

## EDUCATION

Uncle Sam's  
Classroom

by B.K. Eakman

Yolanda and Raul Salazar of Miami, Florida, naturalized citizens who escaped Castro's Cuba, are finding out the hard way that Uncle Sam's classrooms are not about proficiency at anything, or literacy, or basics. America's schools aren't extensions of the home, where families are held sacred and parents are valued. Instead, American education is about "mental hygiene," defined by psychologists as "preventive psychotherapy."

Case in point: Daniel Salazar, age ten, who has been in the Dade County School system for eight years.

The multitude of psychosocial, behavioral, intelligence, and personality tests that make up a typical child's school record today reveal that Daniel was once an "active, sociable, happy, alert, affectionate, and playful" little boy. Between the ages of two and five, Daniel's motor development and language skills were advanced compared to those of other children his age. His kindergarten and first grade records describe Daniel as enjoying school, having no peer, absence, or disciplinary problems, and maintaining a positive relationship with his parents. He had bridged the gap smoothly from Spanish to English. He wasn't even a finicky eater or afraid of the dark.

By the time the school got through with him three years later, the picture had changed. Daniel had turned into a hostile and unhappy child whom teachers pitted against the people who loved him most: his mother and father.

Daniel's sins? Well, it seems that Daniel suddenly had trouble reading in the third grade. He occasionally skipped letters in words. When his voice became hoarse, the school sent the boy for psychometric testing. Bewildered, Daniel was subjected to a battery of vision tests, hearing tests, behavior-rating scales, and strange assessments such as the Kinetic

Family Drawing.

Art not being his forte, Daniel drew a picture of a man, presumably his father, watching television. This was interpreted by the school psychologist as indicating a lack of attention at home. When Daniel said he couldn't draw his mother, this was taken as "possible feelings of ambivalence toward her," not as an honest statement that he was no good at drawing people. Questioned *ad nauseam* about his relationships, he commented that he liked the food his father often brought home after work—thus, the "expert" judgment that food was the only positive thing he associated with his parents.

Meanwhile, the classroom teacher singled out Daniel for preferential seating, assigned him a "buddy," and bribed him with computer time. The combination of interrogation, testing, and special treatment sent an unmistakable message: Something was wrong with him. As Daniel became increasingly apprehensive about the scrutiny (who wouldn't?), he found himself distracted, edgy, and negative concerning his studies. His classmates started teasing him, which made him defensive. Daniel longed to escape his stressful environment, where his every move and gesture were taken out of context. He started complaining that he felt sick, a typical reaction to daily unpleasantness.

The school tagged Daniel with the usual panoply of fashionable (if contradictory) psychiatric labels—Attention Deficit Disorder, dyslexia, hyperactivity, anxiety, emotionally handicapped, learning disabled, low self-concept, depression. Advised that a smaller class would allow Daniel to get the individualized attention her son needed to improve his reading, Mrs. Salazar agreed to it. She was presented with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), which seemed to mean the school would tailor a program to her son's needs until Daniel was confident enough to return to a regular class.

Little did the Salazars suspect that, once in the "special class," there was virtually no possibility that Daniel would ever get out. Moreover, he would be saddled with psychiatric labels that didn't apply to him for the remainder of his school career, and possibly for life. Nor did they understand that, in signing the

IEP, they had essentially given up the right to make any further educational decisions concerning their son. They had given the school *carte blanche* to do what it pleased—in *loco parentis*.

Daniel's teachers noticed him rocking back and forth in his seat. This resulted in further psychiatric screening and "counseling." Eventually, Daniel stopped cooperating and became argumentative. He didn't tell the counselor when his beloved grandfather died or when his best friend was badly injured in an accident—it was none of the counselor's business, after all.

Daniel was placed in a class for the "severely emotionally disturbed" (SED), a warehouse environment where little of an academic nature occurred. A peer-pressure-cooker was the last thing Daniel needed. The only way to survive was to adopt an aura of aloofness (in the vernacular of psychologists, "to act out").

Not surprisingly, Daniel's reading and other academic skills declined further, and he became too upset to focus on studying. His parents were angry; his teachers were disinterested; the kids bullied him; and the counselors intimidated him.

By the time the Salazars saw through the scam and balked, the school had attained the upper hand. The final straw came when Mrs. Salazar was threatened under the Baker Act (removal of a child from his home) unless she agreed to put Daniel on psychiatric drugs. She retaliated by taking the school district to court and her story to the press.

"Is this America or not?" she asked television reporters outside a Miami courthouse on February 8. "We left Cuba to get away from a totalitarian state. But now we see the same thing right here. The school staff lied to me about the nature of the class. They invaded my privacy. They took advantage of my child's innocence. They lied again in the courtroom. The more they lie, the more money they get. What's going on here?"

What was going on is politely called "covering your behind." Caught in their own web of deceit, the school district brought in everyone but the janitor to testify on its behalf, including teachers who had never taught Daniel. The district wasted so much of the court's time that

expert witnesses for the Salazars, brought in to testify on a variety of relevant legal and professional issues, finally had to return home. What should have been a clear-cut case of parental rights became a circus orchestrated by educators who arguably had a greater stake in the outcome than either Daniel or his parents. If the Salazars managed to overturn the “emotionally handicapped” determination and remove their child from the SED class, other parents would be emboldened. Such a precedent could not be tolerated.

