



EDITORIAL

Changing the Ways We Think and What We Believe

At some point in the distant past, many of us in academic work began sensing that everything was moving too quickly. We became increasingly aware that keeping up with our own field of interest, and all our related areas of interest, had evolved from being difficult to impossible. Many of us began to share a wish that we could read twice as fast as we now do! Speed-reading became a cherished goal, and speed-reading courses seemed to blossom everywhere for a while.

Woody Allen summarized the essence of the limitations of this “solution” in his typically incisive way, saying, “I took a course in speed reading and was able to read *War and Peace* in 20 minutes. It’s about Russia.” In the midst of these developments, some decades ago, I somehow gained an insight that I find as valid today as it was when I first heard, read, or thought about this notion. We don’t need to be teaching people how to read faster: we need to find ways to teach people to write material that is worth reading slowly.

Now and then, some material comes along that is meant to be lingered over, thought about, discussed with others, and integrated into our ongoing reflections. Such material can do more than add a tidbit of information here or modify a conclusion there. It can set us on a path toward a fundamental alteration in the way we think about our world and what we believe to be true. I am delighted to report that during 2000, spread over our three issues of Volume 13, we will present just such material. Although all of our published articles, we feel, are certainly worthy of your close attention and reflection, beginning in this issue we offer you a series of three articles that do so to an unusually high degree. You may find that they demand more concentration, more frequent pausing, and more re-reading of some sections than many other articles. However, these three, entitled “Medical Education, Research, and Scientific Thinking in the 21st Century,” deserve this kind of careful attention. The three distinguished authors, who are long-time contributors to our thinking and understandings in the worlds of health care and health professions education, challenge us to think deeply, and perhaps differently, about what we teach in the health professions.

I feel grateful and honored that they chose our journal as the vehicle for publishing their seminal papers. I hope you agree that this is one more sign that our journal is continuing to mature and gain importance in the crowded world of health professions education periodicals.

And we have more evidence that 2000 will be an especially good year for *Education for Health: Change in Learning and Practice*. Also challenging us to reflect on our conventional practices are key articles by John Hamilton, Charles Engel, and Ken Cox. All of them invite us to seriously consider modifications in the ways in which we go about our regular business of educating health professionals. Together with our lead article, they do what we hope this journal will regularly do: provide carefully reasoned challenges to our established assumptions. They also remind us that what we offer as educators is typically shaped less by what we know and more by what we think and believe. Teaching is seldom the product of careful, rational selections among competing options. Much of it is shaped by automatic decisions, deriving from long-standing habits and convictions. These habits and convictions—even those founded on out-of-date or false premises—are unlikely to change unless we devote the time, effort and deep reflection demanded by articles that deal with “big” topics, as several of this issue’s contributors invite us to do.

In addition, with this issue, as part of our “Practical Advice” series, we begin a three-part series that will focus our attention on how we gather and think about evidence. As Hannes Pauli and colleagues emphasize in their lead article, Richard Frankel and Kelly Devers remind us in this paper: our world has been largely dominated by quantitative research. This strategy for gathering and analyzing information has placed constraints, even distortions, on our ways of conceptualizing many important topics, especially the complex, multifaceted topics that we face as educators. In their series, Frankel and Devers provide an introduction to the important but too frequently neglected strategy of qualitative research. Following this issue’s introduction to being a discriminating consumer, they will devote two papers to the process of doing qualitative research. Also in this issue, José Calderón and his colleagues provide a practical example of the use of qualitative research. If you are not already doing so, I invite you to consider the possible relevance of qualitative research approaches for any educational studies that you pursue.

In addition to also offering interesting papers on our core themes of community-oriented education and problem-based learning, we introduce one more feature in this issue. During the 1999 Network meeting in Linköping, one of our Associate Editors, Jane Westberg, spent time talking with several of the many students who were in attendance. She was struck by the important lessons we can learn by seeing the world through their eyes. So, beginning now, we will try to regularly present insights gained from interviews with selected students. We think that the example of the interview of Ronak Iqbal, from Pakistan, provides another powerful confirmation of the commitment to community-based experiences that so many of us hold. A further confirmation of the validity of that commitment is provided in the additional observations from the impressive life experiences shared with us by John Hamilton in our regular feature, “Making a Difference.”

Altogether, this issue presents a high standard for us to strive to sustain in our issues to come.

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