

The Blumenfeld Education Letter

"My People Are Destroyed For Lack Of Knowledge" HOSEA 4:6

Vol. 9, No. 4 (Letter # 92)

EDITOR: Samuel L. Blumenfeld

April 1994

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide knowledge for parents and educators who want to save the children of America from the destructive forces that endanger them. Our children in the public schools are at grave risk in 4 ways: academically, spiritually, morally, and physically — and only a well-informed public will be able to reduce these risks.

"Without vision, the people perish."

Kentucky's OBE Experiment: Conflict, Confusion, and Lower Scores

Kentucky's adoption of Outcome-Based Education in 1990 was the result of the Kentucky Supreme Court's declaration on June 8, 1989, that the state's entire education system, in "all its parts and parcels," was unconstitutional. Presumably the system was unconstitutional because it did not provide equity in funding for all of the schools, and therefore did not give each child an equal education. Of course, the concept of equal education is as phony as the idea that all children have a right to be born to rich, loving parents. But today's courts believe that they can remake reality by judicial declaration. The Supreme Court went on to issue the following directive:

Since we have, by this decision, declared the system of common schools in Kentucky to be unconstitutional, Section 183 places an absolute duty on the General Assembly to re-create, re-establish a new system of common schools in the Commonwealth. . . . We view this decision as an opportunity for the General Assembly to launch the Commonwealth into a new era of educational opportunity which will ensure a strong economic, cultural and political future.

The judges, giddy with the godlike

power of having overturned the state's education system, then issued their "Seven Capacities" which, they said, should define the new curriculum for the schools. The Seven Capacities and their implications were spelled out in a reform proposal drawn up by Betty E. Steffy, Deputy Superintendent for Instruction, dated Aug. 21, 1989, and presented to the legislature. They read as follows:

1. Oral and Written Communication for a Complex, Rapidly Changing Civilization. Implies: Knowledge of the liberal arts, use of technology, life-long learning, human relations skills.

Let's deal with that first. The method of teaching reading and writing in OBE is whole language and invented spelling. Whole language produces crippled readers because it trains the child to view words holistically by their configurations instead of phonetically by their syllabic structure. To put it simply, ours is an alphabetic writing system in which letters stand for speech sounds. The way you become a proficient reader is to develop an automatic association between letters and sounds. That's how you develop

The Blumenfeld Education Letter is published monthly. Sources of products and services described are not necessarily endorsed by this publication. They are intended to provide our readers with information on a rapidly expanding field of educational activity. Permission to quote is granted provided proper credit is given. Original material is copyrighted by The Blumenfeld Education Letter. Subscription Rate: 1 year \$36.00. Address: Post Office Box 45161, Boise, Idaho 83711. Phone (208) 322-4440.

a *phonetic reflex*.

Whole language, on the other hand, forces children to look at written English as if it were Chinese, an ideographic writing system rather than an alphabetic one. The child is taught to look at words holistically, as if they were little pictures to be figured out by a variety of strategies, thus creating a *holistic reflex*. These strategies include picture cues, configuration cues, context cues, syntactic cues, and also graphophonemic cues. Now, if you ask a whole-language teacher whether he or she teaches phonics, they will all say yes, because graphophonemic cues refer to letter sounds, usually beginning consonants. But that is not the same as intensive, systematic phonics in which the child learns to read phonetically without the need for other cues. However, the important thing to know about the holistic reflex is that it creates a block against seeing words phonetically. In other words, it causes dyslexia or reading disability.

As for invented spelling, the child is given no instruction on how to hold a pen, how to form the letters correctly, or how to spell correctly. The child is expected to learn all of this on his or her own at some later date. So how is the child going to become a good communicator if he or she can't read or write properly? That's why we know that OBE is a fraud. Because they are not teaching the children intensive, systematic phonics, or proper penmanship and spelling. Let's go on to Capacity Two.

2. Informed Decision-Making Based on Knowledge of Economics, Social and Political Systems. Implies: Global knowledge, critical thinking skills, shifts from focus on factual knowledge to focus on the use of knowledge to make decisions.

