

# Book Review



## Human Brain and Human Learning.

Leslie A. Hart.  
New York:

Longman, Incorporated, 1983

—Reviewed by Robert Sylwester, University of Oregon, Eugene.

Hart's *How The Brain Works* (Basic Books, 1975) was useful in that it demystified the human brain for many educators with a limited background in science. It encouraged them to contemplate a profession that would someday go beyond the current dominant focus on behavior. *Human Brain and Human Learning* is a logical extension of Hart's earlier book and other more recent work in which he sees the school's traditional organization and instructional approach as antagonistic to the way in which the brain functions. Hart argues that schools tend to reduce all formal instruction to carefully defined small incremental linear components, even though the brain continually and successfully processes variable amounts of random non-linear information in its search for the patterns that underlie program structures, the basis for intelligent behavior. Thus, schools limit the learning potential of students by forcing them to respond to an external one-dimensional way of organizing and presenting information.

Hart's solution is to reorganize schools so they become "brain-compatible." Hart's school would place students

in much more control of their own learning, encouraging them to follow their own interests and sequences. The staff would decrease their present aggressive instructional role and increase their consultant role. He uses the metaphor of a large and inviting smorgasbord to describe schools that provide adequately for diverse groups.

Hart's unfortunate tendency toward global indictments and sweeping generalizations will turn off many educators who see schools as vast enterprises that encompass a wide range of behaviors, run by complex checks and balances. Because Hart broadly sketches his reform proposal he weakens his case, considering the thrashing he gives those currently running the schools. While it doesn't necessarily follow that critics must have solutions for all the ills they identify, Hart tends to gloss over the very real political, bureaucratic, and student problems that his proposal would create.

Still, Hart's book provides a starting point for serious thought and discussion about the rapid increase in brain research and what it means, but it ought to be supplemented by deeper digging into the growing literature on brain research and its educational implications.

Available from Longman, Inc., 1560 Broadway, New York, NY 10036, for approximately \$10.95 in paperback, \$20 in hard cover when publication is complete.

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