

CHARLES E. PHILLIPS

Concealed Aims of Education and How We Achieve Them

To reveal concealed aims is logically to destroy their characteristic and their hidden power. This result may not, however, apply in the field of public education. Our first concealed aim in society and its schools has been to obscure perception of stark reality, and we have been so successful that the exoteric majority will be unable to discern the truth of these disclosures. Educational historians will recall the Massachusetts Education Act of 1647, in which that "old deluder, Satan" is charged with having kept men in ignorance — first by preventing publication of the Scriptures in the vernacular, and later by discouraging efforts to teach the young to read. Whether Satanic in origin or not, the devices of today are much more sophisticated. The educational significance of Marshall McLuhan's dictum, "the medium is the message," is that there is no longer any message clear and definite enough to distinguish true or false. This makes it possible for people to live in a fog — or several contradictory fogs — and cling concurrently to traditional "truth" and modern denials. The coherent reasoning of hot print, the emotional response from cool T.V., and the church whatever its temperature cannot really be in opposition because in each case the medium not the content is the message. All the school has to do to keep the young in a daze is nothing in particular — and this it does. This is why there is enthusiastic advocacy of E.T.V. — that is, of its "use" as a medium — but relatively little support for critical study in school of the content of television programs to which pupils devote much of their time. Critical appreciation of the productions of other mass media, except books, is similarly neglected in school. This leaves pupils able to focus their eyes but not their minds, so that the message, if any, is just the medium itself. A neo-Roman circus.

One method, then, of achieving the first concealed aim — to obscure the perception of reality — is to neglect the study of widely used means of communication. To do this it is helpful to divert attention to what is apparently laudable but in effect futile. Give just a moment's thought to the undisclosed purpose served by trying to make all English-speaking youngsters bilingual through oral French in all elementary schools.

But the school has more direct methods of obscuring reality. Consider the textbook and classroom exposition of the working of political

democracy — the importance and sufficiency of the vote enabling the electorate to choose a local representative, the national leader, and the policy to be put into practice by government. As we used to say in intellectual circles, "Oh, yeah?" The different message the young may get from the newspapers adds to the confusion. To enable the pupil in school to get a realistic view of how democracy works would not make him a cynic, but an active participant. Our concealed aim, however, is not to do this. Think of the present embarrassment of leaders in the United States with respect to the operations in Viet Nam. It is bad enough as things are, but might be intolerable if the schools there had allowed political and international manipulations ever to come into focus. A few months ago with three other Canadians I visited an exceptionally good elementary school in Las Vegas. In an exchange of questions and answers with pupils, we tried to find out how they thought people in other countries, including Canada, regarded the Vietnamese war. They had been non-educated so well that their reply showed an inability even to understand such a question: "We think that Canada and other non-communist countries should do more . . . send troops and things . . . against the aggressors." Think of the position Canada will be in if we become committed to some future war. If our schools were now to educate for realistic understanding and for a higher and broader type of patriotism, as we might perhaps do under present favorable circumstances, our position as a fighting nation would be impossible. Hence the importance of the concealed aim of concealing reality.

Allied to the first aim is our firm but undisclosed second aim — ensuring inability to think independently in critical areas. This aim is stated overtly as teaching to think, without the unnecessary rider that to think means to think rightly. The traditional method of achieving the aim, especially in secondary education, has been to restrict thinking to academic disciplines, which never spill over. But new fields for learning, like social studies or social science, require some finesse in handling. At present security rests largely on the small number of adults, teachers or potential teachers included, who have overcome their own non-education and acquired the ability and courage to think independently themselves. (The recently high birth rate has reduced the incidence of such teachers to safe proportions.) To give at this point only one obvious example of present practice in support of the second aim, and to take that from the top, independent thinking about God has been taboo in all schools. Twenty-three years ago Ontario made the mistake of going further and introduced a course in right thinking about God in its public elementary schools, which *ipso facto* were converted into state supported Protestant confessional schools; but what with an increasingly cosmopolitan population and the increasingly divergent views of Protestant theologians, right thinking has become more and more difficult to define, and all but last ditch fundamentalists seem ready to cry quits. No need to worry. Vagueness and no discussion

are sufficient to dampen independent thinking about religion in public schools. Reference has already been made to thinking about politics.

The third concealed aim of education is the cultivation of hypocrisy. To pretend to believe what you don't believe and to hide behavior not approved by convention is recognized by adults as a minimum duty, and not just by Alfred Doolittle, as the right and proper thing to do. Hypocrisy holds society together. It sets a good example for the young, and it is their own fault if seeing through the sham makes them perverse enough to become cynics, beatniks, or delinquents. Educators should be cautious, however, and realize that democratic society expects and approves only the semi-conscious or indifferent hypocrisy of the majority and is not happy to encourage minorities who have persuaded even themselves that they are obeying the commands of God, or Marx, or both when they warp the minds of the young. What the schools must cultivate is a cheerful and amenable hypocrisy. The aim is stated overtly as the cult of excellence and development of appreciation for the finer things of life. Thus literature is taught in such a way that the adult may later get some pleasure from attending a Shakespearian play as a novelty, and satisfaction from mingling with others who uphold high standards of taste in public, and not be deterred from this duty by boredom. Art should be taught in such a way that the pupil will continue later to express his love of intangible beauty before making down payments on a refrigerator-freezer and a color T.V. Thus he will help keep the economy booming and at the same time contribute to the background music of aesthetic values. These are simple and relatively harmless examples of what the school can do for hypocrisy. Incidental tribute should have been paid to formal achievement examinations, especially in literature, which a pupil has to be a hypocrite to pass. This leads us to the more important aspects of hypocrisy — in the moral sphere — which will be dealt with incidentally in connection with other concealed aims which follow.

