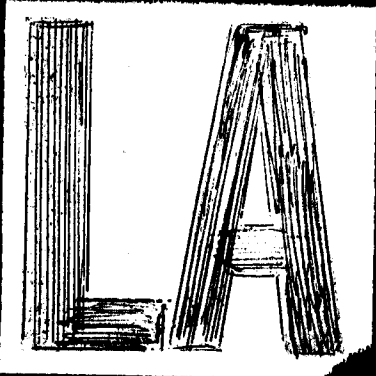


**Can L. Ron Hubbard  
Make Kids Smarter?  
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# WEEKLY

FREE VALLEY EDITION

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Can L. Ron Hubbard's "revolutionary study technology" make kids smarter?  
BY SARA CATANIA

# THE LEARNING CURE BY SARA CATANIA



Promoters of L. Ron Hubbard's "study technology" say his textbooks for children have no connection to Scientology.  
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**When you sit down to read, do you find yourself feeling blank or sort of spiny? Squashed, bent or just not there?**

Sure you do. And here's why: You've gone past a word you don't understand. In fact, the only reason a person gives up studying or becomes confused or unable to learn is because that person went past a word that was misunderstood.

At least that's what the followers of the late Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard want you to believe, because that's the basis of Hubbard's "breakthrough study technology," laid out in a series of textbooks his adherents are pushing for approval for use in schools across the state.

Next month, the supplemental reading list for California public schools, which includes the works of Shakespeare as well as texts of Supreme Court decisions and biographies of presidents and kings, could have Hubbard added to its inventory. If a 20-member citizens' review committee approves the five books based on Hubbard's writings, teachers and districts statewide will be free to buy them on the public's dime.

**An author's bio in the back of *Learning How To Learn*, the first book in the series, claims that "L. Ron Hubbard's advanced technology of study is now used by an estimated two million students and thousands of teachers in universities and school systems internationally. His educational materials have been translated into 12 languages to meet this worldwide demand for the first truly workable technology of how to study."**

But several educators who were asked to review the materials for this story strongly disagree. Johanna Lemlech, a professor of education at USC specializing in curriculum and teaching, calls the books "awful." They "violate everything we know about how children learn, and appropriate pedagogy," she says. "In short, these books should be carefully placed in the cylindrical file."

To the committee deciding if Hubbard's books should land, instead, in the public schools, such analysis is of no import. Committee members aren't concerned with whether the books are decent learning tools, or, for that matter, whether they're part of a campaign by a front for the Church of Scientology to brainwash schoolchildren. Their decision will be based solely on "social content": the absence of overt religious dogma, and the equitable portrayal of girls, minorities and children with disabilities. In other words, assurance that the books are politically correct. The books will escape the kind of scrutiny that would question flaws such as confusing methods of instruction or thinly veiled church jargon, because they are being considered for use only as "supplemental," or secondary, texts.

"We receive literally thousands of books a year, and we want to make sure they meet the minimum legal requirements," says Doug Stone, spokesman for the California Department of Education, which oversees the committee. "When push comes to shove, the final arbiter in terms of academic content would be the districts themselves."

One member of the Los Angeles school board is unimpressed. A former high school history teacher, David Tokofsky calls the books "remedial" and says they would be of little use to any but the lowest-performing students. "If you walked into an eighth-grade class and tried to use these books on kids who are at the proper level, you'd kill them," says Tokofsky, who coached the Marshall High School Academic Decathlon team to a national championship in 1987. "They're not even good comic books."

**At the heart of Hubbard's study technology lies a practice called Word Clearing (always capitalized), a cumbersome process by which students look up misunderstood words and try to understand them. This process is outlined in each of the textbooks, starting with *Learning How To Learn*, which consists largely of captioned illustrations and is recommended for children ages 6 to 12.**

When is Word Clearing employed? "If you are studying and do not feel as bright as you did, or if you are taking too long on what you are studying, or you are yawning, or doodling, or daydreaming." In other words, darn near all of the time.

Each time this happens, the reader is instructed to follow these steps:

Step 1: "Look earlier in your book and find the word you do not understand." The girl in the illustration in *Learning How To Learn* reads "The leg of his pants was torn," and appears to be stuck on the word *leg*.

Step 2: "Find the word in the dictionary." In steps 3 through 5, the girl finds the right definition, reads it and uses it in a sentence.

