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THE CURRICULA OF FEAR, GUILT, AND DESPAIR

A new subject is being taught in junior and senior high schools across the country. It comes under a variety of different course names, but the curricula are clearly designed to produce Fear, Guilt and Despair (FGD) in the minds and hearts of the students.

Most of these new courses are masquerading under the pretense of educating students about nuclear war. When you examine the textbooks and materials, it is evident that the purpose is not to impart knowledge but to change the students' attitudes and behavior to conform to the authors' prejudices and politics (such as U.S. nuclear disarmament), and that the authors have designed FGD as the major tactic to achieve that result.

The fear-guilt-despair curricula examined for this column were: "Decision Making in a Nuclear Age" (DMNA), Box 590, Cambridge, MA 02139; "Choices" (produced by the NEA and the Union of Concerned Scientists), 26 Church St., Cambridge, MA 02238; "Facing History and Ourselves" (FHAO), 25 Kennard Road, Brookline MA 02146; and "Crossroads" (CR), produced by "Jobs With Peace," 77 Summer St., Room 1111, Boston, MA 02110.

You don't have to take my word for it. Just take the words of the students who took these courses, and whose reactions are recorded in student "journals" which they were forced to write and turn in to the teacher as part of the course assignments.

"I am very scared, very, very scared. Because with a nuclear war you don't have a chance to survive." "These days, I just try not to think about my future, because I have a hard time seeing one. There aren't any jobs and there isn't any money for me to go to college. I want to do something with my life, but who cares about me? Besides, we're all going to get blown up anyway." (CR)

"Some of the discussions we had got 'pretty heavy,' and it was hard to handle! It's hard to spend 45 minutes a day talking about dying, and it's depressing!" "Several students began to cry. 'No, no,' they yelled, covering their ears. 'We'll all be dead. It's no use. We're doomed." (DMNA)

"I went into this class planning not to allow it to change my thinking toward the

arms race and military spending. However, to my disappointment, at the end of the class, I have to admit to a degree it has been effective. My point of view of staunch need for arms has changed to a wishy-washy feeling." (DMNA)

"We all, in our struggling humanity, have to clutch to our eyeballs to keep out the cold light of despair." "What I did learn will probably change the way I think and look on life for the rest of my life." (FHAO)

"I have learned that there is seldom a right or wrong but rather a right or left." "I'm conscious of having changed in the strength of my convictions on many of the ethical dilemmas we've confronted. But in other ways I'm less sure of myself and more introspective. Where do I draw the line between right and wrong?" (FHAO)

All the above quotations are from the student "journals" as quoted in the printed materials for the aforementioned curricula. These student reactions are presented without apology or embarrassment by the curricula authors, who apparently are well pleased with the results of their courses and are trying to peddle them to all schools in the country.

The "Decision Making" textbook explains how this course forces the students "to consider not only limitless, but abstract, death, but also his or her very own death." The textbook urges the teacher to force students to "talk about the despair that comes up when thinking about the nuclear world."

The "Choices" textbook explains how students must be forced to "read about the effects of nuclear explosions ... [and] discuss the long-term effects on those who are not immediately killed by the explosion." This textbook tells the teacher that, although "disturbing," "the students have been given many unpleasant facts, but it is crucial to realize the destructive nature of nuclear weapons."

It's no wonder that, according to Educators for Social Responsibility, of the students returning their questionnaires, 87% thought there would be a nuclear war in the next 20 years, 90% felt that the world would not survive a nuclear war, 81% said that worry about nuclear war affected their job plans, and 81% said it affected their hopes for the future. The FGD courses have produced this tragic result.

Maybe we shouldn't be surprised at today's shocking rates of teenage suicide, depression, loneliness, pre-marital sex, and drug abuse. The FGD courses have taught teenagers to abandon hope because they have no future.