the end of the film, and its properties change drastically as a result, thus opening up the topic of the nature of mutation and its occurrence in microbial populations.

Like the other science fiction films, this one gives the class ample opportunity to discover scientific inaccuracies or impossibilities. Here are some examples.

Microbiology: The elaborate decontamination of the research team upon entering their research facility seems foolish. First of all, it is impossible to decontaminate living human beings. They will continue to harbor and release microorganisms. Second, if the research facility were as good as is claimed, it would isolate the researchers from the Andromeda strain completely. Third, the capsule is found already opened in a physician's office and is thus already contaminated, a problem that should have posed greater difficulties for the scientific studies than microbes on the researchers' bodies.

Exobiology: The movie's claim that bacteria had been discovered in meteorites is nonsense. No living organisms have been found in meteorites or on the surface of Mars or on the Moon.

Physics: The idea that Andromeda is a little nuclear reactor is erroneous. A reactor generates energy by breaking apart heavy atomic nuclei such as uranium into smaller nuclei. Andromeda seems to function in reverse of a reactor, taking in energy and producing matter, not starting with matter and giving off energy. Furthermore, the claim that a nuclear bomb exploding at the base of the research facility would create countless new mutations of Andromeda is nonsense. A hydrogen bomb, for example, would produce a huge fireball at its center in which the temperature is typically tens of millions of degrees, and thus any biological structure enveloped by the fireball would be torn apart. Therefore, the Andromeda strain would no longer exist at the research facility.

WE SHOULD note that in the eight times the college course has been taught, a total of over 45 different science fiction films have been studied. Thus, there is ample material to stimulate both instructors and students. Also, while the recent NSF grant was directed specifically towards a ninth- or tenth-grade general science course, the films could be used at several grade levels.

We have all, as teachers, parents and moviegoers, seen the energy and devotion that children bring to science fiction films. Teachers who can channel even a portion of that enthusiasm into serious scientific study may find, as we did a la *Star Wars,* that "the force is with them." □

COMPELLING BELIEF
(Continued from page 35)

will have developed ways of thinking and acting that are incompatible with the new social order. Such people can be compelled to accept communism through repression and regimentation, but they cannot be forced to embrace it. Young children, on the other hand, enter the classroom with open minds, much more easily shaped and convinced. In particular, children are understandably vulnerable to the message that it is they who will be the masters of the new society.

Although there are few worthwhile studies of the impact of communist indoctrination in the Third World, we do have an interesting account of the Cuban school system written by Jonathan Kozol, an American educator who makes no secret of his admiration for Cuba's school policies, which he finds clearly superior to those of the United States.[5] Yet to many Americans, the principal, albeit unintended, message of Kozol's study would be the insidious effects of an educational system that relies on the rawest kind of propaganda in the teaching of history and current world events.

Among the schools visited by Kozol was one named the "School of the Martyrs of Kent" — referring, of course, to the students killed during an anti-war demonstration at Kent State University. Large photographs of the slain students were displayed in the school, as were posters with such slogans as "Against the Neutron Bomb." A large map of South America was highlighted by a large swastika emblazoned over the area where Chile should be.

Even more revealing were Kozol's discussions about politics with a class of 14-year-olds. Asked about the meaning of freedom, a boy responded: "Freedom means — when you are free from international capitalistic exploitation." As for freedom of speech, a girl declared that it would be important "if you want to try to build up solidarity in a land that is oppressed." Pressed as to whether freedom of speech existed in Cuba, a student retorted: "We don't perceive that as a useful question. In our society we are already free from exploitation now."

At another point, Kozol and the Cuban students discussed World War II, which the class happened to be studying at the time. According to the students, the fascist side included Germany and Italy, with no mention of Japan. Not surprisingly, the most important participant on the anti-fascist side was identified as the Soviet Union. The United States, on the other hand, "joined the war but also made enormous profit at the same time. A lot of people in the U.S. made an awful lot of money from the war." And while Hitler was described as a racist, his "racism was capricious." Among Hitler's victims, the only people singled out for specific mention were the Russians; the Jews were not mentioned at all.

The students interviewed by Kozol were among the brightest and most politically conscious in Cuba, boys and girls who will be future leaders of their nation. Kozol was a foreign visitor, an American at that, and this fact may have been a factor in the orthodox answers to Kozol's more probing questions. Yet Kozol makes clear that these students were not simply repeating, robot-like, slogans that had no meaning to them. One is rather struck by the students' utter vehemence in explaining their political beliefs, whether they concerned Cuba's intervention in Angola, the quality of the state-controlled Cuban press, racism in America or political prisoners (there are none in Cuba, we are assured). Yet the positions they defend are altogether predictable to anyone possessing a rudimentary familiarity with Soviet propaganda. It is especially ironic to hear children denounce American imperialist domination of the developing world with formulas and phrases that, above all else, demonstrate the overwhelming degree to which Cuban society has fallen under Soviet influence. Most telling here is the somewhat confused reading of World War II. The most glaring inaccuracies and omissions — America as a war profiteer, Japan as a nonparticipant, the omission of the Jews as principal victims of the Holocaust — can be traced to the Soviet, and not the Cuban, interpretation of history.

