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WHAT IS HAPPENING TO OUR KIDS?

Parents are getting a new answer to the age-old question they ask their children, "What did you learn in school today?" Children in public and private elementary and secondary schools are answering, "Oh, we're learning about the Bomb."

My mail bag is producing some interesting reactions to my columns on this subject. One correspondent writes, "In one of your recent columns, you addressed the defeatist mentality inculcated in our children concerning nuclear war. At that time, I thought you were being alarmist and overstating your point. My thinking has radically changed!"

Continuing, my correspondent wrote: "In my Sunday school class, the students were giving me almost verbatim the same defeatist propaganda you wrote about. They evinced fear that they had no future, that bringing children into the world to suffer nuclear devastation was cruel, and that any plans or dreams they had for their lives were futile."

My correspondent put his finger on the problem: "Somebody has done a criminal thing to these kids, undermining their sense of worth and their ambitions while trying to indoctrinate them in anti-family, anti-procreative, and anti-American propaganda. These are good kids, and the more I heard, the more upset and angry I became. This whole scheme has been hatched in the public schools funded by our tax dollars, yet how many parents know about it?"

Another parent has sent me a copy of 12 pages of instructions given to her eighth grade school child called "Student Guide to Writing a Journal." Assigning pupils the task of writing in a daily journal, or diary, has become quite fashionable in schools that emphasize fads and trends instead of the pursuit of learning. Writing in a journal is one of the major techniques used to change attitudes about the Bomb.

Of course, writing is one of the most important skills that any school can teach a child. Elementary education should include teaching the child how to write his thoughts clearly and logically, and to handle the English language in written form.

But "writing a journal" has nothing whatsoever to do with training in writing skills.

The instructions state explicitly, "Don't worry too much about style or correctness." The student is encouraged to ignore "regular sentence structure, punctuation, logical sequences and so forth." The student is promised that the teacher who reads the journal will not "criticize or even evaluate your writing."

If a child is writing a journal without regard to style or correctness (of grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, logical sequence, facts, etc.), then student journals must have a purpose that has nothing to do with writing skills. It is clear from the 12 pages of instruction that the purpose is to get the child to record on paper -- in a very confidential and uninhibited way -- how he <u>feels</u> about other people and events. The word "feel" appears repeatedly in the instructions.

The clear message of the instructions is, "The journal is not so much a point-by-point description of your daily activities as how you think and feel about them." Don't limit yourself to telling what happened. It is better to tell how you <u>feel</u> about it.

The instructions give several handwritten samples to show the child what sorts of things he is expected to write in his journal. All the samples relate depressing events and the child's unhappy reactions. For example, "I just got mad. I was still steaming at the end of the day." "What a bad day yesterday turned out to be. Going home was a monster." "I really felt like turning the hose on him. Sometimes he really makes me mad." "I felt hurt and angry with her."

Writing the journal induces the child to remember, re-create in his mind and re-live his own unpleasant experiences so they will remain vivid in his memory and can be re-lived again and again. The journal does not allow the child to forget his gloomy moments so that happier and more constructive memories will take their place.

Writing the journal induces the child to nurture and build his own feelings of anger, fear, hate, guilt, revenge, and frustration. Writing a journal encourages the child to share his innermost thoughts and feelings with some adult in the school administration (identified in the instructions as a "correspondent") rather than with his parents.

This kind of journal writing is a grievous invasion of the child's privacy. It encourages the child to report events and attitudes within the home that are clearly none of the school's business, and even to discuss the child's personal reaction "to a recent rap session you've had with your parents."