

Letters

Why Students Drop Out

In "How to Get an 'A' on your Dropout Prevention Report Card" (February 1989), John Hamby stated that family and domestic problems are not the cause of the high dropout rate. I do not agree.

When children are abused at home, they often rebel against any kind of authority. This rebellion carries over into school, and the kids drop out to get away from authority. Further, children drop out because of lack of encouragement and support from their parents. Often parents who did not complete high school tell their kids that school is a waste of time. The children believe this and consequently drop out, as their parents did. Finally, many children in single-parent homes must work to help with the bills. They can't work and keep up their grades, so they quit school.

Abuse, lack of motivation and interest from their parents, and financial problems in the home—these, I feel, are the causes of the high dropout rate.

MELISSA A. LAPORTE
Homestead, Florida

On the Dropout Problem: Hamby Replies

To Melissa LaPorte, I offer my thanks for bringing to the attention of your readers the impact of family relationships on school dropout rates. I fully agree that child abuse, lack of parental support, and too little money are important influences, but I do not agree that they are "... the causes of the high dropout rate."

I am trying to convince educators that schools are part of the dropout problem—and must be viewed by educators as part of the solution. Just because I emphasized the school's role does not

mean I consider other factors unimportant: it simply was not possible to treat them all in one article.

JOHN V. "DICK" HAMBY
Assistant Director
National Dropout Prevention Center
at Clemson University
Clemson, South Carolina

What About the Research on Montessori Schools?

In "What Works for Students at Risk: A Research Synthesis" (February 1989), Slavin and Madden neatly specify the characteristics of effective programs but ignore one such alternative: the Montessori approach. Certainly Montessori meets the criteria set forth by Slavin and Madden. Montessori programs are intensive, comprehensive, and well planned. Montessori schools are found worldwide and in a variety of settings ranging from migrant camps in California to public schools in Florida. So where's the research?

MARLENE BARRON
President
American Montessori Society
New York, New York

Views on Summary Writing

I read with much interest "Teaching Students to Summarize" by Valerie Anderson and Suzanne Hidi (December 1988/January 1989). The authors identified "several simple precepts" that can help teachers better instruct students in summary writing. What is problematic is not the precepts—which seem rational and practical—but the philosophical beliefs and theoretical assumptions upon which they are based; for example, that summarizing is fundamentally a matter of reconstructing the author's meanings.

Instead, I propose that summary writing involves the personal construction of meaning and must be viewed as an activity where learners function as transformers of their own

understandings. Only then will it become meaningful for both learning and learning how to learn.

WILLIAM P. BINTZ
Indiana University
School of Education
Bloomington, Indiana

In the Name of Safety

The photo of a laboratory activity used to illustrate Adam Urbanski's "The Rochester Contract: A Status Report" (November 1988) does not further the content of the article and does a disservice to educational leaders not trained in the science disciplines. The clutter, the crowding, the techniques employed, and the improper (non)use of goggles by two students are certainly not exemplary practices and are conditions that may lead to serious injury if they are not recognized to exist. My colleagues who are not trained in the sciences should be exposed only to scenes that illustrate desirable practices. Isn't that what *Educational Leadership* is all about!

URIEL J. GOLDSMITH
Chair, Science Department
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Spring Valley, New York

An Acknowledgment

I wish to acknowledge the contribution that ASCD publications make to the workshop programs we conduct. In addition, most of my colleagues who teach graduate level use *Educational Leadership* and other publications as almost "biblical" references. On behalf of the members of our Policy Board, congratulations to Ron Brandt for the enlightened, perceptive, and highly effective leadership that ASCD publications provide.

JOHN OWENS
Consultant/Director
The Principals' Center of Long Island
Brookville, New York

Curricular Programs for Children

It's great to read so many articles that have "with-itness" (February 1989). Larry Strong's "The Best Kids They Have" starts the issue off with a great intro. Then Robert Slavin and Nancy Madden tell us "What Works for Students at Risk: A Research Synthesis." Then Madden, Slavin, Nancy Karweit, and Barbara Livermore apply Slavin's work with positive results, "Restructuring the Urban Elementary School."

What is needed is a new approach to curriculum where motivation comes from within, students gain a sense of belonging by working together, and education is inviting. Curriculum programs for children, not for subject matter, must revolutionize the approaches now used in our schools.

CAL GETTY, PRINCIPAL
*Orchards Elementary School
Evergreen School District No. 114
Vancouver, Washington*

With Rights Come Responsibilities

I agree with Curwin and Mendler ("We Repeat, Let the Buyer Beware: A Response to Canter," March 1989) that "... a truly effective discipline plan must include but go beyond rules, rewards, consequences, and punishments. It must send a message of respect, dignity, belief, and hope to those directly affected."

