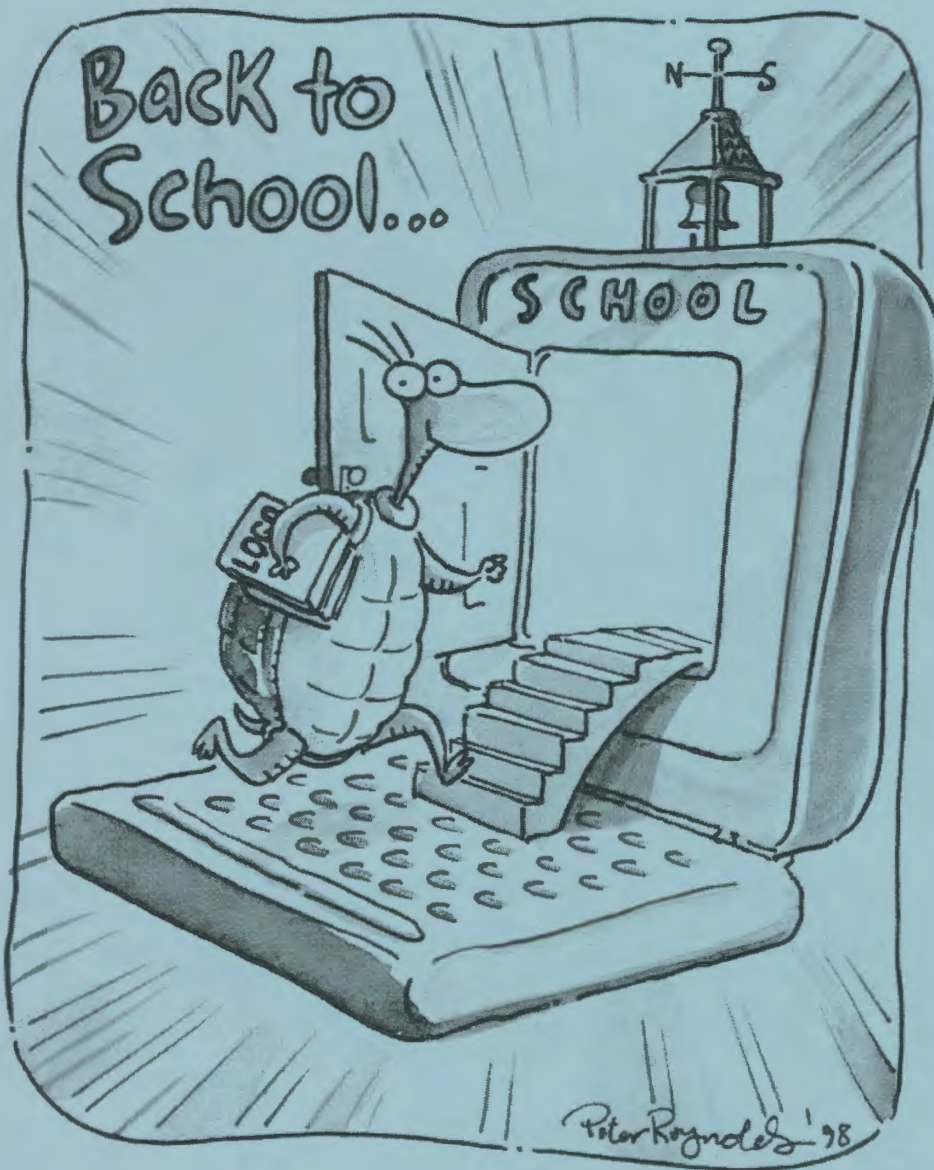


# Logo Exchange

Journal of the ISTE Special Interest Group for Logo-Using Educators



## BACK TO SCHOOL!

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- What I Did on My Three Summer Vacations
- A Mayan Pyramid
- Build Your Own Virtual Pet With MicroWorlds
- Drawing Polyhedron Patterns
- More from the President's Panel
- Surfing the Net—Rehabilitating a Metaphor
- New Year's Resolutions
- Book Review, Logo Online, Teacher Feature

