THE SOWING OF THE SEEDS:
late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

“The Sowing of the Seeds: late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” is the shortest chapter of the deliberate dumbing down of America. Undoubtedly, this chapter may be one of the most important since the philosophies of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Wilhelm Wundt, and John Dewey et al., reflect a total departure from the traditional definition of education like the one given in The New Century Dictionary of the English Language (Appleton, Century, Crofts: New York, 1927):

The drawing out of a person’s innate talents and abilities by imparting the knowledge of languages, scientific reasoning, history, literature, rhetoric, etc.—the channels through which those abilities would flourish and serve.¹

A quantum leap was taken from the above definition to the new, dehumanizing definition used by the experimental psychologists found in An Outline of Educational Psychology (Barnes & Noble: New York, 1934, rev. ed.) by Rudolph Pintner et al. That truly revolutionary definition claims that

learning is the result of modifiability in the paths of neural conduction. Explanations of even such forms of learning as abstraction and generalization demand of the neurones only growth, excitability, conductivity, and modifiability. The mind is the connection-system of man; and learning is the process of connecting. The situation-response formula is adequate to cover learning of any sort, and the really influential factors in learning are readiness of the neurones, sequence in time, belongingness, and satisfying consequences.²

An in-depth understanding of the deplorable situation found in our nation’s schools today is impossible without an understanding of the redefinition in the above statements. Education in the
twenty-first century will, for the majority of youth, be workforce training. Thus, the need for Pavlovian/Skinnerian methodology based on operant conditioning which, in essence, is at the heart of the above dehumanizing definition of education. This “sowing of the seeds” through redefinition will reap the death of traditional, liberal arts education through the advent of mastery learning, outcome-based education, and direct instruction—all of which will be performance-based and behaviorist.

1762

*Emile by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Chez Jean Neaulme Duchesne: A. Amsterdam [Paris], 1762)* was published. Rousseau’s “Social Contract” presented in *Emile* influenced the French Revolution. In this book Rousseau promoted child-centered “permissive education” in which a teacher “should avoid strict discipline and tiresome lessons.” Both Rousseau (1712–1788) and Swiss educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827) believed that the “whole child” should be educated by “doing,” and that religion should not be a guiding principle in education, a theme we shall see repeated over the next 238 years.

1832

*Wilhelm Wundt, founder of experimental psychology and the force behind its dissemination throughout the Western world, was born in 1832 in Neckarau, southern Germany. The following excerpts concerning Wundt’s contribution to modern education are taken from The Leipzig Connection: The Systematic Destruction of American Education by Paolo Lionni and Lance J. Klass* (Heron Books: Portland, Ore., 1980):

To Wundt, a thing made sense and was worth pursuing if it could be measured, quantified, and scientifically demonstrated. Seeing no way to do this with the human soul, he proposed that psychology concern itself solely with experience. As Wundt put it... Karl Marx injected Hegel’s theories with economics and sociology, developing a “philosophy of dialectical materialism.”... (p. 8)

From Wundt’s work it was only a short step to the later redefinition of education. Originally, education meant drawing out of a person’s innate talents and abilities by imparting the knowledge of languages, scientific reasoning, history, literature, rhetoric, etc.—the channels through which those abilities would flourish and serve. To the experimental psychologist, however, education became the process of exposing the student to “meaningful” experiences so as to ensure desired reactions:

Learning is the result of modifiability in the paths of neural conduction. Explanations of even such forms of learning as abstraction and generalization demand of the neurones only growth, excitability, conductivity, and modifiability. The mind is the connection-system of man; and learning is the process of connecting. The situation-response formula is adequate to cover learning of any sort, and the really influential factors in learning are readiness of the neurones, sequence in time, belongingness, and satisfying consequences.

If one assumes (as did Wundt) that there is nothing there to begin with but a body, a brain, a nervous system, then one must try to educate by inducing sensations in that ner-
vous system. Through these experiences, the individual will learn to respond to any given stimulus, with the “correct” response. The child is not, for example, thought capable of volitional control over his actions, or of deciding whether he will act or not act in a certain way; his actions are thought to be preconditioned and beyond his control, he is a stimulus-response mechanism. According to this thinking, he is his reactions. Wundt’s thesis laid the philosophical basis for the principles of conditioning later developed by Pavlov (who studied physiology in Leipzig in 1884, five years after Wundt had inaugurated his laboratory there) and American behavioral psychologists such as Watson and Skinner; for laboratories and electroconvulsive therapy; for schools oriented more toward socialization of the child than toward the development of intellect; and for the emergence of a society more and more blatantly devoted to the gratification of sensory desire at the expense of responsibility and achievement. (pp. 14–15)

[Ed. Note: The reader should purchase The Leipzig Connection: The Systematic Destruction of American Education, a slim paperback book which, in this writer’s opinion, is the most useful and important book available regarding the method used to change children’s behavior/values and to “dumb down” an entire society. The authors, Lionni and Klass, have made an outstanding contribution to the history of American education and to the understanding of why and how America, which up until the 1930s had the finest education system in the world, ended up with one of the worst education systems in the industrialized world in a short period of fifty years.