Step 6: "When you understand the definition that fits

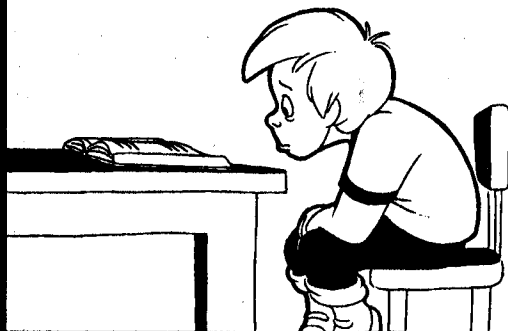
*Learning How To Learn*: Text and illustrations from the book showing "symptoms" suffered by children who have not been schooled in L. Ron Hubbard's "study technology."

Studying about something without having the mass of what you are studying can give you trouble. It can make you feel different ways.

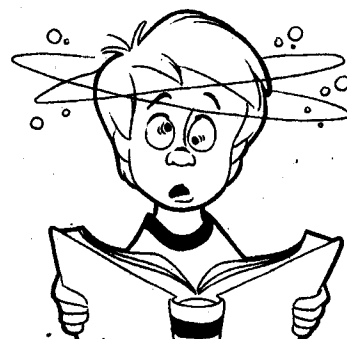
It can make you feel squashed.



It can make you feel bent,



sort of spiny,



sort of lifeless



in what you were reading, then learn each of the other definitions the same way."

*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th edition, lists seven definitions for the word *leg*. Among them: "one of the rather generalized segmental appendages of an anthropod used in walking and crawling"; "a side of a right triangle that is not the hypotenuse"; "the course and distance sailed by a boat on a single tack."

That poor little girl. There she was, minding her own business and teaching her students, maybe she's a little too long for her teacher's satisfaction, and now she's stuck in an endless linguistic loop. If she is having trouble understanding these definitions, she may — the books suggest — be suffering "lack of mass," which she should be able to remedy by constructing clay models of any words or images she doesn't understand. Or perhaps she's come to leap ahead in her learning instead of taking the step-by-step approach essential to success.

Which leads to Step 7: "After you learn all of the definitions of that word then go back to what you were reading. If you are not bright and ready to study again, then there is still another word that you do not understand. Do steps 1-7 again until you are bright and ready to study again."

Or, more likely, ready to throw the book across the room in frustration.

room," and one in Zimbabwe where 7,500 children are being taught with "outstanding results." Similar claims are made of programs in Ghana, Hungary and Sydney.

There is little explication of these benefits, and in at least one case the "outstanding results" are misleading. The report cites St. Antoine, a public elementary school in Lafayette, Louisiana. It claims that after the school's three second-grade teachers were trained in the study technology techniques outlined in *Applied Scholastics' Basic Study Manual*, their students' California Achievement Test scores rose from the 29th percentile to the 46th percentile. The report also claims that this was the first time St. Antoine "ever achieved a rating higher than the 30th percentile," which school principal Helen Magee says is false.

Magee confirms the increase in overall scores, but says that just one of the second-grade teachers used the study technology training. The scores of the students in that class did go up 17 percent, while in the other two classes the scores went up 13 percent and 2 percent. Magee says she was initially enthusiastic about expanding the use of study technology, but when several other teachers at the school were later trained, the outcome was disappointing. "I did not see the same results," she says. "I think you have to have a certain kind of teacher to make it work."

## CAN L. RON HUBBARD'S "STUDY TECHNOLOGY" MAKE KIDS SMARTER?

And no wonder. "In many cases, lack of comprehension is not because of a misunderstood word," says Sidnie Myrick, who leads a UCLA research group on early literacy, teaches a master's course in reading at Cal State L.A., and also teaches a class of first, second and third graders at Thomas Edison Elementary School in Glendale (she was Glendale's 1993 Teacher of the Year). "In fact," she says, "in many cases the student won't get the meaning until the material is presented in a completely different way."

Myrick also finds the books' illustrations "cutesy and condescending," the explanations "stilted and manufactured," and study technology, all in all, "woefully inadequate."

**In a 1964 lecture, Lafayette Ron Hubbard expressed his concern with the state of education:** "The whole educational system, as I see it, of total duress, total squash on the individual, in view of the fact that it's a system that's full of lies, I think it's about the most destructive thing you could have around at all." Enter Applied Scholastics, a non-profit organization founded in 1972 by a group of Scientologists to promote study technology, originally developed by Hubbard to help his followers get a grip on his religious writings and later expanded to apply to the world at large.

