

By Lois Weiner

WHEN ED FISKE, *NEW YORK TIMES* education writer, called the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards an educational "time bomb" on April 5, he was correct in one sense: the board will help to destroy democratic control of schools.

The national system for teacher certification being developed with \$50 million of federal, corporate and foundation funding is being modeled on the professional specialty boards like those in medicine. A panel formed by the Carnegie Corporation will certify teachers who pay a licensing fee and pass examinations now being developed at Stanford University. Board certification is the linchpin of the Carnegie Corporation's drive to professionalize teaching—and to insulate schools from popular control.

Teachers for the 21st Century, the Carnegie Corporation's program for school reform, spells out how those teachers who are certified professionals will run the schools. In the Carnegie scenario, teachers not on the top of the career ladder, parents and citizens will have no institutional authority. Parents are clients with no responsibility or authority to influence school policy, and citizens are denied even the minimal access parents have. Popular "interference" is thwarted by reducing state government to the rubber stamp status it has in licensing other professions.

The *Boston Globe's* report (September 4, 1988) on Sens. Claiborne Pell and Christopher Dodd's legislation to fund the program noted that all those involved with the board presume teachers scoring well on the exam should win higher salaries and new job responsibilities. But there was no mention of teachers who are not board certified. Like parents and citizens, they will not share power in restructured schools.

Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, has become the most prominent salesman for the Carnegie plan. Now retired as president of the union's largest local, its New York City affiliate, Shanker faces only the most attenuated checks on his actions and has used the opportunity to sell the elixir of professionalization to teachers and a public hungry for a cure for education's ills. On the other hand, National Education Association (NEA) President Mary Futrell has been reluctant to endorse the Carnegie plan for national certification. But the NEA has no alternative vision for reform, so as the Carnegie Corporation and its eager agent Shanker promote the plan, the NEA says less and less about its limitations.

The Carnegie proposal has tapped teachers' frustration at being denied the opportunity to apply their skills, education and ideals. Schools structured like factories within bureaucratic school systems suffocate teachers' creativity, autonomy and thoughtfulness. Many of the most active teachers see the drive for professionalization as a call to empower teachers and wrest authority from both school bureaucracies and local political machines concerned mainly with perpetuating their own political power rather than improving life in schools for students and teachers. They are seduced by the desire for greater control over their work and either do not detect the underlying social and political design or accept it because they fear parent and

Proposed school reforms crib on democratic control

community involvement.

Certification is bad: But teachers, parents and citizens who care about education's democratic purposes should oppose the Carnegie plan for certification and its broader agenda of professionalization and demand that the federal government end its funding of the project. An effort to create national certification for teachers is wrong-headed on at least these five counts:

- It reduces social ownership of education by cutting a professional board loose from democratic control and giving it total responsibility for deciding what skills and attitudes teachers must have. Although certification will be voluntary at the start, proponents of the plan have predicted that school systems will be pressured to hire "board certified" whenever possible.

- The boards used as models for professionalizing teaching are themselves seriously flawed and under attack for failing to protect the public interest. Take, for example, an Ohio doctor, James Burt, who was accused of botching surgery on hundreds of women, performing crude experiments without their knowledge or consent. Burt, board certified, was not even charged by the state medical board until the governor intervened. His case is an extreme example of the systemic inability of state medical boards to place the interests of medical

consumers above those of practitioners. The flaw is in having a private organization control a social service. It is a flaw exacerbated in the plan for certifying teachers.

- Tiers of teachers, with board certified teachers receiving higher salaries, as is the plan, will stratify schools even more than they are now. Another hierarchical layer is the last "improvement" schools need.

- Within the schools, who will determine which students are taught by presumably superior board certified teachers? Is there any doubt that children from the most advantaged groups will have the greatest proportion of board certified teachers and disadvantaged children the smallest? Without acknowledging the anti-democratic implications, Fiske noted that soon "real estate agents in tony suburbs will boast to potential buyers" about the high percentage of board certified teachers in local schools. Schools without the money to lure board certified teachers will be certified inferior.

