PS for 4/4/91

Schools Launch Offensive Against Parents

The most controversial textbooks used in public schools today are the elementary school readers called **Impressions**. Parents are up in arms against them in many states and at least one lawsuit has been filed.

Harcourt Brace Jovanovich (HBJ), which through its Holt Rinehart and Winston subsidiary publishes these Kindergarten-through-6th-grade- readers, is fightinq back. This column has obtained a copy of a confidential defense kit, consisting of 359 unnumbered pages, which HBJ is using to help schools to battle parental influence.

A major reason why parents object to **Impressions** is that so many of the stories are too frightening and morbid for little children and the illustrations are too bizarre. Typical examples are a monster fastening its teeth into a head and tearing it off and a demon who sits on a child's head.

The HBJ defense kit makes a contradictory reply: (a) the scary themes are "not predominant," but anyway (b) scary stories actually have a "positive developmental" effect because they provide "bibliotherapy, whereby children can confront and resolve their fears in a fictional setting."

The revelation that elementary schoolchildren are subjected to "bibliotherapy" in the classroom will be quite shocking to those who had not realized that the public schools have been taken over by pseudo-psychologists trying to mold the psyches of captive audiences of little children.

The HBJ defense kit also has a two-part contradictory reply to parental charges that **Impressions** promotes New Age religious practices, witchcraft, and the occult. HBJ protests that there never was "any intent" to promote any religious belief, but that humanism and existentialism "have never been considered as religions," implying that their use in the classroom is acceptable.

The kit claims that "the literature in **Impressions** is quality literature." HBJ's criteria for "quality literature" includes: "A balance of rural versus urban settings, multicultural and multiracial diversity, female and male protagonists, positive portrayals of seniors, Canadian and International authors, men and women writers,

classic and contemporary selections, positive portrayals of people with disabilities, and a variety of genres."

In other words, HBJ has adopted the guidelines of the Politically Correct movement. Under this P.C. movement, which is currently sweeping the college campuses, everything must be judged first of all by its political content, even first-grade readers.

Another reason parents object to **Impressions** is that the Kindergarten-through-6th-grade series uses the "whole language" methodology of teaching reading instead of phonics. AII research shows that phonics is the best way to teach a child to read the English language, and "whole language" is just the trendy new name for the discredited word-guessing system known as "whole word" or "look-say."

The advocates of whole language assert that the child should be taught to read whole paragraphs and stories without ever learning the sounds and syllables that make up the words. How is this possible?

Here is how the answer is inadvertently revealed in the HBJ kit: "A whole language curriculum uses **predictable materials** which allow children to anticipate what is going to come next. . . The children are able to use the pictures to help them figure out what the text might be 1ikely to say." (emphasis in the original)

"Predicting" what a story is likely to say is another term for guessing. It certainly is NOT learning how to read. Predicting is made easy by the technique of having the teacher first read the story to the child who then, in combination with the pictures, can guess at the content of the printed page and pretend to be reading.

The HBJ defense kit is apparently part of a coordinated attack against the right of parents to review, supervise and veto curricula they find dangerous or objectionable. Other examples include the 200-page manual of strategies to attack parents called "What's Left After the Right?" which was funded by the National Education Association.

Another is an article in the February issue of the **American School Board Journal** which sharply attacks parents, calling them "censors" and "extremists" and deploring the "worrisome" trend of "many school boards" to implement "opt-out" policies under which parents can request alternative reading material. Still another example occurred at a recent meeting of the California School Board Association,

which featured a workshop on how to insulate the curriculum from parental influence.