
Interview: Janice Brackenrich

Parents fight outcome-based education in Giles County, Va.

Dr. Wayne and Janice Brackenrich are leaders of the Christian Coalition in Pearis, Virginia, in rural Giles County. Parents of six children, they are spearheading a fight against the implementation of Outcome-Based Education in the county. Mrs. Brackenrich, a nurse, has been attending an OBE training program this summer, whose purpose is to train local teachers to introduce OBE in the schools next September, though at this point only on a voluntary basis. The 35 participants are being paid \$1,000 each to be in the two-month program. Mrs. Brackenrich recounts in this interview, conducted on July 27 by Marianna Wertz, what has been happening in the training program and in the coalition's efforts to halt its implementation.

EIR: Who is paying for this?

Brackenrich: This is being paid for by what our community calls the Partnership. Its full name is the Giles County Partnership for Excellence Foundation, Inc. They were formed in the latter part of 1992. It has different businessmen, including from the Hoechst-Celanese Corp. [Another subsidiary of Germany's Hoechst Corp., Roussel-Uclaf of France, produces the dangerous abortion pill RU-486—ed.]. Also the Appalachian Power Company is part of the Partnership, as well as the administrator of the school system, the director of curriculum in Giles County, and a couple of lawyers.

The Partnership's newspaper says their goals include "economic survival skills, computer technology literacy, and communication skills."

They have a group of mini-grants that they have gotten from the federal government. "Whole-language" was one of them: It's called See and Say. I had a mother tell me she was really upset when she saw some of her daughter's work. She's in the fifth grade and she had written a story and nothing was corrected, no punctuation, no spelling, and she'd gotten an A on the paper. She said the spelling was just atrocious, but the girl felt good about her work.

That's the main thing that everyone stressed at the seminar, that the children need to *feel good* about what they're doing. It's almost like they're throwing academics out the window, to make everyone feel good about it.

EIR: Do they have plans for implementing anything this fall

in the schools?

Brackenrich: One of the last things we had to do was to design some outcomes, some projects to do. My particular group was working on communication. Each group had to come up with a different program. They give you a blank paper to fill out. An example is "A note to a friend" [see graphic]. This can be in an English class. Actually this is a math class.

This is the guide that we received. With each task that you come up with, it has to fit into these criteria. Here the content of the skills is trigonometry and the student is to teach another group of students, which is usually younger children, how to do trig, by writing them a letter. This would be something that you would do in your trig class, and you could also use an English class. What they do in a lot of schools is block time and the trig and English classes would be together.

EIR: What else are you learning in this program?

Brackenrich: We started out the first two days under the High Success Network, William Spady's group, which came from Colorado. We had the first two days at a very expensive resort, at Mountain Lakes.

The main things that we were working on were critical thinking, communications, business projects and journalism projects. The guy from the High Success Network came in and lectured for two days, giving us the basic principles of Outcome-Based Education.

