

Letters

"WE TRIED THAT BUT . . ."

Regarding your Overview (December 1983), I couldn't agree with you more. I believe there is a real need for appropriate national leadership in science curriculum development.

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KEYBOARDING AND COMPUTER LITERACY

To School Boards and Administrators Everywhere:

Listen. Business Education teachers all across our nation are trying to speak to you. But you will have to stop your noisy clamoring about computers or you will never hear. We are trying to tell you the importance of keyboarding in conjunction with computer literacy.

Yes, we know what you think about typewriting. Anybody can teach typing, right? Anybody can say, "J U J space," right? "You don't need typing to operate a computer." Well, you may not need keyboarding to operate a computer, but you surely do need it if you are going to earn a living rather than play games.

Students without keyboarding will be competing in the marketplace with keyboarding whizzes. Will they be competitive?

Please put first things first! We must teach keyboarding *before*, or at the very least, *along with* computers. Business Education teachers can and will produce competent, computer-literate employees for our nation's business world.

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THE FEDERAL COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE: DO AS I SAY, NOT AS I DO

Policy makers and government agencies make pronouncements about rewarding excellence, but their own actions are sometimes quite different.

For example, decisions made by the U.S. Department of Education relating to a small program called Follow Through suggest that the federal government not only ignores excellence, but at times actually discriminates against excellent performance.

Follow Through is a federally funded social experiment whose purpose was to determine which approaches toward compensatory education were most effective with primary grade students. Various philosophical approaches were applied in 180 school districts around the United States for several years. The results from the national evaluation of Follow Through showed significant positive effects in all areas, both academic and affective, for students taught with the Direct Instruction Follow Through approach. Direct Instruction ranked the highest of the nine major approaches in six areas, and second highest in the other three. Recent research indicates significant effects still exist nine years later when students graduate from high school.

The former Commissioner of Education, Ernest Boyer, once wrote to Senator Packwood, "Since only one of the models and therefore only one of the sponsors (Direct Instruction) was found to produce positive results more consistently than any of the others, it would be inappropriate and irresponsible to disseminate information on all the models. . . ." The Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF) (an agency funded to work with local elementary schools and Head Start programs to improve basic educational skills) did exactly what Boyer said was inappropriate and irresponsible—funding *only sponsors that performed poorly* in the Follow Through evaluation. ACYF's first action was to deny the Direct Instruction Model (and other behavioral programs) an opportunity to

apply for funds. In a letter dated August 28, 1979, Dave Weikart, the President of a Follow Through approach, wrote to other Follow Through approaches about the funding policy for ACYF's Basic Skills Program. He indicated that behavioral approaches like Direct Instruction would be able to apply for funds later. This opportunity *never* came.

ACYF claimed there were no communities that desired to work with a behavioral Head Start approach. As Raymond Collins of ACYF wrote in a letter to me:

As part of the [ACYF] proposal submission, each potential site was asked to indicate which type of facilitators (approaches) they preferred from three broad descriptions of educational approaches. . . . None of the sites indicated that a behavioral facilitator (approach) was either their first or second choice.

In response, I sent a list of eight communities with Head Start interested in working with Direct Instruction. ACYF at first denied that these sites were legitimate Head Start sites. But then, in a subsequent letter, Collins admitted that "all Head Start grantees were eligible to submit proposals." Still, no move was made by ACYF to allow the Direct Instruction model to even apply to participate in the ACYF program.

Paul Weisburg, director of a Head Start project connected with the University of Alabama, called ACYF, and the Tuscaloosa School District wrote a letter requesting information, but neither his calls nor the letter received a reply.

Conclusions need not be drawn as to the intentions of the ACYF. The fact remains that, whatever their reasons, they *did* exclude the Direct Instruction model from their project, whose goal was to develop "effective educational strategies that help young children acquire developmentally appropriate educational skills" (a quote from ACYF).

That example of government discrimination against effective programs occurred several years ago. The second example, involving the National Follow Through Office, is continuing today. For the 1982-83 school year, the Direct Instruction Follow Through Project

budget was cut 60 percent. Budget cuts are not news, though. The interesting point is that approaches working with ineffective school programs (projects not validated by the U.S. Department of Education panel) received *higher funding* than sponsors of effective (or validated) projects. All 11 of the Direct Instruction projects were validated as exemplary, yet Direct Instruction was cut more than almost all other approaches. This was in spite of Senate wording in a budget resolution to support effective Follow Through projects. Why was mediocrity rewarded?

D. Jean Benish, Acting Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, said in a letter (dated July 6, 1982): "... the amount of a grant (to a sponsor) based on an unvalidated project was slightly higher than the amount based on a validated project. One of the priorities for the program during the next school year is to validate as many additional qualified projects as possible." Benish seemed unaware that Follow Through schools and sponsors had

already received 14 years of funding to establish exemplary projects.

What has been the result of rewarding mediocrity? Not one additional school program has been validated as exemplary by the Department of Education panel. Not even one school applied. On the other hand, repeated requests over a number of years by successful approaches like Direct Instruction to develop programs for the intermediate and middle school years and students in other school districts have been denied.

What is the funding situation for the 1983-84 school year? Has the Department learned from their experience during the 1982-83 school year that rewarding mediocrity yields little? Have efforts been made to again punish effective approaches by funding them at a lower rate than ineffective approaches? The funding policy for 1982-83 is in effect for 1983-84. So much for the rhetoric of the federally sponsored Commission on Excellence.

But lest I sound too uncharitable, I'll close with a quote by Walpole: "In all

science, error precedes the truth and it is better it should go first than last." □

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THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION REPLIES:

The national evaluation of Follow Through, released in 1977, was much disputed. Two reservations concerned (1) methodological limitations stemming from the lack of techniques in modern educational research to measure *all* the Follow Through variables; and (2) the resulting inability to identify the "best" sponsor due to qualitative differences in materials and procedures used and in functions and skills emphasized. □

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Index to Advertisers

Barnhill Hayes, Inc.	50
CTB/McGraw-Hill	24, 63, 67, 79, 86
The C.V. Mosby Company	19
The Education Digest	79
Harvard University	86
Illinois Renewal Institute, Inc.	58
Instructional Dynamics, Inc.	69
King Saud University	58
Shoreham-Wading River Central School District	50
WICAT Systems	44, 45

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