

# The Blumenfeld Education Letter

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." HOSEA 4:6

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EDITOR: Samuel L. Blumenfeld

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The purpose of this newsletter is to provide knowledge for parents and educators who want to save the children of America from the destructive forces that endanger them. Our children in the public schools are at grave risk in 4 ways: academically, spiritually, morally, and physically — and only a well-informed public will be able to reduce these risks.  
"Without vision, the people perish."

## The Scandalous State of Reading Instruction in Australia

Your editor has just returned from a five-week tour of Australia in which he was able to find out what is happening in education "Down Under." As most of my readers know, we have been told by the promoters and purveyors of Whole Language, that this "new" reading instruction program was developed in Australia and New Zealand where it has proven to be enormously successful.

The truth is quite the opposite. Whole Language is doing to literacy in Australia what it is doing to literacy in America. Of course, Whole Language is not really new. It is the latest adaptation of the whole-word, look-say, sight reading method which teaches children to read English as if it were Chinese, an ideographic writing system. We now know that imposing an ideographic teaching technique on an alphabetic writing system can cause reading disability.

The good people who brought me to Australia are as aware of this as we are in the United States. Thus, the three seminars I gave on teaching intensive phonics in Adelaide, Sydney, and Queensland were well attended and very well received by the par-

ents, home schoolers, and Christian school teachers who attended them.

What follows are reports in the Australian press about the reading problem in that country and the falling academic standards caused by the decline in literacy skills. During my visit I asked my hosts if they could provide me with documentary evidence of the educational problems plaguing Australia. Out of their files came a plethora of clippings from newspapers that graphically told the same tragic stories of declining literacy that routinely appear in U.S. newspapers. The stories will sound very familiar to American readers. (The stories are reproduced with original Australian punctuation):

*The Courier-Mail* (Brisbane, Queensland) 8/2/91

### Falling standards 'a scandal'

The dramatic decline in the standard of Australian schools since World War II was scandalous, a senior academic said yesterday.

The University of Wollongong pro vice-chancellor, Professor Lauchlan Chipman, told an Australian Family Association lunch in Brisbane there was an enormous amount of evidence showing the de-

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cline.

This "education crisis" would critically affect the Australian economy and its international performance was a direct result of poor quality teacher-training institutions.

"Teacher-training institutions have become obsessed with bad theory at the expense of good practice," Prof Chipman said.

National monitoring of education standards needed to be reintroduced and educators had to make research and data collection more accessible.

Queensland had no senior external exams.

The Queensland Teachers Union acting president, Mr Shane Groth, said there was an ideological gulf between Prof Chipman and the union.

"He is harking back to a golden age when there wasn't a golden age," Mr Groth said.

"There is no imperial [sic] evidence to show standards are declining.

"It depends what you mean by standards: if you isolate grammar and tables, they might not be as good. We argue that students now have a much wider array of skills than students of other eras."

External exams could only test mechanics, not quality, Mr Groth said.

There was nothing wrong with competition in education but it could be discouraging for some students and a balance needed to be struck, he said.

Prof Chipman cited the 1989 Australian Army entrance exam—"a basic grade four test", in which 12 percent of males and 4 percent of females holding year 10 and 12 certificates failed.

In a comparison of 1974 and 1984:

Monash University British history student essays in 1984 had significantly more spelling and grammatical mistakes than in 1974.

Studies showed the "assumed vocabulary" from secondary school text books had declined by 500 words since 1945 and the assumed vocabulary for primary school students was half of that of the 1920s.

"Yet there have never been more newspapers, magazines and books," Prof Chipman said.

"The consensus is that the universal level is declining."

Prof Chipman said modern educators placed too much value on self-esteem and the child's feelings at the expense of healthy competition. . . .

There was too much emphasis on creativity without first equipping children with the fundamental skills.

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Adelaide Advertiser (Adelaide, South Australia) 4/21/90

**Schools blamed for illiteracy of army recruits**

Canberra: Federal Defence Science and Personnel Minister Gordon Bilney has defended the caliber of army recruits and blamed illiteracy problems among would-be soldiers on the education system.