# Logo Exchange

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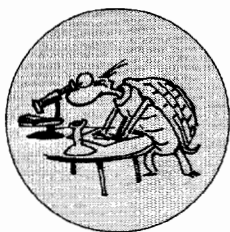
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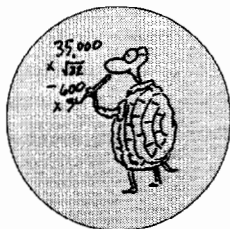
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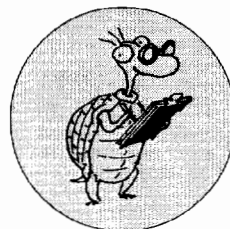
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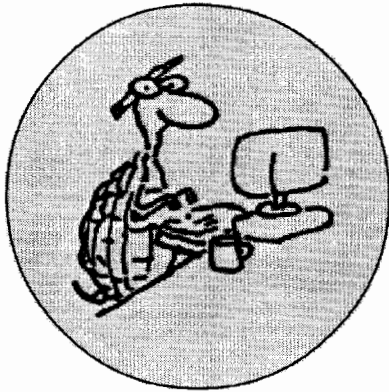
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## Learning Among the Giants

**W**elcome back! As we begin another school year it's only fitting that we take a moment to remember and celebrate our teacher heroes. Recent weeks spent teaching Logo in several Australian schools renewed my admiration for teachers (even ones who don't use Logo). Besides all of the traits we know teachers possess—poise, courage, wisdom, patience, kindness, creativity—I was reminded that teachers also require the stamina of triathletes. Teaching MicroWorlds to 120 laptop-toting seventh graders (at once) was quite an ordeal.

I started thinking about the greatness embodied by teachers recently when the world lost two giants of the profession. Jazz singer Betty Carter passed away in September. She was one of the greatest vocal improvisers and teachers who ever lived. Betty Carter felt a personal responsibility for keeping the music she loved alive and ensured just that by working with young musicians throughout her stellar career. She was committed to filling the world with music of the highest caliber.

I don't know if "Ms. BC" knew of Logo or even owned a computer. What I do know is that every Betty Carter performance was a samba school. She collaborated with her young musicians and made them better through improvisation, humor, praise, gestures, a whisper in the ear and her example. Betty Carter was respected for the teaching she did via countless clinics in public schools and an annual intensive week she led for aspiring musicians.

In the best sense possible, every performance by her ensemble was the embodiment of mutual growth, creativity, expression, and swing. I last saw the Betty Carter Quartet live in New York this past April. During the introduction of the band members, Ms. Carter said, "remember the faces of these young men because in a few years you will hear them again somewhere and think to yourself, 'My, how they have improved.'" At the end of the last set of the week, she invited one young musician after another to come up from the audience and sit in with her band. Her scat-based battle with these musical hopefuls made them dig deep within themselves and perform beyond their expectations. When the number of aspiring students began to snake around the nightclub, Betty Carter passed the torch to the next generation. She turned to the young sweating drummer and said, "It's yours, baby. Let's see how you get out of it." Betty Carter sat down in the audience and laughed out loud, visibly proud of her students.

While I was never good enough to play with Betty Carter, I was good enough to play with Richard Lukas. In fact, thousands of junior high school students in Wayne, New Jersey, had the opportunity to perform with him over three decades. Mr. Lukas was my junior high school band director. He taught me to play the trumpet and to swing a tennis racquet. He became one of my oldest friends—despite his early advice to my parents that they make my trumpet into a lamp. Tragically, Dick Lukas

died of a heart attack in September of this year at only 54 years of age.

Mr. Lukas' stage and tiny office were hothouses where less conventional students were cultivated. He was underappreciated by his superiors, misunderstood by his peers and disparaged by parents who didn't want their children to become musicians but to perform familiar ditties at two concerts per year. His ensembles always played music thought to be above the heads of students, but we were constantly rewarded by triumphing over challenging compositions. I remember the senseless controversy caused when Mr. Lukas decided to dedicate some of band time to the learning of music theory and history. He rightly believed that the school band served many purposes. Among them was for us to learn all about music, learn through music about ourselves and become well-rounded citizens.

I studied privately with Dick Lukas on and off through college and enjoyed the rare privilege of becoming my teacher's teacher when he enrolled in a series of my LogoWriter courses. My teacher/student became an avid computer enthusiast who at one point had an Apple IIgs with thousands of dollars worth of RAM, drives and interface cards. We used to joke that his IIgs supercomputer could run a small country. Over the past couple of years, he asked me about the Internet and I sought his advice regarding instruments for my junior high school children. We had come full circle. Every time my son asks

See **AMONG GIANTS** (Page 4)



# Back to School

**A**hh! The beginning of another (northern hemisphere) school year is upon us. The excitement of seeing our students once more is heady indeed! I can't wait!

