PS for 11/29/90

Guidelines to Check Up on Drug Education

Is education the answer to our social ills? Is the drug problem informational or behavioral? Put more bluntly, is classroom drug education a plus, a minus, or a zero?

Shortly before Drug Czar William Bennett resigned, someone asked him if drug education in the public schools does any good. He replied, "In some places the drug education programs are **not** the right messages."

In an attempt to remedy this problem, a new federal law requires every public school to teach students that "the use of illicit drugs and the unlawful possession and use of alcohol is wrong and harmful." That may seem too obvious a mandate to be worth noting, but to close observers of public school curricula, this law is revolutionary.

It will, indeed, be a dramatic change for schools to start teaching that **any**thing is wrong! Ever since Values Clarification became the teaching model a generation ago, most schools have eschewed the nation that anything is wrong.

Instead, public schools have taught children that behavior is a matter of opinion not morals, that children can make their own decisions, and that they must not be judgmental about decisions others make. As a result, most drug curricula in the public schools today are not designed to forbid drug use.

Here are eight ways to spot a nondirective psychological course masquerading as "drug education":

1. Does it present a "decision making process" by which children are told they should evaluate the "options" and make "their own decisions" about whether or how much to do drugs? Our society and laws have already decided that illegal drugs are wrong; so when it comes to drugs, there is nothing for the student to "decide."
2. Is it nonjudgmental and nondirective, telling the student that "it's up to me" to choose, and telling teachers not to "preach" or "impose their values" on the student? Does it treat attitudes and behavior about drug use as a matter of opinion rather than a matter of right or wrong?

3. Does it require the students to disclose their innermost feelings and attitudes, or to reveal intimate details about their home and family members? Such compelled disclosure is a clear violation of pupil privacy rights. In addition, a “magic circle” or encounter group discussion will inevitably be led by the experienced child, which tends to break down the inhibitions of the inexperienced child.
4. Does it require the student to spend class time discussing emotions, feelings, and attitudes, including discussions about stress, suicide, and depression? School teachers and counselors are not qualified to conduct group psychotherapy in the classroom. Classroom explorations of feelings can be harmful to the healthy child without being helpful to the disturbed child.
5. Does it treat illegal drugs as though they are only marginally different from medicines? Does it teach that there are “positive” uses of drugs or that “everybody uses some kinds of drugs” (such as aspirin and coffee), thereby confusing the child about the difference between legal and illegal substances?
6. Does it emphasize “self-esteem” and “social skills,” instead of giving objective information that illegal drugs are unhealthy plus moral direction that their use is wrong? Spending class time teaching children to “feel good” about themselves is the latest classroom fad. It takes time away from academic work, does not comply with the new law, and there is no independent proof that training in self-esteem actually reduces drug use.
7. Does it include anti-parent innuendoes? Many drug courses drive psychological wedges between child and parent by teaching the child to look within himself for direction instead of to his parents, or even directing the student to consult with imaginary characters such as “a wise man with a lantern,” a “wise rabbit,” a dolphin, a dragon, or a new friendly character from outer space.
8. Does it contain New Age religious practices such as progressive relaxation, meditation, guided imagery, visualization, centering, anchoring, affirmations, or mantras? The practices have no place in the public school classroom and offend the First Amendment rights of all students.

The new law which requires schools to teach that the use of illicit drugs is **wrong** is a 1989 amendment to the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act. It also requires every public school to provide full information to the public, on request, about how it is complying with the new law.

The opportunity is now available to all parents, citizens, and taxpayers to go to any public school and ask to see its drug curriculum. If the school does not produce

evidence of teaching that drug use is wrong, you can report this to the U.S. Department of Education to start the process of cutting off federal funds.