Army enlistment officers revealed this week that the number of potential recruits under 21 being rejected because of poor literacy and comprehension skills had risen 150 per cent in the past five years.

Almost 12 per cent of men and 8 per cent of women failed the "trainability" tests.

Director of army recruiting Colonel Bernie Sullivan said the tests were aimed at Year 9 level students but candidates with Year 12 certificates had failed.

Mr Bilney told ABC Radio's AM program that illiteracy affected up to 15 per cent of Australia's population and was not confined to army recruits.

He understood the literacy and comprehension tests were not difficult.

"But I think everyone would understand that when you're going to be driving some very expensive pieces of equipment or handling really quite complicated exercises on which people's lives depend, then you really need to be able to follow a safety manual or be able to understand instructions," he said. . . .

"We are anxious to get people in who are otherwise bright but do have a literacy problem," he said.

Colonel Sullivan said most potential recruits could answer initial questions like: "The man has a cup: What does the man have?"

"It's the more complex questions that follow in the test themselves that actually undoes them," he said. . . .

The army was also having trouble attracting recruits to take on technical training in the electronics trades in particular.

"I think, quite bluntly, too many kids are taking the easy options at school and they're not getting stuck into the more difficult mathematics, physics, chemistry subjects," Colonel Sullivan said.

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The Age (Melbourne, Victoria) 10/23/90

**One in 10 adults have literacy problems**

More than one in 10 adults in Australia have trouble with basic reading and writing, a national conference on literacy development and industrial productivity heard yesterday.

The president of the ACTU [Australian Council of Trade Unions], Mr Martin Ferguson, told the Melbourne literacy and industry conference that more than one million adult Australians were unable to read a simple sentence in English, understand simple telephone dialing instructions, fill out basic application forms or follow instructions for medication or product use.

More than half a million of those adults had English as their first language.

The conference, part of International Literacy Year, was designed to examine the practical problems relating to literacy in the workplace and solutions to the problems. . . . The Federal Minister for Resources, Mr Griffiths, said it was estimated that a lack of functional literacy cost Australia at least \$3.2 billion each year in reduced productivity because of the additional time taken to communicate instructions.

He said workplace literacy required action by government, management, unions and individuals. It was in the employer's interests that their skilled and semi-skilled employees had access to appropriate literacy training.

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Daily Telegraph (Sydney, New South Wales)  
11/21/88

### **Fury Over Illiterate Students**

Thousands of students leaving school to take up technical college courses are so illiterate they cannot read their own textbooks, according to an alarming new survey.

The problem is so widespread that special remedial classes in English and mathematics will have to be set up in every college in the State to enable apprentices and other students to continue with their courses.

NSW Education Minister Terry Metherell said yesterday a survey of colleges indicated that 10 to 15 per cent of all trade and general studies students had deficiencies in literacy and numeracy.

"That's the equivalent of up to 10,000 students who are lacking in the basic skills," he said.

"These people may not be illiterate but some do not have the basic level of English needed to undertake a trade course.

"They cannot read some of the basic information in their trade manuals or interpret simple mathe-

matical work.

"These figures demonstrate what everyone has feared for a long time — that a large number of students are falling through the safety net which is supposed to catch poor performers.

"The scale of the problem has alarmed college teachers."

Dr Metherell, angered by the survey's results, said some of the worst illiterates were picked up as soon as they sat for college admission tests or tried to fill in enrollment forms.

Others were detected in the first few hours of class when it was clear they could not follow their lectures or textbooks.

Intensive remedial classes, running for 10 to 12 weeks, will now be held at all colleges to bring students up to the standard required to enable them to complete their studies.

Dr Metherell said the problem seemed to be most severe among those who left school early to pursue trades — rather than Higher School Certificate students.

In a bid to ease the crisis, children as young as eight will undergo special literacy and numeracy tests in Government schools next year.

A sample of Year 3 students will be tested in English, mathematics and basic reasoning during the second term.

All Year 6 pupils will then be tested in literacy and numeracy in the third term to give parents a realistic idea of school standards.

Regular tests for Year 10 students will be in place by 1990.