But it is also important to understand that along with rights come responsibilities. Consideration for others, hard work, respect for authority, and effective decision making are but a few of those responsibilities. When students do not evidence wise decision making, it is essential that they learn there are consequences for self- or other-defeating behaviors. Canter's model has proven to be an effective initial program, in many instances, for effective school development.

TIMOTHY J. HOWARD
*Assistant Principal
Portage Public Schools
Portage, Michigan
Adjunct Assistant Professor
Western Michigan University*

Equity and Education

Thank you for the articles, "Gender Equity and Educational Reform" and "What the World Needs Now: More Women in Mathematics and Science" (March 1989). I agree it is important to focus in on the problem of sex equity. In using a K-6 hands-on science curriculum, our district has insisted on each child's having his or her own objects/equipment/materials. We had found in a study six years ago, just before starting this program, that when insufficient materials are available, boys will claim the lion's share of direct physical experience with the materials.

For another example, middle school boys reported several times as much experience with electricity *outside school* as did middle school girls, while the two sexes reported about the same amount of experience *inside school*. Comparing their experience with their performances on a cognitive measure of knowledge about electric circuits—and extrapolating from the data to predict these scores if both groups had had comparable experience—girls could be predicted to outperform boys on the cognitive measures by a substantial margin.

When girls have all the direct physical experience with science equipment and phenomena that boys normally receive, therefore, we can expect them to obtain the same capabilities as boys, as assessed by different measures.

RICHARD MCQUEEN
*Specialist, Science Education
Multnomah Education
Service District
Portland, Oregon*

Time to Put Testing in Its Place

Bravo! The April 1989 issue, "Redirecting Assessment," goes straight to the heart of my concerns. Costa, Shepard, and Madaus, in particular,

pinpoint the need for educational assessment to be broadened beyond the narrow base of standardized testing. Surely it is time to put standardized testing in its proper place and consider multiple measures for more meaningful and valid assessment.

MARY G. BENNETT
*Vice Principal
Malcolm X Shabazz High School
Newark, New Jersey*

"Who Will Teach Minority Youth?"

Wali Gill offers a clear solution to the question "Who Will Teach Minority Youth?" (May 1989). Historically, the parents of minority students have played a role of significant proportion. Now they must again assume that role. Gill displayed a high degree of courage when he reflected on these traditional instructions: "You have to work twice as hard as others ... be a credit to our race ... and don't let me hear anything bad about you."

BOBBY L. HARRIS
*Assistant Principal
Thompson High School
Alabaster, Alabama*

As an educator, I know that schools must win the support of parents and learn to respond flexibly and creatively to students' needs. As a parent, I know it is essential to teach our children social skills, instill confidence, and expose our children to varied life experiences. Wali Gill reminds both educators and parents of our very important roles.

KAREN HAYES BUTLER
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Superintendent
Office of the Superintendent
Omaha Public Schools
Omaha, Nebraska*

What Do You Think?

We welcome your comments on articles in *Educational Leadership*. Please send letters to: Executive Editor, ASCD, 1250 N. Pitt St., Alexandria, VA 22314-1403. Letters selected for publication may be edited for brevity and clarity.

Postscript on Midcareer Adults

Robert Evans ("The Faculty in Midcareer: Implications for School Improvement," May 1989) has particularly impressed me with his Continuum of Midcareer Types, discussion of revitalization, and caveats. However, all professionals at midcareer are not "prone to de-motivation . . . and a leveling off of performance." Some feel more motivated if, for example, they no longer have as many home responsibilities and can give more to their careers.

Just as adults discover that "maintaining competence is less rewarding than initially achieving it," they face the generativity/self-absorption duality described by Erikson. Those who develop a strong sense of generativity do not require a pat on the back. Their sense of self emerges largely from being who they are. Those who require the continual reward structure are usually those with greater self-absorption.

JUDY-ARIN KRUPP
*Author, Researcher, Consultant
 Manchester, Connecticut*

IN THE OCTOBER ISSUE . . .

Strengthening Partnerships with Parents and Community . . .

Educational Leadership takes a fresh look at school/business collaboration and successful parent involvement, featuring

- ★ Dan Merenda's views on the value of school/business partnerships,
- ★ Jane Lindle's surprising findings about what parents really want,
- ★ and much more, including the pros and cons of parent choice, practical suggestions about communicating with parents, and the new approach of fundamentalists concerned about public school programs.

Plus Contemporary Issues' searching examination of renewed racism in schools, with ideas about how to combat it.

COMING IN NOVEMBER: What Schools Can Do About What Students Don't Know—promising concepts and programs in major curriculum areas to help you address problems in achievement..

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