from Phyllis Schlaf1y

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The New Fad: Outcome-Based Education

“Who owns the children?” asks Peg Luksik of Johnstown, founder and chairman of a parents’ advocacy group called the Pennsylvania Parents Commission. “Who determines what values, attitudes, and beliefs they should hold?”

That's the question Pennsylvania parents, 1ed by Mrs. Luksik, are wrestling with as they square off against the state's education establishment over a new teaching fad called Outcome-Based Education (OBE) which the state Board of Education is attempting to force on the state's public schools. It amounts to a major reorganization of the public school system, especially the way children are taught, graded and graduated.

The Board of Education is ignoring the protests of parents, a thousand of whom gathered at the State Capitol to protest in November, and of Governor Bob Casey who asked that some outcomes be deleted. The parents have appealed to the State Legislature and are hopeful that it will reject OBE within the next several weeks.

According to Mrs. Luksik, there are three things wrong with OBE: it doesn't work, it's expensive, and its goals are affective (concerned with emotions and feelings) rather than academic (concerned with knowledge and skills).

For as long as most of us can remember, secondary schools have been structured on a measurable grid called the Carnegie units. The traditional high school course includes four units of English; three units each of mathematics, science and social studies; two units each of arts and humanities; a unit of health and physical education; and several electives. After you complete enough units with a passing grade, you get a high school diploma.

Outcome-Based Education tosses the traditional units out of the window and replaces them with “learning outcomes” that cannot be measured objectively by tests and for whj.ch there is no accountability to parents. Pennsylvania's 51 learning outcomes replace academic subject matter with attitudes and behaviors.

For example, Pennsylvania outcomes require students to “appreciate their worth as unique and capable individuals and exhibit self-esteem” and “apply the fundamentals of consumer behavior to managing available resources to provide for personal and family needs.” That's the sort of vague psychological mish-mash for which the American taxpayers will soon be paying $5,000 per year per student, if OBE is allowed to restructure the classroom.

Sue North, a Washington State parent who has been leading opposition to the implementation of Outcome-Based Education in her state, charges that the OBE's objective is [to mold our children into ‘politically correct' thinkers rather than to help them achieve academic excellence.” One outcome, for example, is citizenship.

But, according to Mrs. North, that doesn't mean patriotism and love of country, but an amalgamation of attitudes deemed appropriate for life under a world government. “lt's all group consensus collectivism,” she adds.

Mrs. North also objects to the experimental nature of OBE. “No research has proved it effective” she says. “Our kids are guinea pigs in a process that hasn't even been perfected.”

Washington's Goal 1 is for students to be able to “communicate effectively and responsibly in a variety of ways and settings.” No indication is given of what, is meant by “responsibly.” One of the outcomes listed under Goal 2 is for students to know and apply the core concepts and principles, among other things, of “healthful living."

What constitutes healthful living is not disclosed.

Goal 3 is for students to “think critically and creatively, and integrate experience and knowledge to form reasoned judgments and solve problems.” It is unclear whether or not “knowledge” includes the kind of specific fact-oriented knowledge that most of us consider an essential part of education.

Another downside of OBE is that individual differences among students will be stifled. Since every child must meet every outcome, children with a particular talent will be required to forfeit time in their area of strength in order to meet the outcomes in every other area.

Pennsylvania’s OBE plans “will spend a lot of money to make things worse,” according to Mrs. Luksik. School districts in Pennsylvania have predicted that first-year costs for additional staff, teacher retraining, etc., may run as high as three-quarters of a million dollars per district.

Under OBE, each child will have a computer file to track the child's efforts to master the learning outcomes. These “electronic portfolios” will take the place of traditional assessments and test results and will be the basis for the school's efforts to remediate whatever attitudes and behaviors the school deems unacceptable.

Parents are concerned about who will have access to these files and what will become of the data compiled on each student. Parents also worry that their children won't be learning anything worthwhile.