

## **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

*Correspondents: John E. Onofrio  
Ralph Frick  
David N. Campbell*

### **On "Middle School Research"**

Dear Editor:

After carefully digesting Wiles and Thomason's review of "Middle School Research 1968-1974 . . .,"<sup>1</sup> I find them to be guilty of the same ambiguities as those to which they allude in the research. They refer to the "low quality" of research available. However, they fail to indicate clearly the standard upon which they base their conclusion.

Personal biases of researchers flavor all studies to some degree, yet these parameters are generally noted in the statement of limitations. Furthermore, it is well that junior high school or middle school educators further investigate the complexities of their grade organization structure.

Perhaps the reviewers, rightfully so, are encouraging others to offer their insights and suggestions for improving middle school education. This is certainly needed and welcomed.

Middle schools are in search of a definition. However, the definition being sought is operational rather than theoretical. The literature is replete with theoretical constructs for the "school in the middle." Why were these not cited?

It has been stated that the journey is sometimes more intriguing than the destination. A precise definition is of minimal importance at this time. Should we not, however, instead be seeking clearer goal formation for middle schools, not as a separate entity from the K-12 continuum, but in concert with the total developmental pattern of the learner?

Middle school education is a relatively recent phenomenon that has mushroomed

<sup>1</sup> Jon W. Wiles and Julia Thomason. "Middle School Research 1968-1974: A Review of Substantial Studies." *Educational Leadership* 32 (6): 421-23; March 1975.

within the past decade. In many cases it has served as a relief valve for expanding elementary or high school enrollments. I might venture that the rationale for its continued existence in some situations may be a consequence of a multitude of needs rather than a cause for educators to rally around.

**JOHN E. ONOFRIO**  
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### **Comments on "Alternatives to Grading"**

Dear Editor:

The articles in the January 1975 issue on "Alternatives to Grading"<sup>2</sup> present delightfully diverse points of view. As a total package, they represent a balanced and, I think, comprehensive treatment. I hesitate about the latter aspect because it appears to me that there are two critical issues which, while embedded in the total content of these articles, would provide additional enlightenment if summarized.

First, there is a difference between formative and summative evaluation. The grade is essentially summative; between assignments of grades, the teacher's feedback to the student is formative in nature. The more thorough, personal, and extensive the formative feedback is, the fewer and simpler will be the problems of summative judgment.

Second, the suggested alternatives to grading assume a prerequisite quality of the teacher-student relationship. The nature of the grading system employed is important because it is expected to implement effectively principles of

<sup>2</sup> "Alternatives to Grading" *Educational Leadership* 32 (4): 241-304; January 1975.

evaluation that are compatible with the established learning environment. Grading difficulties occur when the grading system becomes the prerequisite, the antecedent condition instead of the consequent condition.

Any grading system is a tool to be employed in relation to the task to be accomplished. It is good or bad to the degree that it is well used or misused in meeting established educational needs.

RALPH FRICK  
Professor of Elementary Education, Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia.

Dear Editor:

It was "interesting" to read the editorial "The Grading Syndrome"<sup>3</sup> by Professor Longstreet and followed by the response of her colleague Professor Rinne. Despite their diverse arguments for and against grades they are both operating under the same false assumption, although Professor Rinne less so than Professor Longstreet. It appears they both assume that the function of the school is education which is

<sup>3</sup> Wilma S. Longstreet. "The Grading Syndrome." *Educational Leadership* 32 (4): 243-46; January 1975.

certainly terribly naïve but understandable since many of us once assumed that. However, Professor Rinne seems to understand that P-F and other alternative grading systems are not very helpful for employers, the military, and college admissions officers, and he is quite correct.

Professor Longstreet is advocating a dangerous precedent—a "self-motivated society of intellectually active men and women." Who will then be content to put 800 door handles on G. M. Vegas every day for the rest of one's life, or clean the washrooms of Professor Rinne's university, or indeed take his courses so they could "look to (him) for judgments on their performance. . . ."? And again I agree with Professor Rinne, many students do indeed "achieve a most dispassionate and mature attitude toward letter grades." They learn the qualities most often required in the business world by our efficient training in school via grading, ranking, sorting, and labeling. They learn to lie, cheat, deceive, flatter, outmaneuver, and put others on. We have just had a brilliant example of this in our national government. I would award them a A—. It would have been an A if they hadn't got caught.

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