

The Vagaries of Turtle Research: Gibboney Replies

Educators need to look seriously at comprehensive, nontrivial studies.

Madeline Hunter faults me for not providing alternatives to her view of learning and teaching. My views are implicit in the counter arguments I advance and in the sources I cite.

Hunter has not demonstrated a satisfactory research base for her model. In addition, she still insists upon a narrow training process that ignores competing approaches, reading, and critical discussion. This view reveals how little she values unfettered thought.

Goodlad sees Hunter's model as powerless to change pedagogy. He places it in the category of doing "little or nothing" to change present mechanical methods (1984, pp. 298-299).

Hunter builds her case on the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study (BTES) research and cites Rosenshine (1986). Yet, most of this research is based on the process-product research paradigm. This paradigm reduces the art of teaching to atomistic teacher behaviors and correlates them to low-level student skills in reading and math. The paradigm shows no causal links between teacher actions and learning, it is silent on thinking, and it provides a weak foundation from which to build rules for teaching. Hunter's claims for scientific sanction sink in this swamp.

Other problems exist. Is a minuscule effect size for direct teaching—one-tenth of a standard deviation in reading and mathematics—worth the training? Rosenshine says that the research he cites is applicable to "any well structured discipline," but in context, he means this as drill-for-skill. (Fenstermacher 1978, Garrison and Macmillan 1984, Peterson and Walberg 1979, p. 61). Is direct teaching worth the costs in poor attitudes toward school and ability to think?

Why does Hunter not mention the final report of the Napa County project that compared her model to control schools in grades 2-4? Hunter consulted with the treatment schools. The teachers received intensive train-

ing. The results significantly favored the control schools in reading and showed no difference in mathematics. The researchers called the drop in reading scores "alarming" (Stallings and Krasavage 1986).

Hunter has unique criteria for what "works."

I am relieved, however, that there is now less chance that Mortimer Adler will substitute thumb signals, small-step learning, and explicit seatwork for reading and discussing good books.

Deweyan-type interventions are supported by some good research. Cremin judged Dewey's laboratory school to have been "first-rate," based on documentary reviews. Ellsworth Collings' well conceived longitudinal study, completed between 1917-1921, demonstrated the superiority of a community-based project curriculum, grades 1-8, in a range of important cognitive and personal outcomes (Hines 1972). Nor should we forget the classic Eight Year Study, completed in 1941. Joyce cites many supporting studies in models 9-17 (Joyce and Weil 1986). My own longitudinal study with inner-city dropouts supports learning tied to meaning and feeling. Funded by NIE and based on a true experimental and ethnographic design, study results significantly favored the experimental students in reading and mathematics. One important reason for the students' in-school success was a caring environment. Furthermore, almost twice as many experimental students continued their education after graduation (Gibboney Associates 1977).

Should not scientists acknowledge the success of these (and similar) comprehensive and nontrivial interventions? Can a worthy science ignore any valid study? If Hunter and Rosenshine are going to study turtles, so to speak, they should look at an array of turtlehood—at old turtles and young turtles, and not only at turtles that swim on their side of the lake.

The studies I cited, and the history

behind them, form the foundation to my teaching and curricular alternative to Hunter's mechanical model. My staff development alternative is now being written (with John Gould). The data support using an inductive, dialogue process to improve teacher and administrator practice and to alter structures in three school systems.

Hunter and Rosenshine are correct. The educational community is beyond Dewey. We crawled past him, but we were going in the wrong direction. □

References

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