

Letters

Let's Not Wait for Magic Formulas

I get the impression from Richard Gibboney ("A Critique of Madeline Hunter's Teaching Model from Dewey's Perspective," February 1987) that educators should not use the teaching techniques presented in her model. Gibboney calls it incomplete and atomistic and wants a more holistic account of learning and teaching. Until such a magic formula is found, we best use the methods and techniques that Hunter, Thomas Good, Gene Brophy, David Berliner, Barak Rosenshine, and others give us that will help increase learning in our classrooms.

His biggest disservice to Hunter was to criticize her training program by examining materials and interviewing participants. It's like critiquing a Broadway play after reading the program and then talking to people who saw it.

To really understand Hunter, you must see and hear her. You must dialogue with Hunter. You must witness Hunter and her colleagues as they demonstrate. Her books are sketchy and in some cases outdated. They are more like field guides to keep in one's hip pocket for an occasional referral. I hope Gibboney will contact Hunter, arrange to go through her training, and then write another article—one that is not based on secondary sources.

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An Invitation to Gibboney

My initial reaction to Richard Gibboney's opinions relative to the Hunter model ("A Critique of Madeline Hunter's Teaching Model from Dewey's Perspective," February 1987) was that the headline caption on page 46 and the essence of the article are the most absurd and erroneous misinformation I've ever read in a respected educational journal.

On a positive note, another immediate thought was that finally Madeline

Hunter is receiving media attention on a national basis that is long overdue and much needed.

My third thought, which very well may be incorrect, was that here is another published statement of opinion from someone in the "ivory tower" of academia. I admit to my ignorance of Gibboney's on-the-job teaching experience and qualifications.

This year I will complete 23 years of experience in public school education. In addition, I have worked with and heard expressions of opinion about the Hunter model from hundreds of classroom teachers or school administrators. I can honestly say that such opinions, which I consider to be a basis for valid and meaningful research, have been, without exception, an endorsement and high praise of Madeline Hunter and her instructional model. This I offer as "research," which Gibboney incorrectly states is lacking regarding the model.

There is much more I could and would like to say. However, I think Madeline Hunter has rebutted Gibboney much better than I could do with her response in the same issue of the journal ("Beyond Rereading Dewey: What's Next?"). I will conclude by inviting Gibboney to visit our school district to observe where the action is—in the classrooms. While our staff is still in the process of learning the Hunter model, he will not observe didactic or mechanistic teaching, passive teachers, or evidence of teacher and student thinking that would be characterized as stifled.

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The Academic Mugging at Work

Gibboney's attack on Madeline Hunter represents "academic mugging" on a very successful and widely used teaching model.

Almost any model can be criticized for failing to take into account all of

reality since it can usually be shown that there is some piece of it that cannot be dealt with by the model. This "negative case analysis" represents the critic continuously revising hypotheses by hindsight. The object is to find what the model can't or doesn't account for or appears to de-emphasize and cast as something of the greatest importance. Conclusion? The model is inferior.

Part of the mugging is to show that parts of the model have been oversimplified; therefore, reality eludes it. The charge of being "mechanical" is flung at such simplistic (i.e., naive) representation because, of course, what's "real" is not mechanical, especially what teachers should do with children because children are, after all, not machines. If a model is simplistic and mechanical it can then be dismissed as unworthy of discussion because the critic is dealing with higher, more complex, and obviously more important, levels of interaction.

The Hunter model isn't perfect but she never said it was, however, it is more deserving of seasoned review than Gibboney's tirade.

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In Hunter's Defense

I find the blindly hostile attack of Madeline Hunter by Richard Gibboney ("A Critique of Madeline Hunter's Teaching Model from Dewey's Perspective," February 1987) offensive and unprofessional.

The effects data he asks for are there, had he only looked. Many school improvement efforts included Hunter training and collected data on the results. Even Bruce Joyce reports in his studies intervention effect sizes for direct teaching of 0.5 to 1.0 standard deviations, plus up to 10 points gain in IQ scores. Further, based on his work on teaching thinking skills—the very point on which Gibboney bases his position—David Perkins takes the stance that direct mastery

teaching of specific thinking skills and content is probably the most effective way of teaching thinking frames, provided that it is followed by application, transfer, and extension activities.

Hunter is not the only answer, but her approach, if implemented and supported properly, does offer an effective way of addressing some effective teaching issues.

WALT MICKLER
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Kudos for Contemporary Issues

I would like to thank you for including the Contemporary Issues article in the February 1987 issue of Educational Leadership (The Issue at Hand: The Family). I hope you will continue this feature beyond the article, "The Welfare of Families," by Mark Stern. It is so important that we all be reminded of the real world that today's children are experiencing. Without this reminder, it becomes too easy to develop curriculum that is not relevant or meaningful.

MARGUERITE E. LEWIS
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Another Defense of Hunter

Richard A. Gibboney's article "A Critique of Madeline Hunter's Teaching Model from Dewey's Prospective" (February 1987) was a bombastic and unnecessary attack on a colleague. His assault was displeasing, especially the rhetoric and how it was used.

Gibboney based his fundamental argument against Hunter's Instructional Theory by using John Dewey's definition, "the primary aim of teaching is to cultivate thought." That's nice, but it's not enough.

Come out of your ivory tower and try to teach second grade without Madeline Hunter's "mechanical wooden" techniques.

CAL GETTY
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Student Appreciates Contemporary Issues

The weather, at the time of my reading Alex Molnar's article, was 28 degrees, very windy and cold, but after understanding the depth and humility displayed in the short critique on "The Family" (March 1987), I am rejuvenated, happy, and concerned about this issue. I am happy to know there are statisticians out there who have a heart; I'm happy to know that the serious problems of teenage pregnancy and family structure, and their effects on school achievement are being studied rationally and not "white washed" (no pun intended) as a "minority" problem.

The March issue contains a profound statement by Sandra Hofferth. She makes her point without the statistical jargon so familiar to this type of reporting. I enjoyed reading this issue and look forward to it next month.

FLORESTIE VANCE
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One More for Hunter

Our district is currently using the Hunter model for staff development. In the hands of sensitive teachers and administration, the model is useful. In a climate of quick answers and immediate accountability, it can become a dangerous tool. The answer lies not in eliminating some of the Hunter ideas, but in using them discriminately, as Hunter advocates.

It is not enough to focus on what the teacher does; we must focus on what the student does. Sometimes stating an objective helps students clarify their own objectives; sometimes stating the objective may be a hindrance. This is especially true in the earlier years. If students need to understand "woodenness," they must actively explore instances of "woodenness," and the teacher's objective is to have students experience "woodenness." The focus is on what the student must do.

JIM MACRI
Sparta, Illinois

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Effective Schools Research Abstracts
c/o Dr. Lawrence W. Lezotte
Publisher
P.O. Box 476
Okemos, MI 48864

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