

Letting the Cat Out of the Apron

Latest targets in the "Rainbow" wars:

- "Don't Dress Your Cat in an Apron," a poem. (Teaches disrespect for parental authority.)
- A song about recycling, sung to the tune of "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." (Offensive secularization of a traditional Christian song.)
- Any suggestion that a school is a family. (Only a family is a family.)

These items, all part of the beleaguered "Children of the Rainbow" first-grade curriculum, are on a new, improved hit list being circulated by opponents of Schools Chancellor Joseph Fernandez.

A marvelous thing, this "Rainbow" curriculum. It started out as 400-odd pages on how to teach kids to be tolerant. By now it has become a laboratory demonstration of how to crack the gorgeous mosaic.

"The Hispanics don't want it," said Iris Pabon, a Latino member of Community School Board 19 in East New York. "But the black people, they always try to do whatever they think is good. We don't even have a chance to see the book."

Oh yeah. We have heard this carol all over town in recent weeks. A wonderful touch for the holiday season. *The stupid yuppies want it. The bossy blacks want it. Fernandez and the Latinos want it.* And of course, the entire mosaic is happy to join together and turn on the gays for wanting it.

Tonight, Community Board 19 — whose students come from some of the poorest, most violent neighborhoods in the city — is scheduled to hold a public meeting on the changes its superintendent has proposed for the "Rainbow" curriculum.

They include all the deletions listed above, plus every reference to homosexuality, lesbian/gay families, and the dreaded word:

Levander Lilly, the superintendent in question, was completely and totally unavailable for comment.

This same hit list has cropped up all over town. It was approved, in diluted form, by the school board in Staten Island. Opponents of the "Rainbow" agenda are mailing it to school board members in Bay Ridge-Bensonhurst.

That district settled the "Rainbow" issue once already, by adopting the popular Fifth Grade Compromise. (No mention of tolerating homosexuals until Grade 5.) Now, support for the curriculum is wavering, and a new proposal to ban it entirely is on this week's agenda.

"It's escalated from a feeling that six was too young to be learning who sleeps with who," said Marilyn Birnbaum, a 20-year veteran of the board. "Now it's a whole thing about genders, the United States flag and all it stands for."

The escalation is being orchestrated by Jerry Cammarata, a conservative member of the Staten Island school board, who fixed the list of suggested deletions to every school

district in the city.

"If we allow this to seep into our literature, we may one day regret it," he warned.

Cammarata is part of an extremely vocal segment of the New York population that believes the gay community has infiltrated Fernandez' office, and is using the "Rainbow" curriculum to turn the city's children into homosexuals.

"I truly do believe the homosexual community wishes to have more pro-

literation," he said. "There's probably a surge of effort among the gay community, which works [for Fernandez] in very, very high places, to try to instill their lifestyles on the students."

This would never have happened if the Berlin Wall was still standing, people. Never has a city been more in need of a few Communists to worry about.

It is a long way from cat poems and recycling songs to homosexual conspiracies. To make the connection, you have to be very suspicious, and very vigilant.

The recycling song is on Cammarata's hit list, for instance, because the first stanza changes "He's got the whole world in his hands" to "We've got the whole world in our hands."

"For you and me, it's innocuous. But when you're dealing with a first-grade mind, and you change *he* to *we* — that can be very disturbing to a child," Cammarata said.

The "Rainbow" opponents found another troublesome message in a poem by Dan Greenburg:

*Don't dress your cat in an apron
Just cause he's learning to bake.
Don't put your horse in a night-gown*

*Just cause he can't stay awake . . .
A person should wear what he wants to*

*And not just what other folks say.
A person should do what she likes to.*

A person's a person that way.

"Well now," says Cammarata. "You see, that sounds innocuous. But when you take a child and impose situations of dress, of gender, at such an early age, you take away from that which is being taught in the school."

Right. The new list of proposed deletions also includes "Rapunzel's Revenge: Fairy Tales for Feminists."

This book is included in the bibliography for the "Rainbow" teacher's guide. It's out of print. The publisher is in Ireland. Nobody, including the school boards, can find a copy.

