

Programs for gay students criticized

As a licensed clinical psychologist, I have grave concerns about initiating special counseling programs for teenagers who are labeled homosexual.

While Sears and other writers claim that special services benefit adolescents ("Helping Students Understand and Accept Sexual Diversity," September 1991), my work with more than 100 homosexual adults points up the dangers of premature identification with a sexual lifestyle with such long-term consequences. Those who make such a commitment as adolescents but later attempt to change their sexual orientation encounter deep resistance.

My specific criticisms of special programs—such as California's Project 10—are these:

1. *Special services label a disproportionate number of students as homosexual.* The name Project 10, for instance, suggests 10 percent of the population is homosexual. This widely used statistic, from the Kinsey Report of the 1930s, is open to question. Four more recent studies find that from 1 to 3 percent of the population is homosexual.

Not only do inflated percentages give budget power to special services, but greater numbers also suggest normalcy and legitimacy to teenagers.

2. *Special services can erroneously label youngsters as homosexual.* Homosexual thoughts, feelings, and fantasies don't make one a homosexual. Many factors can lead teenagers into homosexual behavior: curiosity, undifferentiated needs for affection, need for attention, and desire for a sense of belonging. We know the importance of self-labeling. It's an injustice to direct an adolescent into an identity with lifelong emotional, social, and health consequences.

3. *Special services, often staffed by gay counselors, support gay identity.* "Homosexual" is a sexual orientation, "gay" a chosen sociopolitical identity.

While individual counselors may have the best of intentions, gay counselors have chosen this minority status as a way of dealing with their homosexuality, and are paying the price of being a minority. The theory of cognitive dissonance tells us that the greater the personal price we pay for our decision, the more strongly we defend it to others. How can a gay counselor be neutral?

Also, special programs often are based on the assumption that the way to address the problems of suicide, alcohol, drug abuse, and dropping out of school—problems that affect homosexual students to a significant degree—is once again to affirm the student's gay identity. This assumption is particularly ironic, for the gay subculture has more suicide and drug and alcohol abuse than heterosexual society.

4. *The philosophy, "You're different; you're one of us, predominates.* Separate rooms with special books, pamphlets, and posters send the message that only gays can understand and help gay youth, that heterosexual parents, teachers, and counselors cannot. For an adolescent with low self-esteem and little emotional support, forming close bonds with members of the gay community can exert powerful appeal.

5. *Special services assume that there is such a thing as a gay adolescent.* This is the biggest fallacy of all. Adolescents are too immature to claim a personal identity that defines their relationship to society at large. The profound consequences of claiming this social and political identity mean that this should be an adult decision made in one's 20s.

My alternative to special services and programs is to meet the very real needs of students with homosexual inclinations through a school's established counseling system. Such a program should include parents in the system, and it should teach compassion and tolerance to all students. The counselors should be qualified to address alcohol and drug abuse or other behavioral difficulties. Finally, such a program should

affirm students as persons, without labeling them gay and/or homosexual.

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For an expanded treatment of these ideas, see Nicolosi's *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality*, Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1991.

Education is a service, not a product

I was quite astonished to read Ron Brandt's Overview column in the May 1990 issue. He appears to accept, and indeed endorse, the notion that education has to do with manufacturing a product. He quotes both Lee Iacocca of Chrysler and James Renier of Honeywell without challenging their identification of education with manufacturing. Brandt does argue, however, that unlike manufacturing, education is more difficult to restructure so as to cut cost and increase output. He argues that only if we have more financial flexibility can we effectively restructure education and turn out better products.

Iacocca and Renier notwithstanding, education is not a product industry. It is, or should be, a service industry. How we talk about education reflects how we think about it. When we speak about education as a product we immediately think of achievement test scores as measures of the quality of that product. But if we speak of education as providing a service, we think about developmentally appropriate practices that will best serve the needs of parents and their children.