A fourth set of concealed aims encourages cheating, belligerence, and reluctance to cooperate. The umbrella aims for these are good work habits, doing one's best, healthy competition, healthy sport, fair play, and self-reliance. Cheating is most effectively encouraged by examinations and their concomitant consequences of pass or failure, although the assignment of daily homework gives valuable preparatory practice. Belligerence is fostered by football. Reluctance and inability to cooperate are nurtured by traditional methods of classroom instruction, which make it an offence for pupils to work together or help one another. Obviously these are mere illustrations. You can think of many other ways by which the concealed aim is achieved.

A fifth concealed aim is important enough to warrant more lengthy discussion. The aim is to make young people increasingly discontent. The reason for doing this is to have them forever seeking short-lived satisfaction by purchase of "goods." This keeps business profitable and

provides through taxes a steady supply of money for education to make more people discontent. The cover for this aim is education for leisure, with current emphasis on creativity. Needless to say, successful encouragement of creativity would defeat the hidden purpose, but the nearest we come to success at present is less and less creativity in successive grades. As a result, even adults with a hobby interest like photography have so little creative ability left that they keep buying new equipment to gloat over once and store away unused. You may think that the high birth rate and the increasing number of illegitimate babies shows a flair for creativity. But note that a growth in population is good for business and that the concealed aim actually encourages such productive activity as a highly motivated but brief escape from discontent and boredom. In this connection consider also the value of other easy forms of entertainment requiring little concentration and only spasmodic attention, and you will see another reason for the school's reluctance to help create an educated demand for better commercial T.V. The sale of cosmetics and name-brand detergents would slump disastrously if people became absorbingly interested in leisure pursuits — reading good books, seeing good T.V. programs, and engaging in creative activities. The school is a safeguard against such a disaster. Among its resources for the cultivation of boredom is a large stock of facts in neatly classified bundles for memorization — dead stock and surplus, really, in an environment replete with facilities for instant information — but for that reason all the more useful for its concealed purpose in the treatment of a captive audience.

Before turning to the major under-cover ethical aims, we shall find two advantages in looking at the doctrines and values on which the aims are based. First, it will dispel any notion that the concealed aims of education are diabolic or cynical, because the basis is eminently respectable — nothing other than traditional Christian theology. Second, it will make the aims easier to understand and accept. The cornerstone of the foundation is the long entrenched doctrine regarding human nature. The first part of this teaching asserts that man has fixed and known characteristics and that correct knowledge of these is necessary for an understanding of human behavior. (The modern heresy to be eschewed is that study of man's behavior is the most reliable guide to an understanding of his potentialities, and that his adaptability is of much greater significance than any characteristics allegedly fixed.) The second part of the teaching represents man as fallible — and even having a bias towards evil, according to some. The implication that we are all sinners helps us to accept an environment of violence, deception, and exploitation on a grand scale. It is balm to the conscience of the great who use others as pawns, since the nature of the latter would cause them to do the same if they had the ability and the chance; and for the same reason it disposes the majority to condone the sins that might have been their own. The contrary heresy, which would disrupt society, is that men individually and collectively must take responsibility for

their actions. A ramification of the orthodox doctrine is the dependency of man — on God as interpreted by theological authority, and on men of superior status in business and government. The essential point to be grasped is that the divine authority is present among men as an independent agent. (Remember what happened to Bruno.) By extension and analogy the same becomes true of human authorities, so that even the police and school principals are seen as agents detached and apart. This concept is reinforced by doctrines regarding sin, punishment, and expiation, which lead the offender against the laws of society or the rules of the school to look on acceptance of punishment as paying his debt, so that the loss or harm to others is not his concern. The whole set of values is epitomized in the doctrine that truth and error, right and wrong, have been defined authoritatively for men by God and/or His agents by a process in which man had and has nothing to say. All of this is taught openly in school as Christian democracy.

Now for the sixth concealed aim, retardation of moral development. The overt statement in this case may be almost any string of high-sounding words indicating a determination to teach a code of moral virtues. The concealed aim is achieved in school by efforts to achieve the overt aim — by admonitions to be virtuous, by indoctrinating courses in ethics or its religious foundations, and even by courses in civics or health. But the more important means is negative. Discussion by pupils of any vital issue in connection with any subject is almost immediately curtailed on grounds that the course must be covered and that examinations are imminent. Discussion of moral issues by groups of pupils uncontrolled by the teacher is rare, especially if they are adolescents with possibly dangerous views. By these and other positive and negative means moral development is effectively prevented, and moral codes are preserved for the breach no less than the observance.

The seventh, and for this article the final, concealed aim is irresponsibility. This is pursued under cover of its opposite — fostering responsibility. There might be danger in this if there were any possibility at all that present spasmodic efforts to develop responsibility in school could be successful. But logic as well as experience show that it cannot happen. If a teacher knows what is right and wrong, ethically as well as epistemologically, and requires the pupil to agree or conform, then clearly he takes responsibility — not the pupil. Similarly in practice, if the teacher assigns and corrects homework, selects and arranges content for study, requires a parent to sign a conventional report card, and with the principal controls the operation of the whole school curriculum, it is obvious that the only choice left to the pupil is between making an effort to string along or making a pretense. Some say that a responsible person is one who knows what he can do, says what he will do, does what he says, tries to do even more, and makes good to the best of his ability any loss or harm incurred by others through a deficiency in his performance. In school, however, responsibility is

interpreted as duty, which is doing what somebody else says you should do if he can make you do it. An alternative wording for the seventh concealed aim would be to make young people dutiful.

Now you have them — seven concealed aims of education. It has not taken us long to uncover them. It will take us much longer to get rid of them in our schools.