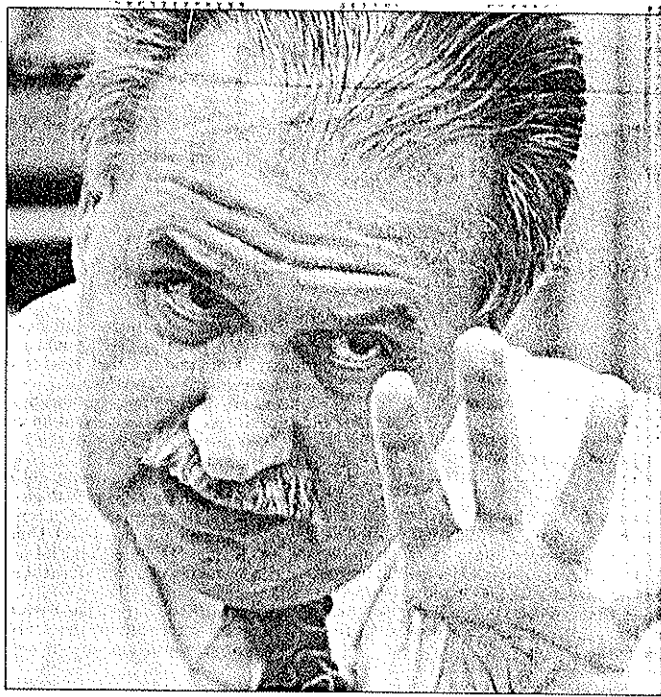
"We've expunged it until we can see it," says Cammarata.

"That's one of the arguments we've made!" cried a spokesman for Fernandez triumphantly. "All these books [in the bibliography] are not necessarily available."

This is what we've come down to in New York public education. The central board recommends books that don't exist, and the local districts go to the trouble of banning them.



Gail Collins



'NOT ME.' Chancellor Joseph Fernandez' book has stirred up storm.

Did He Say That?

Fernandez 'fixes' book quote

By Nick Chiles
STAFF WRITER

Call it the phantom quote.

Last week, Schools Chancellor Joseph Fernandez adamantly denied ever calling Board of Education member Ninfa Segarra a "political prostitute" — even though his own autobiography said he had. Fernandez and his publisher promised that the reference, of whose origins they claimed ignorance, had been removed from the final version of the book.

Now, the final version is out and the quote is still there — except now it's not attributed to anyone. Segarra, of the Bronx, called the editing sleight of hand "a coward's way out."

"I think it's worse than before," said Segarra, who contended her mother was upset by the reference. "At least when he was saying he said it, it gave somebody responsibility for such an extraordinary comment. Now it's not accountable to anyone. It is extraordinary for somebody, especially a woman, to be called such a horrible term. For a public official to be called that is beyond civility."

The book, published by Little, Brown and Co., is called "Tales Out of School: Joseph Fernandez's Crusade to Rescue American Education" and is due in stores in January.

Segarra, who wrote to the publisher last week seeking a retraction and apology, said yesterday that she's now considering contacting an attorney.

In the book on page 242, Fernandez said his adversarial relationship with the board drove him to make "remarks that I had never felt the urge to make."

The next sentence in the uncorrected review copy reads: "At one point, I called Segarra, who happens to be a very bright young lady and a diligent (if somewhat overzealous) advocate, a 'political prostitute' because of her turn-around on the condom issue."

The sentence has been changed in the final version to read: "At one point, Segarra, who happens to be a very bright young lady and a diligent (if somewhat overzealous) advocate, was called a 'political prostitute' because of her turn-around on the condom issue."

James Vlasto, spokesman for Fernandez, suggested yesterday that "probably" a third party called Segarra the unflattering name and "re-layed it" to the chancellor. Or perhaps Fernandez overheard it.

"It certainly was not the chancellor" who said it, Vlasto said. "He does not use language like that, even when he's angry. That's not his style."

Vlasto said the correction was made long before last week's news conference, where Fernandez apologized if his "blunt" language offended anyone.

Fernandez is scheduled to meet on Thursday with Segarra and board members Carol Gresser of Queens and Michael Petrides of Staten Island to receive their evaluation of his three-year tenure and discuss his future in New York.



Ninfa Segarra