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“Censorship vs. Parents’ Rights”

A funny thing happened. on the way to People for the American Way's annual press release on “censorship.” The usual laundry list of complaints about library books and supplementary reading such as Huckleberry Finn and Catcher in the Rye have faded into yesterday's news.

The real story is the increasing controversy over the mandatory psychological, non-academic classroom course work that is imposed on elementary schoolchildren. How long can PAW get away with the charade of calling it “censorship” for parents to object to the psychological manipulation of their children?

How long can PAW get away with calling parents “enemies of the public schools” because they seek some involvement in the selection of textbooks forced on their children in the classroom? How did we get on the kick that parents are labeled “censors” and “book burners” if they raise questions about the suitability of required classroom materials?

Isn't it a good thing for parents to have a hands-on involvement with their children and their textbooks? Don't all studies show that the children who perform the best are those whose parents have a strong relationship with their children's school work?

PAW's recently released 10th annual survey of what it calls “Attacks on the Freedom to Learn” catalogues 376 incidents which PAW asserts were attempts by parents to “censor” public school materials. Contrary to the general impression conveyed by most news accounts and by PAW's own advertising, most parental objections do NOT concern well-known books, but DO concern non-academic classroom curricula imposed involuntarily on elementary schoolchildren.

The most frequently objected-to materials, according to PAW's own count, are the psychological self-esteem courses. This year the curriculum called “Pumsy: In Pursuit of Excellence” moved into first place on the list of curricula most objected

to by parents. Next in order of ranking' were “Impressions,” “Quest,” “Positive Action,” and “DUSO.”

Pumsy is a self-esteem course used in the early elementary grades. Some parents objected to it for containing New Age techniques, invading family privacy, and undermining church and family values. other parents objected to it for containing mysticism and Hinduism, using “exercises similar to eastern religious techniques,” and undermining parental authority.

According to the PAW report, some parents alleged that, during Pumsy sessions, children are put into a semi-sleepy state during which “ideas are drilled in.” One parent said, “it teaches you that you can retreat inwardly anytime you choose, and that no one can stop you.” Parents just don't like having a school tell their children to listen to a mythical creature called “The Clear Mind” as a way to solve their problems.

Impressions is an elementary school reading series that is highly controversial in many parts of the country. Parents objected to it for containing occultic themes and pictures, teaching children chants to the Devil, and containing references to “witchcraft, satanism, cannibalism, anti-authority, and teenage suicide.”

According to PAW, some parents alleged that school officials who selected Impressions have “an agenda to separate children from their parents.” Other challenges to Impressions asserted that it promotes the fear, violence, and disrespect for parental authority.

Quest is a self-esteem curriculum that is widely used in Kindergarten through grade 12. It is often presented as an anti-drug course, although whether it really is an anti-drug curriculum is a matter of hot dispute in many parts of the country. According to PAW, parents object to Quest principally because it teaches “decision- making” based on values clarification, it practices psychotherapy, and it undermines parental authority.

DUSO (Developing Understanding of Self and Others) is a self-esteem curriculum used in elementary schools. Parents objected to it for allegedly containing "religious rituals of Hinduism and eastern mysticism, guided fantasy exercises, subliminal messages and techniques commonly associated with New Aqe practices.tl

Parents asserted that DUSO is “promoting religion… deceptively disguised as a self-esteem program.” They also objected to it on the ground that it invades family privacy, undermines parental authority, "hypnotizes” children, has them engage in “bizarre activities, and uses anti-Christian New Age techniques.”

The PAW survey noted that the highest number of challenges to school materials occurred in Florida, including 20 challenges in Jacksonville alone. Curiously, PAW did not report the lawsuit filed by Planned Parenthood of Jacksonville to attempt to censor the abstinence curriculum called “Sex Respect.”

PAW must think “censorship" is OK when it's practiced by Planned Parenthood.