

EIR **Special Report**

How to transform U.S. schools: the curriculum question

by Carol White

The present crisis in education is the product of the policies of two decades, which have affected not only funding but have vectored what is taught away from traditional curriculum. The result has shown on both sides of the spectrum: in the accelerating rate of high school dropouts, drug users, and functional illiterates; but also in such comparative statistics as those which match U.S. performance in mathematics and science education to those of the Soviet Union. Is it less than a national emergency when the Soviet Union graduates 300,000 engineers and scientists each year while the U.S. has a freshman-class enrollment of only 100,000, many of whom are, in fact, foreign nationals who plan to return to their native lands?

Clearly something must be done, and quickly; but even were it possible, it is in no wise adequate to merely unravel the tangle: to somehow get back to the situation of U.S. education in the immediate post-Sputnik period of the early sixties, when, with government sponsorship, mathematics, science, and language education flourished. It was precisely then that American education suffered its gravest damage, with the systematic introduction of curriculum revisions such as the "new math."

When we look at the courses in lifeboat ethics, consumer economics, sex education, and conservation presently being taught, we can almost sympathize with the supporters of the Moral Majority who advocate a return to "basics"; but such apparent palliatives are no answer to the challenge posed by the present Soviet success in training a growing scientific elite. Nor should it be overlooked that *every* Soviet high-school graduate must complete a two-year course in the calculus, along with four years of training in physics, three years in chemistry, and other physical sciences.

The post-Sputnik impulse to revitalize curricula in the United States was in itself healthy: the problem was that the model for that revision was taken from the French structuralist school—Jean Piaget—and British logical positivism—Bertrand Russell—when, in fact, the United States had an appropriate model at hand, by reflecting on the essential impetus to our fusion and space programs given by scientists either German-born or German-trained.



Carlos de Hoyos/NSIPS

A sixth-grade student in New York City explains a model of a magnetic-confinement nuclear fusion device.

As Lyndon LaRouche wrote in the Aug. 11, 1981 installment of his *EIR* military policy series, the German educational system, prior to the 1960s reforms of Willy Brandt, was a model for the training of youth. This program, properly associated with the name of Wilhelm von Humboldt, had a century-and-a-half record of unparalleled success, not only in producing genius, but also a cadre of scientists and engineers capable of enriching the discoveries of geniuses such as Bernhard Riemann.

By the time of the First World War, 8 percent of German youth who had graduated from gymnasias (academic secondary schools), had received an intensive education centered around the study of the Greek language, physical geometry, classical poetry and drama, and universal history, taught by the educators of the standard of the best university professors. It would have been 12 percent, but post-world-war attrition; nonetheless, up until 20 years ago, German gymnasias still operated under a curriculum modeled on the Humboldt educational reforms, and today there is a movement under way in Germany to restore the curriculum and revoke the Brandt liberalization of educational standards.

The key to reversing the present disastrous trend in American education is to be found in the core commitment of the Humboldt curriculum to the study of language, and particularly Greek, as the repository and generator of the capacity for concept-formation.

A person who cannot articulate his or her thought, to that extent cannot think. A child exposed to rock music, pornography, and the banalities of television program-

ming, and their reflection in the schools under the guise of popular culture, is doubly deprived: he or she is continuously exposed to the articulation of gibberish or worse, but he is also being denied access to the history and accomplishments of civilization by which to gauge himself morally, as well as functionally.

The study of English through the medium of the King James Bible, the plays and poetry of Shakespeare, the writings of Milton, and the writings of Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, George Washington, and Abraham Lincoln—to give only a partial list—must become the core of the high-school curriculum. Every child must be offered, as well, the opportunity to master the Greek language and its poetical and scientific writings in order to appreciate how Greek developed in conceptual richness, as the thought of that people emerged from the time of Homer to Plato. At least one modern language should also be taught.

If language is taught properly, it implies the study of history, for example, through the medium of the plays of Friedrich Schiller and William Shakespeare; but every student must know the sweep of history, as well as grasp in-depth knowledge of American history. Again, if properly taught, the study of the topology of language, the manifold degrees of freedom expressed by its moods, cases, tenses, and voices, is a prerequisite to a deep understanding of the languages of physical geometry.

If we are to maintain our public schools—and we must—it is not enough merely to restore our schools. We must give our youth the moral tools necessary to rebuild the nation.