The school district, of course, had an entire arsenal at its disposal—the teachers’ union and a cottage industry of mental-health specialists consisting of social workers, special-education resource agencies, behavioral-research institutes, and the American Psychological Association, all of which stand to benefit financially and politically from a burgeoning “at-risk” population. Teams of legal advisors for the school district worked to disallow testimony from any expert witness for the Salazars who might threaten their case (for example, pediatric neurologist Dr. Fred Baughman, on the grounds that he wasn’t an expert in learning disabilities).

Like most people, the judge was not expected to know much about the behavioral “sciences.” A pediatric neurologist should have been a shoo-in as an expert witness since the school’s own “psycho-educational evaluation” had justified massive intrusions into Daniel’s family on the grounds that neurological factors might be contributing to the boy’s problem. But Dr. Baughman’s testimony was disallowed just as he was about to take the witness stand.

The Salazars’ ace-in-the-hole was a professional tutor, Barbara Rivera, a petite, blonde dynamo who has never met an “uneducable” child. Having successfully homeschooled her own children, she discovered that they enjoyed seeking out the least fortunate and bringing them hope and concrete educational, financial, and social opportunities. Dozens of big stores contributed surplus items to the Riveras’ literacy project. Within five years, the Riveras were taking in the homeless, stocking the bare kitchens of people they hardly knew, nursing other people’s sick children back to health, and enlisting the enthusiastic aid of dozens of “uneducable” kids to do likewise.

A down-home woman with a sense of humor, Mrs. Rivera explained to the

court that Daniel Salazar didn’t have a learning problem. He was simply overwhelmed by a large campus; a seemingly unpredictable environment; and hundreds of little bodies running all over the place. For a child who is already a bit flustered, she explained, the first task he has trouble mastering can sometimes shake his confidence and compromise further learning. Rivera’s successes center on recapturing that first botched assignment, then moving on in a small, nurturing environment.

If the school had paid attention to its own case-study evaluation, Mrs. Rivera pointed out, someone would have capitalized on Daniel’s strengths, such as higher-than-normal computation skills, an aptitude for music, above-average rote memory, successes with drill and repetition, and increased comprehension when concrete examples are used to explain something. Daniel also had good spatial orientation and above-average auditory memory. The problem was visual perception. But because the old skill drills of previous eras have been discredited by the education establishment (workbooks, for example, are no longer used), teachers have forgotten how to build the self-confidence of kids like Daniel—specifically, by having him repeat tasks he did well in a variety of formats. Punctuation and grammar, for example, improve markedly when children with good sight memories rewrite sentences so that just the nouns or verbs change each time, rather like practicing a favorite football play using different scenarios.

But prospective teachers don’t learn these techniques in their university classes now. Proficiency and excellence are not priorities. Indeed, teaching children *how* to learn isn’t a priority. Instead, the primary focus in education is psychology and its close relative, social work. “Ed psych,” as education majors call it, indoctrinates naive college students into the cult of group-think, a scheme that plays out in the classroom as “cooperative learning,” “social promotion,” “grade deflation,” “process orientation,” and “interdependence.”

The Salazar case underscores the way in which education policymakers perceive students—“labor force management,” “human capital,” and “human resources.” These labels, like the ones applied to Daniel Salazar, equate human beings with inanimate objects which occasionally “malfunction.” Conversely,

the ubiquitous surveys, questionnaires, and opinion polls disseminated by these same officials are so personal in nature that children and parents believe that someone important cares what ordinary people think. But the tests and surveys are only marketing tools, implying an autonomy nobody possesses any longer.

A whole range of characteristics never before viewed as destructive, such as strong religious conviction, today are regarded by survey analysts as markers (risk factors) for mental illness. Every raised eyebrow and grimace is scrutinized for some sinister meaning by battalions of professional paranoids who call themselves “scientists.” Red-flag behaviors, such as rocking in a chair or swinging one’s foot, are matched against arbitrary designations on a checklist drawn up by any one of dozens of behavioral-research institutes. These psychological screening instruments are sold to school districts, government agencies, and corporations to help them “assess” their “human resources.”

Beginning at an increasingly younger age, those with unfashionable beliefs and unique character traits are treated as “defectives”—rigid, uncooperative, or unstable blobs who either must be rehabilitated or weeded out of the job pool. Elementary and secondary school-teachers play into the hands of bloated bureaucracies vying for government tax breaks, contracts, grants, or partnerships to help carry the unfunded mandate of political correctness.

Thus, schools today promote success without achievement, ethics without religion, and character without morals. Educators proclaim the message of self-esteem, but any attempt to pull ahead of the crowd is discouraged (except in sports and entertainment) because it might make everyone else feel deficient. Amid all the noisy chatter about “relevancy” and “real-world” experiences, our schools have obliterated the concept of failure.

Clinical-sounding labels such as “emotionally handicapped” may make failure more palatable. They certainly make it more permanent.

