

Letters

Mindless PR Campaign

I am less than favorably impressed by James H. VanSciver's superficial little article, "Our School's Campaign to Accentuate the Positive" [*EL*, October 1979, pp. 72-73]. A public relations campaign—sending letters home praising students who do well, messages on Christmas, careful driving, good reading, disc jockey announcements—is far from a meaningful response to the probing and justifiable criticisms that beset American education today. At best, VanSciver is weakly defending a tottering institution with mindless "positive" propaganda.

Would it not have been much more meaningful and beneficial to engage students, teachers, parents, and community—even the so-called "bad press"—in a continuing dialogue in classes and in special programs? That dialogue could examine current issues relating to American education, causes for problems that beset it, and alternatives for solutions.

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Hailed and Derailed

May I congratulate you on the October 1979 issue of *Educational Leadership*. Instead of the usual serving of educational pedagogue, intellectual pabulum, and inane, syrupy humanism, we were served intellectually honest, nutritious fare. The October journal is worthy of the teaching profession! The

articles were well validated and addressed some of the more important issues with which practitioners are faced today.

I can only hope that the level of quality achieved in the October issue will become the rule, rather than the exception, as I look forward to future issues.

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I am appalled at the overall tone of the recent issue of *Educational Leadership* [October 1979], from cover to cover. Beginning with the not-so-subtle cover, which puts in order the priorities that foretell the inside content (with a sop to the humanists among us—"Praise in Moderation" indeed), to the articles that are all so heavy and serious in their stress of cognitive skills and knowledge—as if the affective domain had never been heard of and as if confluent education were not a viable and worthy goal.

Have the works of George Isaac Brown, Sid Simon, Richard Jones, Carl Rogers, Bob Samples, and others been totally dismissed by these people? Are they victims of the popular pendulum that is now swinging backwards to the basics of repression: discipline, duty, and drudgery to the exclusion of all else? When are so-called educators going to admit that it's all right to feel and to enjoy learning; that it's all right to listen to students' values and to encourage stu-

dent's expressions of attitudes? Furthermore, when are educators going to recognize that when they say, "I'm not going to deal with the affective domain; I am not going to be concerned with kid's values," they are dealing negatively, and that kids learn from that that teachers don't care about values, attitudes, and feelings?

Even the line drawings in this issue show frowns and unpleasant expressions. Where did the "Aha!" expressions go? Where the joy and the happiness and interest? What a shame!

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Contradiction or Semantics?

Your October 1979 issue of *EL* was most timely and provided practical resources for educators involved in helping teachers become more effective regarding student cognitive growth. Jere Brophy's article, "Teacher Behavior and Student Learning," [pp. 33-38] was especially appreciated.

However, I am inclined to take issue with Brophy on a particular interpretation. The author commented on the increasing support for the effectiveness in upper grades of what Flanders calls "indirect teaching," where teachers praise, use students' ideas and opinions, and encourage students to participate orally regarding instructional objectives. In the article, the paragraph that followed illustrated a contradiction that may confuse readers. Brophy stated that

important determinants of learning in upper grades are not teaching behaviors under "indirect instruction" as defined by Flanders, but "direct instruction" of lectures, demonstrations, and teacher-led discussions where teachers elicit students' contributions, use and integrate students' ideas into class discussions, and praise students.

A more appropriate label for "indirect instruction" would have been "indirect teacher verbal instruction" since the purpose of Flanders' instrument is to analyze teacher-student classroom verbal interaction. Secondly, Brophy's explanation of his comparative interpretation of "indirect instruction" in Flanders' terms and "direct instruction" as a dichotomy is misleading. As referenced in this article, the interpretation is a synonymy. Concerning Flanders' instrument, a teacher's verbal pattern is described as a ratio of indirect to direct verbal statements. Thus, a teacher whose predominant verbal pattern is indirect may lecture, demonstrate, and lead discussions that elicit—with questions and/or statements—students' oral reactions on various levels of cognitive discourse, integrate students' ideas and/or opinions into class activities, accept and clarify students' feelings, and praise students. Hence, with reference to Flanders' Interaction Analysis, "indirect instruction" would include those same teacher behaviors Brophy lists under "direct instruction."

Furthermore, a teacher whose verbal pattern is direct would predominantly lecture, give directions, and substantiate teacher authority.

Such an instructor would not provide students many opportunities to respond orally to instructional objectives or to express ideas and opinions, and teacher-led discussions would be just that. Therefore, with reference to Flanders' instrument, "direct verbal instruction" and "direct instruction" as described in this article would be the dichotomy for which the author may be searching.

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I appreciate Forlenza's interest in my article and his attempt to clarify one of the points raised in it. However, I believe the argument reduces to semantics (in this case, the definition of terms like "direct" or "indirect," and whether a term like "indirect teacher verbal instruction" should be distinguished from "indirect instruction"), and I do not find his suggestions to be particularly helpful.

