KNOWLEDGE AND INSERVICE NEEDS OF TEACHERS

The article on teacher needs in your (February 1980) issue is an example of the failure of researchers to adequately define the theoretical structure of the concept being researched. On the basis of teachers' scores on a test, the authors conclude that there is little relation between teachers' perceived need for inservice and their level of content knowledge. Jones and Hayes assume that unless some absolute level of knowledge is obtained, teachers will be less than adequate. However, they offer no evidence that a score above 61 is necessary for successful teaching of reading. They also seem to assume that the purpose of inservice is to give remedial treatment to teachers who lack content knowledge. Jones and Hayes fail to recognize the influence of curriculum development and institutional support on the level of teacher competence. They also neglect the importance of assessing institutional needs and personal professional needs in implementation of a staff development program.

—JON C. MARSHALL
Associate Professor
University of Missouri-St. Louis
—SARAH D. CALDWELL
Director, Teacher Center
Ferguson-Florissant School District
St. Louis, Missouri

VIDEOTAPING SHOULDN'T REPLACE CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

I read "Split Screen Videotaping: The Genie in the Bottle" (February 1980) with interest. Self-analysis should certainly be an important phase of every teacher evaluation process, and using videotape and interaction analysis enhances the approach. I do, however, take exception to the statement, "The advantage for the building principal is that he/she does not have to take hours away from his/her desk to sit in classrooms during a busy school day." No principal sitting at a desk can know much about what is going on in the building for which he/she is responsible. Classroom observations provide valuable information for the principal in regard to classroom environment, teacher-student interaction, and the extent to which program goals are being fulfilled. One cannot gain a full understanding of these important aspects of the teaching-learning process without being in classrooms and being around the building. The time to sit at one's desk is after school.

The teacher evaluation process should be multi-faceted. Improvement of instruction is too important an area to use only one method.

—STANLEY K. LANDIS, JR.
Principal
Eyer Junior High School
Macungie, Pennsylvania

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

You asked (May 1980) for comments on Educational Leadership.

1. I find that the "illustrative" photos actually detract from the Journal. What little relevance they possess is established only by the title, and any photographic quality has disappeared in reproduction. Ours is a professional journal read for professional purposes. "Readability" is of concern (type size, line length, avoidance of "cont'd on," and so on), but I'd reject the "white space" and "provocative photo" arguments.

2. Educational Leadership is not, should not be, a "research" journal. Research-based articles should be included, and should provide the references that enable us to investigate further those items of particular interest. I like your current practice—and don't worry about protecting us from authors who overgeneralize. We're unprotected, anyway.

3. I have a hunch that many who say the journal is "too theoretical" have faulty impressions of both the idea of theory and its potential for guiding practice. If anything, we need more good, developed philosophy and theory than I see operating on a day-to-day basis in our schools. Even the "eclectic approach" implies logic (criteria, theory, and so on) in its acts of selection.

"Careful language" (or, more precisely, careful thinking) should be a requirement of any article—possibly even more so for the so-called "practical" writings.

4. I have just recently returned to school curriculum development work from 17 years spent in higher (teacher) education as a faculty member, division chairman, dean, chancellor, and president. I had a modest but valid publications record. But I had the time, the expectation, and the stimulation of others in like circumstances. These circumstances simply do not exist for most school employees.

I suggest that you can only expand the opportunity—by announcing themes of coming issues and inviting people to write.

—ELDON BREAZIER
Curriculum Coordinator
Unified School District 331
Kingman, Kansas

I was shocked at what I considered the bad taste of your March 1980 cover. Under the title of "Discipline Strategies" you show a picture of a black man and another minority person in a scuffle. The white man is either about to join it or to break it up. His role is unclear.

What is clear, unfortunately, is the subliminal message of the picture which encourages the stereotype that minorities are troublemakers.

I hope you will be more sensitive in the future.

—MYCHELLE KARITON
Resource Specialist
Sacramento, California

We regret any unintended offense. We meant only to illustrate a discipline situation that sometimes confronts teachers. The two "fighters" are both students and the man is a teacher in a Virginia high school.

The Editors

HOW WRITING ISN'T TAUGHT

The Tibbettses (March 1980) were on target by saying we need to teach the practical aspects of writing developed by teachers from years of practice, and Maxwell, in his deprecating attitude, was correct in the emphasis on inservice and total responsibility of all teachers to teach writing. However, neither touched on the following:

1. Abolishing workbooks and ditto sheets, replacing them with students' writing in complete sentences on their own paper.

2. Teaching students to proof and correct their own work.
A striking obstacle to teaching writing in schools is the misuse of commercial and teacher-made worksheets because they reduce a student’s need to write. There is nothing wrong with the judicious use of worksheets to sharpen skills, but students learn to write by writing.

—RICHARD L. SARTORE
Elementary School Counselor
Arnold Central School
Albany, New York

HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY: ENDLESS SCRAPPING

Schumann should be commended for his stand against what he refers to as “conventional courses of history and geography that stress memorization of facts, dates, events, and so on. However, the solution is not to be found in scrapping history and geography. If Schumann understood the history of America, he would know that the reason to teach American history well and with enthusiasm is that in our system it is unpredictable which students will be the muckrakers or (he depress or our exports on the surface for students placed in the in-school suspension program. The coordinating in-school suspension teacher (who holds a teaching certificate) implements these instructional plans with the help of aides.

Regarding the charge of child abuse and proper environment, the classroom had been used in previous years by a social studies curriculum in the wilds of British Columbia, I suggest that both authors are correct and incorrect. The teaching of history and geography traditionally has achieved little; many social studies teachers are ineffective, but neither of the authors’ proposed solutions stands up. Schumann offers in its place a fascistic that includes the pieces he believes are important. Everyone has his/her own particular combination, but unfortunately people seldom agree because they reflect purely individual views.

Simms-Brown argues, only by implication, that history and geography can accomplish what Schumann wants if only they are well taught. Her definition of history is all-inclusive and Schumann assumes that no one can understand any topic unless they trace its development over time, a common view of the historian if not the rest of the population.

Both articles. I suggest, see curriculum development as autobiography. They postulate ways of developing curriculum that is suited to them. They both imply that “what is right for me is right for the world.”

The weakness in both articles lies in the fact that the authors state no goals. It is a difficult that also faces teachers and social studies experts. When we all learn to define the appropriate ends, there will be time to identify the route or routes. Without that, curriculum development becomes an endless argument about means, topics, disciplines, and studies, all of which generates great heat but no light.

—IAN D. PARKER
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