Now what is critical thinking all about? It's about using the dialectic technique to destroy the child's beliefs in absolutes. The

dialectic method was used by the ancient Greeks and brought into the modern era by the German philosopher, Hegel. He believed that history progresses through a process of unceasing conflict, the dialectic, in which a prevailing view known as the thesis engages in conflict with its opposite, known as the antithesis, and when the thesis and antithesis get done beating each other up, they come up with a synthesis. This synthesis then becomes the new thesis which meets its antithesis, does battle, and creates a new synthesis.

According to Hegel, this process goes on forever and is the means by which God is perfecting Himself. Now, he's not talking about the God of the Bible. Hegel was a pantheist who believed that everything that exists in the universe is God, that we are part of God, and that God is in the process of perfecting himself through the dialectic.

Now the dialectic method is being used in the public schools to destroy the child's belief in Christian absolutes. That's what critical thinking is all about. Critical thinking is not the same as logical or clear thinking. Logical thinking is objective and supports absolute values. Critical thinking is subjective and undermines absolute values.

As for the idea that it is more important to teach how to use knowledge rather than to acquire it opens the door to a lot of pedagogical mischief. Knowledge is power and suggests its own uses. There is no such thing as a generic use of knowledge since there are so many different kinds of knowledge. But knowledge must come first. But in OBE the student is trained to become a processor of knowledge, not an accumulator or owner of it. Turning an empty-headed student into an effective processor of knowledge is equivalent to the alchemist's dream of turning lead into gold. Next is Capacity Three.

3. Citizens Role in Government. Implies: Understanding of how government and politics func-

tion at the local, state and national level, knowledge of how individuals can effect change through the political process.

Note that the emphasis is on effecting *change* through the political process. You can be sure that the change OBE promoters have in mind is changing our political system to one that will fit into the New World Order. Next is Capacity Four.

4. Knowledge of Self. Implies: Belief in self, [an] education system that enables students to realize their potential, elimination of schools based on a factory production model, recognition of student diversity and productivity, focus on strategies to promote physical and mental well-being.

The idea that the traditional public school is based on the factory production model of the Industrial Age is an important part of OBE's critique of traditional education. The OBE school, organized around outcomes, is supposed to be much more in tune with the Information Age. But with whole language low-level literacy an integral part of OBE, we find it hard to see how OBE is going to help students succeed in the "information" age. Also, when educators start talking about a child's "mental well-being," watch out. That means the child will be subject to psychological manipulation and therapy. All of that malarkey about "belief in self" has no business in the public school house. The school ought not be a psych lab, and teachers ought not be practicing psychiatry without a license. What does "belief in self" mean other than having confidence in one's abilities? It means being able to do things right. But if you are not taught to read properly, and you have little knowledge in your brain, what kind of self-confidence will that build? Next is Capacity Five.

5. Fine and Performing Arts for Understanding Cultural and Historical Heritage. Implies: The arts

are an integral part of the core curriculum, the arts to include all forms of creative expression.

I thought I'd have no trouble with that Capacity until I was given a little brochure in Kentucky about a forthcoming performance in Louisville of The Joffrey Ballet, dancing to music by Prince, entitled "Billboards." The brochure states:

When the daring Prince of rock meets the ambitious soul of The Joffrey Ballet, the result is an exciting performance blending tradition with cutting-edge rock 'n' roll. . . . Prince has been called "a modern Mozart and one of the most important figures in the history of music," and The Joffrey Ballet has long been considered one of the pre-eminent performing arts institutions in the United States.

Prince, "a modern Mozart and one of the most important figures in the history of music"? Prince is better known for his near pornographic performances than his resemblance to Mozart. But, believe it or not, the brochure explains to teachers how the performance meets the goals of Kentucky's Outcome-Based Education curriculum:

The cultural experience of seeing a world-renowned ballet company meets several goals and learner outcomes of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), and provides a positive educational experience through the arts. The following are suggestions for making *Billboards* a part of your KERA activities:

Goal 1 Basic Communication

Learner Outcome 1.14 - Construct meaning and emotions through music. Sample High School Activity:

By analyzing the music composed by Prince for the production of *Billboards*, students will accomplish this goal. . . .