In ruminating about a suitable back-to-school theme on which to ponder, the thought entered my head: Why not go straight to the fundamental idea? OK, here goes!

Question: What do you predict will happen if you type the following in your favorite Logo interpreter or command center and press Enter or Return?

## **back to school**

Assignment: Put your Logo Exchange down, give it a thought or two first, and then try it.

As you might imagine, the response really depends on your hardware and software. (Just for fun, I will include a matching activity at the end of the column that includes a sampling of different responses. This will give some of you "ole turtles" a chance to show off a bit, and will give you "young snappers" a sense of the rich heritage from which today's Logo versions have sprung.)

I want to put enough space and text between the assignment above and what I want to say next so that you really can give it a fair try, even if your eye sort of involuntarily skipped on ahead—sort of like "inadvertently" looking at the last panel of the comics before you are really there. OK, this seems to be about the right distance.

Of all the responses, the one that was most thought-provoking to me was

**I don't know how to to**

What? How to to? Yep, that's what it said. Now how can we make some sense of it?

---

**I personally feel that the procedure construct is one of the most powerful features of Logo. But as powerful as it is, have we and our students exploited its full potential? Likely not.**

---

Well, evidently the word "to" was playing some sort of a dual role for that particular hardware and software version. It probably was not a reserved word or primitive, and yet it functioned as one when used to define a procedure. In fact, I was able to define a procedure named to! Strange. Interesting.

But wait! There's more! Let's think about what "to to" might mean to us as teachers and students returning for another school term.

One of my favorite ways of describing a procedure is that it is similar to the infinitive form of a verb. By suggesting that verbs be selected as procedure names, you can facilitate your stu-

dents slipping very easily into a multitude of interesting phrases.

**to dance  
to move  
to sidestep  
to take one  
to slide**

How to "to" might be a straightforward way for students to encounter the very concept of an infinitive for the first time.

But, "to" can represent the fundamental concept of a procedure as well. And it might be here that we can think a bit about working with our students in a particularly effective way.

I personally feel that the procedure construct is one of the most powerful features of Logo. But as powerful as it is, have we and our students exploited its full potential? Likely not.

As we and our students return for another period of time together, let's take an extra moment to think about procedures. For those students coming "back to school" who have not yet learned "how to to" it would be especially important that their introduction to procedures be crafted carefully and thoroughly.

Let's give them lots of time to play around with the idea, and lots of opportunities to try different things.

For the more experienced students, an in-depth review of procedures along with a few engaging challenges might kindle in them an interest in exploring

**See BACK TO SCHOOL (Page 4)**

the construct even further. Perhaps an emphasis on the idea of subprocedures within a superprocedure or maybe input variables might be something to look at in a bit more detail.

For our advanced students, the combination of input variables, conditionals, output, and recursion will always have something new and different to offer with procedures, given the right kind of stimulation. Brian Harvey's trio of advanced Logo books (MIT Press) abound in such activities and even higher level challenges, for example.

When our students come to a fuller understanding of the true power of procedures, then "how to to" will become more of a life skill and less of an error message! And that is certainly worth coming "back to school" for, isn't it? Let's make it so.

```
to into :x
output :x
end
```

```
to life
output 100
end
```

**forward into life**

Tom Lough, Founding Editor

PS: Here is the matching activity I promised. You may find some real surprises.

Good luck!

**Instructions:** Match each hardware and Logo software combination with the response you think you would get after typing "back to school" and pressing Enter or Return. Correct answers appear upside down on this page.

**Hardware and Logo software combinations**

- A. LogoWriter with Apple IIe and PC
- B. Logo PLUS with Macintosh
- C. PC Logo for Windows v.2 with PC

- D. MicroWorlds with Macintosh or PC
- E. Sprite Logo with Apple II+/c/e
- F. LEGO Dacta Control Lab with Macintosh or PC
- G. Terrapin Logo with Apple II+/c/e
- H. Apple Logo with Apple II+/c/e
- I. LEGO TC logo with Apple IIe
- J. PC Logo 4.0 for DOS with PC

**Responses**

- 1. I don't know how to back
- 2. I don't know how to to
- 3. to didn't output
- 4. >
- 5. Can't use to as a command
- 6. to didn't output to back
- 7. The procedure back needs a number as its first input.

