PS for 11/2/89

R-Rated Videos in the Classroom

If you wonder why public schoolchildren are not learning essential facts (like where the United States is on a map of the world), or why they have not read the major classics written in the English language, perhaps you should look into whether they are spending their time in high school classes just watching movies.

That's what one mother did in Yucca Valley, California. Mrs. Kathy Roden discovered that her son had been shown five R-rated films in his high school English class between May 11 and June 16, with three class sessions devoted to each film. The R-rated videos, which contain graphic sex or violence, nudity or profanity, were *Robo Cop*, *Aliens*, *The Fly*, *Betrayed*, and *Good Morning Vietnam*. One PG and one PG-13 rated film were also shown during the same semester of English.

When parents complain about school curricula, the standard response from school personnel is, "You are the only one who ever complained." The reason Mrs. Roden was the only one who complained was that the teacher had warned the students that, if they parents found out about the videos, she would not be able to show any more.

When Mrs. Roden asked her son what else he did in this English class, she discovered that there was no textbook. Instead of following an academic curriculum, the rest of the semester's course involved reading *USA Today*, writing a few compositions, and engaging in class discussions.

This wasn't the first time this brave mother had discovered that classtime was devoted to showing movies which are non-academic, to say the least. Two years earlier, she had protested the showing of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* in a math class.

As a result of that complaint, the school board has issued a "directive" against classroom video showings. But no penalty was attached and apparently the teachers didn't take it seriously.

At the June 20 school board meeting, Mrs. Roden's husband Ray made a seven-minute presentation with a short clip from each of the R-rated videos shown this year. Mrs. Roden also submitted "objection forms" from 87 parents demanding to

be notified in advance if the teachers planned to show any R-rated or X-rated films or present any material on abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, values clarification, or privacy-invading topics in the classroom.

In October, Mrs. Roden's son, a senior, was sent out of his American Government class by the teacher on the day a film was shown and told to write a composition on the First Amendment. The boy was also told he would no longer be allowed to attend a student-directed classes on current events.

When Mr. and Mrs. Roden called for an appointment with the teacher, they were told the teacher would not meet with them unless he received an advance copy of the questions they wanted to ask and unless his attorney could be present. The Rodens agreed, but the principal suggested they forgo the meeting and have their son substitute independent study for the mandatory American Government course.

Meanwhile, the school board announced that it was considering adopting the 1987 "directive" against classroom use of videos as school policy. During the review period, some 20 teachers attended the September 19 school board meeting to protest the adoption of this policy.

At least nine teachers spoke against the proposed policy, citing as reasons their "First Amendment rights," "academic freedom," and "separation of church and state." One teacher stated that he resented having his "professionalism questioned."

Finally, after many months of work on the part of parents, on October 17 the Morongo Unified School District in Yucca Valley, California, adopted a policy in regard to the showing of videos in the classroom. The policy sets up a procedure for the approval of videos and films which must be complied with prior to classroom use.

The new policy requires that all videos go through an approval process that includes the actual viewing of the material and the designation of "acceptable, good, or excellent" ratings. Teacher must submit their video requests to the principal, indicating the quality rating, as assurance that the video is not to be used for entertainment or reward purposes, the amount of classroom time the video will require, and a justification for the class time to be used.

It is sad that parents have to spend so much time and effort to get public schools to be accountable.