

If A Is for Armstrong, Shouldn't B Be for Berlin?

The variety of viewpoints in your outstanding issue, *Whose Culture?* (December 1991), helped clarify my own thinking. I'll summarize my point by referring to the way the article about the African-American Immersion school begins ("School Snapshot," Marge Scherer). What I'd like to ask is: If A is for Armstrong, shouldn't B be for Berlin (Irving) and C for Comden (Betty)?

If C is for Carver, shouldn't E be for Edison and F for Ford? While K is for King (Martin Luther), should not C be for Chavez (Cesar) and H for Henry (Patrick)?

The key, it seems to me, is to indicate that people of all backgrounds have made significant contributions to American society. While it is important to provide role models and build positive self-images, it is crucial that we do not do so in a way that is counterproductive. To teach about the contributions of only one ethnic group is to denigrate contributions of others. A balanced presentation is the only way to bring our society together. To do otherwise would be to fragment our nation and lead to some of the disasters we are seeing elsewhere in the world today.

Paul Flaum
Superintendent of Schools
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On Teaching African- American Boys

Overwhelming evidence points to a crisis in the education of African-American children today, in particular African-American males. One solution receiving much public scrutiny is to have African-American male students exclusively taught by African-American male teachers.

My opinion of this not-so-new idea is greatly influenced by my own experience in a public elementary school in Michigan in the late 1960s.

A fellow teacher (an African-American female) and I (an African-American male) made the decision: she'd teach the 6th grade girls, and I the 6th grade boys. Our classrooms were next door and we could work with both groups together occasionally.

We found our experiment to be not only educationally sound and gender-nurturing but effective and successful, leading us to the inescapable conclusion that there are times when males want to be with males only and females want to be with females only. This practice is not in any way condescending to either sex.

When we taught sex education, we found that our students seemed to be more at ease. At recess, we were able to become more directly involved with the sports of our students. At the same time, we were aware of the other's activities and could promote and support intermingling, too. This allocation of time decreased the showing-off and one-upmanship behavior that can spill over into the classroom.

When discipline and ego-building were necessary, I was able to maximize the positive because "we were the boys." I respected my students and accepted no intolerant behavior. Many single-parent-household mothers voiced their pleasure over the fact that I was a positive role model for their sons. Some told me laughingly how tired they were of their sons telling them what "Mr. Teacher" had said or done in class. To this day when I am visiting my hometown, I meet former students who remind me of their fond memories. Notwithstanding all the students I've taught in my career, that class holds a special place in my heart.

What bearing does my personal recollection have on the educational dilemma facing African-American males today? Simply put: every public school system should provide some concentrated opportunities and constructive purposes for young African-American male students to spend quality time with suitable adult African-American males.

Jerome Tillman
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The Spiritual Imperative

Recently I was required to write an essay on my professional objectives. My view of those goals was irrevocably altered by Dona Kagan's article ("Gifts My Mother Gave Me," November 1991). It crystallized for me my gnawing sense that a critical piece is missing from the way we go about our business and the way we go about living. The spiritual nature of her message makes her article qualitatively different from other articles. I hope it will not be the last of its kind in your journal.

Ann Buhman Renninger
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The Power of Strong Convictions

Dona Kagan's heartwarming and penetrating article was a privilege to read. I am a retired junior high school social studies teacher who believes deeply in perceptual psychology—that one's reality and behavior are products of one's belief system.

A teacher's first calling is to help enrich his or her students' belief

systems with positive values, ethical standards, rational attitudes, meaningful self-concepts, and sensitive appreciations. I am grateful for educational leaders like Kagan who state their philosophical convictions so clearly for others' considerations.

Russell A. Baum
Los Angeles, California

Physical Education Enlivens and Integrates Curriculum

Throughout your issue, *Integrating the Curriculum* (October 1991), authors stressed the importance of developing authentic, meaningful and active integrated learning experiences. I found it disturbing that physical education was neglected as a content area worthy of integration, particularly when physical

education, perhaps more than other content areas, has the potential to enliven and bring relevance to the curriculum.