**Notes**

- 1. Not all hardware and Logo software combinations could be represented. For simplicity, no capitalized words are included in responses. Be aware that, for some (mostly earlier) Logo versions, capitalized words have special significance. Also, details of a change of mode and opening of an edit window (which may be associated with responses 4, 6, or 7) are not included.
- 2. Thanks to former LX editor Dorothy Fitch for her enthusiastic assistance in putting this activity together.

**Answers**

J-4	E-4
I-5	D-2
H-4	C-7
G-3	B-6
F-1	A-5

**Tom Lough, Founding Editor,  
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me about his mouthpiece, I will think of Mr. Lukas. I am grateful for his wisdom, humor, friendship, and guidance. He too filled my life with beautiful music.

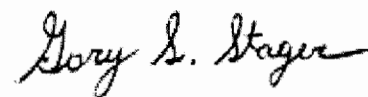
In honor of my great teachers, I thank you for your dedication to improving the lives of children. Your daily heroics deserve much respect and appreciation. While schools become more reactionary and regressive, you dare to challenge your students and the system with Logo. Your students will remember you fondly.

**Issue Notes**

This issue contains ideas for classroom Logo use, provocative tales about teaching and learning, and reports from Logosium '98. Several of my Logo heroes, Brian Silverman, Tom Lough, Orlando Mihich, Bill Spezeski, and Jeff Richardson, contributed wonderful pieces, as did our remarkable contributing editors, Carolyn Dowling and Alan Epstein. Since much has been written recently about the quality of teacher education, this issue's Teacher Feature is Professor Linda Polin of Pepperdine University. She answers the question, "why Logo?" quite forcefully. Dan Kinnaman's work conflicts provided the opportunity to invite one of my favorite authors, Susan Ohanian, to write for *Logo Exchange*.

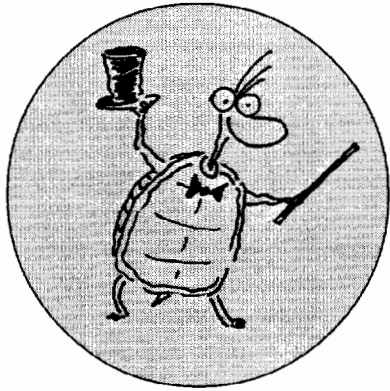
Please share your tales of classroom Logo use, research, and project ideas with *Logo Exchange* readers. The publication cannot exist without your contributions. I'm sorry for the tardiness of this issue and will work hard to have subsequent issues arrive in January, March and May. Like so much of what teachers do, editing *Logo Exchange* is a labor of love.

Wishing you all a year of learning and laughing. 



Gary

**Gary Stager, Editor-in-Chief  
logoexchange@stager.org**



## FEATURE ARTICLE

# What I Did on My Three Summer Vacations

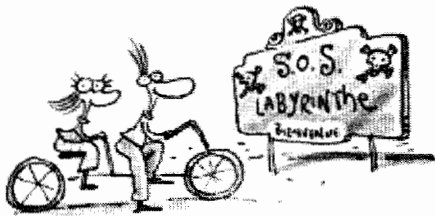
by **BRIAN SILVERMAN**

illustrated by **PETER REYNOLDS**

[www.fablevision.com](http://www.fablevision.com)

Previously published in *Mathematics and Informatic Quarterly* (in Bulgaria)

**W**e finally did it. We made it through the maze in Montreal's Old Port in 11 minutes. There's a really good chance that our time is the all-time record.

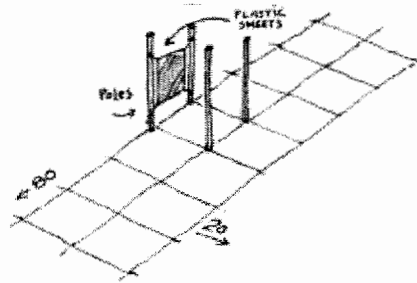


It all started a few years ago when my daughter, Diana, and I were biking and found ourselves in Montreal's Old Port. There was a new attraction called S.O.S. Labyrinth, that promised a pirate adventure. It turned out to be a giant indoor maze in an old warehouse building with a handful of obstacles with a pirate theme. The "pirates" were kids on roller blades providing help to the desperately lost and confusion to the rest of us.



The maze is a 20-by-80 grid of about two-metre squares. The walls are made of thick plastic sheets hung between poles that are placed at the grid points. Four small sections of the maze have

been built up to resemble a ship's bridge, an engine room, a cargo hold, and lockers for the crew. These four checkpoints have hidden stampers to stamp a card received when you enter the maze. This card is also time-stamped when you first enter the maze and again when you leave.

