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Letter to the Editor

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Letter from the Editor

The humanistic mathematics movement which began as the personal vision of a few, has now become a major part of mathematical culture. What was viewed with skepticism is now accepted an expected.

Our journal attracts new readers and new authors. The thoughts and experiences that are shared advance the health and strength of mathematics and the mathematical community. The mix of themes in each issue enriches us all.

Stephanie Singer's lively report of a course for a general audience is an example of what can happen when math students are in a student-friendly environment. Professor Singer describes the excellent atmosphere "which I long to recreate in my more traditional classes." I think that she speaks for many of us.

E.G. Bernard also discusses language and writing mathematics. "All young children, except the most severely handicapped, possess a language,... (and) possess the ability to learn a system of symbolic knowledge."

Frederick Reiner considers the many resemblances between mathematics and the arts. "if we claim aesthetic values are inherent to our doing mathematics, can we specify what those values are or the role they play in our practice?" "Like the philosopher of art, we are not so interested in developing the concepts of beauty as we are in applying these to a particular type of activity."

M.K. Siu and C.I. Fung of Hong Kong write about the loss of self-esteem among math majors. "Students lack a global view of the subject and rarely appreciate or enjoy it from a cultural aspect, and too little emphasis is put on the subjects' own worth."

Y. Zheng of Nanjing University relates the philosophy of math, math education, and the philosophy of math education. Along the way, he remarks that the "new math" paid little attention to the "actual cognitive processes, of how humans think about mathematics."

The paper by G.S. Monk is reprinted from issue #2, 1988 when the newsletter was mailed to fewer than a hundred readers. Issue #9 is being sent to over a thousand, distributed over every continent.

The Exxon Education Foundation has supported the movement and journal since 1986, for which we are all grateful. Their support has also made possible the timely publication of the Math Association of America Notes Volume 32, Essays in Humanistic Mathematics. Many readers have contributed $25 or more, which have helped stretch the budget and to buy computer software and hardware for the desk top publishing. The voluntary, tax deductible contributions may be sent to Harvey Mudd College, c/o Alvin White, Humanistic Mathematics Network. The College sends each donor an acknowledgement and thanks. I want to add my special thanks to all.

Issue #10 should be mailed in May or June.

Alvin White

Letter to the Editor

The Einstein Effect. Many authors have commented on the annoying fact that most people believe that you have to be gifted, if not a genius, to succeed at mathematics. Consequently many people brag about being weak at mathematics, while very few admit that they cannot read or write and they certainly aren't proud of this fact. I wonder if this problem can be placed at the door of Albert Einstein. All my life the idea that you have to be a genius to understand mathematics and physics seems to have been tied to the fact that only geniuses could understand relativity and other work of Einstein. So my question is this: Did this popular view that only the gifted few can do mathematics precede Einstein? In other words, did the annoying phenomenon described above occur back in the year 1900? Or were "readin', writin' and 'rithmetic" equal in those days? I would be interested to know.

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