Goodlad (1984) found that a large percentage of students (80 to 87 percent) at all levels of education like physical education. And, as Hidi (1990) indicates, interest in subject matter predisposes students to approach learning with greater attention and depth. As Goodlad points out, many academic settings are characterized by a dearth of active learning. In physical education, students learn actively by doing, not through passive seatwork.

It is a false dichotomy to consider language arts, mathematics, science, and history as academic subjects and

physical education as nonacademic. Indeed, physical education can include all of that academic content including biology (physiology, anatomy, nutrition, sports medicine); physics (kinesiology, biomechanics); social studies (sports history, sociology, philosophy, and psychology); mathematics (statistics, measurement); music (folk, square, social, and classical dance); and language arts (sports vocabulary and literature).

In short, physical education offers an ideal opportunity for developing integrated learning activities. All educators need to consider the benefits of utilizing playing fields and gymnasiums as laboratories for teaching both psychomotor and cognitive objectives.

Lynn Housner
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Spare Us the Superiority

After reading Roy B. Leipnik's letter to the editor (December 1991) I now know how our nation can reach the math and science goals set forth in America 2000. Just replace all educational leaders holding "unimpressive education credentials" with retired scientists from MIT. Their scientific knowledge, coupled with their "understanding of corporate and international competition" should serve them well in dealing with drugs, gangs, teen pregnancies, vandalism, depleted school budgets, and limits on property taxes (as in California where Mr. Leipnik resides).

Seriously, those of us in education welcome the expertise of world-class scientists or anyone who can work with us to provide a better education for our students. But please, spare us

the air of superiority. It only exists in your minds.

Jerry L. Young
School of Education
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Cleveland, Mississippi

Response: Let's Not Hide from Economic Reality

Admittedly my comments didn't reflect a full understanding of the drug, gang, teen pregnancy, vandalism context that Dr. Young cites. These problems are less severe here than in Los Angeles, but the financing problems he mentions are on target.

I realize that the Mississippi Delta is desperately poor and decidedly backward; soldiering on in the Delta requires a great deal of courage. Perhaps educators need to be shielded from international economic reality in order to fight on down there. But we will have to fix the hole in the export-import dike before we can significantly improve the lot of the people in the Delta or in the L.A. Ghetto.

Roy Leipnik
Professor of Applied Mathematics
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Santa Barbara, California

New Names for Immersion Schools

The Milwaukee school featured in "School Snapshot: Focus on African-American Culture" (December 1991) has a new name. Victor Berger Elementary School has become Martin Luther King Jr. African-American Immersion Elementary School. A middle school for African-American culture will open this fall. That school is not Parkman as stated in the article but Robert Fulton Middle School. For more information, contact principal Robert Griffin at (414)264-0160.

INSIDE MAY

"Using Performance Assessment"

As we slowly move away from the multiple-choice test and toward performance assessment, what problems are being encountered and what solutions are being proposed?

The May issue of *Educational Leadership* looks at:

- new initiatives at national and state levels to make tests more authentic, meaningful, reliable;
- authentic ways schools and teachers are measuring problem-solving in science, competency in writing, conceptualization in social studies;
- portfolios—on videodisc or in shoeboxes—how they are bringing new meaning to the process of keeping records.

COMING IN SEPTEMBER: "Building a Community for Learning."

How to develop a collaborative culture at school, enlist community support, and form partnerships with businesses, universities, and parents.

To Group or Not to Group?

What Every Administrator and Policy Maker Needs to Know About the Research on Ability Grouping



The bottom line of educational reform may very well depend on how restructuring efforts deal with the individual differences among learners. More than 60 years of research on the effects of ability grouping has resulted in what one school administrator called "a wilderness of mirrors" about this controversial and politically loaded topic. Now, for the first time, one of the nation's leading research analysts has examined questions such as:

- How have new methods of analyses enabled us to look at the research more objectively?
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- What are the most defensible decisions about grouping that are supported by the research?

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