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"It is more important to get it right, than to get it first."

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Essays:

Turning Back The Clock 2

Visits:

Island View 5

Extended Insights:

Lingering Perceptions 6
What Happens At Graduation 9

New Perspectives:

Cloister Creek 10
River Centre Clinic 10
ASPLINT 13
Back2Basics Sober Living 13

Seen N' Heard:

Page 14

Conference Calendar:

Page 16

Educating the Female Brain

by Lon Woodbury



During the 1960s it was commonly believed there were no significant differences between males and females. The only real differences accepted were in a few aspects regarding the basic plumbing. As this thinking went, the perceived differences in abilities, interests and needs between the sexes were only social constructions, probably instituted by the "patriarchy" to maintain their dominance and to keep women in their place. These constructed views were seen as part of the oppressive and rigid thinking from the past that had to be torn down and abolished so women could take their place as true equals.

For years, all right thinking people believed this as accepted fact.

Then, in the early 1990s, a watershed event occurred. Time Magazine published an issue heralding recent brain research that showed conclusively that there were significant differences between the brains of females and males. That Time Magazine needed to make such an issue about this research showed more than anything else how ingrained the uni-sex thinking was. I still remember the shock waves this pronouncement made. Comments ranged from a gasp to shock. "You mean our parents might have been right about something?" "Will this kill the women's movement?" …and so forth.

Our parents were not dumb; they did know a few things that were forgotten during the period while ideologies held sway before bumping up against reality. And, no, it didn't kill the women's movement, which has accomplished much since the Time Magazine research. In fact, it has probably accomplished even more since it became based more on reality than some wishful thinking ideology.

Over the last couple of decades brain research has clarified the differences between male and female brains with advantages to both. One of the advantages is the trend to get away from pursuing a mythological happy medium in elementary and secondary education to try to appeal to both males and females at the same time. Just a simple awareness of the differences can better inform the teacher's overall strategy. Single sex classes are becoming an option that is sometimes needed. Therapeutic schools and programs learned long ago that for some children, single sex classes are at times the best approach by far. At other times, coed classes can utilize and cross feed from the different perspectives. Fortunately, the rigid perspective that virtually all school activities must at all times be coed is losing ground.

The source of the main difference is the result of the hormone bath each child receives shortly after conception. The estrogen bath as a general rule produces girl babies with a brain hard-wired toward communication facility and oriented toward social interactions. The testosterone bath produces male babies who are as a general rule more physically active and oriented toward individual actions. This plays out in competitive vs. collaborative activities.

Continued: **Female Brain/ 2**