Today, Applied Scholastics is just one branch of a Scientist-run organization called the Association for Better Living and Education, or ABLE, charged with disseminating Hubbard's educational teachings around the globe. Applied Scholastics alone claims more than 200 centers worldwide, from Malaysia to Zimbabwe to Denmark. In the Los Angeles area there are eight privately run Applied Scholastics schools using the materials. There's also an after-school tutoring program in Compton called the World Literacy Crusade, the Hollywood Education and Literacy Project, or HELP, and something called the Applied Scholastics International Training Center (which in reality is the Hollywood Boulevard offices of Applied Scholastics, where training sessions are periodically held).

The official defender of Hubbard's study technology is ABLE president Rena Weinberg, a petite, fierce woman with a clipped South African accent and cascades of brown hair. She waxes nostalgic about the many years she spent spreading study technology throughout her racially riven native country. "We trained tens of thousands of teachers through the whole apartheid era right into the new government, and now the program is of course supported by the government," she says. "It's fabulous."

Applied Scholastics' publications and Web site are packed with "success stories." Its 1995 annual report boasts of a training program in Mexico for 1,200 teachers under whom "more than 30,000 students benefited from the application of this study technology in the class-

**A Scientist kind of teacher, perhaps.** While Applied Scholastics has no official connection to the Church of Scientology, there are numerous unofficial links. Board members include celebrity Scientologists John Travolta, Isaac Hayes and Anne Archer, who is touted as the organization's "international spokesperson." All Applied Scholastics books are published by Bridge Publications, which exists solely to churn out Hubbard's works. (In Scientologese, "The Bridge" is a series of costly courses purporting to lead one to a higher, pain-free state of existence.)

Applied Scholastics spokeswoman Weinberg insists that there is nothing remotely Scientological about the study technology texts, which, she says, are strictly educational. "You go, 'Oh, L. Ron Hubbard the religious leader,'" she says. "That's how you see it. That's not how he saw himself. He was an author, first and foremost. A humanitarian. What's the commonality between Scientology, Dianetics and Applied Scholastics? Is it the religion itself? No. It's the person. That's all there is. That's the commonality."

But the books speak for themselves. In *Learning How To Learn*, "L. Ron Hubbard" is printed across the cover in type as large as the title. The terms "lack of mass" and "skipped gradient," which appear throughout the books, have obvious Scientological equivalents. In Scientology, "mental mass" describes an undesirable image in the mind. And a series of "gradients" must be passed through in order for church adherents to reach higher states of being, the highest being the state of Clear, which itself sounds a lot like the state to which students aspire through Word Clearing. Many pages in the books are devoted to listing and illustrating the symptoms children will suffer when they don't "clear up" words. Children who don't follow the proper procedure could end up feeling "squashed," "bent," "blank" or "not there."

"As simple as it seems," goes a note to parents and teachers in several of the volumes, "many of the tribulations in children's lives can often be traced back to words they have not understood in their reading materials or in life." In fact, Hubbard claimed, proper application of study technology should eliminate learning disabilities and attention-deficit disorders, which he did not consider real. Students with these disorders "are failing to learn because no one has ever taught them how to learn," according to Weinberg. No one has taught them "how to identify the barriers to learning and how to overcome these barriers."

Meanwhile, in Hubbard's *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, which is basically a primer for Scientology, "dopey, sleepy or dull" feelings are described as symptoms of a shutdown of the analytical mind, which must be in optimum condition in order for an individual to progress. And in Scientology, ailments such as asthma, arthritis and bursitis are considered "psychosomatic ills," curable through diligent use of Hubbard's techniques. ➤

## LEARNING

One last thing: The first text in the educational series is called *Learning How To Learn*. The word *Scientology*, as defined by Hubbard himself, means "knowing how to know."

"The materials are a Trojan horse to introduce Scientological concepts to young people," concludes one prominent university professor who specializes in language development among children and who reviewed the Applied Scholastics texts for this story. (Citing past cases in which critics of Scientology have been stalked and sued, he asked that he not be named. "Given the way that Scientologists respond to people they perceive to be their enemies," he says, "I would have to want to get involved in a crusade.")

The close relationship between Scientology and study technology appears to be openly acknowledged by the church's faithful. In Chapter 10 of *Dianetics*, Hubbard refers to "Educational Dianetics," which he says "contains the body of organized knowledge necessary to train minds to their optimum efficiency and to an optimum skill and knowledge." A call to the toll-free Dianetics information line to inquire about this course of study yields a referral by the operator to the *Basic Study Manual*, one of the five Applied Scholastics books up for approval. "That's what Educational Dianetics is," the operator says. "It's study technology, which is a part of Scientology."