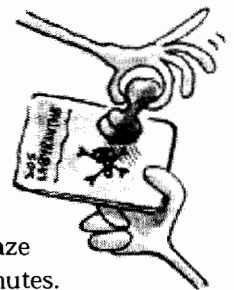


When Diana and I first tried, we got lost almost immediately. It took us about an hour and 20 minutes to find our way out and get all the stamps we needed. Despite being lost most of the time, we enjoyed it so much that we went back the following week. This time we brought my son, Eric, along because he'd missed the first time through. The second time, to avoid getting lost, we decided to follow a set of simple rules that, as any little robot will tell you, can help to get you out of most mazes.

The rules are:

- 1) turn right whenever you can
- 2) turn around when you reach a dead end.

That's all there is to it, and it actually works. We followed the rules and managed to make it through the maze in about 22 minutes.



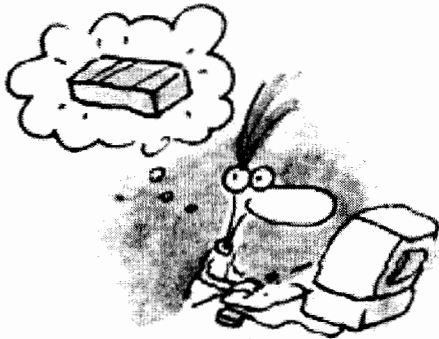
When we finished, the pirate behind the desk put our names on the board as the group that had the best time of the day. He mentioned in passing that it was a better time than he sees most days.

The challenge at this point was obvious. Our goal was to get the best time ever. We only had to figure out how. I had a plan that I thought would be pretty simple. However, as is almost always the case, it didn't turn out to be as simple as I'd initially imagined. The plan was this: Go through the maze twice. The first time through, bring along a little computer to record our path. Then go home, draw a map, find the best route and go back the following day and go through running as fast as we can.

There were a couple of immediate problems. The first one was pretty easy to resolve. How could we be sure that the maze didn't change on us between the first run and the second? (The plastic panels are moved on a regular basis to keep the maze from staying the same.) A couple of phone calls and oblique

questions later, we'd found out that the maze is changed only once a week, on Thursday night. The second immediate problem was trickier to resolve. Our plan required little computers to record our path. We didn't have any little computers. Even if we did, we wouldn't know how to make them record paths.

My friends at MIT had little computers. We'd been working for a few years on making "programmable LEGO bricks." At that time we were at the point where we'd had a couple of prototypes that had worked for a bit, but none of them were reliable enough for the task. However, as a result of a sort of spinoff of that project, there were some little computer boards around that weren't much bigger than a deck of cards. I asked my friend Randy Sargent if I could borrow one. He mailed it to me, and I had it within a few weeks. Unfortunately, by then the season was over and the project would have to wait until the next summer.



During the course of the winter a couple of things happened. One was that I had a lot of fun programming the little computer board I'd received. Over Christmas I played with making a tiny version of Logo. By New Year's we had Logo-programmable LEGO robots that didn't need to be attached to a big computer. At the same time Randy had been working on perfecting a new programmable brick. By the following summer these came together and we had a programmable brick and a logo program for saving information about where in the maze we'd been.

Little computers are pretty stupid. We would have liked to have been able

to just carry one along and have it remember where it had been. But the little computer wasn't up for the task. What we did instead was attach a couple of pushbuttons to it—one to click the number of "squares" we'd gone forward, the other to click in the amount that we'd turned at each corner.

The summer mostly slid away before we got around to trying a second run. When we did get around to it, it was just Eric and me. Before getting into the maze, we'd attached the brick to his belt and run some wires up his shirt and down the sleeves to the pushbuttons in his hands. Unless you were looking hard, you wouldn't have noticed anything suspicious. We scoped out the maze counting out loud on the straightaways and yelling out directions at the corners. People looked at us a bit strangely in general and were particularly confused and curious when we had to bring out the brick for minor adjustments.



We didn't do too well on that round. The brick started misbehaving about three quarters of the way through. And even if it hadn't, the recorded data had lots of mistakes in it. With a lot of guessing and processing we were able to construct about a quarter of the map but no more. Since it was late summer we gave up again for the year figuring we'd pick it up again the following year.

The next winter was a good one for programmable bricks. When we did the second run, there were only five work-

ing bricks in the world and even those five needed a fair amount of baby-sitting. By the next summer, there had been several new iterations of the design (largely the work of Fred Martin) resulting in dozens of working bricks that were solid enough that we wouldn't have to worry too much about hardware failures for the next round.

