Beware of Gifted and Talented Invitations

by Phyllis Schlafly *July 16, 1997*

Any parent will puff up with pride when the school says that his child is "gifted and talented" and should be promoted into a special class with other talented students. But parents would be well advised to disregard the ancient maxim, Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.

I have just come into possession of a document that defines the "Philosophy" of the Gifted and Talented Program for a fourth grade New Jersey public school. It brags that this is "a DIFFERENTIATED [sic] program" in goals and curriculum, and that class size will be limited to twelve students.

The document starts out using all the trendy public school buzz words: self esteem, self-awareness, problem-solving, decision making, higher-level cognitive processes, self and peer evaluation, and self-direction.

Page after page instructs the teacher how to give guided imagery exercises under the caption "Your Mind's Eye." "Room will be darkened. Students must find comfortable position. Eyes may be closed or open. Closed is preferable. . . . Concentrate on slowly breathing, releasing energy from body."

"Tranquil Scene" is the title of one imagery exercise. "You're standing on a sandy beach. . . . Feel the sand between your toes. . . . See little white fluffy clouds drifting, drifting - - - - See yourself sipping your favorite drink. Taste it ... enjoy." At the end of the exercise, the teacher is instructed to count to ten, thereby "giving the students an opportunity to adjust to returning." It certainly sounds like an out-of-body experience if it takes a count of ten to return to reality.

A second instructional imagery exercise, called "Fruit," might substitute for lunch. "Sit comfortably. Relax. Close your eyes. See a large fruit.....See yourself taking a big bite. Hear the crunch. Enjoy the taste. Smell it."

This "Mind's Eye" curriculum is not just a mindless activity to entertain students. It is guided imagery with a purpose.

The teacher is instructed to "chart names of students, number of objects remembered and specifically what objects each student remembered." For what purpose will the teacher "chart" this imagery information about each student? To scan it into the child's computer profile? To follow up with psychiatric sessions with the school counselor? Is this how public schools are helping our best and brightest students?

Then the teacher is instructed to "conduct discussions on sleep and dream theory. " Students are told to "remember and record a dream" and to "discuss their dreams and discover how certain parts stand out, or are enlarged or diminished or distorted."

It's no wonder that parents are demanding laws to protect student privacy. The schools seem obsessed with gathering personal information from children that is none of the school's business.

The next exercise is supposed to help the students engage in "analysis." Indeed, it does take extraordinary analysis to understand why the curriculum calls this exercise "abstract" communication.

Students are told to "form a human sculpture which communicates their analysis in an abstract way - - - - Students get into small groups and create sculptures, making sure that at least one part of someone's body is connected to someone else's. A statement about a dream could be used to stimulate individual and group sculptures. "

That sounds mighty cozy. It surely will be more fun than the tiresome tasks traditionally given to fourth-graders, such as learning decimals, fractions, long division, and writing simple compositions.

Stay tuned; the fourth grade gifted and talented students are now ready to progress into some heavy learning. Students are taught to "use the experimental research technique in a self-directed learning activity related to experimental anomalies."

The teacher is instructed to introduce clairvoyance (which the curriculum defines as "seeing" events taking place far away), telepathy (defined as the ability to send messages from one person's mind to another), precognition (defined as predicting events in the future), and psychokinesis (defmed as moving objects with concentrated mental energy).

Students are then told to conduct their own experiments and report their conclusions to the class. Will this information be scanned into the students' computer profile, too? And how will the students' work be graded? Oh, that doesn't matter any more; all students get A's and B's to preserve their self-esteem.

The federal Javits Gifted and Talented Education Act laid out the vision that the federal taxpayers should give children of "outstanding talent" some "services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools." I wonder if this is what Senator Jacob Javits had in mind when he sponsored the law.