

Letters

Back to the Design Table

The February 1988 theme issue ("Restructuring Schools to Match a Changing Society"), although wide ranging and informative, paid little notice to several relevant topics in education today.

Marc Tucker's discussion ("Peter Drucker, Knowledge Work, and the Structure of Schools") touches upon the need for teaching higher-order analytic, conceptualization, and communications skills but does not prescribe a remedy for this nation whose schools fail to meet those needs. Mueller, Chase, and Walden ("Effects of Reduced Class Size in Primary Classes") make a strong case for reducing class size in primary grades, but do not consider reorganizing schools to make them administratively lighter, converting administrative time to instructional time with no increase in cost.

The ways in which schools must be restructured to reflect the major societal shift from an industrial base to an information base are not addressed. Ignored are the tools of electronic technology and the applications of these technologies in administration, supervision, and instruction, such as for individualized learning and remediation and for group work and cooperative learning.

It is time to stop bandaging crumbling school systems, return to the design table, and structure sound educational facilities for tomorrow using the tools that are available today.

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Schools Must Empower as Well as Prepare

Congratulations on a vigorous examination of the restructuring of schools (February 1988 issue). I am delighted with some articles and dismayed with others. The cover is appropriate: out

of new wood we only know how to carve a little red schoolhouse, presumably a reformed one, but certainly not a restructured educational institution. There is in the splendid articles a recognition of the need to restructure, but restructuring continues to look like reform of the existing institutions.

Schooling that makes a difference departs from the industrial productivity model and is developed around clear organizing principles. Despite the ingrained American distrust of theory and philosophy, we must advocate and promote clear thinking about the full nature of humankind, the ways in which learning in the individual takes place, and the purposes of education beyond the economic agenda of governors. Our schools need to be reformed to empower and liberate, as well as train and prepare, people who will live and work in the postmodern world.

MALCOLM D. EVANS
Belle Mead, New Jersey

Plaudits for "Equal Access to Knowledge"

John Goodlad and Jeannie Oakes ("We Must Offer Equal Access to Knowledge," February 1988) not only analyze the problem but offer helpful suggestions toward the beginning of solutions. I particularly want to echo their statement that "nearly all children can learn from quality literature, nearly all can learn a second language. . . ." As our small black Catholic high school in Atlanta prepared to merge with a larger white Catholic high school, I was told that any of our students who wanted to study foreign languages would be required to take a foreign language aptitude test. The results: some students who were doing well in first or second year Spanish showed up on the aptitude scale as having low or questionable ability for foreign language study! Had they been given such a test when signing up for Spanish class, they

might never have had the stimulation and enjoyment of learning a foreign language.

I applaud the authors' recommending the elimination of tracking. The stigma that ability grouping puts on students and the damage to their self-image and self confidence cannot be justified. Another story comes to mind. A high-ability second year Spanish class had left my classroom. When the next class came in, a group labeled "low-ability," one of the boys began erasing the work I had on the chalkboard. When I asked him to leave the material there because I wanted to use it again, his startled reaction was: "You mean you're going to teach us the same stuff you just taught those smart kids?" I didn't know whether to cry or hug the kid.

Thank you again for an article that could be the beginning of some profound and life-giving changes in schooling.

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Curriculum Revision

The February 1988 issue is especially valuable because I am in the process of revising the curriculum in our school district. It is a pleasure to be able to quote current articles that espouse my own philosophy. I have found the 1988 ASCD yearbook also to be valuable.

Our science curriculum committee is nearly finished with the philosophy, and the math committee is "in the midst." Your publications arrived just when I needed them.

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A Narrow View of Vocational Education

It is obvious from Sizer's response to the question about the role of vocational education in the secondary school ("On Changing Secondary Schools: A Conversation with Ted Sizer," February 1988) that he has a limited perspective of the purposes of vocational education. In a study entitled *An Untold Story: Purposes of Vocational Education in the Secondary School* summarized in *Educational Horizons* (Fall 1986), nine broad purposes, in addition to learning technical skills, were identified from detailed, in-depth observations of the practice of vocational education in the secondary schools of Minnesota. These include thinking through problems, learning about working with others, providing community service, and developing aesthetic appreciation and expression.

To be able to manage work and family responsibilities effectively, the focus of vocational education, is one of the most liberating and empowering life skills we can envision for our young people. Vocational education is a place to learn, a way to learn, and a reason to learn—for everyone, in some measure—in the secondary school.

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On Substance Abuse

I was drawn to reading the March 1988 issue by the cover and was further committed to reading on by Ron Brandt's poignant "Classroom Control." The articles under the heading of "Contemporary Issues" are the finest collection featuring the topic of adolescent substance abuse that I have found within any magazine that

targets educators as its major reading audience.

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Teenage Drinking Is Unacceptable

"The Greatest Risk of All" (Dan Watson, March 1988) is not teenage drinking and driving, but programs like S.A.D.D. and "Friday Night Live," which miss the central issue by encouraging young people to "persuade their peers to party safely." What is needed is a greater sense of outrage on the part of parents and schools, a message that says "not only is it wrong to drink and drive; drinking itself is unacceptable." Stating this position will not eliminate teenage drinking. It must, however, be our fundamental premise.

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Some Hurts Aren't "Easy to Banish"

I feel compelled to respond to the first clause of the caption on page 2 accompanying the March 1988 cover drawings: "How easy it is to banish the hurts when our students are young..." Simply, I would ask: How does one easily banish the hurts of the three-year-old who reports, "Daddy hit Mommy in the mouth, and she had to go to the hospital"? How does one easily banish the hurts of a four-year-old who tells his mother, "I wish I had a gun so I could kill myself"? How does one easily banish the hurts of the five-year-old who has been repeatedly sodomized?

ANONYMOUS

Do As I Say . . .

I was impressed by Samuel Totten's "The Myriad Dangers of Tobacco Use: Ignorance Is Anything But Bliss" (March 1988). Totten did an excellent job of elucidating the dangers of tobacco as these dangers apply to students. But I was disappointed because there was no mention of tobacco abuse by teachers.

If teachers smoke on school premises, we are telling students to "do as I say, not as I do." We are sending the wrong message. We should ban smoking in schools for students, teachers, administrators, volunteers, and maintenance and office personnel. We are not infringing on a person's right to smoke when we ban smoking; we are simply protecting the right of nonsmokers to breathe clean air.

JOHN MERRITT, PRINCIPAL
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March Issue Came at the Right Time

I look forward each month to your high-quality journal with its timely and relevant articles. I was particularly impressed with your March 1988 issue on "Helping Youngsters Cope with Life." I find myself quoting various authors' sentiments and points of view, have shared numerous articles with colleagues, and have written to several of the authors for additional information about programs described. As the issues always seem to do, this one came at just the right time. It has proven to be a powerful and effective tool in assisting our school district with the work we are doing.

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