

# OBE guru pushes jobs in fast-food industry

by Leif Johnson

At a seminar in Missouri in early August intended to train teachers in the state's proposed new program of outcome-based education, OBE salesman Robert Webb gave a vivid idea of what really lies behind the rhetoric of this insidious concept. The meeting was sponsored by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for St. Genevieve County, 80 miles south of St. Louis.

The Farmington School District's theme this year is "Feel the Excitement," and it was presented by Webb, who travels around the state giving such briefings on behalf of the state education department. A former sports writer, Webb promotes the systems analysis of William Edward Deming, an expert on Japanese industry, and the "less is more" ideology of Brown University professor Theodore Sizer, one of the principal theoreticians of OBE.

"Don't get rid of people, restructure people," is Webb's motto. "Teachers are now our best cheerleaders. It's really a neat feeling. Change won't occur if you have a bunch of old battle-axes in the first grade. To get someone to change, put them in charge. If they don't change, the people around them will kick them out."

## No more teachers, no more books

What is the nature of this restructuring in the schools? Not a broad-based education in history, science, and mathematics. "We found the biggest expansion was in fast foods," said Webb. "So we have monthly meetings with the fast food people to tailor our product to their needs. Since some kids work in fast foods after eight in the evening, we re-scheduled so they could sleep in in the morning. We taught a six-week course on how to work in fast foods—applied education. We used team learning for this and developed an 'Authentic Testing Workshop' to evaluate the outcomes of the students.

"By the year 2015, eighty-five percent will need technical training so we developed three tracks: college, technical, and work preparation. We marketed what we were doing and why. . . . Our goal is 'Total Quality Management,' site-based management: Each school makes its own budget decisions within district goals."

Webb is proud of the fact that OBE has been able to "boil down" classroom objectives. "We developed, with the Minnesota Metropolitan Corp., the benchmark tests at grades 3, 5, 8, and 10, all computerized, which are used to improve

the teachers as well. For example, a school's grade four math teachers came up with 101 objectives for the year. This was boiled down to 38. They no longer go through the book. It's now all electronic—we haven't bought a math textbook in two years."

Besides becoming a glorified McDonald's training program, Webb boasted that the school has taken over the role of the parent in raising the children of unwed mothers. "In the schools we have day cares where high-school students get one hour a day parenting classes with their children. We will have a Human Resources Center to centralize the state agencies in one location." Anticipating criticism, Webb hastened to add, "Now, of course, we're not trying to raise the children, that's Mom and Dad's job.

"But can't you just feel the excitement? Go ahead, *feel the excitement.*"

Webb then distributed handouts in large print, one of which had the caption: "Four Basic Principals [sic]." "You can call OBE anything you want. You can call it Instructional Management. The state has OBE, Mastery Learning, re-learning. The state will give many new directives but they are only guidelines. You are not told what to do, but we have to set national standards since this is such a mobile society."

"The best teacher is television," Webb continued. "You can do it over and over again. If you're not with Channel One, you're missing out. We use TV all over the school—you just can't believe it. The high school science students go to the elementary schools with the TVs to teach them. . . .

"We say, if you can't write real well, maybe you can say it. You don't have to have pencil and paper tests. It's not necessary to spell every word correctly, the computer checks spelling. We have a class in International Studies and the class can turn in anything *but* handwritten papers. The students have to learn how they can individually best communicate. . . .

"You can do what you want with curriculum, as long as the students achieve 80% on the benchmarks. Those who don't and their parents will be counseled. Computer print-outs tell them exactly which outcome they have missed. We remediate over and over again until they get it, and we give enrichments to those who do get it."

## LaRouche reps upset the apple cart

Two representatives of Lyndon LaRouche's movement on the scene decided to apply humor. They circled the misspelled word in Webb's handout and circulated it to the teachers present. This created quite an uproar. When Webb asked what outcomes the teachers wanted to see, one waved the sheet and shouted, "Spelling!" Webb appeared rattled, blamed his secretary, lost his train of thought, and asked where he was. Another teacher piped up, "You were talking about increasing attention spans"—which in fact he had been. The gathering ended as the Missouri OBE directress screamed, "I used to be a damned good teacher!"