Also, during the winter there was plenty of time to think about what went wrong the previous summer. The main problem was that mistakes in clicking the buttons led to so much distortion in the map that it was completely useless. The maze is so big, (more than a thousand straightaways and turns), that it's impossible to do the kind of recording that we did without making mistakes. We thought a bit about eliminating mistakes but decided instead to run the experiment with several programmable bricks simultaneously, do the recording several times separately, then regroup and compare results.

As it turns out, Randy and another friend, Carl Witty, were planning to come to Montreal towards the end of the summer to show off their robots at an artificial intelligence conference. They arrived with a car full of computers, tools, and robot parts. Their robots all come with cameras connected to electronics that could discriminate colors. Their demos included robots chasing balls and each other at high speeds. It seemed only natural to get them involved in the third round.

We had a lot of discussion about whether we could use the vision systems they had in their robots for more automatic data gathering. We decided not to because even if we could resolve all the computer issues, we weren't sure that we had enough batteries for all of the needed electronics for the time it'd take. We did decide, however, that since they had brought along several miniature cameras, we'd take a video record of first trip through and use that to help interpret the data we'd get from the computers.

Carrying a camera around a maze really didn't seem subtle enough. In-



stead we took the camera and sewed it into a hat with only the lens sticking out the front. The camcorder fit neatly in a backpack. By the time we were ready to go, Carl, Randy, and I each had a programmable brick rubber banded to our belts, and Eric had a camera in his hat. The data gathering run took about two hours and was pretty boring. The bricks kept disagreeing with each other, but we ignored this because we decided to sort it all out later. Eric, originally worried that he'd attract too much attention with the camera, ended up not being able to convince anyone that he actually had one.

We brought the electronics home, dumped the data to three separate laptop computers and then spent an evening that didn't quite turn into an all-nighter trying to make some sense of it. For hours there we were, each of us with his own computer bouncing sequence numbers, grid locations, and reports of similarities and differences in data between us. My wife, Erlyne, and the kids watched for some of this and enjoyed part of the video but abandoned us when it seemed that we'd really fallen off the deep end. We persisted and after spending some time getting a feel for the method to the madness we decided to systemically play through the video noting when everything looked to be working and stopping the tape and fudging when it didn't. Our stamina ran out before the tape did, and we gave up for the night with about three quarters of the map in place.

The next morning, we all felt refreshed and raring to go. In less than two hours the printer was churning out copies of a complete maze map. We were about to set off when Eric asked why each of us had to go to get stamps at each of the places rather than split-

ting up the job. We realized pretty quickly that he had a point. There was a rule against going through the walls. There wasn't a rule against the cards with the stamps going through the walls. It took us about a half an hour of staring at the map and thinking to come up with a plan that involved three teams and three relay points to pass the cards along like a baton in a relay race. Eric and I had the first stretch, passed the cards to Randy, and then headed off to where Randy would pass them back after having met Carl twice along the way.

It all worked like clockwork. The maps were accurate, the plan workable. Eric and I had the first stamp in less than two minutes and found Randy in another two. When we called him through the plastic wall, he didn't answer but his hand appeared. He said later that a pirate was standing right beside and he was trying to not attract any attention. After

the handoff we headed to the final relay point, where we met up with Carl and got the cards through the wall from Randy. From there it was just a quick run to the end to get the last time stamp. It had taken 11 minutes, much less time than we had imagined possible.

We went to see the pirate at the desk. The board of daily winners wasn't around any more. We showed him our card that confirmed that we'd done it in 11 minutes. He said that if we did it that fast we must have cheated. Maybe it's true. Throwing that much technology at a problem may be cheating. On the other hand, it may just be another way of solving it. **LX**

### About the author

Brian Silverman is the Director of Research at LCSl where he has played a significant role in the development of MicroWorlds, LogoWriter, LEGO TC logo, IBM Logo, Apple Logo, and numerous other dialects. He is also a visiting scientist at the MIT Media Laboratory.

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## **BOOK REVIEW**

# **The Book of Learning and Forgetting**

**by CAROLYN DOWLING**

***The Book of Learning and Forgetting***  
**by Frank Smith**  
**1998, Teachers College Press,**  
**New York**  
**ISBN: 0-8077-7350-X (paperback)**

**T**he title of this book is irresistible. It touches on two of the core anxieties of our lives, first as children, then as adults—society expects, even demands, that we “learn,” but we know very well that what we are supposed to have learned we all too often and too easily forget! Many of us have learned extremely effectively that learning, at least within formal contexts, is hard work, and that the outcomes are at best unreliable.

