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Letters

Edifying thoughts

While I am as appalled as anyone at the poor
science and math schooling—I will not dignify
it by calling it education—our children are
receiving, I must take issue with some of the
priorities expressed by Andrew Gleason, et al.
("Math Education—Does It Have the Right
Stuff?" SN: 5/28/83, p. 346).

Teaching "...when to multiply, not how to
multiply" will merely shift deficiencies, not
eliminate them. Neglecting fundamentals never
improved anyone's education, even if other
fundamental skills are taught in their stead.
Teach *all* fundamentals, not just one instead of
the other. Until basic skills of all sorts are effec-
tively taught, increasing classroom time will
accomplish nothing, except more schooling in
drivel.

People's attitude toward numeracy is a still
more basic problem, and was not addressed at
all. I frequently hear people say "Oh, I'm terrible
at math!" not regretfully, but with a sort of pride.
Ditto with most other sciences, especially the

This Week

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Cover: Just as electrical activity in the human brain can suddenly become disordered during an epileptic seizure (as shown in the brain-wave trace), computers may also suffer similar "convulsions." Mathematical concepts of "chaos" seem to link these and other situations in which well-ordered systems shift into irregular, chaotic behavior. (Brain waves used in composite illustration reprinted by permission of Perigee Books, from *The Brain: A User's Manual* by The Diagram Group, © 1982 by Diagram Visual Information)

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"hard" sciences. Until attitudes like that are eliminated we will not have any math or science education worthy of the name....

K. A. Boriskin
Framingham, Mass.

... Nowhere in the articles (on public education) do I see a large sampling of math teachers' observations, only thoughts by study committees, college personnel or school administrators—all well removed from the "front line." As a high school math teacher for 17 years, during the declining test score era, I have observed the following: a drastic increase in student absenteeism, administrative attitudinal change from role of team leader to that of adversary, increase in student and parent apathy, increase in student discipline problems, less personal responsibility by students, ... impairment due to drugs, increased ... student passivity ..., textbook shift to greater theory and more reading ..., more students entering high school with reduced basic skill proficiency ...

While all avenues for improvement should be pursued I can't help but believe the root prob-

lems are more in attitudes and values than in content.

Don Beattie
Detroit, Mich.

Corrections:

In "The Longest Day" (SN: 7/9/83, p. 21), the sentence "In 1972 ... the time for the earth to complete one turn on its axis was decreasing by four-thousandths of a second every day" should have said increasing. While the rate of rotation is decreasing, the time for a complete rotation is increasing.

The photo of sky glow over San Diego (SN: 7/23/83, p. 58) should have been credited to the California Institute of Technology.

In "Marine Fossils Hint Antarctic Ice Cycles" (SN: 7/2/83, p. 6), rocks containing marine microfossils were scraped from the ocean basin and carried up the Transantarctic Mountains by an advancing, rather than receding, ice sheet. When the ice began to shrink, the rocks were left behind.

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