If the results are poor, the State Government will have to require teachers to put more emphasis on core subjects.

And urgent remedial lessons will be arranged for those with unsatisfactory results.

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The Courier-Mail (Brisbane, Qld) 7/15/91

### **College illiteracy 'alarming'**

Queensland needed 10 times more literacy experts than were available to deal with the alarming number of college students with literacy problems, an adult literacy officer said yesterday.

Mr Ian Falk, a state vocational literacy officer with the Employment, Vocational and Further Education and Training Bureau, said currently 40 regional officers specializing in literacy problems were employed by the Employment, Training and Indus-

trial Relations Department.

"In order to serve the number of people in need of literacy help in colleges we need 10 times that number," Mr Falk said.

"To address the problem in the workplace, we need at least double that number again."

Mr Falk said that in the past three years growing awareness of the extent of the illiteracy problem in Queensland TAFE [Technical and Further Education] colleges and in the workplace had led to vast improvements in available resources.

Three years ago 10 regional literacy officers were employed by the department, doubling the previous number of officers.

"We now have 40, which is five times as many as three years ago, and that indicates a growing awareness of the problem," he said.

"The difficulty is knowing the magnitude of the problem because the people who need our help are the people who have not yet come to us for help."

He said the extent of the problem was being realized as more industries underwent award restructuring and employees were being required to show proficiency in various skills, including communication and literacy, in order to be promoted.

"There are people who simply cannot follow written instructions, or understand emergency and health signs because they cannot read them or do not understand them."

The Australian Council of Trade Unions has estimated that workplace illiteracy costs Australia \$6.8 billion a year. The Queensland Council for Adult Literacy president, Ms Jenny Farmer, said a 1989 study of the general population showed that 48 percent could not interpret dosage instructions on a medicine label, 73 percent could not understand a newspaper report on technology, 31 percent could not use the Telecom Yellow Pages, and 57 percent could not work out a 10 percent surcharge on a menu.

"Adult illiteracy is a very serious problem that has to be addressed as a matter of priority."

She said more experts were needed to help students at college level attain competent literacy skills before they joined the workforce and added to the growing number of employees in need of help.

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Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney, NSW) 1/  
26/85

#### Problems with 3 Rs worsening, say teachers

Years of neglect of primary schools by Federal and State Governments have led to increasing liter-

acy and numeracy problems in the classroom, according to the Australian Teachers' Federation.

In a submission presented to the Commonwealth Schools Commission's Basic Learning in Primary Schools program this week, the federation says that primary schools in this country are not well resourced in world terms: class sizes, for example, are considered larger than those in other industrialized nations. . . .

The federation also says that there is little or no provision for primary school teachers in Australia to take time off to improve their skills or prepare classes, that migrant education programs are poor, and that there is an urgent need to upgrade the teaching of mathematics in primary schools.

While the federation admits that these deficiencies have led to literacy and numeracy problems in many primary schools, it rejects any suggestion that overall standards have declined in recent years.

"The bogus argument that standards are declining and that schools have 'failed' to do their job are a dangerous and counterproductive diversion from the need to formulate and implement policies that will assist the underachievers," it says.

The federation says that it would support the use of school-based diagnostic tests to measure the skills of individual students.

It would, however, strongly oppose the introduction of some form of uniform, nation-wide literacy and numeracy testing of primary students, especially if the results of such tests are used to stream children into top and bottom classes, to compare one school (or one geographical area) against another, or for credential purposes.

"The educational argument against standardized testing has a philosophical, social and administrative aspect—a test reduces complex human knowledge and potential, and the educational outcomes of schooling, to a simple number that is used for comparison with other numbers," it says. . . .

The federation would also reject any proposals to introduce teacher testing or evaluation measures, since "mechanisms already exist to determine the professional competence of teachers".

The federation recommends that more money be spent on primary education to enable smaller classes, with greater individual teacher attention for particular students.

It has also called for more relief time from face-to-face teaching, to give teachers more time to prepare classes, and seeks more leave to enable teachers to attend training and development courses.