He is correct, of course, in making a distinction between the statements of Flanders himself and the use of Flanders' interaction analysis system to measure classroom instruction. Different writers have proposed a variety of I/D ratios to be derived from the coding using the Flanders system, and the particular ratio suggested by Forlenza is but one of these. In my article I was referring to the definition offered by Flanders himself, as follows:

"Direct influence consists of those verbal statements of the teacher

that restrict freedom of action, by focusing attention on a problem, interjecting teacher authority, or both. These statements include lecturing, giving directions, criticizing, and justifying his own use of authority. Indirect influence consists of those verbal statements of the teacher that expand a student's freedom of action by encouraging his verbal participation and initiative. These include asking questions, accepting and clarifying ideas or feelings of students, and praising or encouraging students' responses (Flanders, 1965, page 9).

It is clear from this quote that Flanders includes lecturing and giving directions as direct influence. In addition, he pejoratively includes criticism and justification of authority under direct instruction, even though most observers would not include these behaviors as instruction at all. The same applies to the formula suggested by Forlenza.

In closing, I wish to make two points. First the teacher behaviors included within indirect instruction in the quotation, although correlated positively with learning gains at the junior high and high school levels, apparently do not directly *cause* these learning gains. Flanders appears to have overstated the case for these variables (Barr and Dreeben, 1977). The truly causal variables seem to be those involved in presenting material clearly and eliciting high quality student responses, not those involved in accepting or praising responses once they are elicited.

My second point is that it is arbitrary and inappropriate to define criticism as part of direct

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They are, therefore, understandably impatient with the illogical, irrational realities of the adult world.

• *Social insecurity.* The social insecurity which is normal in adolescence is often heightened in the gifted because of their perceptivity and sensitivity toward others. The same qualities that produce fine poetry, art, music, and literature can also subject their creators to intense emotional pain and suffering, even alienation.

• *Ethical awareness.* The need of the gifted for values clarification and development of ethical awareness is especially acute in our technological, mobile, crowded society. With computers and other technology now so readily available, many sociopathic opportunities are within the reach of adolescents. Home-made nuclear devices, genetic and behavior modification, and embezzlement of funds are just a few of the staggering possibilities.

Each school administrator needs to embark on a program to lead the faculty in working out the best program for that particular student body. This program falls into three stages. Each staff must assess how intensively they need to dwell at each stage.

1. Understand education of the gifted and establish goals. Achieve staff consensus on definitions. Discuss issues and reach agreement on if, and to what extent the gifted will be pulled out into separate programs and what the gifted program is to accomplish.

2. Design activities in the

regular curriculum that allow for the identification of gifted and encourage achievement by all students.

3. Design programs for the cultivation and development of talent in those identified as gifted and talented. Develop inventory resources. Decide upon evaluative criteria and methods.

Ultimately, each student who has been identified as having talents that warrant special attention will need to have an individual educational plan. Skill in developing such plans will require special training for teachers. Those who

are concerned with elitism may take heart from the remarks made by Edwin W. Martin,⁵ deputy commissioner for the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, U.S. Office of Education. Martin argues that "some of the good instructional practices that are designed for very bright children will be helpful in improving instructional practices for all children." He goes on to say that "gifted programs will tend to become a reform element in elementary and secondary education."

Programming for gifted and talented students must be fluid and dynamic. It should be thought of as a verb, not a noun. It is always evolving, requires constant assessment, modification, and nourishment to grow and to remain healthy. *EJ*

⁵ Edwin W. Martin, *Education Update*, Issue #5 (New York: Scholastic Magazines, Inc., Fall 1979), p. 2.

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instruction and praise and encouragement as part of indirect instruction. These teacher evaluational behaviors are conceptually and empirically distinct from the dimension of direct versus indirect instruction. In fact, to the extent that they may be related at all, praise and encouragement form part of the complex of behaviors that define direct instruction, as Rosenshine has pointed out in several publications.

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References

- Barr, Rebecca, and Dreeben, Robert. "Instruction in Classrooms." In *Review of Research in Education*, Volume V. Edited by Lee S. Shulman. Itasca, Illinois: Peacock, 1977. pp. 89-162.

Flanders, Ned. *Teacher Influence, Pupil Attitudes, and Achievement*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1965.

Back to the Classroom

I vacated the teaching profession to pursue what I thought would be a more challenging, rewarding career. How wrong I was!

Educational Leadership, presented to me by my graduate professor, inspired me to renewed dreams and goals. The articles, especially those on "leadership" (March 1979 issue) by Gordon Cawelti and James MacGregor Burns, raised in me a consciousness that had been suppressed for a year now.

Thank you. To the classroom, I will return.

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