

Correspondence

Dear Editor,

Am I the only scientist reading *Thought & Action*? Or the only non-department of education person for that matter?

Thought & Action continues to fascinate me. I am an associate professor of chemistry, one who receives this journal because of a union affiliation I must pay for at my university, and one who has found a disappointing lack of interest in this journal among my colleagues in the science and engineering disciplines.

There is an undercurrent of belief that says since this is an NEA publication, it must just be for "education types." I find this distressing precisely because I have worked with some of my own university's "education types" and find that all of us in such a collaboration come away better for it: My education colleagues know more about chemistry and I know more about how to teach.

Yet when I approach colleagues in my college (an Engineering and Science College) about interdisciplinary efforts, or even a thorough reading of *Thought & Action*, they seem to consider doing either a waste of time.

I have always thought the image of a professor laboring away in his or her own little area to be a

caricature. But after hearing enough comments from friends and colleagues about not wanting to venture into other areas, I have been forced to reconsider.

Thought & Action seems to me to fulfill a function overlooked by other journals — even periodicals such as *The Journal of Chemical Education* or *The Journal of College Science Teaching*, both of which I read routinely. *Thought & Action* seems to me to give us the broadest possible view of higher education.

In the last few issues, I've gotten glimpses into how English literature courses are taught, for instance, into how technology and education interact in a non-science class, into some of the politics of education.

Certainly, one can claim that other journals or trade magazines do this as well, but I find that *Thought & Action* does the best job of putting it all between two covers. I haven't found another professional journal that tries to aim at so wide an audience.

So what is the point of my ramblings here? A small request, or perhaps a call to action for *Thought and Action* regular readers.

If you are on good (read: speaking) terms with colleagues in other disciplines at your college or university, share this journal with

them. Get them to read a bit.

Find a good article on pedagogy and share it with some friends. You're bound to learn something. Try to get them to actually go through some of the articles. Photocopy one and circulate it to as many colleagues as you can, for use in some broader, professional discussion.

Sure, it's probably not up their alley--their own disciplinary specialty -- but that doesn't matter. Articles about teaching in Iran may seem of low consequence to scientists or architects, but this kind of piece broadens their views of the whole education process.

The same holds true for other articles. Articles about adapting people to existing technologies, as opposed to adapting technologies to serve people, for instance, affect all educators.

Whatever the letters we hang at the end of our name, by being academics we are all educators. Get your friends and colleagues to read this journal. They'll be better at their jobs for having done so.

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Dear Editor,

In the August 1999 issue of the *NEA Higher Education Advocate*, Rebecca Johns tells those of us who've devoted our lives to higher education that "it's time to debate our mission," and encourages us to do so in the pages of *Thought & Action*.

The role of education has long been debated, both in our relatively young country as well as throughout history, and as a result of those

debates the mission of higher education has often changed.

But Professor Johns's fear that education may be driven by the need to prepare employees for the Information Age at the expense of philosophy, ethics, art, and social issues creates a very narrow perception of higher education.

Education generally is the primary means to prepare workers, but that does not mean preparation for employment in the new century automatically excludes study and learning in the non-technical, liberal arts courses and curriculum.

A quick review of the majority of programs in higher education, including those whose focus is to provide employees for the Information Age, reveals required course content in an array of non-technical areas, including the humanities, social sciences, art, and philosophy.

In fact, to ensure the survival of higher education, it is imperative we respond to the needs of our society, which includes those who seek to prepare themselves for employment in the corporate world. To create an atmosphere that disdains the economic needs of our citizens moves education back to an era where only the wealthy desired, participated in, and benefited from higher education.

Fortunately, higher education is not confronted with an either/or situation. Rather, it is our responsibility to ensure that all programs and curriculum continue to provide students with studies in a variety of areas, including the humanities and social sciences, while at the same time providing the skills needed for the next wave of technology. To conclude that skills in analyzing, communication and crit-

ical thinking can best be addressed in curriculum that is not employment-related belies the reality of teaching that occurs every day in institutions of higher education.

In fact, some would argue that those very issues perceived at risk can be taught as well in an employment related program, where students can be helped to see the application of concepts and consequences in a real context!

To limit our vision by refusing to address the needs of the global workforce is to insure our demise

as dinosaurs, unable to adapt to the changing needs of our students.

History has demonstrated that entities that are unable to find new ways to meet the needs of those they serve are doomed to extinction. Yes, we can be concerned about satisfying those we serve and at the same time maintain the integrity of the mission of higher education!

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