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Comment: The Australian Teachers'

Federation is that country's equivalent of the National Education Association. As the reader must have noticed, the ATF's solution to declining literacy and numeracy standards is not to blame them on faulty teaching methods but on large class size. More money will solve the problem!

As for national testing, the Australian government is planning its own version of our NAEP, with ATF voicing the same objections as the NEA. And, of course, neither the ATF nor the NEA favor teacher testing.

The similarity of the education crises in the two countries is quite uncanny. The Australians use a slightly different vocabulary, but the ideas are virtually identical.

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Adelaide Advertiser (Adelaide, S.A.) 11/10/90

#### Three Rs spell bad news for army recruits

The Australian Army is battling a major problem with new recruits — the three Rs.

Poor literacy levels of aspiring soldiers were blamed yesterday for the increasing incidence of failure in the army's entrance test, comparable to grade four standard.

An army enlistment officer, Major John Dodd, said yesterday that in 1985 4.3 per cent of male applicants and 4.03 per cent of female applicants failed the test.

He said the test for general enlistees included questions such as "The black dog crossed the road. What color is the dog?" and "The man has a box. What does he have?"

By 1989, and although the standard of the test had not changed, the failure rate had jumped to 11.75 per cent of men and 7.74 per cent of women wanting to join up.

Major Dodd said the high failure rate was "disturbing", particularly because the majority of applicants were school leavers under 21, most of whom had reached Year 10 and some who had completed Year 12. . . .

Major Dodd said he did not believe there was a "lower standard" of applicant seeking a military career.

Instead, he attributed the trend to lower "educa-

tional standards and motivation in schools".

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Sydney Morning Herald (Sydney, NSW) 3/19/87

#### Alan stands up for the army of illiterates

Truck-driver Alan Coombs goes through hell every time he walks up to the counter of a government department, council or bank and has to ask the clerk to fill out a form for him.

All because he can't read or write. He is one of an army of one million adult illiterates in Australia.

Mr Coombs (not his real name) decided this week to fight back—by launching a one-man campaign to get community services provided for illiterates.

Mr Coombs, 26, says that he has lost \$20,000 because of his disability when he got into debt because he could not read flat leases or credit card rules.

"There are a lot of illiterate kids coming out of schools in NSW today and they will be ripped off too because no-one wants to help us and because we can so easily be taken for a ride, especially by people who wrongly tell us what is in documents," he said.

His decision to fight back followed two upsetting experiences on Monday — at the Motor Transport Department in the city when he went to apply for a licence to replace his lost one — and later that day at the Town Hall when he had to apply for a parking permit.

"Clerks treat you like dirt and they try to make you take the form home and get someone else to fill it out," he said.

He changed his bank three times because the counter clerks treated him so badly and now banks with the State Bank.

"They're absolutely wonderful — they take my passbook from me when I come in and fill out forms for me without my having to ask, because they must have it on their computer that I can't read or write."

An intelligent man with a wide vocabulary, he had a bad start in school near Windsor and never recovered. He used to be put out to do gardening or made to sit in a class with other slow-learners and "I didn't learn anything about reading and writing in 12 years education."

He thinks he may have suffered brain damage during birth. He has been to seminars and classes for adult literacy but they have not helped him to read or write.

How does he drive a truck around the city? "I

can tell the signs by their special features, colours or letters such as P for parking zone.

"And I get someone to write down a street name for me and I go through the map and match it up with the same letters there. It takes me 15 minutes sometimes to find a street, but I always do it."

Ms Kitty Knight, adult literacy coordinator for the eastern metropolitan area, said yesterday that adult illiterates had a very tough time, "especially as the literacy demands of the bureaucracy are increasing all the time."

She said that illiterates she had helped in classes at Randwick Technical College ranged from architects to hairdressers and tradespeople.

"Life is often very hard for them and they have to get very cunning to hide their problem from others."

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**Comment:** So, even in Australia you can spend 12 years in school and come out not knowing how to read or write. Mr. Coombs thinks he may have suffered brain damage during birth, which, he believes, may account for why the adult literacy course he took didn't work. But I examined some of those adult literacy programs while in Australia and found them to be as miserably bad as the whole-word reading instruction which originally caused Mr. Coombs' disability.

