

**R. Mynors, D. F. Thomson,
and W. K. Ferguson, eds.
THE CORRESPONDENCE OF
ERASMUS: Vol. 2.*
Toronto: University of
Toronto Press, 1975.
\$25.00.**

Between the ages of thirty-four and forty-seven, Erasmus of Rotterdam (1467-1536) managed to accomplish what we might now call a full "self-education." This he did as an "auto-didact," against tremendous odds, at the end of the Middle Ages and at the beginning of the era of print. A poverty-stricken bastard, a reluctant cleric, sent to study at decadent universities, ever-travelling to seek patronage and to avoid the plague, Erasmus' achievements are all the more staggering.

His literary gifts apparently developed without benefit of formal training, as many great talents have done. His *Anti-Barbari* and *Adagia* already showed stylistic mastery of Latin as early as 1500, but only a year later, Erasmus announced in a letter to Antoon van Bergen still another massive enterprise:

Latin scholarship, however elaborate, is maimed and reduced by half without Greek. For, whereas we Latins have but a few small streams, a few muddy pools, the Greeks possess crystal-clear springs and rivers that run with gold. I can see what utter madness it is even to put a finger on that part of theology which is specially concerned with the mysteries of the faith unless one is furnished with the equipment of Greek.

He went on to describe his intention to become as able in Greek as in Latin, whether in matters literary, philosophical or theological. At a

time when scholars in Northern Europe went perforce to Italy for tuition in Greek, Erasmus' declaration showed temerity at the least. Without the help of a reliable formal educational structure, Erasmus nevertheless managed to achieve his objective before his fortieth year.

Erasmus' achievements in learning were only at their beginnings. Fortunately, this particular auto-didact recorded many of his most crucial personal and intellectual decisions about learning and life in correspondence, the typical sixteenth century lifeline among scholars, their fellows, and their patrons. The various stages of Erasmus' intellectual growth and his long dalliance with theology and politics are now quite open to the modern English-speaking reader thanks to the work under review here. Read along with James D. Tracy's recent intellectual biography and with the more general treatments of Huizinga, Bainton and P. S. Allen, the correspondence makes it easier than ever to share Erasmus' excitement as the whole of the Greek universe opened to him.

The Mynors-Thomson translation of letters from and to Erasmus in the decade-and-a-half from 1501 to 1514 conveys beautifully the tone and the power of the original Latin. It is organized and annotated so well by W. K. Ferguson that even the details of Erasmus' many meetings and travels (France, England and the Low Countries, 1501-1506; Italy, 1506-1509; England, 1509-1514) do not confuse the central matters of the tale.

Perhaps no other of the eighteen volumes of correspondence still to come will catch and hold the attention of educators as does this one. For after 1514, Erasmus became more concerned with the *application* of learning than with its acquisition. His letters thereafter tell much about contemporary theological debate, political strife and general social conditions in the Europe which Erasmus knew. These later epistles, too, contain much to interest the historian of education. But no other is likely to offer so clear an insight into a man

*For a review of Vol. I, see *M.J.E. Spring* 1976, p. 110.

in the act of re-forming himself as the present volume.

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**Leo D. Leonard and
Robert Utz.**
**BUILDING SKILLS FOR
COMPETENCY-BASED
TEACHING.**

New York:
Harper and Row, 1974.
248 pp. \$6.95.

**Robert Utz and
Leo D. Leonard, eds.**
**THE FOUNDATIONS OF
COMPETENCY BASED
EDUCATION.**

Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt,
1975. 184 pp. \$6.75.

Leonard and Utz co-authored a "how-to-do-it" book on competency-based teaching in 1974 and one year later co-edited a collection of essays on competency-based education.

The first book, *Building Skills for Competency-Based Teaching*, does not deliver what it purports to deliver — a model to provide the reader with the basic strategies and competencies needed to individualize instruction. James Cooper, in his Foreword, claims that its unique feature is that it models the process which it attempts to teach. Alas, both the authors and Dr. Cooper must have a different operational definition from this reviewer of what constitutes an "individualized instructional module." Cooper states that each chapter is organized as a learning module — "a self-contained learning package" with behavioral objectives, appropriate learning activities, a pretest to assess the entering level and a post-test to evaluate competency. These components are present, but not in the format one would expect in a self-instructional package. The pretests al-

ways begin with a note to the *teacher*, not to the student, and the *teacher*, not the student, is expected to evaluate the responses to both the pre- and post-tests, as no criterion of acceptable response is provided. The lack of a good instructional model detracts from the book's usefulness, but the chapters do give useful background information for developing competency-based curriculum.

Utz and Leonard make a very strong case for the use of behavioral objectives in curriculum planning. Included in the Introduction is a summary of the response made by James Popham in defense of the use of behavioral objectives. The authors state that a behavioral objective approach does not necessarily exclude affective concerns, foster conformity, inhibit student freedom or dehumanize the student. The use of behavioral objectives is obviously the cornerstone of their presentation of the competency model. In this respect, they do practice what they preach and behavioral objectives appear for each of the chapters.

There are five skill areas presented. The first two, the authors admit, are not related exclusively to a competency-based curriculum. They obviously consider them as pre-requisite skills (although they do not use that term) for any classroom teacher. The first chapter is titled "Developing Self-discipline." Although there would be general agreement that this should be the ultimate goal of all management strategies, there is not even an oblique reference to this ultimate objective. The objectives and content of the chapter are designed to help teachers specify problem behavior in specific, observable terms and to design appropriate strategies "to promote the behavior you wish to develop" or "to eliminate the problem behaviors." One might challenge the selection of content of Chapter 2, "Applying Learning Concepts." The objective of the chapter is presumably to sensitize the teacher to motivational factors in student learning. Utz and Leonard refer briefly to the terms "artificial" and "real" learning from John Holt's *How Children Fail*,