Reading this book is a therapeutic experience. It is not our fault, and we are not stupid. We can all learn and do so with great efficiency and success from the moment we first draw breath. The problem, according to Smith, lies with a range of currently accepted beliefs about the nature of learning, which are actually profound misconceptions.

A large part of the book is concerned with establishing a contrast between what he terms the “Classic View” of learning (and of forgetting) and the “Official Theory.” The former acknowledges the vast amount of learning that takes place intuitively or “naturally” within social settings in which learners model their behaviors and attitudes on others with whom they identify.

Smith describes this identification in terms of joining a “club”—that is,

aligning oneself with others who possess particular qualities and competencies that, most important, we feel we will ultimately be able to achieve ourselves. Through engaging in activities cooperatively in the company of other club members, we “learn” without conscious effort.

By contrast, the Official Theory suggests that learning is the result of hard and deliberate effort within artificially contrived environments in which features such as testing, grading, and other means of contriving competition ensure that large numbers of people learn that they cannot learn—that they are effectively excluded from the “learners club.”

Smith’s Classic View of learning has much in common with the thinking of other writers and theorists including Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Papert. With such support, why does this view not prevail in schools? Smith devotes considerable space to explaining the sociopolitical as well as the intellectual foundations of the Official Theory, with an emphasis on the twin demons of psychology and of military/industrial organizational theories and practices.

Computers come out badly as well, in particular the concept of Artificial Intelligence, in the chapter titled, “The Official Theory Goes On-line.” This surprises me a little, as I recall that in an earlier work this author welcomed computing technology into the classroom, particularly as providing a rich environment for collaborative writing. In this book, his vision of the technology seems to be confined to the use of computers for individualized and dehu-

manized forms of instruction. Computers definitely belong to the “dark side.”

This is unfortunate and discouraging to those of us who experience classroom computing far more in terms of his Classic View of learning. Perhaps a complimentary subscription to *Logo Exchange* would not go amiss?

The concluding sections of the book look at the possibilities for remedying the current situation. Not surprisingly, the tone is not particularly optimistic. Nevertheless, he does provide some encouragement for teachers in regard to “Repairing the Damage”—beginning with the damage that has already been done to ourselves as learners.

Reading through this book, one finds that questions and objections inevitably arise. “But what about . . . ?” These are addressed at several points in the form of a dialogue between the author and a notional reader—an effective way of bringing broad principles “down to earth” in terms of particular situations.

In keeping with the central thesis of the book, the author suggests that we are most likely to understand, remember, and learn from it if we read it in a relaxed manner for enjoyment, rather than approaching it as a formal “learning task.”

Try it!



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fd :h
build.r :h :l - 15
end

to recl :h :l
repeat 2[fd :h lt 90 fd :l lt 90]
end

to build.l :h :l
if :l < 20 [stop]
recl :h :l
fd :h
build.l :h :l - 15
end

to sides
build.r 54 / 3 150
bk 54 * 3
lt 90
fd 60
rt 90
build.l 54 / 3 150
end

to temple
rt 90
bk 10
lt 90
rec 20 80
fd 20
rt 90
bk 2
lt 90
rec 5 84
fd 5
rt 90
fd 2
lt 90
rec 10 80
fd 10
rt 90
bk 2
lt 90
rec 5 84
rt 90
fd 2
lt 90
pu bk 35
rt 90
end

to entrance
fd 20
lt 90 pd rec 16 8
rt 90
fd 12
lt 90 rec 16 16

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rt 90
fd 20
lt 90 rec 16 8
fd 8
rt 90
pu fd 4
setc 7
repeat 3[ pd fill pu bk 16]
setc 9
end

to staircase.l.r
pu start
lt 90
fd 155
pd fd 20
make "a pos
bk 175
rt 90
fd 54 * 3
lt 90
fd 35
setpos :a
bk 20 + 150 + 10 + 50 + 150 + 20
make "b pos
fd 170
rt 90
fd 54 * 3
rt 90
fd 30
setpos :b
end

