

# Letters

## Ire and Admiration

What a fascinating September issue ("What Should Schools Teach?")! You've inspired both ire and admiration from this regular reader.

The curricular structure provided by Allan Glatthorn ("What Schools Should Teach in the English Language Arts") certainly can be functional, though it's often been used to set up nonsensical "basic skills" structures in many districts. However, the "content" he describes leaves much to be desired in the encoding areas of the curriculum (writing, spelling, grammar). Glatthorn describes what he calls a "process" writing program, but uses terminology (*exposition, persuasion*) which relates to a bygone era.

The influence of James Britton and James Moffett is still evident today in relevant language arts curriculums. Writing modes are viewed as expressive, transactional, and/or poetic, and the process is seen as *recursive*—that is, these modes occur in cyclical fashion, and grammar/usage issues are faced as they occur in children's writing. Correction/editing as part of the process is crucial; naming the parts of speech is helpful in communicating, but hardly an essential part of curriculum content.

Robert Slavin's "Synthesis of Research on Grouping" was excellent. He's kept us up to date on grouping research for quite some time. But the central question remains critical: when a teacher finds significant differences among reading levels of the children in her class, what should she or he do? *Some* form of grouping is necessary to serve students at their instructional level. You've found no alternative to the teacher's dilemma.

Your method of "reporting" in this case may serve only to exacerbate the

problem—isn't one *People* magazine enough?

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## What Would Dewey Do with a Computer and the September Issue?

If public education is not healthy, it is not because the professionals are not having a healthy debate. I read the September issue, "What Schools Should Teach," with interest, delight, and deep concern: concern that the very vital debate was missing the answers that are before us.

All the ingredients for educational renewal are generously sprinkled throughout the various articles. What is lacking is a vision that integrates these ideas into a coherent, practical approach to curriculum design and instruction.

In his interview, Ernest Boyer reflects on "core curriculum": "I get uneasy when I hear that term, even though I use it myself. . . . I'm much more concerned that students go beyond a study of the disciplines to develop an understanding of human commonalities, which could be achieved in a variety of ways. . . . I don't think we've had, during the past five years, a creative debate about how we might organize academic fields to help students integrate knowledge and apply it to the world they will inherit."

For renewal to occur, the debate must take place at the application level. We need to consider the degree to which curriculum is going to be oriented toward process or product, toward structure and control or discovery and creativity. For example, Allan Glatthorn ("What Schools Should Teach in the English Language Arts") writes, "As I conceptualize the curriculum, it embraces four compo-

nents. The mastery curriculum meets two criteria: It has high structure; it is essential for all students. . . . The organic curriculum has low structure but is also essential for all students."

Writing on "Achieving Useful Science," Robert Yager states that "in an actual S/T/S program, students investigate problems that affect their communities, employing their natural curiosity and concern."

Thinking about cooperative learning and students as problem solvers, Matthew Lipman ("On Philosophy in the Curriculum") states that "the students become accustomed to asking each other for reasons and for opinions . . . to building on each other's ideas."

Finally, when Robert Slavin ("Synthesis of Research on Grouping") tells us that "instructionally effective methods provide group rewards based on the individual learning of all group members," we hear another key concept in the rhetoric for process-based instruction, which harks back to discovery learning, and before that, perhaps to Dewey.

So what would Dewey do with a computer? Would he listen to the Computer Curriculum Corporation salesman on the inside cover and let technology help him install computerized mastery work stations, or would he choose a vision that integrates the elements of an organic, student-centered curriculum?

But wait, what's this? On the cover is a picture of four students working together at a computer. Perhaps we have decoded how Dewey would address curriculum renewal—the use of word processing coupled with cooperative activities. When the writing process and cooperative learning techniques are used by teachers for revising curriculum, true renewal of teachers and of curriculum occurs. These two pedagogical movements become

facilitators of social and intellectual development that addresses and solves heretofore insoluble problems.

As teachers experience the power of writing as a process coupled with cooperative learning for solving their professional problems, they internalize the essence of these methods and realize a vision of education that organically balances process and product, a vision that reflects our truly human educational capabilities.

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### "Irrational" Viewpoint, or Just an Opposing One?

I was disappointed with the inclusion of "How an Imaginary Movement Is Being Used to Attack Courses and Books" by Edward Jenkinson in the October 1988 issue of your fine magazine.

I have not read *Tactics for Thinking*, nor do I claim to be an authority regarding its theoretic or philosophic bases. Rather, my complaint is with the tone of the article: smugness and insensitivity to the basic concerns of a sizable minority of the American public. Not only that, Jenkinson also displayed a basic disingenuousness, preferring innuendo to fact.

The author implied that most criticism of modern American education comes from what he would probably term the "religious right" or the "lunatic fringe." However, he started with the assumption (possibly false) that the course American education has taken, ostensibly considered the "will of the majority," is the correct and proper course. In other words, because it *is*, it must be correct. However, as history repeatedly teaches, the majority has not always taken the right path.

The title of the article used the phrase *imaginary movement* to describe the New Age movement. The author wrote of the movement as a figment of the protesters' imaginations. However, it's not unusual to see advertisements for a variety of products, including music and books, that promote a "New Age" lifestyle.