Learner Outcome 1.3 - Constructing meaning from messages communicated in a variety of ways. Sample Middle School Activity:

By attending *Billboards*, students will be exposed to the beauty, grace and communicative powers of ballet. After watching the performance, students can be asked to describe the actions observed and the emotions displayed.

We have not seen The Joffrey Ballet nor heard Prince's music but we suspect that the dancers' gyrations to Prince's rock 'n' roll beat will communicate a somewhat steamy message. Somehow this writer feels that if students are to be taught to appreciate the arts that it is better to start with our classical heritage of music—the real Mozart, not a rock 'n' roll imitation — and classical ballet. The brochure further informs us that the performance is:

Presented with the support of the Mary and Barry Bingham, Sr. Fund. Made possible in part by Dance on Tour, a special initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts, in partnership with the Southern Arts Federation and the Kentucky Arts Council. The Joffrey Ballet's national tour is sponsored by Philip Morris Companies Inc.

So you can't even trust the educators or the government when it comes to the arts. It wasn't always that way. When I was in the third grade in public school in New York City, we had music appreciation. Our teacher set up a portable hand-cranked victrola on a table and played classical music selections. Although that took place sixty years ago, I still remember most of the selections played. Which simply indicates how well a child can learn and retain in memory what he or she considers to be of great value. And I believe the third grade is where I acquired my taste for classical music. My teacher had good taste. But can we say the same for OBE educators? Here's the next Capacity:

6. Demonstrated Student Competence at Graduation. Implies: Competence in core curriculum linked to diploma, recognizes student differences, calls for acquisition of life skills.

That, of course, is pure OBE. The student cannot graduate until he or she can demonstrate, not by simple written test, but by a behavioral performance that he or she

has achieved the visionary higher-order exit outcome. If you have trouble understanding what that's all about, you're not alone. Most teachers can't figure it out either. And that's why OBE is doomed to failure. It makes no sense. Here's Capacity Seven.

7. Kentucky High School Graduate Competitive in National Job Market. Implies: Kentucky high school graduate with skills equal to skill of graduates in other states.

Well if Kentucky's students are not taught to read and write properly, how are they going to graduate with skills equal to graduates in other states? That's easy. The graduates in the other states will be just as illiterate.

And there you have the Seven Capacities articulated by the illustrious Supreme Court of Kentucky. Needless to say, those breathtaking, overpowering ideas were put into the heads of the judges by education-reform "experts"—otherwise known as OBE carpetbaggers and change agents. Does anyone believe the judges dreamt them up on their own?

Meanwhile, in February 1989, Governor Wallace Wilkinson, by executive order, created a 12-member Council on School Performance Standards to determine what Kentucky's students "should know and be able to do and how learning should be assessed." After six months of "intensive effort" the Council came up with its Report in September 1989 which states:

This report provides a blueprint for a new Common Core of Learning stressing the application of knowledge rather than just accumulating knowledge, ways to measure learning to make sure the new learning objectives are being attained, and curriculum reform that will guide the student toward these objectives. . . . Additional time; resources; and the joint involvement of school staff, the community, business, and industry will be needed to provide the details and ownership for a workable Kentucky education plan.

Six months later, in March 1990, the Kentucky Education Reform Act, popularly known as KERA, became law. That was quite a hustle for legislation that imposed an entirely new philosophy of education on the state, one that required a tax increase of \$1.4 billion for the first two years of implementation. And what were they implementing? A totally new system of education with no real track record of success, no guarantee that it would produce its much touted results. And all of this was accomplished in only nine months after the Supreme Court's decision!