An interesting fact is often omitted in the unfavorable comparisons between the achievement of Japanese and American students. In Japan, even at the high school level, teachers do not have their own rooms. Rather, teachers have desks in a common room. This arrangement

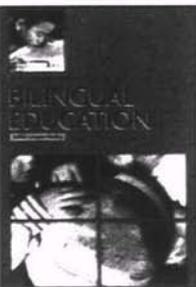
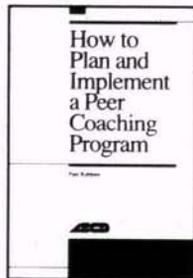
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conveys the message that education is a service that teachers literally "bring to" students. The service analogy is, therefore, not antithetical to academic achievement.

Unless we change our educational discourse, the many valiant efforts at restructuring described in the May issue will have few, if any, effects. Long ago, Heraclitus recognized the importance of discourse in education when he wrote that "Education has nothing to do with filling a pail, rather it has everything to do with igniting a flame."

David Elkind
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Ron Brandt replies

I didn't intend to imply endorsement of Iacocca's and Reiner's views by quoting them. My point was that we must somehow communicate with the business executives who are beginning to have more influence on education policy than educators are. I agree that students are not products; they are more like workers whose knowledge and skills are the products. But the analogy is imperfect. Schools are not factories.

Slavin replies to Guskey

In a letter in the May 1991 *Educational Leadership*, Thomas Guskey criticized my synthesis of research on cooperative learning (February 1991) for overemphasizing my own research and ignoring the findings of David and Roger Johnson. In writing my synthesis, which is based on *Cooperative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice* (Prentice-Hall, 1990), I tried to include every study of cooperative learning ever done by anyone that met a common-sense set of criteria: four weeks' duration of research; use of a control group; evidence that the experimental and control group were initially equivalent; and, in the case of achievement, measures

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tion of research; use of a control group; evidence that the experimental and control group were initially equivalent; and, in the case of achievement, measures that assessed material taught in experimental and control groups equally.

The Johnsons have indeed done dozens of studies of cooperative learning, but few met the four weeks' duration requirement. Most involved use of cooperative learning over periods of three to ten hours. Such studies are useful for theory building, but should not serve as a basis for educational decisions. Still, the Johnsons' work has contributed a great deal to research on cooperative learning, and my book cites 29 different articles by them and their colleagues.

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Good statistics about bad programs tell little

In her terrific article published in the March 1991 issue, Susan Demirsky Allan concludes that Slavin did not consider the quality of the programs used for gifted students in his meta-analyses that show little effects from ability grouping ("Synthesis of Research on Grouping in Elementary and Secondary Schools," September 1988).

In his response ("Are Cooperative Learning and 'Untracking' Harmful to the Gifted?" March 1991), Slavin notes that meta-analyses for the gifted have shown effect sizes for accelerated but not enrichment programs. In addition, there are no major effect sizes for interventions for high-ability students.

Unfortunately, this response again overlooks Susan Allan's criticism. Studies included in a

meta-analysis are carefully selected. However, the criteria are usually based solely on the quality of the statistical design with usually no consideration of whether the interventions in the studies were effective. Often, meta-analyses number-crunch the results from good statistical studies of lousy programs.

Does this type of research knowledge extend knowledge? Not really. Overrelying on pessimistic results from poor interventions can inhibit the development of more effective approaches.

To his credit, Dr. Slavin has proposed basic standards for programs to be considered in meta-analyses. These standards, however, are woefully inadequate, and have not been widely accepted.

I share the ideal of getting students from varying backgrounds to work together. I have devoted my professional life to trying to figure out how to get educationally disadvantaged students to succeed in academic course-

work. But I do know that simply untracking and relying on cooperative learning will not work. There are huge differences in learning rates between gifted and disadvantaged students. In addition, policies that discourage efforts on behalf of high-ability students will encourage the financially able parents of such children to leave public education. Meta-analysis cannot change these realities.

The only real solution is to develop much more powerful interventions for the educationally disadvantaged students so that they can really compete with educationally advantaged students and become eligible for high-quality enrichment and gifted programs. In addition, the only research that matters is that which is done about sustained high-quality interactions between a good teacher and students.

Stanley Pogrow
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