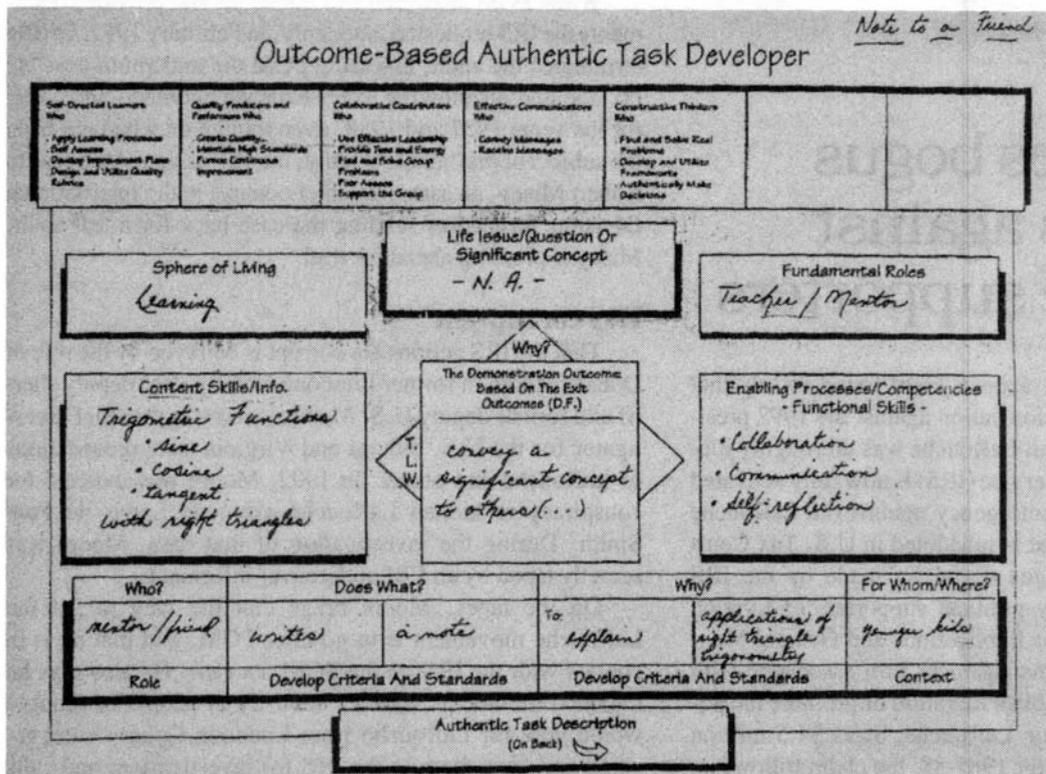
Then they had a couple of days when we were on our own, going over some of the things that we had learned. Goodness, sometimes I would be so bored, because they would go over the same thing; just changing the words.

EIR: Then what do they say is the advantage of OBE?

Brackenrich: The main thing the teachers say is, if you can reach that kid that you haven't been able to reach before, and get that one child excited about learning something, then it's all worth it.

EIR: Is that at the expense of everybody else?

Brackenrich: Right. I see socialism here, and that's one of my big fears. There's no pursuit of excellence. You take the guy that's the high achiever, and they have to help the ones



This "Authentic Task Developer" is a lesson plan for an OBE trigonometry class.

being remediated, and it lowers everyone to the same level.

EIR: Is there any opposition among the teachers?

Brackenrich: I've showed them lots of materials on what OBE is about, but what they keep saying is you have to understand, this is Giles County, we would never, ever get involved with anything that would hurt our students or that would be detrimental to them.

EIR: Are the participants in this program aware of the national scope of OBE and its intent?

Brackenrich: I tried to tell them that this is not just our idea. This is something going on in 26 different states. It was like talking to a brick wall. These teachers don't read anything, they are not aware of anything that's going on. Some of them had never even heard of OBE, had never read anything other than what the superintendent had told them.

EIR: As I understand, is your Christian Coalition is planning a mass meeting before school opens to try to stop the program?

Brackenrich: Our main goal is to educate the public. We don't feel, now that I've been through this, that this is a full-scale implementation. Some of the teachers will use it and some of them will not use it. So it's not so much to stop it as to let the parents know and pick up the ball and keep it rolling.

EIR: Has any part of this been implemented yet?

Brackenrich: In the mini-grants that they had last year, our son was part of a communications-collaboration group, which was part of the OBE. They had a language pathologist and five other teachers involved and it impacted 150 students in three elementary schools.

They did role-playing. They had a little celebration at the end. Each time they had one of their projects finished they would have a "celebration," and bring the parents in. They even talked about selling it to the parents. It sounds like a big marketing thing to me.

EIR: Are you aware of Virginia's big marketing program for OBE now?

Brackenrich: Yes. We're going to have bumper stickers: Virginia is for OBE lovers. I'm sure there will be tee-shirts and hats.

EIR: As you know, Nancy Spannaus is focusing on stopping OBE in her independent gubernatorial campaign in Virginia. She's concerned that if this continues there won't be a literate generation left in the country.

Brackenrich: Yes, but the teachers don't see this. The teachers are saying there's a crisis. But you create a crisis, and then you say we have to do something about the crisis. Then anything comes along and they say, let's do this, at least it's not the same thing, it's something different. But that's not the way to do education. It's gobbledygook.