**Across the country, followers of L. Ron Hubbard** are already quietly applying his teachings in the public schools, as teachers, career-day speakers and after-school volunteers. In many cases, their connection to Scientology is left unmentioned. And perhaps that is how Hubbard would have wanted it. In a vintage bit of Hubbard subterfuge, reprinted in the *St. Petersburg Times*, he outlines the means by which a housewife can turn a women's club into an organ for the church. He instructs that she first get the club's affairs in order, and then begin selling Scientology as a way to keep the kids in line, fix up marriages and "whatever comes to hand, and even taking fees for it." He advises discretion. "Don't ask for permission," he says. "Just enter them and start functioning to make this group win through effectiveness and sanity."

This past summer, a Los Angeles elementary school teacher named Linda Smith requested permission from the school board to start a charter school in the San Fernando Valley. It was later revealed, amid much media hoopla, that Smith is a Scientologist and that she planned to use the Hubbard texts at the school. Smith said she didn't mention that she was a Scientologist in her application because she didn't think it was relevant, and she didn't mention that she planned to use Hubbard's books because she was awaiting licensing from Applied Scholastics. Yet no licensing is required in order to use the books, according to Weinberg. Smith eventually withdrew her application, claiming an illness in her family.

Smith's story becomes more disturbing when considered as the latest in a long line of questionable strategies employed by Applied Scholastics and other organizations run by Scientologists that target schoolchildren, not only in the Los Angeles area, but across the state, the nation and beyond. One particularly sweeping example, which came to light in the early 1990s, was the widespread distribution of a Hubbard booklet titled *The Way to Happiness*. Although the booklet is presented as free of church doctrine, Scientology officials estimated that 6.8 million copies

had been given to children in schools across the United States, calling it "the largest dissemination project in Scientology history" and the "bridge between broad society and Scientology."

**L. Ron Hubbard's textbooks** have already been rejected twice by the citizens' review panel, known as the Legal Compliance Committee and made up of retired teachers and principals, parents, a building contractor and a phone-company technician. But there's no limit on reapplication, and Applied Scholastics has been persistent, modifying the books to address the committee's concerns over the lack of representation of girls and minorities and then resubmitting them.

Rovina Salinas, a consultant with the Contra Costa County Office of Education, chairs the 20-member committee, one of several throughout the state that divvy up the thousands of books and other educational materials submitted each year for approval as supplemental texts in the public schools. Typically Salinas breaks the committee into four subgroups, and any given set of texts will be reviewed by just one of these groups. The first time the Applied Scholastics books came through, Salinas decided, in an unusual move, to have two of the subgroups consider them independently. Both groups were troubled by the Scientology connection. Salinas, too, found it worrisome.

"My one concern was that there was some sort of subliminal message," Salinas says. "Something that you would really have to read between the lines to determine." But that type of message is beyond the committee's purview. Members were not permitted to review Scientology texts for similarities, because, Salinas says, their job with regard to religious content is merely to look for any overt attempts at inculcation or bias toward one religion over another.

For her part, Weinberg dismisses as groundless any fear that the Applied Scholastics materials are a recruiting tool. "Do people get brought into Scientology" as a result of using these books? she asks. "Hell no. That's not the aim. They go and learn how to study. They go off and they do their studies. That's what they do."

**Upon request, Weinberg has arranged** for a meeting with a public school teacher who uses the Applied Scholastic materials in the classroom. After the interview in her office, she brings in Teresa Posner, who teaches sixth-grade math and science at Porter Middle School in Granada Hills.

Shortly after she received her credential, Posner says, she learned about Applied Scholastics from a friend and began using the techniques of study technology. Eventually, she wanted to learn more. "After studying the Hubbard study techniques for about three years, I wanted to know what other things Hubbard did," she recalls. She began devouring his science fiction, and his religious writings as well. She was so impressed that she joined the church. "The principles of Scientology," she says, "just made so much sense."

Since Weinberg had just emphatically denied that people like Teresa Posner exist, it's hard to believe she set up this interview, right here in the president's office at the international headquarters of Applied Scholastics. Apparently the company representative monitoring the conversation can't believe it either. He quietly slips out of the room. Within minutes, two Applied Scholastics staffers appear, inform Posner of an emergency phone call and escort her away. End of interview. End of story. □