- The task the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has set for it-

self—determining precisely what teachers must know and do to be effective—has been criticized by some educators as being inimical to building an understanding of how people teach and learn. William Ayers, writing in the September issue of the *Journal of Teacher Education*, argues that trying to establish teaching's "knowledge base," as the board has promised, actually obscures how complex a task teaching is, how specific it is to each person and situation.

The schools clearly need fixing, but the plan to professionalize teaching is just what education and teachers don't need. The quality of teaching, like the quality of the schools themselves, needs to be on the agenda of a movement demanding democratic control of the schools. To state the need for a movement of community activists, parents, teachers and students is not to detract from the obstacles that impede its formation. But failure to reclaim the schools as democratic institutions will have consequences far more daunting than the stumbling blocks to assembling a coalition to fight for popular control of schools. ■

Lois Weiner is a doctoral student at Harvard Graduate School of Education, on leave from teaching at the High School for the Humanities in New York.

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JUNE 16-17, 1989



Join us to commemorate the June 16, 1976 massacre of children in the township of Soweto.

AGENDA OF EVENTS

FRIDAY, JUNE 16

10 a.m. **BRIEFING SESSION** at the Capitol to inform visitors about the sanctions bill.

Noon **STAND IN SOLIDARITY** on the Capitol steps, including prayers and songs.

1-4 p.m. **MEET YOUR SENATOR** to urge support for sanctions legislation.

7 p.m. **"SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE"** with Allan Boesak, including nonviolence training at Metropolitan AME Church in Washington, D.C.

9 p.m. **BEGIN ALL-NIGHT CANDLELIGHT VIGIL** at the White House. Prayers of solidarity and songs of truth will lead us through the night.

SATURDAY, JUNE 17

11 a.m. **"SPEAK FOR THE CHILDREN"** Rally/Service at the Sylvan Theatre, featuring Allan Boesak and key religious and labor leaders speaking out to end apartheid's terror. Entertainers against apartheid will provide music.

1 p.m. **"MARCH FOR THE CHILDREN"** to the White House to call out the names of apartheid's victims, to demand a change in U.S. policy toward apartheid, and to stand in solidarity with the South Africa freedom movement. The event will be followed by the option for nonviolent civil disobedience.

The march is part of **FROM PENTECOST TO SOWETO**, the first ecumenical campaign sponsored by the **South Africa Crisis Coordinating Committee** (Partial list includes representatives of the following): African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, American Baptist Churches, American Committee on Africa, American Federation of Government Employees, Bread for the World, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Church Women United, Clergy and Laity Concerned, Episcopal Church, Evangelicals for Social Action, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Interfaith Centre for Corporate Responsibility, Jesuit Social Ministries, National Office, National Baptist Convention (USA), National Baptist Convention of America, National Council of Churches, National House of the Lord Church, Pax Christi, Progressive National Baptist Convention, Presbyterian Church USA, SANE/FREEZE, Sojourners, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, Washington Office on Africa, World Council of Churches, U.S. Office

NATIONAL CONTACT: NCC Africa Office (212) 870-2645, Sojourners (202) 636-3637, or WCC, U.S. Office (212) 870-2533.

To boldly go where no ad has before

By Tom Engelhardt

AS "CHANNEL ONE," WHITTLE Communications' attempt to beam ads into schools daily via a prime-time-style news show, ends its test run, so too has the expectable storm of public protest and debate exhausted itself—at least temporarily. But as Whittle management evaluates whether to expand from six to 10,000 schools by 1990, delivering to advertisers what the *New York Times* calls "one of the largest captive audiences of teen-agers ever assembled," an unexpected critique of Channel One is developing in the ad community.

For advertising professionals, Channel One's use of video and satellite technology to penetrate that rarest of entities—an ad-free environment—gave the Whittle scheme a patina of innovative modernity. Nonetheless, there is a growing awareness that a "captive" audience, policed by teachers bent on testing students on material seen, may not be an appropriate way to ensure early brand loyalty. Ad managers and agency executives are quietly considering the problems involved in having their products associated not with excitement, sensuality and fun, but with homework and old Mrs. Grunby, the social studies teacher.