Another commentary on the importance of Wundt’s theories comes from Dennis L. Cuddy, Ph.D., in an excellent article entitled “The Conditioning of America” (The Christian News, New Haven, Mo., December 11, 1989). An excerpt follows:

The conditioning of modern American society began with John Dewey, a psychologist, a Fabian Socialist and the “Father of Progressive Education.” Dewey used the psychology developed in Leipzig by Wilhelm Wundt, and believed that through a stimulus-response approach (like Pavlov) students could be conditioned for a new social order.]

1862

The first experiment with “outcome-based education” (OBE) was conducted in England in 1862. Teacher opposition resulted in abandonment of the experiment. Don Martin of University of Pittsburgh, George E. Overholt and Wayne J. Urban of Georgia State University wrote Accountability in American Education: A Critique (Princeton Book Company: Princeton, N.J., 1976) containing a section entitled “Payment for Results” which chronicles the English experiment. The following excerpt outlines the experiment:

The call for “sound and cheap” elementary instruction was answered by legislation, passed by Parliament during 1862, known as The Revised Code. This was the legislation that produced payment [for] results, the nineteenth century English accountability system.... The opposition to the English payment-[for]-results system which arose at the time of its introduction was particularly interesting. Teachers provided the bulk of the resistance, and they based their objections on both educational and economic grounds.... They abhorred the narrowness and mechanical character the system imposed on the educational process. They also objected to the economic burden forced upon them by basing their pay on student performance.
[Ed. Note: “Payment for Results” and Outcome-Based Education are based on teacher accountability and require teaching to the test, the results of which are to be “measured” for accountability purposes. Both methods of teaching result in a narrow, mechanistic system of education similar to Mastery Learning. Teachers in the United States in 1999, as were teachers involved in the experiment in England, will be judged and paid according to students’ test scores; i.e., how well the teachers teach to the test. Proponents of Mastery Learning believe that almost all children can learn if given enough time, adequate resources geared to the individual learning style of the student, and a curriculum aligned to test items (teach to the test). Mastery Learning uses Skinnerian methodology (operant conditioning) in order to obtain “predictable” results. Benjamin Bloom, the father of Mastery Learning, says that “the purpose of education is to change the thoughts, actions and feelings of students.” Mastery Learning (ML) and its fraternal twin Direct Instruction (DI) are key components of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and Effective Schools Research (ESR). The reader is urged to study the definitions of all these terms, including the behaviorist term section found in the glossary of this book prior to reading further. The one common thread running through this book relates to these terms and their importance in the implementation of workforce training and attitude and value change.]

1874

Edward Lee Thorndike was born August 31, 1874 in Williamsburg, Massachusetts. Thorndike was trained in the new psychology by the first generation of Wilhelm Wundt’s protégés. He graduated from Wesleyan University in 1895 after having studied with Wundtians Andrew C. Armstrong and Charles Judd. He went to graduate school at Harvard and studied under psychologist William James. While at Harvard, Thorndike surprised James by doing research with chickens, testing their behavior, and pioneering what later became known as “animal psychology.” As briefly stated by Thorndike himself, psychology was the “science of the intellect, character, and behavior of animals, including man.” To further excerpt The Leipzig Connection’s excellent treatment of Thorndike’s background:

Thorndike applied for a fellowship at Columbia, was accepted by Cattell, and moved with his two most intelligent chickens to New York, where he continued his research and earned his Ph.D. in 1893. Thorndike’s specialty was the “puzzle box,” into which he would put various animals (chickens, rats, cats) and let them find their way out by themselves. His doctoral dissertation on cats has become part of the classical literature of psychology. After receiving his doctorate, he spent a year as a teacher at Western Reserve University, and it wasn’t long before Cattell advised Dean [James Earl] Russell to visit Thorndike’s first classroom at Western Reserve: “Although the Dean found him ‘dealing with the investigations of mice and monkeys,’ he came away satisfied that he was worth trying out on humans.”

Russell offered Thorndike a job at Teachers College, where the experimenter remained for the next thirty years. Thorndike was the first psychologist to study animal behavior in an experimental psychology laboratory and (following Cattell’s suggestion) apply the same techniques to children and youth; as one result, in 1903, he published the book Educational Psychology. In the following years he published a total of 507 books, monographs, and articles.