Of course, Prof. Ken Goodman, our own whole-language guru, might claim that Alan Coombs is perfectly "literate" because he is adept at using all sorts of "strategies" to derive "meaning" from print. After all, that's how whole-language people define literacy. But the strategies fall flat on their collective faces when Mr. Coombs must fill in forms with no picture clues, no context clues, and no syntactic or semantic clues. Not even invented spelling will save him there. What Mr. Coombs needs is a simple intensive, systematic phonics reading program. But the chances of his finding one in Australia are practically nil. The reading establishment in Australia is as hostile to intensive, systematic phonics as is its counterpart in the U.S.

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The Australian (Sydney, NSW) 7/15/87

### Spelling tests in schools to end

Spelling tests are to be abolished in NSW schools by 1990 with the introduction of a new method of teaching.

Traditional verbal and written tests are to be phased out and replaced by a more holistic approach, primary school teacher Mr Max Green said yesterday.

Mr Green, head of Balarang Primary School on the NSW south coast, has been researching the new spelling curriculum that will be phased in from 1988, before being made mandatory in 1990.

Mr Green, who was attending the Australian Conference on Language and Learning in Sydney, which ended yesterday, said the new method aimed to take the competition aspect out of learning to spell.

This aspect often promoted feelings of inferiority and depression.

"We encourage children to do a lot of reading and writing, so that they become familiar with words," he said.

To correct the words the children were encouraged either to go to a dictionary or book, or else try to identify the error by writing the word down a few times.

The new curriculum was written by Ms Rhonda Jenkins, a language consultant from the NSW Department of Education.

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Telegraph Mirror (Sydney, NSW) 8/28/91

### Bosses act to halt decline in spelling

The NSW Chamber of Commerce may soon be forced to issue its own certificates assuring employers that school leavers applying for jobs know how to spell.

It would be used by job seekers with — or instead of — school assessments.

And Chamber executive director David Abba said today it might not be long before job advertisements specify: "Must be able to spell."

Mr Abba said the proposed certificates, which would also cover proficiency in typing and other skills, might be necessary because bosses could not be sure school, or even university graduates, were

competent in the three Rs.

The uproar over spelling began when it was revealed the Education Department will scrap standardized spelling tests in September and introduce the Writing K-12 system in primary schools.

The Education Department has denied abandoning the teaching of spelling and argued that the new syllabus would improve spelling by encouraging children to master the words they use and need.

Opposition Leader Nick Greiner pledged a coalition government to introduce tests in spelling, grammar and mathematics at the end of Years three, six and 10.

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#### The system adds up to a failure: solicitors

Two prominent Sydney solicitors have branded the NSW education system a farce after most young job candidates for a position at their firm could not correctly spell 10 words.

The solicitors, Henry Grech and David Bannerman, have slammed the system for not teaching students the basics of spelling and writing. . . .

"There must be something the matter with our schools when they are turning out people who simply cannot spell every day words."

The Blacktown solicitors said they were embarrassed and angry after studying 40 applications from school leavers for a position as a junior with their firm.

Part of the interview included a spelling test with words such as urgent, mortgage, solicitor, contract and believe.

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#### The Australian (Sydney, NSW) 7/2/91

#### Bad education system 'brings economic doom'

The nation's education system has been strongly attacked as a recipe for lower living standards and long-term economic damage.

The corporate general manager, technology and development of BHP, Mr Peter Laver, told an Australian Academy of Science national forum in Canberra the educational shift away from excellence towards comfortable mediocrity was a prescription for continuing economic decline.

There were few more critical issues facing industry today, because its employees needed to per-

form better if it were to become internationally competitive, he said.

There was a strong perception among employers that the present education system was meeting neither present nor future need. . . .

A recent community literacy survey had revealed a "startlingly high" level of incapacity to perform simple tasks requiring basic cognitive literacy and numeracy skills.

"This result is a damning indictment of the school system in Australia, and a burden that must be accepted by industry," Mr Laver said.

"The consequence of this literacy problem is that industry training resources are being wasted, teaching employees things they should have learned at school." . . .

