

value-laden, then all the outcomes will be attitudinal and value-laden, and the system becomes attitudinal and value-laden. . . .

### **New Age spies in the classroom**

The other thing that we will have is a mentoring program. Now, we have had a mentoring program for teachers in the state for a few years. We start out with beginning teachers coming out of school, and it is a good idea to put them in with a more experienced teacher. That's the way they sold this. The experienced teacher can be the mentor. Now, with OBE, beginning teachers *and* experienced teachers can have mentors. The language they've got in this bill is that experienced teachers who are "having difficulties" both inside and outside the classroom will now have a mentor.

This means that if I am a 17- to 20-year experienced teacher having difficulties (and no one has defined that term), they will put a mentor in my classroom with me. The problem with that is, that if we look at school districts like Bremerton, which have had OBE for the last four or five years, we see that there is coercion going on, and actual extortion. About half the staff hates OBE, and they've been told they *will not* say anything negative about it.

What we suspect will happen with this mentor program is that, because the whole system must shift to an OBE model, as a teacher, if you don't go along with it, you will be given a mentor, and be remediated, just like a child will be remediated if they don't demonstrate the desired outcome, until you change, until you accept outcome-based education. That means that the 17- to 20-year experienced teacher, who may be a very effective teacher with children, and who may be a good, solid, basic skills teacher, or teaches the subject matter very, very well, but who doesn't believe in outcome-based education, may have a 21- to 22-year-old OBE-oriented teacher following him around, being his mentor. I don't know how the union allowed this, except that the union signed on to the Governor's Council report. They basically have sold their teachers down the river.

This bill also tells the state superintendent to look at the laws and make recommendations on changes in the laws governing the non-continuance of contracts. If I do not comply with OBE, they remediate me with a mentor, and if I still don't comply—and I believe the terminology in the bill is "made sufficient progress"—they just won't renew my contract. . . .

### **Teaching patriotism is illegal**

All the way along, we heard that this bill, the education reform, was locally grown, but when we looked around at the other states, we found that their programs looked exactly like this one. Then we heard that we are going to deregulate the school system, so that people can have more local control. Sounds good. A lot of people bought into that. Well that was a lie. It was just a bold-faced lie by the Legislature.

There is a directive by the Legislature to the Commission on Student Learning, this non-elected board, to look at 216 laws for the state of Washington governing education, and see if they should be repealed.

So they weren't just deregulating, they wanted to take away a lot of the laws. We finally did get Sen. Dwight Pelz to admit that. He's the chair of the Senate Education Committee. We called Senator Gaspard's office (Senator Gaspard is the Senate majority leader) and said, "What about this?" He said don't worry about it, these are just the laws we have to repeal so that we can make outcome-based education work in the state.

We thought 216 laws was an awful lot of laws—the list is eight pages. You'll notice they didn't list the laws by title or anything, so we don't know what they are, they are just

## **Even American college students can barely read**

National attention has long been focused, and rightly so, on the problem of children from disadvantaged backgrounds who leave school unable to read even a simple English sentence. Less widely recognized, however, is the crisis among middle class, college-bound students.

Daniel J. Singal, a university professor writing in *The Atlantic Monthly* (November 1991), describes the abysmal reading skills of freshmen at some of the nation's best colleges. He estimates that today's college-bound high school senior scores 50-60 points lower on the verbal section of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and 25 points lower on the math section, than in 1970 (SAT scores run from 200 to 800). According to other sources, average verbal scores had already dropped 39 points between 1956 and 1974.

Singal writes:

"Those who tend to dismiss those sixty lost SAT points as insignificant haven't seen a college term paper lately. It's not that freshmen in 1991 are unable to read or write. Most of them possess what the National Assessment of Educational Progress calls 'satisfactory' skills in this area. But is that enough for college? Do they have sufficient command of the English language to comprehend a college-level text, think through a complex issue, or express a reasonably sophisticated argument on paper? Those of us who were teaching in the early 1970s can attest that the overwhelming majority of freshmen at the more selective colleges arrived with such 'advanced' skills. Now only a handful come so equipped."

numbers. So we went back and got a common school manual, which is all the laws that deal with education, and we started the laborious task in looking these laws up, one by one.