Thorndike’s primary assumption was the same as Wundt’s: that man is an animal, that his actions are actually always reactions, and that he can be studied in the laboratory.
in much the same way as an animal might be studied. Thorndike equated children with the rats, monkeys, fish, cats, and chickens upon which he experimented in his laboratory and was prepared to apply what he found there to learning in the classroom. He extrapolated "laws" from his research into animal behavior which he then applied to the training of teachers, who took what they had learned to every corner of the United States and ran their classrooms, curricula, and schools, on the basis of this new "educational" psychology.

In *The Principles of Teaching Based on Psychology* (1906), Thorndike proposed making "the study of teaching scientific and practical." Thorndike’s definition of the art of teaching is

> the art of giving and withholding stimuli with the result of producing or preventing certain responses. In this definition the term stimulus is used widely for any event which influences a person—for a word spoken to him, a look, a sentence which he reads, the air he breathes, etc. The term response is used for any reaction made by him—a new thought, a feeling of interest, a bodily act, any mental or bodily condition resulting from the stimulus. The aim of the teacher is to produce desirable and prevent undesirable changes in human beings by producing and preventing certain responses. The means at the disposal of the teacher are the stimuli which can be brought to bear upon the pupil—the teacher’s words, gestures, and appearance, the condition and appliances of the school room, the books to be used and objects to be seen, and so on through a long list of the things and events which the teacher can control.

1896

*Psychology by John Dewey, the Father of "Progressive Education," was published* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1896). This was the first American textbook on the "revised" subject of education. *Psychology* would become the most widely-read and quoted textbook used in schools of education in this country. Just prior to the publication of his landmark book, Dewey had joined the faculty of the Rockefeller-endowed University of Chicago as head of the combined departments of philosophy, psychology and pedagogy (teaching). In that same year, 1895, the university allocated $1,000 to establish a laboratory in which Dewey could apply psychological principles and experimental techniques to the study of learning. The laboratory opened in January 1896 as the Dewey School, later to become known as The University of Chicago Laboratory School. Nestled amid the Mississippi River campus, the School of Science and Engineering was the first laboratory school in the United States. Dewey thought of the school as a place

> where his theories of education could be put into practice, tested, and scientifically evaluated.

...Dewey... sought to apply the doctrines of experience and experiment to everyday life and, hence, to education... seeking via this model institution to pave the way for the "schools of the future." There he had put into actual practice three of the revolutionary beliefs he had culled from the new psychology: that to put the child in possession of his fullest talents, education should be active rather than passive; that to prepare the child for a democratic society, the school should be social rather than individualist; and that to enable the child to think creatively, experimentation rather than imitation should be encouraged.

What kind of curriculum would fit the school that was a mini-cooperative society? Dewey’s recommendation was indeed radical: build the curriculum not around academic subjects but around occupational activities which provided maximum opportunities for peer interaction and socialization. Since the beginning of Western civilization, the school curriculum was centered around the development of academic skills, the intellectual faculties, and high literacy. Dewey wanted to change all of that. Why? Because high literacy produced that abominable form of independent intelligence which was basically, as Dewey believed, anti-social.

Thus, from Dewey’s point of view, the school’s primary commitment to literacy was indeed the key to the whole problem. In 1898, Dewey wrote an essay, “The Primary-Education Fetish,” in which he explained exactly what he meant:

There is... a false education god whose idolators are legion, and whose cult influences the entire educational system. This is language study—the study not of foreign language, but of English; not in higher, but in primary education. It is almost an unquestioned assumption, of educational theory and practice both, that the first three years of a child’s school life shall be mainly taken up with learning to read and write his own language. If we add to this the learning of a certain amount of numerical combinations, we have the pivot about which primary education swings.... It does not follow, however, that conditions—social, industrial and intellectual—have undergone such a radical change, that the time has come for a thoroughgoing examination of the emphasis put upon linguistic work in elementary instruction.... The plea for the predominance of learning to read in early school life because of the great importance attaching to literature seems to me a perversion.

Endnotes:

2 Ibid.
3 The Leipzig Connection may be obtained by sending a check for $11.45 to: Heron Books, P.O. Box 503, Sheridan, OR, or by calling 1–503–843–3834.
5 Dr. Cuddy’s important publications on the history of American education, from which this writer has frequently quoted, can be obtained by writing: Florida ProFamily Forum, Inc., P.O. Box 1059, Highland City, FL 33846–1059; or by calling 1–914–644–6218. Cuddy’s newly revised edition of Chronology of Education with Quotable Quotes and Secret Records Revealed: The Men, the Money and the Methods Behind the New World Order should be in the library of every serious education researcher.
7 Ibid.