

Letters

Feedback About Photo

Shades of Hester Prynne! I am referring to the photograph that accompanied "Moral Education in the Life of the School" (May 1988). The only thing missing is the red "A" emblazoned on the young woman's breast. Where, by the way, is Reverend Dimmesdale? Was that the only image you could come up with to illustrate the need to develop a program on moral education in our schools? This photograph comes close to wiping out 200 years of social progress by equating (presumably) unwed mothers with moral bankruptcy. For shame!

CONCETTA DUVAL
Salt Lake City, Utah

Editors' note: We did not at any time presume that the model represented an unwed mother, nor would we wish to present her as an example of moral bankruptcy, if she did. We were intent upon illustrating a fine piece of work with a graphic and evocative photograph, and we regret that we fell short of the mark in your case.

Improved But Not Changed

In "The Changing Basal Reader" (March 1988), Roger Farr claims that since the mid-1970s, the quality and content of basal readers have changed and improved. While I agree that basal readers have changed in quality and content, I do not believe that they have changed in nature. The literary and editing modifications found in today's basal readers are only surface changes. The deeper theoretical assumptions and philosophical beliefs that drive those changes, however, have unequivocally remained the same.

For instance, today's basal readers, like their predecessors, reflect the belief that reading is best learned through direct instruction of a prescribed, hierarchical, and sequential set of basic reading skills. Moreover, their primary focus remains more on literature than on learners, more on explicit reading skills than on implicit reading strategies, and more on iden-

tifying reading deficiencies than on supporting and extending the reading strategies students already possess.

Besides being faulty, Farr's claim is dangerously misleading. In my view, the major problem plaguing basal readers isn't so much a matter of what they include, but what they exclude. Although basal readers now include award-winning literature, they continue to make personal choice and self-selection peripheral issues in learning to read. They continue to ignore the fact that making decisions as to what and why specific literature should be read is an integral part of learning how to read. In my view, however, these decisions must be made by readers, not teachers and publishers.

The alternative is to produce basal readers that reflect the assumption that the act of reading is at least as important as, perhaps more important than, what is being read. In addition, they must be written to actively engage readers in the reading process, to identify and extend their existing reading strategies, to invite personal choice and self-selection, and to maximize a wide variety of reading materials and opportunities. Only then can we say that basal readers truly have changed.

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Art and the Arts Not Synonymous

I picked up the December 1987/January 1988 issue with great expectations. Here was an issue on education in the arts. I plunged into the magazine ready to learn and savor everything.

And what did I find? The usual. The great majority of contributors use the words *art* and *arts* interchangeably, as though one actually were exactly the same as the other, as though somehow

music, dance, and drama had disappeared. I was dismayed to find again the attitude that the arts consist of drawing, painting, sculpting, architecture—all the visual arts—and not much more. One author went so far as to refer to dance as a visual art.

How can we begin to deal with education in the arts when even the Secretary of Education titles his article "Why the Arts Are Essential" (p. 4) and then speaks almost exclusively of appreciating paintings. Where is an appreciation of music? Of ballet? "The Star-Spangled Banner" and "The Marseillaise" are as historical as they are musical. The works of Shakespeare speak eloquently to the values we hold dear and to the culture in which we live. The beauty and grace of a performance of *The Firebird* are as uplifting as any painting.

The art that is most dominant in our culture today, especially when dealing with students, is music. There is music on television, in elevators, as we wait on the telephone. Tape recorders, stereos, and compact disc players are as common as toasters and refrigerators. A series on education in the arts that does not give proportionate time and emphasis to music does not understand the mindset of the market that educators serve. Students get turned on to learning through what they know, understand, and appreciate. That's one of the points Howard Gardner makes in talking about aesthetic growth.

The use of the word *art* as a synonym for *arts* narrows the possibilities for interpretation. I am sure that some writers do not consciously think of excluding the performing arts when they speak of the arts. I am sure that they would agree that art can be any "use of the skill and imagination in the production of things of beauty" (*Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary*). But the emphasis on visual art and the effective exclusion of music, dance, and drama in the articles in this issue lessens the importance of those subjects. They become "second class citizens" again!

Yet not every student will learn as much through art as he may through music or drama. And where can all of the arts come together as one experience but in the theater?

The attitudes of writers, educators, administrators, and professional organizations influence the public which they contact and serve. Let us give the arts *all* of the importance that they deserve, *and* recognize *all* of the components that make up an education in the arts.

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Dabbling Is Not Enough

Congratulations for taking such a strong stand about arts education in our country. Educators, parents, and students too often consider the arts a "luxury," something to be dabbled in when "important" matters have been thoroughly covered. In actual fact, the arts are just those "important" matters. Given that most of the socialization process in the United States takes place through images—on television, in films, photojournalism, fashion, and advertising—it is imperative that children learn to "read" and think about visual media if they are truly to be informed citizens. We threaten the very foundations of our democracy if we allow our students to remain ignorant of the visual language that is, these days, our society's primary tool of communication.

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California Framework, No Basis in Reality

"California's New History-Social Science Curriculum Promises Richness and Depth" by Francie Alexander and

Charlotte Crabtree (September 1988) is yet another attempt to justify the frequent changes in California's social studies curriculum, the latest and worst being the the 1988 *History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve* put out by the California State Board of Education.

The entire framework is based on the assumption that California students will move through such a curriculum from K-12. Anyone teaching social studies in California, or teaching teachers of social studies, knows the demographic realities of teaching in this changing state. Continuity is impossible and such a framework unrealistic and myopic when you have thousands of students coming into and going out of the classroom as a daily occurrence. To assume that a new student, perhaps an immigrant, has had any of the previous course content is absurd.

One reason social studies teachers rarely take seriously any curriculum recommendations from the State of California is because of this constant "social distance" that is present between what "they" think exists in our schools and what "we" know exists. The 1988 framework is doomed to be ignored by everyone except the California State Board of Education and the few who wrote it.

ALFRED LIGHTFOOT
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For Shame

Re: "Life Within the Walls," September 1988, by Patricia McDaniel Dombart.

Teachers—for shame, for shame—join the convent or retire.

Educational Leadership—for shame, for shame—for printing such stuff. (That word was originally *junk*, but I thought it was too harsh.)

CAL GETTY
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On Business Education

Thank you for printing "Business Education Will Prepare Today's Students for Tomorrow's Economy" by C. LeMoyné Smith (September 1988). I share Smith's sentiments concerning the absence of any mention of business education in your 1988 yearbook and in most of your previous publications.

All vocational education programs have a great deal to offer high school students, most of whom will eventually enter the world of work. Business education not only provides students with entry-level job skills but also provides them with knowledge and skills that are essential for success in college as well as in numerous business and nonbusiness related occupations and as educated consumers.

I hope that your future publications will continue to call attention to the value of business education and the other components of vocational education.

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