What we found was some very staggering, staggering things. There is a law on the books, folks, that requires all of our students in this state to be taught the U.S. and Washington State Constitutions. I kind of like it. There is a law that requires the teaching of morality and patriotism in the schools. Let me read it: "It shall be the duty of all teachers to endeavor to impress on the minds of their pupils the principles of morality, truth, justice, temperance, humanity, patriotism. To teach them to avoid idleness, profanity, and falsehood. To instruct them in the principles of free government, and to train them up to the true comprehension of the rights, duty and dignity of American Citizenship."

That law was on a list that is targeted for repeal. We were told that these were just the laws that they needed to repeal so that outcome-based education would work in this state. I have a real problem with that. If OBE needs to repeal laws like that, then I've got to tell you it is a bad program, and we shouldn't be doing it.

Some other interesting things came out. There is a law on the books which gives authority to the local school district board of directors to operate and stock their school libraries. That law was on that list, targeted for repeal. To us that sounds like twenty-first-century book burning. Because if the local school board no longer has the authority to operate and stock the libraries, who does? Will it be the non-elected Commission on Student Learning that decides what goes into those libraries? Many of you probably remember a movie

Singal goes on: "Countless times I have been amazed at how little students have managed to glean from a book I know they have read, to the point where they are often unable to recall the names of prominently mentioned figures. So much escapes them; even those of above-average ability absorb no more than a dusting of detail from a printed text."

Equally distressing, he says, is the rate at which today's students read. A professor at the University of Michigan who used to assign a book a week in the 1960s, now allows two to three weeks for each title, and has been forced to use simpler books. Twelve to fifteen books per semester used to be the rule of thumb at selective colleges; today, it is six to eight books, "and they had better be short texts, written in relatively simple English," according to Singal.

All too often, Singal reports, high school students "are given works that, as the English department at one highly ranked independent school puts it, are 'age-appropriate' and 'reflect concern for social pluralism.' 'Age-appropriate' means giving students assignments 'that reflect their interests as adolescents, that they can read without constant recourse to a dictionary, and from which they can take whatever they are inspired to take.' "

If a graduating senior has read *Catcher in the Rye*, but not Shakespeare or Poe, he or she arrives at college utterly unprepared for higher learning. This is what is happening today.

### **A deep-rooted problem**

Singal recommends that the quality and quantity of assigned reading for students at all grade levels be "dramatically increased." This, while necessary, is easier said than done. The roots of the problem run deep in our cul-

ture. Television, the "one-eyed babysitter," is one important factor, as a generation of children has been rendered intellectually passive and unaccustomed to using their minds to carry out enjoyable and worthwhile activities in their spare time. The pervasive influence of the 1960s counterculture is also to blame.

Allan Bloom documents in *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987) that there is a shocking lack of intellectual depth and moral values in American families today. Families which in times past would have gathered around the dinner table to read the Bible, today have nothing important to say to one another. "Our students," he writes, "have lost the practice of and the taste for reading. They have not learned how to read, nor do they have the expectation of delight or improvement from reading. . . . When I first noticed the decline in reading during the late sixties, I began asking my large introductory classes [at the university level], and any other group of younger students to which I spoke, which books really count for them. Most are silent, puzzled by the question. The notion of books as companions is foreign to them."

Bruno Bettelheim and Karen Zelan, in *On Learning to Read* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), trace the reading problem to, among other things, the deteriorating quality of the primers used to teach young children to read. Primers in the 1920s used an average of 645 words; in the 1930s, 333 words; in the 1940s-50s, 350 words; by 1960-63, pre-primers used 54-83 words, and primers 113-173 words. Yet a child of this age has a vocabulary of 4,000 words or more! The stories told in the basal readers, with this stunted vocabulary, are so boring that the child has no interest in learning to read them. He feels that he is being treated like a stupid person.—*Susan Welsh*