

Letters

Implications 'trivialized'

Because I have read the original research reported in "Kids and the Bomb" (SN: 8/17/85, p. 106), I feel that the brevity of the summaries of these studies and the focus on the limitations of research methodology trivialize the implications of the overall findings. In contrast with this is the bill passed by the California State Assembly (3848) requiring all school districts in California to submit plans for nuclear-age education, stating, "If left unchecked, this lack of motivation and feeling of helplessness could prove to be as devastating to American society as war itself."

The next productive step for research in this area would be to compare the attitudes of students whose high schools inform them about nuclear weapons and stimulate critical thinking skills by presenting opposing points of view about the issues involved with the attitudes of students who are not similarly instructed. Researchers might then correlate differences in attitudes with academic motivation and achievement, feelings about the future and critical thinking skills.

In a finite planet with shrinking resources and a fragile ecosystem, where nuclear weapons have changed everything but our way of thinking, our hope of survival may rest upon informed citizens who are aware of the power of individuals to bring about change.

Lillian Feldman
San Diego, Calif.

It was interesting to note how teenagers responded to questions by psychologists and psychiatrists on their feelings concerning nuclear war. Their tendency to mask their true feelings and opinions may be as much a response to the interviewer as to the questions. If the interviewers were to arrange discussion groups at several schools, introducing themselves as psychologists to half of the groups, and as advisers to Congress with the other half, I believe they would get two entirely different responses. In the first case, the students would probably feel "on the spot," that their personalities were being analyzed and their privacy invaded. In the second case, they would probably feel more as though their opinions were of value and perhaps even influential, and would respond with much more honesty and enthusiasm. This response would probably hold true even if the question were whether or not to paint the halls pink.

Ellen Shurtleff
Medford, Ore.

Musical memory

I enjoy light classical music, and when I read "Taking food from thought" (SN: 8/10/85, p. 85), I noted that if I'm listening to a familiar piece, my mind will not rest until I can "name that tune." Once I can identify the name, all sorts of associated information, such as when I last heard the piece, become available. Perhaps more investigation can be made into this "name index" aspect of memory.

Henry J. Happ III
Albuquerque, N.M.

Hilbert on math

In his commentary regarding the possible utility of Clifford algebra as a universal language for physics ("Ptarmigans Wheeling Over the Gorse," SN: 8/24/85, p. 122), it is ironic that Dietrick E. Thomsen mentions the famed mathematician David Hilbert, who was not much given to the practical utility of mathematics. Indeed, if I remember my high school mathematics teacher's quotations correctly, Hilbert once said, "One hears a good deal nowadays of the hostility between mathematics and the applied sciences. I don't think this is true. They have nothing whatsoever to do with one another."

James W. Guthrie
Professor of Education
Director, PACE
Berkeley, Calif.

Commends new techniques

Bravo for Salwa Elgebaly and her use of cow's eyes, salvaged from slaughterhouses, instead of live animals for studying eye injuries ("Research and testing without animals," SN: 8/24/85, p. 125). I'm sure that a lot of scientists feel relieved. Undoubtedly many of them are uncomfortable but feel obligated to defend the use of live animals even when the humane/animal rights/animal liberation adherents expose excessive and questionable uses of animals.

Substitution of new techniques in place of live animal use is a winner and something that everyone can applaud. I hope to see more coverage of these advances in SCIENCE NEWS.

C.I. Clausing
Marlton, N.J.

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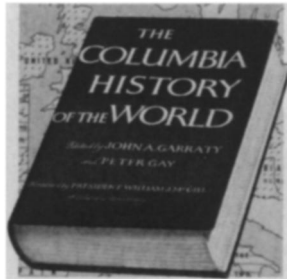
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