to startup
cg ht
start
staircase
sides
temple
entrance
staircase.l.r
end

```

### About the Author

Orlando Mihich, a graduate chemical engineer, has been teaching Logo and Science to middle school students for the past 14 years. He is currently a computer teacher at Booker T. Washington MS 54 in New York City, and an instructor at the New York Institute of Technology.

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dard curriculum to students, then we'd be better off with quill pens. It is both the opportunity and the obligation of teachers using computers to support idiosyncrasy.

### Resist much

Even such a supreme rationalist as George Bernard Shaw confessed to a fascination with machines, saying he once nearly bought a cash register "without having the slightest use for it." We teachers are probably more vulnerable to things mechanical than most. We live harried, hassled lives beset by hucksters and inspectors alike. But we must keep track of what matters, what the children need. We must decide what computers should do, not merely celebrate what they can do. We must not allow sharpshooting wheeler-dealers to bring in their millennium-skills promises, turning our classrooms into techno-skill dumps, hazardous to the well-being of children. We must question. We must judge. And always, always, we must resist much. LX

### About the author

Guest columnist Susan Ohanian is the author of hundreds of articles and the author of popular books on teaching and learning including: *Garbage Pizza*, *Patchwork Quilts and Math Magic*, *Who's in Charge? A Teacher Speaks Her Mind* and *Ask Ms. Class*.

Last Word Contributing Editor Daniel Kinnaman was unable to meet even the elastic deadlines for this issue of *Logo Exchange*, since he has recently been named publisher of *Curriculum Administrator Magazine*. We wish Dan well in his new role and look forward to him appearing in future issues of *Logo Exchange*.

**Susan Ohanian**  
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# New Year's Resolutions

by **SUSAN OHANIAN**

**O**ne of the true glories of being a teacher is that life really does begin anew each September (other months outside of North America). What happened last year is relegated to folklore, and we get to try again. Each September, students and teachers alike get the chance to start again. In this spirit of beginning again, I have a few proposals for new year's resolutions.

## Take time to ignore the skills

Increasingly, teachers and students alike are surrounded by imperatives to pile up the skills. Everybody from TV pundits to newspaper op-ed writers to Congresspersons to corporate CEOs preach Standards, and in most peoples' minds Standards are translated into memorizing the times tables in third grade and quadratic equations by eighth. There is considerable pressure to move term paper writing lower and lower. I know of schools where parents are asking for research papers in second grade.

Beset as we are by agendas and products promising us curricula and machinery to teach twice as much in half the time, let's resolve instead to stand firm for attempting half as much in twice the time. One way to start on this road is to realize there is no such thing as a basic skill. What we call skills are merely disjointed items that appear on standardized tests. They have no aes-

thetic value, are of no practical use to anybody, and should not be allowed to invade our classrooms.

## Make 1998-99 the year without answers

Let's restrain our pedagogical greed for answers, instead making 1998-99 the year for questions. Around the turn of the last century, Scottish novelist and poet George MacDonald complained, "I offer you roses and you boil them." Now, one hundred years later, what would happen if we made 1998-99 the year of rejoicing in roses rather than boiling them? What if we made this a year of enjoyment, not interrogation?

## Avoid snake oil

We're hearing a lot these days about "skills for the millennium." They don't exist. The illicit progeny of the snake oil marketed in the 19th century as universal cure-alls for every thing from sexual dysfunction to irregularity to depression, promises made in the name of millennium skills are just as phony. We must not confuse racket with reality. Even if we did have some crystal ball for seeing future job possibilities for our students, we should resist these futurist lures. A teacher's job is not to teach for the future. As teachers, always, always, we must concern ourselves with the present lives of the children in our care.

## Don't mistake convenience for progress

It is no surprise that teachers, whose professional lives are filled with so much inconvenience, would sometimes get enticed into mistaking convenience for progress. The truth of the matter is that there isn't one school in 50 where the institution of the photocopy machine has brought about an improvement in the educational experience offered children. In most schools, the copy machine just makes it easier to hand out lots of killing skill drill papers.

Discontent with the status quo, not mechanical wizardry, is the first step toward progress. This is why, so far, computers have failed to revolutionize education. Most software purchased by most schools, whether it's teaching blend or the 38 rules for capitalization, is just whistling in the pedagogical dark.

## Celebrating individual idiosyncrasy

Educational camp followers—whether they're publishers or methods entrepreneurs or bureaucrats or politicians—are always on the lookout for the product or system or technique that can bypass the vagaries of individual teachers and students and thereby truly standardize education. If computers are employed to deliver such a stan-

See **RESOLUTIONS** (Page 15)