Many cite the recently released *21st Century Report* from the Institute of Life Styles and Life Studies in Cambridge, Mass., that shows school to be the least popular American environment for 14-18 year-olds with \$25 or more in weekly pocket money.

In an increasingly narrowcast world in which "environment" is crucial to the process of "product bonding," more and more ad professionals are privately questioning the

FANTASY

Whittle approach in a critique that goes something like this:

Your message here: Teenagers, who control an estimated \$60 billion a year of family income, are still remarkably shielded by school from the ad/consumer universe. An environment in which the Walkman is banned, personal decoration frowned upon and all but cafeteria food discouraged has to be considered a relatively consumption-free zone. And if one adds in the consumption-free space created by homework, untold prime hours of ad influence are lost every week.

Ad professionals feel this cripples American society both in terms of its potential buying power and of its democratic spirit. They point, for instance, to the *21st Century Report's*

figures showing that 83 percent of all girls aged 14 to 18 years would rather be in the most dilapidated hypermall than in the best science class imaginable (the figures for English, social studies and math are 85 percent, 88 percent and 94 percent respectively).

These ad pros conclude, however, that if you wanted to reach a population of prisoners, you would hardly choose to put yourself in jail. By analogy, they feel that Whittle-like efforts to break the ad into the school environment are misplaced. The only profitable approach to concentrate on, they suggest, is breaking teenagers out.

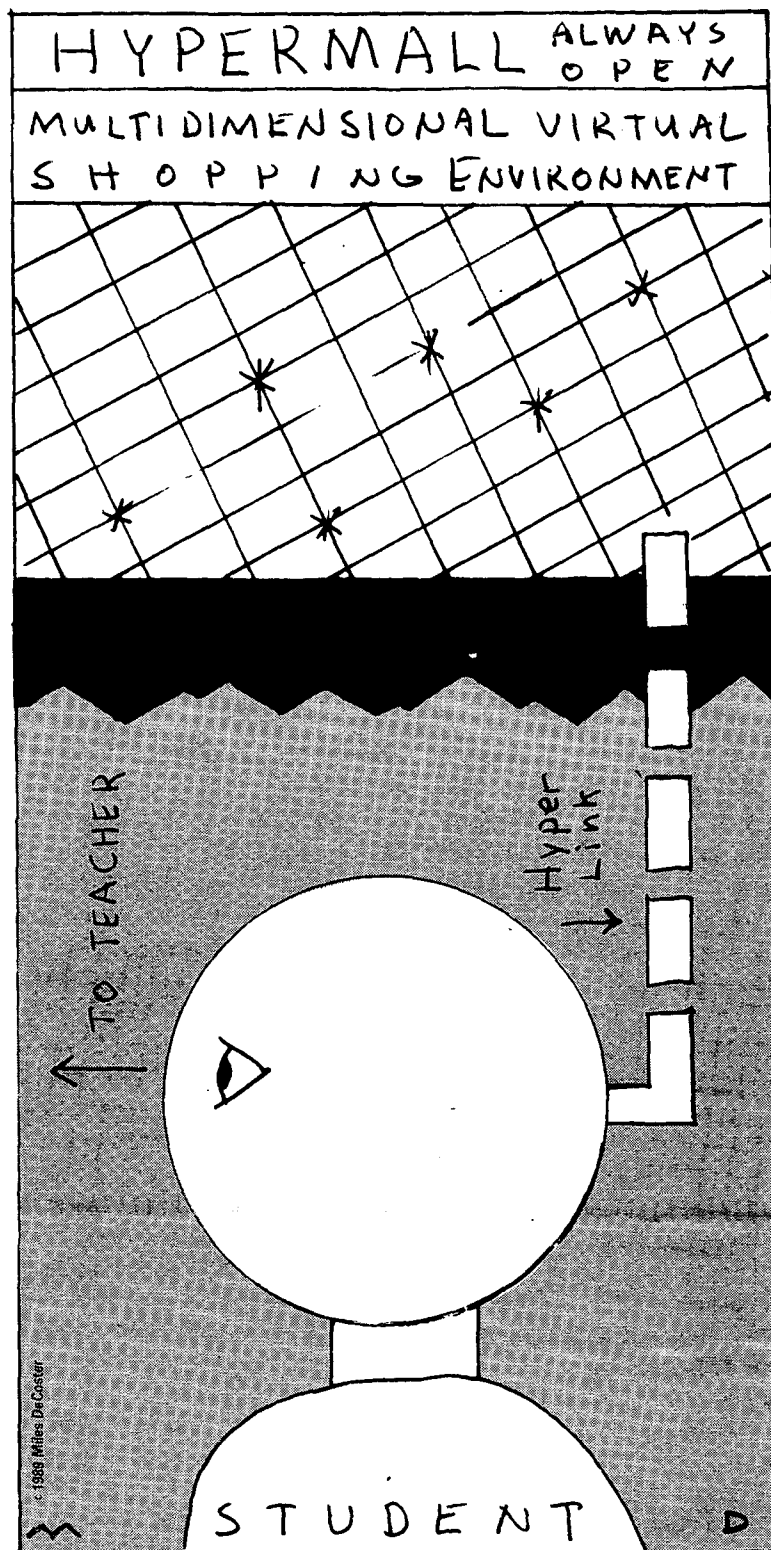
Fortunately, given trends in corporate conglomeration, some multinational R&D budgets now equal the GNPs of small Third World countries. As a result, ad professionals find themselves poised to fund and exploit a series of scientific breakthroughs that, by the next century, may reverse the whole concept of ad outreach. In fact, a privately funded study by London's Saatchi Center for Wellbeing and Human Development reports that two unnamed agency giants have already seeded R&D subdepartments to study "virtual and hyperspatial modes of transport for bringing the potential consumer directly to the ad."

