

GUEST EDITORIAL

Some years ago Jeanne Chall made the comment that in her experience rarely did she find teachers making decisions and implementing instruction guided by research findings. The observation is no less applicable today, and relates to language and mathematics instruction, as well as to the teaching of reading.

The rationale for what teachers do in the classroom must be seriously questioned. The prevailing justification for choosing a particular instructional approach appears to be based on the use of a theory which has logical or personal appeal and traditional usage which produces time-honoured, if not empirically supported, practices.

To the researcher, who has invested a substantial part of his or her professional career working for the improvement of instruction, the realization that what and how teachers teach today is little different from what was happening ten, twenty or more years ago, must be very depressing. And what of the long promised technological revolution in education? Textbooks, teacher talk and chalk are still the main vehicles of instruction.

The question of change in education is of course as much a philosophical/sociological issue as it is a subject of research. Improving instruction is, however, very much a matter for empirical study and the dissemination of findings is crucial to this endeavour. Teacher educators are key people here, being in a position to digest the findings of research and to translate these into a form which teachers can implement.

The fuzziness that has existed in research on teaching can no longer be used as an excuse to apologize for not knowing the answers, for talking in generalities, for espousing an eclectic position in dealing with how to teach, and for graduating teachers with a set of attitudes and ideas rather than a set of competencies.

We may still not have an adequate model or theory of teaching to operate within, and we may not agree as to what personal characteristics a teacher should possess; we do see, however, a growing acceptance of the importance of learning outcomes as the criterion for judging the effectiveness of instruction. There is a growing body of applied research on teaching as it relates to pupil learning that teacher educators cannot continue to ignore or to dismiss lightly. When we know something works and we are not using it, our reasons had better be good and our alternative strategies equally effective.

Finally, to the classroom teacher. Hopefully, this decade will see an increasing awareness of, and emphasis on, the instructional role of teachers, and a growing confidence and competence in those variables over which the teacher has most control - what and how they teach. Teachers too should view themselves as empiricists, continually relating instruction to pupil achievement. Such an approach to what they do in the classroom will be incompatible with practices that may look and feel good to the teacher but which may have no demonstrated positive effect on pupil learning. The end result of choosing an instructional approach which has clear empirical support for its use can only be improved teaching with substantial gains in pupil achievement.

And now to a less controversial topic. This issue of the journal sees a number of minor changes. The change with greatest significance is the introduction of two sections called **Research and Review** and **Viewpoints and Brief Reports**. The first section is devoted to straight research reports and to substantial and comprehensive reviews of the literature. The second section is for shorter research reports and commentary on current topics and issues in special education. It is hoped that this structure will give us greater freedom in presenting articles to you while continuing our determination to publish original material of considerable academic merit.

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