administrators know that the test this fall will not be the same one they've seen in the past."

Since most if not all states now have assessments (tests) similar to Michigan's, developed with advice and partial funding from the U.S. Department of Education, teachers nationwide are probably being given the same advice so that their students will do well on the test and their school will look good on the nationally-publicized wall charts.

Testing students' "backgrounds"

Of perhaps even more importance from the standpoint of de-emphasis of basic skills and invasion of privacy, are the following comments made by educators: "We're looking at the background of students, individual characteristics, the textbooks, everything....In the past reading was taught through learning sounds, letters and groups that letters make. Now the new approach takes into consideration the student's life, interests, everything...information on who the students are, their ages, family backgrounds, including income levels."

Professor Carbo, during her Portland lecture to Maine teachers, verified Bud Sargent's information by saying, "State tests in Michigan and Illinois also will be adapted to whole language....Previous reading tests have measured specific skills such as finding the main idea and supporting details. Instead, the new Michigan and Illinois tests focus on students' overall understanding of the critical concepts and ideas in a text."

And what "critical concepts and ideas" does one find in the Michigan whole-language reading texts which will most likely be reflected in the new NAEP reading test?

Teachers' objections to tests

They are controversial enough for the Michigan Department of Education to demand "security" for its U.S. Department of Education-funded whole-language pilot tests, and to have had hysterics when the parents of a child taking the reading test got possession of a test. The parents, both public school teachers, wrote a letter "To Whom It May Concern" which was circulated all over Michigan. Their concerns are: "(1) types of questions—value-related and personal evaluations; (2) require personal opinion answers—no right or wrong; (3) questions are isolated and not asked in relation to particular stories; (4) not effective reading test—doesn't test basic skills; (5) tests children's psychological areas without parental consent; (6) causes children to be confused as to what is expected of them." Their letter concluded: "As educators and parents of four children, we implore you to consider assisting in a legal battle against the state of Michigan's experimental test."

Isn't it sad when parents and teachers must become detectives and spies in order to find out what the education "change agents" have planned for their children and our nation? Like detectives, parents and teachers must search for all the pieces of this puzzle of "guaranteed illiteracy" and put them together in order to find out that the new whole-language fad is **required** by the federal Department of Education's new NAEP assessment and is **not,** as taxpayers are so often told, a result of work among teachers at the local or state level.

Does not the NAEP reading test's alignment to the discredited whole-language reading instruction spell disaster for any hoped-for improvement in our nation's schools and resulting ability to compete internationally? How long will we wait to demand action to stop our nation's slide into totalitarian illiteracy? Why don't our media education moguls, who seem almost to delight in parading uneducated American public school students across our TV screens for all the world to see, ever discuss the **real** cause of illiteracy: the use of whole-language/look-say reading instruction?

The wall of silence about phonics

A wall of silence, as potentially deadly as the Berlin Wall (if you cannot read, you are not free) has been erected, blocking out the views of pro-intensive phonics educators.

Professor Jeanne Chall, who heads Harvard's remedial reading laboratory, calls the move toward whole-language "shocking" and says, "there has been little research to document the method's success in this country...children are coming into the lab who were in whole language classes."

Marian Hinds, President of the Reading Reform Foundation in Tacoma, Washington, says, "The professors of reading, aided and abetted by the International Reading Association, are in the process of foisting on American primary schools another form of educational malpractice [whole-language] that will guarantee the continued intellectual crippling of American children for years to come."

Samuel Blumenfeld, reading teacher and author of numerous books on American education, says, "whole language proponents claim that they teach reading for 'meaning.' What they actually teach is reading for very limited meaning, for it is impossible to develop an extensive, complex reading vocabulary via that method. Once you've mastered the alphabetic system, everything in the library is at your disposal. How is it possible that after almost 60 years of failure, such utter nonsense as look-say and whole-language can still command the fervent allegiance of so many supposedly intelligent teachers?"

Dr. Kenneth Lexier, former Assistant Superintendent in a large school district in Maine, says, "the almost total avoidance of the research supporting a code emphasis [intensive phonics] in beginning reading instruction may be one of the most outrageous injustices perpetuated by our preservice training institutions. From small state colleges to major universities, the bias is clear and undeniable—phonics is out and whole language is in....This is a conspiracy deserving of a *Washington Post* expose."

Sigfried Engelmann, a researcher at the University of Oregon, says, "The whole language argument is a study in fantasy. The argument is simple-minded, at best. Yet in states like California, Washington, and Arizona whole language is the big thing...and the approach is actually treated as a serious approach, even though it doesn't have a shred of evidence to support the notion that it works well, let alone that it is the 'best' approach."

Our nation continues to be a "nation at risk" mainly because we have increasingly become a "nation of sheep" afraid to take a stand for our children and nation in opposition to the mammoth educational establishment which thrives financially on the serious problems associated with illiteracy. The more illiterates, the more social problems and crime. The more social problems and crime, the more courses in drug, alcohol, suicide, and sex education, and, of course, the greater the need for more teachers and counselors to deal, usually unsuccessfully, with those problems. (Note the push for tax-supported school-based clinics and daycare.)

Can we any longer trust or afford the education "experts" and social engineers to solve the problems they caused? According to Education Secretary Lauro Cavazos, the United States will invest more than $199 billion in precollegiate education this year. He said in the Department of Education's sixth annual report card on U.S. schools:

"We are already spending more money per student than our major foreign competitors, Japan and Germany. And yet our students consistently fall behind the competition in comparative testing. Looking at virtually every qualitative measure—college entrance exams, graduation rates, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and international assessments—we see our students performing minimally, lacking the advanced skills needed to succeed. This deplorable fact further underscores my belief that money alone is not the answer to our education deficit. Since 1982, we've seen per pupil spending rise from $3,160 to $3,977, a 26 percent increase. And that is in real terms, adjusted for inflation....We must do better or perish as the nation we know today."

Write Mrs. Barbara Bush at the White House, Washington, DC 20500, and tell her you support her efforts to wipe out illiteracy. Ask her to have Secretary of Education Cavazos authorize a controlled experiment whereby the three reading instruction methods are fairly tested. Designate ten schools to use intensive phonics, ten to use a regular basal reading program, and ten to use whole-language. In that way, we shall be able to determine once and for all which method is the most effective.

Write your Congressmen and ask them to put a hold on the new NAEP reading test scheduled for administration in 1990, pending an investigation of its alignment to one single discredited method of reading instruction, whole-language. Tell them that such an investigation **must** include the views of prominent educators who support intensive phonics reading instruction. Non-partisan citizen action on this extremely important civil rights issue is vital to the survival of our free society.

Additional Resources

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