

# Letters

## On Developing Thinking Skills

After reading and rereading articles in the April 1988 issue, I found it necessary to go back to the September 1984 issue to compare and revisit views on similar topics. You are to be commended for your ongoing commitment to keep the "thinking" issue in the fore.

The instructional tools of McTighe and Lyman ("Cueing Thinking in the Classroom: The Promise of Theory-Embedded Tools"); the thinking strategies of Beyer ("Developing a Scope and Sequence for Thinking Skills Instruction"); and the "Connections" of Mirman and Tishman ("Infusing Thinking Through 'Connections'") all provide a systematic delivery mode to develop higher-order thinking skills. However, I am concerned that the teachers who are the key to developing students' ability to think will view the programs as fads.

If teachers are to be successful in the development of their students' ability to think, then the process is even more critical than the product. Marketed thinking skills programs may be a useful means, but they are not the end. An education that prepares students to be productive adults in a highly technological society will have achieved its aim.

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## Making Supervision "Human"

Edward Pajak's "Research Trends in Supervision" (April 1988) is on target with my findings as I work with teachers in the Hilliard City Schools. We are proud of the collegial problem-solving mode of our interaction. Skillful intervention results in a warmer relationship between the two parties and the development of friendlier direct communication.

The role of the supervisor in this mode is "fluid," difficult to document (in fact, much of what happens should not be documented or told), but gratifying when the result is increased understanding and communication. Thanks, Ed, for making supervision "human."

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## On a Historical Note

As a Virginian, I take issue with the statement in "Moral Education in the Life of the School" (May 1988) that 1647 was "20 years after the first settlers landed" (p. 5). The first settlers landed much earlier than 1627. The first permanent English settlement was established in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607. Had the ASCD Panel on Moral Education chosen the term *Pilgrim* rather than *settler*, they would have been on more solid historical ground, even though the Pilgrims landed in 1620, 27 years before 1647.

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## Getting to Know You

"What Evangelical Parents Expect from Public School Administrators" by Frank Nelsen (May 1988) was refreshingly helpful. Unlike many other offerings on the religious right, this one was rational and useful. Thank you for publishing articles that are helpful in resolving school and community problems.

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## More on Evangelical Parents

I would like to compliment you for including "What Evangelical Parents Expect from Public School Administrators" by Frank Nelsen in the May 1988 issue. The point of view of evangelicals must be understood by anyone who hopes to run an effective public school. This is not to say, however, that public schools should promote their agenda.

The author makes a valid point about censorship in school libraries. If the purpose of a school library is to make it possible for students to explore the wide range of ideas and points of view that make up our world, there is no excuse for censoring (non-selecting) authors of note whose topic is religious. However, my experience with evangelicals has been that they are much more interested in getting their message to students than in assuring that students have access to the messages of others.

I take strong issue with the author on one point. If Nelsen sees little difference whether creationism is presented in a science class or in social studies, he misunderstands the nature of science. The process of science has at its core the goal of being willing to reject previously held theories when a different explanation better fits the physical evidence. The evangelical point of view has at its core the belief in the Bible as unchanging truth, and physical evidence is evaluated within the context of this unchanging truth. This approach makes possible the *belief* in creationism, while science leads to the *tentative acceptance* of organic evolution.

I have had many rewarding discussions with creationists, but I have never met a creationist who was willing to reevaluate his or her belief in the authority and accuracy of the Bible. Creationism is an important world

view, but it has nothing to do with science.

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### Education in a Democracy

Frank Nelsen's plea to understand and accommodate the beliefs of evangelicals in public schools (May 1988) is good advice for those confronted with parents who object to specific items and will accept substitute items for their own children. However, those who feel they speak for God and will burn in an eternal fire if they do not keep *everyone's* children from reading *The Wizard of Oz*, discussing moral alternatives, and learning that science starts with open-ended questions are not so easily satisfied. The beliefs of those who follow Schlafly, the Gablers, the LaHayes, and so on, are so antithetical to education in a democracy that rational dialogue with them is not possible. Their goal is not accommodation but takeover.

All citizens have a right to criticize and try to change what they don't like in public schools, but educators have an obligation to teach those values that promote the principles of democracy and to resist those that undermine them. If we don't draw lines, we will soon find that public education will cease to exist. Then, perhaps, students from all cultures and religious persuasions will hear only the mind-numbing beliefs of the radical right.

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### The Content of Values Teaching

Merrill Harmin's "Value Clarity, High Morality: Let's Go for Both" (May

1988) pleases me greatly. Perhaps the values clarificationists have "come a long way." I hope the same comment can soon be made about the moral development and reflective thinking advocates.

Since the days when Louis Raths, Jim Macdonald, and I were involved in the same program at New York University, some of the human products of our schools have moved through a values vacuum into a values morass. To some extent this condition has resulted from our failure to teach values that have a universal and beneficent thrust. Surely values clarification, reflective thinking, and other methodological approaches remain as important as ever. The real deficiency, however, lies in the area of content. We have three major sources of the values we should bring carefully and sensitively to the youngsters in our schools: (1) daily utilitarian content of a fair play and harmony-among-people sort; (2) wisdom-of-the-ages values found in world literature (e.g., fidelity, generosity, patriotism, and regard for parents, children, the ill, and the needy); and (3) the tender, humane values found in religion (love, mercy, and the rest).

I commend you for the May issue. After nearly 45 years of affiliation with ASCD, I have finally seen our organization produce written material that faces really practical matters in values education.

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### Values Beyond Question

I read with great interest the articles about moral/values education in the May 1988 issue, hoping to find something of value that I could apply as an elementary counselor. What I found instead (and what I really expected) were exercises in futility and contra-

dition. Nowhere did I find a set of values that are said to be beyond question by any given segment of society or, more important, by individuals bent on "doing their own thing" with philosophical arguments that support their behaviors. The authors, in general, started on square one and ended up, sadly, in the same place.

A real problem is that as long as values are "man-made," opinions will differ among people of high moral principle and good will, especially in areas that are less well defined and with solutions that require compromise.

A second problem is the dichotomy between private and public morality. What good does it do for an adult who uses alcohol in moderation, for example, to tell children that drugs are bad for them? Actions speak so loudly that students have a hard time hearing the words.

A third problem is the lack of connectivity between actions and motives. Much good has been accomplished by people with less than pure motives; on the other hand, experience teaches us that well-intentioned friends are often sources of great pain. As long as reasonable connections cannot be made between behaviors and motives, moral education will not be as effective as it can be.

As long as individuals are taught that they are, in the end, the final arbiter when conflicts between conduct and conscience occur, a review of history demonstrates that rationalism resulting in a seared conscience rules the day. What is needed is a return to a set of values that is beyond man's ability to debate away as humanly developed values can be; and only the supernatural, God-given set of values of the Judeo-Christian tradition regarding moral conduct meets the criterion.

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