PS for 9/14/89

"First Aid Kit" in Florida Schools

School bells are ringing again for the opening of school, but parents and students in Okaloosa County, Florida are in an uproar over a new course in the middle schools. Called "Bridges," it is given for the first 20 minutes every morning, using New Age and privacy-invading techniques.

"Bridges" is a lengthy curriculum, much of which is unobjectionable except that it consumes so much time that should be spent on academic lessons. The part that has provoked parents' ire is the couple of hundred pages called "First Aid Kit," which is taught for two of the five days each week.

The First Aid Kit spends much time teaching the child to reduce "test anxiety" through "DEEEEP BREATHING" exercises like yoga or self-hypnosis, predicting that this will give students "higher scores on tests." No wonder the children are stressed; they are first told that a test is a "monster" and the picture on the page shows a gargoyle.

The children are taken through "relaxation and imagery" exercises to teach them "centering" and how to talk to individual parts of the body as though they could act independently ("Eyes, WAKE UP"). Centering is a favorite New Age technique designed to make you think you have a "space" in the center of your body which will be filled by new energy or wisdom (or, parents fear, by occult influences).

On one day, the teacher leads a group discussion on whether each pupil would rather be "an only child, the youngest child, [or] the oldest child." After each child writes a paragraph explaining his choice, the teacher takes a survey to see which sibling is the most popular. You can imagine the effect on the children who don't fall into the "most popular" category.

Pupils are told to write their own epitaph for a bulletin board display. They are given a picture of a tombstone with an angel on it to get in the spirit of death.

In a "self-contempt" lesson called "Who, Me?", the students must draw a picture of themselves as an animal. No wonder juveniles sometimes act like animals when the school teaches them to pretend they are!

Each child is instructed to make a list of 10 to 20 “things in my house,” then identify which family member was “responsible for bringing it into the house,” and then further identify each thing by writing “LUX” if the child thinks it is a luxury or “NEC” if the child thinks it is a necessity. The child then evaluates his parents’ decisions.

In another privacy-invading game, the pupils learn about their “Paper Bag Self.” On the outside of a bag, each one attaches pictures of things which represent personal traits that are shared with others, and on the inside of the bag pictures of personal traits that other people don’t know about. Then they must share these inside traits with the class.

In a lesson called “How Do *You* Spell Family?”, the pupils are told to write statements that express their feelings about their own family. Students are told to “discuss the similarities and differences between their favorite T.B. families and their own families.”

Students read on depressing story after another, such as “The Scapegoat” in which bullies take out their anger and aggression on Eddie and make him squirm, and “The Maligned Wolf,” which purports to show that the wolf in the story of Little Red Riding Hood was mistreated. In an exercise called “Boiling Point,” students are instructed to make “an anger thermometer” telling what kinds of incidents make them “extremely angry.”

Another typical depressing story, called “The Ialac Story,” recounts a child’s day in which his brother calls him “you lazy jerk,” his mother says “you just don’t care how you look,” his sister says “drop dead,” his teacher and classmates all make accusatory remarks, and the poor kid goes to bed thinking, “nobody likes me. I might as well give up.”

Pupils are required to spend many sessions role-playing such depressing parts as: “your best friend is telling others he or she doesn’t like you any more” and “you’re a bully who takes money from smaller kids.”

In this course for 6th, 7th, and 8th grades, pupils discuss ways to “alter the world.” They sit on the floor in silence and play “a card game for practicing nonverbal communication.”

One morning, the students pretend that they are different types of eggs, including “I feel like I have egg on my face,” “I’m an egghead,” “I’m hard-boiled,” “Some

folks think I’m cracked,” “My thoughts get scrambled,” “I’m an eggspert,” and “I get eggsuberant.”

This is education?