Change-Agent Carpetbaggers

Who were the change-agent carpetbaggers who descended on Kentucky to foist OBE on the state before the people even knew what was being done to them? Most of them were brought into the state as paid "consultants" to the Task Force on Education Reform. Probably the most notable of them was David W. Hornbeck, former chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. He chaired the foundation's Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents, which, in June 1989, produced its report, "Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century." He was also former president of Carnegie's Council of Chief State School Officers. As of 1993, he was co-director of the National Alliance for Restructuring Education and a senior adviser to the Business Roundtable. The latter represents the collaboration of big business in the OBE movement.

Hornbeck has been credited, both in newspapers and from members of the Task Force, for single-handedly restructuring Kentucky's schools. KERA swallowed the entire Carnegie reform package. Once his job in Kentucky was finished, Hornbeck went

on to Iowa to do the same work there. And, as of February 1994, he was in Alabama leading the OBE drive there.

Mr. Hornbeck is a salesman for the New World Order, and what he is selling is the education system to go with it. That system is Outcome-Based Education, and that's what the Kentucky legislature bought in 1990.

If there is one thing we know about the New World Order it is that it's anti-Christian to the core, for it is based on a humanist view of man and society. That view is clearly stated in Humanist Manifesto I, issued in 1933:

Religious humanists regard the universe as self-existing and not created. Humanism believes that man is a part of nature and that he has emerged as the result of a continuous process. . . . Humanism asserts that the nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values. . . . In place of the old attitudes involved in worship and prayer the humanist finds his religious emotions expressed in a heightened sense of personal life and in a cooperative effort to promote social well-being. . . . Man is at last becoming aware that he alone is responsible for the realization of the world of his dreams, that he has within himself the power for its achievement.

What the humanists are telling us, in other words, is that we don't need God! And that's what OBE tells children: We don't need God. Humanist Manifesto II, issued in 1973, reiterates what the earlier Manifesto said:

As in 1933, humanists still believe that traditional theism, especially faith in the prayer-hearing God, assumed to love and care for persons, to hear and understand their prayers, and to be able to do something about them, is an unproved and outmoded faith. Salvationism, based on mere affirmation, still appears as harmful, diverting people with false hopes of heaven hereafter. Reasonable minds look to other means of survival.

We believe . . . that traditional dogmatic or authoritarian religions that place revelation, God, ritual, or creed above human needs and experience do a disservice to the human species. . . . As non-

theists, we begin with humans not God, nature not deity. . . . [W]e can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species. . . . No deity will save us; we must save ourselves.

That's the non-theistic religion that's subtly woven through every page, every lesson of OBE. Humanist Manifesto II also calls for the creation of a New World Order. It says:

We deplore the division of humankind on nationalistic grounds. We have reached a turning point in human history where the best option is to *transcend the limits of national sovereignty* and to move toward the building of a world community in which all sectors of the human family can participate. Thus we look to the development of a system of world law and a world order based upon transnational federal government.

To put it as simply and bluntly as possible, OBE is humanism transformed into public school curriculum. In other words, Transformational OBE is turning Kentucky's public schools into humanist parochial schools in which the overriding aim is to deChristianize the children and turn them into humanists.

Another OBE carpetbagger was Frank Newman, president of the Education Commission of the States, a Carnegie supported agency. Newman was quoted in the *Lexington Herald-Leader* (7/28/89) as saying, "It's no longer a question of whether Kentucky can compete with Tennessee. It's a question of whether Kentucky can compete with Korea." He also was hired as a consultant to the Task Force.

Another change-agent of note was a gentleman by the name of Harold Hodgkinson who managed to keep the kettle of reform boiling by way of critical letters and press interviews that stirred up response. In this way it became possible to identify key members in both conservative and liberal education camps, making it easier to dis-

credit the opposition before they knew what hit them. Hodgkinson has the best change-agent credentials: a stint at the Center for Research and Development at the University of California at Berkeley (1968), Director of the Carnegie Commission on Institutions in Transition Study (1968-70), recipient of a Carnegie grant in 1988 for a project by the National Institute of Education.

