

The Conspiracy Against Literacy

The decline of literacy in America is no accident. It is the result of policies ~~decided upon~~^{made} and implemented by American educators at the very top level of the education establishment hierarchy. The earliest and most important attack on literacy can be found in the writings of John Dewey, the father of modern American education, who wrote in 1898:

There is . . . a false educational god whose idolators are legion, and whose cult influences the entire educational system. This is language-study -- the study not of foreign language, but of English; not in higher, but in primary education. It is almost an unquestioned assumption of educational theory and practice both, that the first three years of a child's school-life shall be mainly taken up with learning to read and write his own language. . . .

My proposition is, that conditions -- social, industrial, and intellectual -- have undergone such a radical change, that the time has come for a thoroughgoing examination of the emphasis put upon linguistic work in elementary instruction. . . .

The plea for the predominance of learning to read in early school-life because of the great importance attaching to literature seems to me a perversion.

Thus, in the eyes of the progressive educators, of whom Dewey was a leader, training a child for high literacy became a "perversion."

At the time Dewey wrote the article he was busily experimenting

with a new form of elementary education at his Laboratory School at the University of Chicago. In the new education, social activities and studies replaced literacy as the central core of the curriculum. The goal of Dewey's experiments was to come up with a new curriculum that would prepare American children for a new collectivist social order.

The progressives were members of the Protestant academic elite who no longer believed in the religion of their fathers. They put their new faith in science, evolution and psychology. Science provided the means to obtain unlimited knowledge of the material world; evolution explained the origin of life; and psychology provided the scientific means to study human nature and control human behavior.

It was the ever-pervasive problem of evil that made these men turn to socialism for the answer. Since they no longer believed in the Biblical explanation of the origin of evil and the need for personal salvation, they looked for other "scientific" explanations. They concluded that evil is caused by societal factors -- ignorance, poverty and social injustice. They also believed that the causes of social injustice were capitalism, individualism and religion, and that if heaven on earth were to be achieved they would have to get rid of these and replace them with socialism, collectivism and humanism. Thus, a new curriculum was needed to prepare children for this radically new social order

Dewey had carefully studied the existing social order and came to the conclusion that high literacy was its sustaining foundation. Why? Because high literacy helped develop the independent, individual mind which could stand on its own two feet and think for itself. It was this independent intelligence that stood in the way of the new

social order and therefore had to be destroyed. Dewey wrote in 1899:

Earlier psychology regarded mind as a purely individual affair in direct and naked contact with an external world. . . . At present the tendency is to conceive individual mind as a function of social life -- as not capable of operating or developing by itself, but as requiring continual stimulus from social agencies, and finding its nutrition in social supplies. The idea of heredity have made familiar the notion that the equipment of the individual, mental as well as physical, is an inheritance from the race: a capital inherited by the individual from the past and held in trust by him for the future. The idea of evolution has made familiar the notion that mind cannot be regarded as an individual, monopolistic possession, but represents the outworkings of the endeavor and thought of humanity.

In other words, the individual mind was really the property of humanity and not the individual. Dewey could come to this radical conclusion because he no longer believed in the existence of the individual soul and its personal relationship to its creator. As late as 1935 he wrote:

The last stand of oligarchical and anti-social seclusion is perpetuation of this purely individualistic notion of intelligence.

The Judeo-Christian belief in the existence and sanctity of the human soul obviously buttressed this "individualistic notion of intelligence." And therefore Biblical religion too had to be destroyed.

and replaced by humanism, the new religion of the new social order.

As Dewey's views became more widely known, the idea of downgrading literacy became accepted as a necessary reform in the new curriculum. G. Stanley Hall, Dewey's teacher at Johns Hopkins and subsequently president of Clark University, wrote in 1911:

The best pedagogues are now drifting surely, if slowly, toward the conclusion that instead of taking half the time of the first year or two of school to teach reading, little attention should be paid to it before the beginning of the third year Primary reading should no longer be made a fetich. This should always be secondary and should have a purpose -- that is, there should be no reading for the sake of reading, for this is never an end, but should always be a means of gratifying an interest.

And if children, as a result, didn't learn to read well, so what. Illiteracy wasn't all that bad. Hall wrote:

Very many men have lived and died and been great, even leaders of their age, without any acquaintance with letters. The knowledge which illiterates acquire is probably on the whole more personal, direct, environmental and probably a much larger proportion of it practical. Moreover, they escape much eyestrain and mental excitement, and, other things being equal, are probably more active and less sedentary. . . . Illiterates escape certain temptations, such as vacuous and vicious reading. Perhaps we are prone to put too high a value both upon the ability required to attain this art

and the discipline involved in doing so, as well as the culture value that comes to the citizen with his average of only six grades of schooling by the acquisition of this art.

And so the calculated, systematic destruction of literacy became one of the chief aims of the new education. But how was this to be *accomplished* done? How were the educators to give the impression that children were being educated while at the same time depriving them of the chief tool of education, literacy?

The solution was easier than anyone would have thought: simply remove the alphabetic-phonics method of teaching reading, which is the proper way to teach someone to read an alphabetic writing system, and replace it with a new look-say, whole-word, or sight method that teaches children to read English as if it were Chinese, an ideographic writing system. That would do the trick. And indeed it has.

The two men who worked tirelessly to translate this anti-literacy policy into textbooks for the schools were William Scott Gray of the University of Chicago and editor of the Dick & Jane reading program and Arthur I. Gates of Teachers College, Columbia, editor of the Gates Macmillan Readers. By 1930 the new books were ready for the schools.

Of course the parents of America were not informed of the momentous changes that were about to take place in primary reading instruction. But the educators ^{*there is no doubt*} ~~were~~ ^{*themselves*} ~~clearly aware~~ ^{*that*} / what they were about to do would ^{*widespread*} cause/reading disability among American children. ~~That, indeed, was~~ ^{*clearly*} ~~their intention.~~ Indeed, they were ~~xxxx~~ warned that such would be the result of their new teaching method. The warning came from a distinguished neuropathologist who specialized in children's learning problems, Dr. Samuel T. Orton.