The author used the same fallacious argument to dispel the "myth" that secular humanism is a religion, apparently depending solely on his readers' sympathy to make his point. The problem, again, was a basic dishonesty in his approach. The tenets of *The Humanist Manifesto*, written many years ago and a source of faith for many people, have largely been accepted and incorporated in the American politico-socio-economic (including education) system.

The blurb and the endnotes used the phrases *irrational attacks* and *irrational charges* to describe the state of mind of those with opposing viewpoints. However, a close inspection of the bibliography disclosed a list of highly educated, intelligent authors whose reputations have been made by the honesty and wisdom in their books. Norman Geisler, for instance, is the author of *Christian Apologetics*, a book that is remarkable for the precision and clarity of its language and the depth and honesty of its philosophic arguments. Tim LaHaye and Dave Hunt, two other respected authors, are widely read in Christian circles.

What really bothers me is that I have come to picture Jenkinson as an individual who is broadminded when it comes to cultural, or economic, or even racial differences, but narrow-minded about people who have legitimate differences with him in religious matters. I sadly make that assumption based on my repeated experience with people who brand as "irrational"

those whose belief systems contradict or conflict with their own.

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### Setting the Record Straight

In "On Research and School Organization" (October 1988), Robert Slavin referred to a study conducted in West Orange, New Jersey, to support his claim that the Hunter program isn't effective. We need to set the record straight. The West Orange study is a four-year longitudinal study examining the effects of the implementation of the Hunter model on a number of variables, including student achievement. The study was completed in June 1988. The data have been collected, and the results will be presented at the ASCD Annual Conference in March 1989.

The article to which Slavin referred reported the results of the first year only. Although the initial data indicated that there was no effect on student achievement as measured by a standardized achievement test, there was a significant increase in the final grades of students enrolled in classes of teachers trained in the Hunter program compared to untrained teachers.

One of the exciting findings of the first-year study was that the teachers trained in the Hunter program experienced significantly improved attitudes toward their profession. They felt good about themselves, their students, and about the skills they had learned. Equally important, they reported that their relationships with supervisors and administrators were more collegial. Further, the students' attitudes toward school in these teachers' classes also improved significantly.

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## Morality and Myth

As is the case for the other articles in the May 1988 issue addressing values and morality (with the exception of one brief note in Merrill Harmin's article), Richard Paul ("Ethics Without Indoctrination") completely misses the nature of morality. Morality is not a product of the mind and the senses, but a product of the heart. Nor is morality a separate curriculum as in the phrase "moral education." Morality comes not from critical thought and reasoning but from myth. Paul has made the error of confusing references and, in this case, of selecting the wrong epistemology.

Morality—stemming from the needs of members of the species to feed off one another, to reproduce, and to conquer and subdue—is communicated in the myths of all cultures and is made manifest through the cultural deity. Other myths, common

to all cultures, have extended human will beyond, and transcendent of, a bestial order of life (to which the already cited needs are ties) to levels of consciousness that include forgiving the self in order to avoid judging others, a recognition of the infinite qualities of the deity that are formless and eternal. (Harmin recognizes this idea of transcendent myth when he mentions "sensing inner guidance," p. 27).

One doesn't teach ethics through the epistemology of critical thought or reasoning. Critical thought only leads to fantasizing about ethics. One teaches ethics by living by and teaching the myths and what happens when the myths are ignored. Cultural and ethnic differences are of no consequence because the deity-like characterizations that make myth incarnate in physical beings are archetypal. In our culture, when the deity-like characterizations are not followed, there is

guilt and resentment. When the organism has repressed or rejected the myth, there is only damage and addiction, which can be used either to destroy the organism or as the means for regaining the myth.

Ethics are taught by upholding the myth and holding students to tacit knowledge they already have regarding the standards inherent in it. The teacher doesn't allow the student to cheat and steal or denigrate another because in doing so the student falls from an essential, deity-like self to suffer guilt and resentment. This suffering can be relieved only by giving retribution, a return to the reality of the essential self and a oneness with the deity of the myth.

It appears we (the U.S. culture) are losing our myths and the ethics specified by them. But the answer to a lost myth, or a possibly lost myth, is not critical thought but its inseparable opposite: retribution and a return to the myth—or the evolution of a new myth.

In education we continue to apply the wrong epistemology to the right state of being or the right epistemology to the wrong state of being. Paul's article is an example of the former. It needs to be corrected. But, I fear, all the practitioners are out there waiting to be told how to teach moral education, and the critical thought idea, by being of latest fashion, will tempt them into belief. Such is the nature of the self and the metaphor of unethics.

As Joe Campbell says, morality came out of the body—we all already have what we need to be moral. Most of what education is doing today, including most of what's printed in *Educational Leadership*, is designed to disengage the student from what he or she already has. What ASCD is proposing comes very close, again, to doing something to students, to imposing something from the outside, not helping students better use what they already have.

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## What Do You Think?

We welcome your comments on articles in *Educational Leadership*. Please send letters to: Executive Editor, ASCD, 125 N. West St., Alexandria, VA 22314-2798. Letters selected for publication may be edited for brevity and clarity.

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