

Worth Noting

A miscellany of items that have come to our attention ...
--The Editors

EDUCATION IN THE WORK PLACE

In an article in the September, 1992 *Harper's* titled "Education Reform: Don't Count on Business," Robert Reich, a Harvard economist and as of this writing President-elect Clinton's choice for Secretary of Labor, makes a case that the much-touted business support for education is flimsy and meager. Only eight percent of American firms, Reich says, provide skills training, and that training is fifty percent more likely to go to employees with college degrees. The rate of corporate giving to education has been declining for five years, and state and local tax breaks siphon off further business dollars from schools.

Corporate America does so little, Reich says, because it can hire skilled workers outside the U.S. or import them ("immigration is a saving grace") more cheaply, and because the workers whom it does train then move on to better jobs. Yet that training is "a public good," according to Reich, and he proposes concrete ways — beginning with Head Start — to improve it, for "The skills and insights of a nation's people are the enduring unique attributes of a national economy."

Arguing similarly, in an article titled "Twenty-First Century Limited" (*New York Review of Books*, 11/19/92), Alan Ryan, a Princeton political economist, points out that American education through high school is deficient, while our college and university training is excellent. This produces a sophisticated, highly paid information processing class and a poorly paid, intellectually undemanding manual and service sector. "The deficiencies of American education might not matter much — in gross," Ryan says, "... but it is morally ugly." Furthermore, it is "human capital" that matters — "the qualities of commitment, skill, adaptability, and so on that make one work force more productive than another ...," and they are man-made and culturally produced.

In a tripolar (U.S., Japan, and Europe) economy it is essential to look for creative social solutions to human problems suitable to our own culture, rather than adopting — or adapting — German models of education, for example, or imitating Japanese industrial structure.

CIVIC EDUCATION

Continuing the debate on the role of the English classroom in a civic education, Peter Smagorinsky, in an article in the December issue of *English Education* titled "Towards a Civic Education in a Multicultural Society: Ethical Problems in Teaching Literature," discusses the ethical conflicts teachers face when deciding which books to use in the literature classroom. Smagorinsky, who teaches at the University of Oklahoma, poses a number of questions that teachers must consider when composing course syllabi. For example, should teachers choose literature on the basis of gender, or ethnic, religious, or regional voice? If so, given time constraints, who should be included and who omitted? Should teachers provide a balance of positive and negative images in the depiction of various subgroups? Smagorinsky argues for a critical, thoughtful look at the way texts are selected and approached in English classrooms.

As writers and teachers of writing, we sometimes have to remind ourselves that verbal skills are not the only components of intelligence. Smagorinsky reminds us of that in his book, *Expressions: Multiple Intelligences in the English Class*, published by NCTE in 1991. In it Smagorinsky draws on theories of Howard Gardner that focus on "additional intelligences" — spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and so on — to assist teachers in helping students to find their own strengths. After discussing the theory of multiple intelligences, the author provides a series of writing activities that draw on them. Formatted in NCTE's large-size, big-print look, the activities are ready to Xerox for classroom use.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor of the *NWP/CSW Quarterly*:

As I forced myself to read, in growing revulsion, shock, and disbelief, paragraph after disgusting paragraph of the lead article in the Summer 1992 issue of *The Quarterly*, I grieved for those children, their innate sense of modesty and decency destroyed by a corrupt anti-culture whose squalid depravity staggers the imagination. Cyrano's words to Le Bret rang in my mind:

Oh my friend, I seemed to see

Over some flower a great snail crawling!

Sincerely,

Mary Buckalew

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