In other words, KERA is not the product of the people of Kentucky. It's the product of a small, Carnegie-financed cadre of change agents whose job it is to bring all of public education in America under firm control of a centralized power in Washington. How they did it in Kentucky is simply a model for them to use in doing it elsewhere. For example, in New Hampshire the same strategy is being used by first getting that state's Supreme Court to rule that the state's public education system is inequitable and therefore requires radical reform. And before you know it, as if by magic, there's an OBE reform bill being considered in the legislature.

A National Fraud

The American people should know that they are being had. They will be spending billions of dollars on education reform from coast to coast in the expectation that the next generation will be well educated, and when they find out that they are not, who will pay for this fraud? None other than the taxpayer. You can sure that the educators will find reasons why the plan failed. I can just hear them saying it now: the idea of OBE was great. It was just poorly implemented because of lack of money, lack of parental support, and opposition from Christian fundamentalists. It would have worked had not radical rightists misinformed a gullible public about what OBE truly is. That's what they will say, because generally that's what they always say.

Is KERA working? What kind of results are the people of Kentucky getting from OBE which has now been in place since 1990? An extensive article on KERA in *Education Week* of April 21, 1993 provides some illuminating information. It says:

Although Kentucky is still in the process of developing a full-blown assessment system, interim measures in reading, writing, math, science, and social studies were given to all students in grades 4, 8, and 12 last year.

For the first time in the state's history, how pupils performed was compared not against each other but against absolute standards for what students should know and be able to do.

The state determined how many students performed at the "novice," "apprentice," "proficient," and "distinguished" levels.

The results were startling. Roughly 90 percent of the state's students scored below the "proficient" level, including many who have traditionally done well on other measures of performance. . . .

Gerald Wischer, the president of the Ohio Valley National Bank in Henderson, says, "Those tests didn't come out nearly as well as the community thought they should."

"Maybe," he speculates, "we're not as good as we thought we were."

So there you are. I suppose it's unfair to judge OBE on the basis of these first tests. After all, KERA has only been in place three years. Kentucky's commissioner of education, Tom Boysen, described KERA as the "second-greatest revolution in American public education." But it's probably the costliest, so far. In the article on KERA just quoted, we read:

The law specifies six learning goals that all Kentucky students must meet. (Since the law's passage, those goals have been elaborated into 75 "valued outcomes.") It then orders the state to develop a new system of portfolios, performance assessments, and paper-and-pencil tests to measure children's progress. . . .

[The law] requires that nongraded-primary programs be established in every elementary school by [the fall of 1993]; that high-quality preschool pro-

grams be provided for all 4-year-olds at risk of educational failure; that a network of family-resource and youth-service centers be created at or near schools in which at least 20 percent of students are eligible for free or subsidized school meals; and that extended-school services, such as before- and after-school tutoring, be provided for youngsters in need of extra help.

By the way, according to an education department spokesperson, those 75 "valued outcomes" were taken directly out of Bloom's Taxonomy. As you can imagine, all of this is confusing enough to parents. But what about the teachers? How do they feel about all of this?

"Our teachers are exhausted, to be quite frank," says Jim Young, the superintendent of the Russellville Independent School district in southwestern Kentucky. "And I think this is a statewide phenomenon. They are just worn out."

Principals complain that it's impossible to keep up with all of the paperwork and reading materials generated by the law. Phyllis Becker, an English and Latin teacher at Henderson County High School, says, "I've been taken out of my classroom so much for meetings and committees and workshops that I don't feel I'm doing as good a job as I have done in the past."

[Gayle Ecton, Henderson's superintendent, complains], "We've got teachers who've been teaching 20 or 25 years, and then all of a sudden we say, 'Let's do cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and the whole-language approach and use developmentally appropriate materials.' It's overwhelming, and you get more resistance."

There you have it. The whole-language approach being shoved down the throats of teachers and students, an approach that will create even more illiteracy than we have now.

