

1-1-1976

## We Suggest

Eleanor Buelke

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### Recommended Citation

Buelke, E. (1976). We Suggest. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 16 (2).  
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# WE SUGGEST

*Eleanor Buelke*

Coles, Robert

*The Mind's Fate*

Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1975. pp. xvi + 282.

*The Mind's Fate*, a rather unusual book, written by one who is acknowledged as an outstanding social commentator of present times, is a collection of essays, arranged chronologically from 1961 to 1975. Many of the essays are analytical, philosophical, literary reviews. Some of them are like word portraits of other authors, seen in the colors of their own writings. Dr. Coles writes from the vantage point of a seasoned practitioner in child psychiatry, as well as a committed social observer, one who looks at psychiatry as a combination of clinical science and deeply humane caring for others. Few professionals who deal with improvement, instruction, and development of the human mind have managed the same successful synthesis.

Some educators take pride in teaching as if primarily engaged in a craft, working with persons as if they were things, or objects, or maintaining the cool, objective non-involvement of a strict diagnostician and clinician. Others work hard to preserve the aloof stance of the scholar who neither cares about, nor is moved by "the pupil as a person." Many think it is not only possible, but preferable, to attempt to instruct in the cognitive realm alone, ignoring the affective, intuitive, creative domains of the human mind. Content, happy, and secure with their neat, statistical accountability charts and printout sheets, they claim to have charted the growth of their pupils' intellects; then they move confidently forward to predict and categorize the next sequential steps in "learning." Today, however, as more and more geneticists, sociologists, neuroscientists, and bioethicists have entered these areas of concern about learning and human behavior, they are differing with some traditional methods, and are increasingly listened to.

In a current issue of the *Saturday Review* a large portion of the content is devoted to articles under the heading, "Inside The Brain: The Last Great Frontier." From it emerge messages for social change, particularly important for those involved in teaching-learning situations. One of the most important implications deals with the vastly changed idea of the relationship between the conscious mind and brain mechanism:

The new interpretation, or reformulation, involves a direct break with long-established materialistic and behavioristic thinking, which has dominated neuroscience for many decades . . . . The revised interpretation brings the conscious mind into the causal sequence in human decision-making—and therefore into behavior generally . . .

. . . This swing in psychology and neuroscience tends now to restore to the scientific image of human nature some of the dignity, freedom, and other humanistic attributes of which it had been deprived by the behavioristic approach . . . . . Instead of separating science from values the present interpretation . . . . . leads to a stand in which science becomes the best source, method, and authority for determining ultimate value and those ultimate ethical axioms and guideline beliefs to live and govern by.<sup>1</sup>

Trends and themes such as this have been examined and explored by Coles who sees his life work as “an enterprise which extends far beyond the walls of the clinic.” Relating his writing to the field of education, it might be said that teachers:

1. Cannot solve all problems; but, they can read and study, dare to accept themselves fully, and offer themselves freely to uneasy and restless children;

2. Cannot prevent the existence of all insanity, violence, and dangers; but, they can struggle to make sense out of individual behavior and to be considerate, responsive, and humane to others who are troubled;

3. Do not have precise prescriptions for “perfect child” rearing; but, they do know how to spare children a substantial variety of harsh and senseless practices;

4. Can invoke no magic power to clear the air of all hysteria, appeals to hate, verbal abuse, and propaganda on the national scene; but, they might refuse to silence their consciences in the occasional moments of honesty they spend with themselves;

5. May not agree exactly on how to view man as influenced by his past and by his present private, and public, worlds; but, they might generally concede that there is in each life cycle an essentially ethical basis which is worthy of some respect, and which can be clinically observed in each one’s capacity for a growing sense of conscience; and

6. Are not able to eliminate totally the contemporary problems facing children, and the accompaniment of mental distress; but, they must realize that all human beings are thoroughly individual, and that categorizing their complaints and theorizing about their futures is risky business.

A professional and stimulating writer like this author, experienced and competent in his field, can suggest many writings related to his own for the reader’s personal pursuit. This volume is replete with many such references. It is recognized that as history has accelerated, as research and methods of reporting it have expanded, as the mass media have proliferated and entered into almost every phase of life, it has become difficult to become completely informed, even in the areas one knows best. There seems to be less and less time to acquire more and more knowledge and understanding

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<sup>1</sup>Roger W. Sperry, “Left-Brain, Right-Brain,” *Saturday Review*, (Aug. 9, 1975), p. 33.

of increasingly complex matters and events. Nevertheless, as Norman Cousins reminds us about time spent lingering over good reading:

. . . . allowing it to stimulate the mind is a civilizing experience. No one need apologize for savoring the full meaning of print or for combining thinking with reading . . .

It is nonsense to say there is not enough time to be fully informed or to do any of the things that are part of a rational existence. Time given to thought is the greatest time-saver of all.<sup>2</sup>

If, as Cole suggests, “the mind’s fate” is, really, a person’s fate, those whose daily business it is to touch the minds of others *must* be ever nourishing, ever vigilant, of their own minds as well.

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<sup>2</sup>Norman Cousins, “Time To Know,” *Saturday Review*, (Sept. 6, 1975), p. 2.