

# Letters

tunities to try out the necessary new roles; and (+) continuity of emphasis on a particular improvement, set of goals, or focus on desired change in teacher behavior.

William Tikunoff and John Mergendoller disagree with the idea that rigorous, detached scientific research should "inform and direct" instructional processes in classrooms. Rather, they suggest that involving teachers in conducting research is the most likely way to ensure its application. They describe how research done by teachers can in itself be a rich and powerful form of staff development.

The yearbook includes a final chapter, appropriately called "A View from the Schools," in which Stuart Rankin accurately states the position of the practitioner: "The point is that school people have the problems now; they cannot wait for certainty; they must go forward with the best hunch, using available information." This note of reality adds to the sense of urgency for further, better collaboration because it emphasizes that the problems *will* be dealt with, correctly or incorrectly, on a daily basis. Problems will not wait while we ponder and brainstorm and plan, however important and valuable these methods may be.

Staff development is a trying and complex business. Because it involves human beings, it can never be treated as an exact science. The yearbook authors and the editor continuously deal with the importance of *context*. The editor dignifies and adds respect to the importance of human perceptions and craft knowledge as well as funded knowledge in the improvement of schools and the people who work in them. It is, in many ways, an affirming and hopeful publication, although it clearly and accurately points out the many problems facing staff development personnel.

One is left with the comforting feeling that the long-needed and eagerly awaited marriage of practical theory and theory-based practice may, in fact, be close to reality, and, more important, that successful learning for *all* our future citizens can result.

Available from the University of Chicago Press, 5801 S. Ellis Ave., Chicago, IL 60637, for \$17.00.

## BRAIN GROWTH SPURTS DISCREDITED

It's surprising—nearly a year after I thought all parties interested in Herman Epstein's findings and hypotheses had been alerted to the fallacies in his work and to the undependable nature of what he was telling public school people—to find an article (May 1983, "Cognitive Levels Matching") respectfully citing Epstein's work.

Although I'm surprised that the authors would advance such a citation and that the editors would publish it, I realize that other educational literature of the past several years has predominantly paid attention to Epstein's views and that not a great deal has appeared to contradict them.

This whole business of brain growth periodization is the most irresponsible use of "scientific findings" I have run across in over 20 years of work in the public schools. In lengthy research into Epstein's claims and in conversations with dozens of participants, I found that very few of the people who are making speeches and writing about Epstein's notions have done any research on his work or even understand it very well. And the scientists and other researchers whose findings Epstein himself cites either know almost nothing about his ideas, or discredit them when they have the opportunity. Few of them have taken such an opportunity because they do not find Epstein's findings sufficiently important.<sup>1</sup> They are, however, aghast at the importance being placed on them by public school people.

I'm sorry that I and others such as John Arnold of North Carolina State University, Barbara Hutson of Virginia Tech, Joseph Novak of Cornell University, Kurt Fischer of the University of Denver, and Martin Hahn of William Patterson College, who have found it to be so poorly based, have not communicated this to you. Our case is essentially a negative one, and it is hard to invest one's time in this kind of venture.

RICHARD McQUEEN  
Specialist, Science Education  
Multnomah County  
Education Service District  
Portland, Oregon

<sup>1</sup>The following scientists/researchers have

either published such views or communicated them directly to me: Jay Gould (*The Mismeasure of Man*); Dorothy Eichorn (Berkeley Data); Barbel Inhelder and Kurt Fischer (EEG/learning spurts); Gerhart Nellhaus (Nellhaus Charts); Quinn McNemar (Stanford-Binet tests); Marian Diamond and Harry Jerison (brain weight changes); J. McVicar Hunt (early childhood studies); Howard Gardner, Sheldon White, Anton Larson, and Robert Karplus (Piagetian stages).

**Editor's note:** We have invited Richard McQueen to prepare an article elaborating on this letter. We will publish his article, with appropriate responses, in a future issue.

## HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

As a past contributor and reviewer of manuscripts for *Educational Leadership* in the areas of teacher stress and job dissatisfaction, I wish to commend you on the September 1983 issue.

That issue provides support for what many of us have been emphasizing and confirms the conflicts and pressures currently experienced by many educators. We are being asked to solve the complex problems of the present and an unknown future with solutions from the past. Although anxiety over the unknown is understandable, answers from the past, while comforting for the moment, are unlikely to be our best solutions.

Solutions recently grasped for, such as the back-to-basics, minimum competency, and creationism movements, have been based on past societal needs. Perhaps the "New Basics" recommended by the National Commission on Excellence in Education offers hope for the near future.

In order to prepare our students for a changing world, and the necessity of lifelong learning, we will need to re-examine our curricula at all levels—inquiry, problem solving, integrating, and valuing must be emphasized, as the September issue suggests.

Thank you for providing support for those of us trying to promote education for the future.

ELAINE G. WANGBERG  
Associate Professor  
University of New Orleans  
New Orleans, Louisiana

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