Perhaps the most eloquent complaint about OBE is to be found in *The Hancock Clarion* of 12/30/93, an article by Eddie Price, a 39-year-old teacher at Hancock County High School. Mr. Price has taught school for 17 years. He writes:

I agree that education in Kentucky needs reform, but KERA is NOT the answer. I am not working for any particular group; I'm battling alone — one small voice in a wilderness of state-controlled propaganda. This monster is so huge, so complex, so twisted, that it can't be attacked with a simple argument. I can only share my own un-mandated thought in the hope that others will listen and act. . . . I MUST speak out against what I perceive as a massive wrong in education. . . .

Like most teachers I am enthusiastic about new discoveries, new directions in teaching. . . . For that reason I resolved to give KERA my sincerest efforts. Schools were literally being forced to undergo change, so I decided to willingly comply. . . .

The perpetrators of KERA began inundating our schools with mountains of regulations, restrictions, and KERA mandates. Most of the guidelines were vague, subjective, and even contradictory; no one in the state department seemed to know what was going on. . . .

Then the state passed down a list of KERA-mandated outcomes — [75] VALUED Outcomes. Everything that would be taught would be reordered to meet these VALUED outcomes. A few weeks later these outcomes were labeled "Learner Outcomes." I learned that this change was effected to quiet concerned groups across the state. Citizens were questioning the concept of the state mandating what values would be taught. . . . I began to realize that I wasn't in total agreement with the state. . . . Our curriculum would have to be pared down and structured around values and attitudes. We were directed by the state to "weed out unimportant material" that did not meet the VALUED (that's what they really are) Outcomes. . . .

In 1992 I applied with a teaching partner for a state grant to develop an interdisciplinary unit which would link World History, World Literature, and other classes together. . . . We competed with other school teams across the state and tied for the winning unit! . . .

Then came the "accountability factor." . . . Specific content was not mandated — only the vague and highly subjective Values Outcomes. . . . When teachers voiced concerns about not meeting the Values Outcomes, they were "soothed" with the explanation that schools would be given the chance to improve. "A Kentucky Distinguished Educator will be sent to your building to help you grow." Then I learned that this official had the absolute power to declare the school "A School in Crisis"! The principal, and individual teachers could be eliminated with the single stroke of a pen. . . .

I pressed on, learning as much about KERA as

possible although in disagreement. I began implementing it into classroom. I attended special workshops on Multiple Intelligences. . . . I was DISMAYED when the KIRIS Tests were administered! These evaluated only one area of intelligence — the linguistic area! One of the questions required the students to discuss pictures of ballet, African tribal dancing and a Spanish folk dance. . . . [W]hat horrified me was the fact that I as a Social Studies teacher had "failed" to teach those dances. . . . [N]o way could I have anticipated this question that would, in reality, measure 33% of what I had taught for the '92-'93 school year! . . . When Social Studies scores dropped slightly at our school, I initially felt guilt and shame. . . .

This autumn I attended the Kentucky Council for the Social Studies in Louisville, where I found my fears echoed on a much broader scale. Social Studies scores had "dropped" dramatically statewide and teachers who had tried to embrace KERA had been rudely slapped in the face. . . .

When I sat down and read the entire history of KERA's evolution, I realized that our lawmakers and, even worse, our public had been skilfully and strategically duped. KERA had been slickly packaged in a deceptive language of "glittering generalities" that the public seemed eager to swallow in the name of reform. . . . Pro-KERA articles and comments have no problem making headlines while others with opposing views must pay exorbitant sums for "political advertising". Massive public disenchantment and frustration is downplayed as "concern associated with change"; teachers who speak out against perceived wrongs feel threatened and run the risk of being cast as "anti-reformers" or "traditional diehards opposed to improvement," or even "hidebound"! . . . For a "dissident," teaching in the public schools today is similar to living under a Stalinist "Reign of Terror." Many teachers submit their horror stories and misgivings to anonymous publications or ask legislators not to quote them — for fear of repercussions. . . .

That's what OBE is doing to Kentucky as seen through the eyes and experience of a dedicated teacher. And that's what the promoters of OBE would like to do in every state in the Union. Can OBE be stopped? Yes, if the parents and opposing teachers march on their state capitols and read the riot act to their legislators.

"The best safeguard against crime is godly men and a godly society." —R. J. Rushdoony