PS for 10/4/90

The Scandal of Quest

Probably the most widely used drug education program in the public schools is **Quest**; its junior curriculum is called **Skills for Adolescence**, and its elementary curriculum is called **Skills for Growing**. Most parents would be shocked to discover that this program not only does NOT prevent children from doing drugs, it actually results in more drug usage.

The Quest organization has known this at least since 1985. Yet its promoters and salesmen continue to peddle the course to unsuspecting schools.

The documentation for this scandal is an internal research memorandum dated June 26 and July 11, 1989 which was acquired by the La Jolla Program, a summer institute on education reform at the University of California in La Jolla started in 1967 by the famous psychologist Dr. Carl Rogers.

The memo is an analysis of the results of a survey on **Skills for Adolescence** in 1988. According to the memo, the survey reveals "higher reported use and lower perception of risk" AFTER students took the **Skills for Adolescence** program, as determined by pre-tests and post-tests.

Experimental programs are usually evaluated by a system of texting students before and after a program is used, and comparing results with a similar group that does not use the program. Quest made such an evaluation in regard to four substances in 1988, but the results were so shocking that Quest kept the report secret.

Concerning cigarettes, the research showed "much greater increase" in usage by the Quest students plus "apparent perception of lower risk from heavy cigarette usage." No change was reported in either use or perception of risk for students in the group that did not use Quest.

For marijuana/hashish, the evaluation shows that the Quest students had "increase lifetime and 30-day use," the increases were "substantial," and the students perceived that "experimentation and regular use" of these drugs involved a "lower risk." The non-Quest kids showed a small decrease in usage, and the evaluation called the difference "striking."

For cocaine/crack, the students who took Quest showed “a small increase in use” and the students who did not take Quest showed “a small decrease” in use.

For alcohol (which, of course, is illegal for the students’ age group), the evaluation showed a “striking increase” in lifetime use and in use in the previous 30 days, along with a decreased perception of risk from alcohol. The non-Quest students showed no change in use or opinions about alcohol.

The report summarized the findings by stating that “Quest students show increases in use” of these four types of substances and “more relaxed attitude towards use” of those substances. The report concluded that the results of this evaluation were “not what Quest would like to see.”

Was the researcher optimistic that other studies would produce more favorable results? Alas, no. He admitted that “initial analysis of the remaining items seems to support the emergent pattern.”

Quest wangled its way into thousands of classrooms all over the country without ever producing any research to show that the course reduces or discourages drug us. Instead, Quest has grown to a $12 million enterprise by trading on the sponsorship of the Lions Clubs and displaying testimonials saying that students **like** Quest, which is, of course, irrelevant to its purpose.

Quest has an obligation to label its curriculum with something like a Surgeon General’s Warning: The use of Quest is dangerous to the health of students. Keeping this fact secret from schools, students and parents is a scandal that cries out for an investigation.

The reason why Quest encourages experimentation with drugs is that it subjects students to an avowedly “non-directive” process. Instead of telling children that they should “just say no” to drugs because they are wrong, bad, unhealthy, and illegal, Quest tells children that they have a right to make their own decisions about whether or not to do drugs.

This process is called “decision making,” and it encourages students to make choices independently of their parents and other adult guidance. Classrooms are reduced from learning situations to encounter groups, and teachers are reduced to mere facilitators.

Since the school gives positive rules on some matters (come to class regularly, don’t drive on the wrong side of the road, do wear helmets when you play football), but Quest tells students they can make their own decisions about doing drugs, students conclude that any decision is acceptable and therefore become easy prey for the hard sell from the drug peddler. Children deserve position directions from parents and teachers that the use of illegal substances will not be tolerated.