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gious presuppositions. Where communism differs from other systems is in the thoroughness of the indoctrination process and, most importantly, in the fact that communism is a system for export. Today, for example, Cuban "advisors" are playing the dominant role in the formulation of Nicaragua's educational priorities, while Soviet officials from the Asian republics have been given the assignment of transforming the schools of Afghanistan.

The nature of communist indoctrination also carries important implications as regard to the prospects for peace and global reconciliation. The real meaning of peace goes much deeper than signatures on arms agreements and peace treaties. It requires understanding, tolerance and mutual respect. That the average Soviet citizen could grasp the realities and complexities of American life after having been taught to despise and fear this society throughout his formative years strains the imagination. While we hear much today about the failure of Americans and Soviets to understand each other's society, this formulation, which apportions responsibility evenly between the two, misses the point. Genuine understanding will be impossible as long as indoctrination remains the supreme goal of Soviet-style education. One hopes for progress in this area. Unfortunately, the record of the Soviet Union and other communist countries in recent years, including the heyday of détente, gives little hope for optimism. □

1. This and subsequent Soviet examples are taken from *US/USSR Textbook Study Project: Interim Report,* published in 1981. The project, sponsored jointly by American educators and the Ministry of Education in the Soviet Union, examined how the history of each country was reflected in the school textbooks of the other nation.

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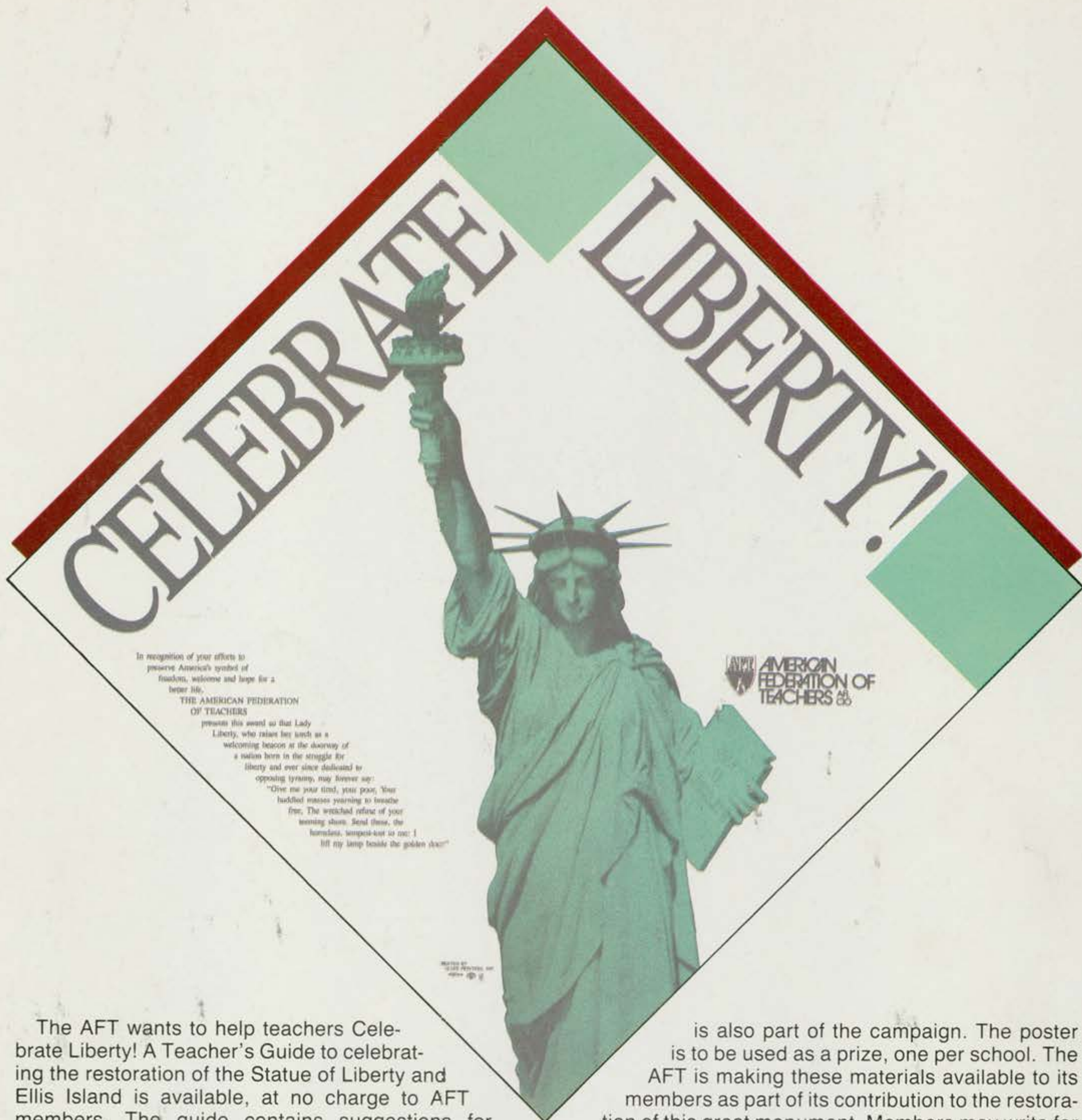

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