Meanwhile, the common pantheon of heroes and villains, poems and stories, paintings and documents that gave a diverse people unity and a common voice and heritage are disappearing. Even basic reading and computation have been made so convoluted and controversial that average parents can no longer follow

their children's lessons.

On June 2, 2000, the judge handed down a precedent-setting decision in the Salazar case. She determined that the psychiatric examination of Daniel was invalid since it was not conducted by a medical doctor, which is illegal under state law. She agreed that the parents had been misled as to the nature of the "special class" in which the youngster had been placed and ordered him to be returned to a normal educational setting. Apparently, the judge saw through the thinly veiled attempts to intimidate the Salazars into drugging Daniel, as well as the efforts to keep expert witnesses for the parents from testifying in court. Since May, when the judge ordered Daniel placed in regular classes on an *ad hoc* basis before the final decision, his behavior has completely turned around.

Daniel will understand eventually, if he doesn't already, that he was a pawn; another victim of an educational system that calls itself "child-centered" but is actually centered on money and politics. In the 1930's, behavioral eugenicist Paul Popenoe of the American Eugenics Society (later renamed "the Society for the Study of Social Biology") declared that "the educational system should be a sieve, through which all the children of a country are passed. . . . It is highly desirable that no child escape inspection." The landmark, federally subsidized Behavioral Science Teacher Education Project (BSTEP), launched in 1969 at Michigan State University, set this nation on the course described by Popenoe. BSTEP changed education from a ticket to self-determination to a management tool of the state.

Today's "humanized" educational environment is short on transmission of knowledge and long on market research, human experimentation, and psychobabble. Experts with behavioral-science degrees, not education credentials, are merging psychology with computer technology—and, in so doing, they are delivering the Holy Grail of social engineering.

No child today dare march to the beat of a different drummer. The sexpots and studs of the 1960's who thumbed their noses at the rules, called police "pigs," and mocked traditional standards of morality are now hell-bent on micro-managing every facet of people's lives. They dot every "i" and cross every "t," but they never rethink their ultimate objective. They know that the perfect crime is

not getting away with something even after one is caught red-handed; the perfect crime is the one that nobody knows has been committed. In education, this has meant launching an army of misguided educators *cum* social workers to examine everything from our opinions to our medical records and bank accounts. All the Einsteins who ever flunked algebra, all the Beethovens who ever composed without hearing, all the mavericks who somehow catapulted civilization thousands of years beyond where it would have been—to the asylum with them. Gently, if possible. Kicking and screaming, if necessary. Resistance is futile.

Or is it? The Salazars' case might teach us a thing or two about the virtues of resistance.

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## HISTORY

### Jesse Jackson, Jr., Refights the Civil War by Sean M. Salai

The skirmish at Monocacy, "the battle that saved Washington," stalled Jubal Early's rebel army of 15,000 men just 35 miles from the nation's capital in 1864. Since the site in Frederick, Maryland, became a National Battlefield nine years ago, visitors have been reminded how Gen. Lew Wallace's vastly outnumbered men desperately bought time for reinforcements, repulsing the last major Confederate invasion of the Civil War. Now, however, the young park is adopting a new focus.

"We are researching the slaves who were there," Cathy Becler, the park's chief of interpretation, explains. "We're taking a more holistic approach to interpreting the battle, and are planning to hold a seminar on slavery in conjunction with Antietam next March."

This more "holistic" approach is be-

coming common at the nation's battlefields, thanks to Jesse Jackson, Jr. Last November, the congressman from Chicago inserted language into the FY-2000 Interior Appropriations Bill requiring that all federally funded Civil War battlefields address the issue of slavery.

As Jackson sees it, some battlefields are "missing vital information about the role that the institution of slavery played in causing the Civil War." His provision directs the secretary of the interior

to encourage the National Park Service managers of Civil War battle sites to recognize and include in all of their public displays . . . the unique role that the institution of slavery played in causing the Civil War and its role, if any, at the individual battle sites.

Jackson's attempt to legislate historical interpretation has outraged a lot of people, and not just neo-Confederates. Leaders of the Civil War Round Table Associates—one of a burgeoning number of groups representing 25,000 amateur and professional historians nationwide—have vigorously protested the new Park Service guidelines. They point out that the majority of people don't go to Gettysburg or Antietam to learn about the causes of the war; they're interested in the battle.

Robert W. Meinhard, professor emeritus of history at Winona State University in Minnesota and a self-described liberal, is among the most vocal opponents. "The battle is why the battlefield park exists and that is why people come," he argues. "The precious few minutes available for interpretation must be devoted to the battle. . . . I would like to see a new park devoted to teaching about slavery as the cause of the war, which I feel is very important. But not on battlefields. Being a teacher for many years, I know that you simply can't have split objectives and cover both adequately."

Another point man in the opposition is Jerry L. Russell, a Little Rock-based political consultant who runs both the Round Table Associates and HERITAGEPAC, a political action committee devoted to battlefield preservation. He also believes that the addition of a socioeconomic focus to the 15-20 minute battlefield instructional programs detracts from the battles themselves. "Clearly not," Park Service chief historian Dwight Pitcaithly assured Russell in correspondence. "The