Mr Laver said employers could not sit back and criticize unless they were prepared to do something about the system.

This included: feeding back to the education system details on the skills of recruits; communicating their requirements more clearly to teachers; encouraging greater exchanges and visits between business and educators.

It was a cardinal rule of business to supply what the customer wanted: the education industry had not fully accepted the need to understand its market.

The chairman of the Australian Science and Technology Councils (ASTEC), Professor Ray Martin, said he was deeply concerned at the barrier that seemed to exist between schools and the real world.

"The teaching profession is crucial because they talk to our children and give them their perception of what industry is all about," he said.

"Unfortunately school leavers these days seem to have a pretty poor image of business, and almost no concept of its role in generating a healthy economy for Australia.

"But the teachers also argued that business sees things too narrowly, and that education is about other things as well."

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#### Herald-Sun (Sydney, NSW) 8/31/91

#### Teacher taught how to kill

A schoolteacher has been suspended after giving her students explicit instructions on how to murder.

The female science teacher gave her class of about 30 teenagers graphic demonstrations of how to garrotte and inject a fatal air bubble into the blood-

stream.

Frightened students in the Year 10 class ran out of the room and reported the teacher to the head science teacher at Riverstone High in Sydney's west.

NSW Education Department officials investigating the incident say the teacher, Ms Amanda Carver, was suffering personal problems.

But Ms Carver said in an interview last night she had demonstrated the murder methods to get students' attention before explaining the dangers of stress.

"So as part of that I started talking to them about how frail the human body is and how easily it's damaged," she said.

"Nothing of what I said to them could have been used to damage themselves."

The incident came to light yesterday when a student's mother rang a radio station to complain about the lesson.

"She put a kid on a seat and had a syringe in her hand with a needle in it and showed him (the student) that if you put that into your vein and shoot air into the vein it will kill you," she said.

"She got another kid and had a piece of string with two pencils and put it up to his throat and said if you put it in a certain spot it will kill you."

Ms Carver has been sent on sick leave and suspended until the incident is investigated, NSW Education Minister, Virginia Chadwick, said yesterday.

Counselors have been made available to students who saw the lesson.

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**Comment:** After visiting Australia, I've come to the conclusion that the behavioral psychologists and socialists now control government education throughout the English-speaking world, and that their aim is the same as it has always been: to change Christian capitalist society into humanistic or pagan socialist society. Mrs. Joan Kirner, former Minister for Education, now Premier of Victoria, and a Fabian Socialist is quoted in a 1984 Victorian Fabian Society Pamphlet as saying:

"If we are egalitarians in our intention we have to reshape education so that it is: part of the socialist struggle for equality, participation and social change, rather than an instrument of the capitalist system; a vital

weapon in the transition to more equal outcomes for disadvantaged groups and classes rather than a ladder to equal educational opportunity for individuals; a catalyst for system change rather than the legitimization of system maintenance."

Of course, our educationists do not use the word socialism; they prefer the phrase "democratic governance." But it all means the same. Socialism may be crumbling in Eastern Europe and elsewhere but it is alive and well within the education establishment. The educators seem to think that they can make socialism work because they're smarter and more sophisticated than the Russians or Chinese or Ethiopians. But socialism will never work because it is based on a misreading of human nature. Socialists believe that evil is caused by capitalism, individualism and religion. And so, their aim is to get rid of all three.

But what they ignore is that evil is caused by man's sinful nature, and no matter what kind of society you have, you cannot escape that basic fact. And that is why none of the socialist experiments of the past 75 years have worked. And that is why the plans of the Fabian Socialists throughout the English speaking world are doomed to failure.

In fact, socialism itself is a manifestation of man's sinful nature in that it reflects man's intellectual pride and arrogance and the lust for power over others. The behavioral psychologists have worked long and hard to create assessment tests and remedial programs to manipulate and control children. They must gain great satisfaction in thinking that they have developed the means of changing the behavior of millions of young people by weaning them away from traditional values. But what they've produced are millions of children whose moral confusion and rootlessness is creating social anarchy and emotional chaos.

Do the behaviorists know what they're doing? What do you think?