Beam me up, Saatchi: The Saatchi Center's study highlights two counter-Whittlesque "scenarios." The first involves the use of Virtual Environments, or VEs. VEs are computer-generated three-dimensional worlds which suitably equipped humans can "enter" and with which they can interact.

The relatively crude VEs of the present moment, which already have widespread NASA and military applications, are expected to give way within a decade to visually sophisticated and "inhabitable" worlds that would appeal to advertisers. Planning is already underway to "transport" students to a variety of computer-generated hypermall environments during school hours. There, without ever physically leaving the classroom, they could freely "wander," electronically purchasing products later to be shipped to their homes.

These computer-generated products could, in turn, meld with any sort of "entertainment environment" advertisers might care to computerize with three results: the elimination of television (Why watch a screen when you can be inside it, singing and buying with the Michael Jackson or Madonna of some future moment?); the freeing-up of the vast ad funding television absorbs; and, finally, the coming of the first totally ad-controlled selling environment in history, with previously unheard of "psychoprofits" from "cybermers" (cybernetic customers).

At the moment, even the most ad-



vanced, freestanding VEs in development involve the wearing of cumbersome helmets and encoded gloves, inconceivable in a hostile autocratic setting like school. VE designers believe, however, that miniaturization

Ad executives are considering the problems of having their products associated with homework and old Mrs. Grunby.

will someday allow VE components to be hidden in, say, a "pimple" on an acne-streaked face and an "eraser" on a pencil. Then a student, seemingly hard at work writing a theme, might actually be gliding via hand-and-cheek controls through an MTV-style "living catalogue."

The second, rather more futuristic, scenario Saatchi identifies as promising involves the work of MIT

physicist Neils Konek in reconstituting human beings (he calls them "beamers") in all-ad environments, and a teleportation system being explored by Professor Issue Kiyamoto of Tokyo University. Konek and Kiyamoto hope by the year 2125 that state-of-the-art black-hole technology will create out-of-body "contexts" in which students could actually be transported into an as-yet-undeveloped "Ad World," while their material bodies remained in the classroom and, to the eyes of their teachers, fully attentive. "In our research," Konek says, "we've discovered that leaving as little as .078 percent of an affluent teenager's brainpower in the classroom is enough to maintain a B minus average."

"I guarantee you," adds Professor Konek, "that when we look back from the 22nd century, Channel One's going to seem as much like an evolutionary dead-end for advertising as Neanderthals did from the point of view of Homo sapiens." ■

Tom Engelhardt is a senior editor at Pantheon Books.

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Near Misses in Marketing #11

