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# RINKY-DINKS AND HEROES

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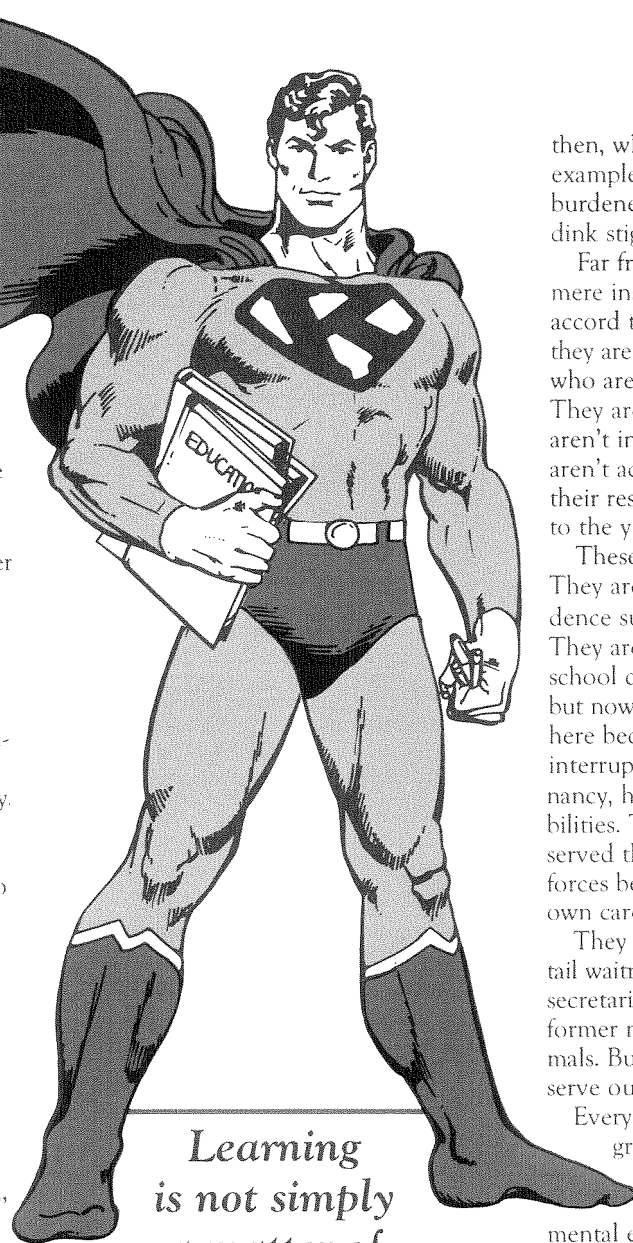
**D**uring the unveiling of the new computer lab in the Department of Developmental Studies, a visiting faculty member, impressed with what we say, was overheard to say, "All of this just for a bunch of rinky-dinks?"

It would be hard to imagine a better example of the upward struggle faced by all developmental education programs. Regarded as the poor second sister in the colleges and universities, developmental education goes about its business in an environment of reaction ranging from resignation through academic snobbery to downright enmity.

The leading cause of this mild hostility surely must be a sense of embarrassment that such a program needs to exist at all in higher education. After all, faculty work hard and endure the frustrations unique to teaching, all for relatively little compensation. At the very least, we should be permitted to believe that we are contributing mightily to the national interest by educating our future leaders, our future luminaries. In this way, our sacrifice and dedication is well-rewarded.

The presence of these "rinky-dinks" is a painful reminder that our work may be somewhat less grand than we prefer to imagine, and it's really not very good for our institutional and personal images.

But if we can go beyond the day-to-day anguish over the discovery that not all of our students are destined to be rocket scientists, we may elect to pause over a tenet on which all educators ought to be able to agree: Learning is not simply a matter of chronology and past disposition. No serious educator would argue that if one can't read by the second grade, he never will; if one hasn't graduated from high school by age 18, he never will; if one doesn't attend college at



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age 18, he never will. No serious educator would argue that if one has been disinclined or unable to learn effectively in the past, he will always be disinclined or unable. No serious educator would turn his back on the principle of life-long learning. To do so would be to ignore our own careers and goals, and would serve as a repudiation of all we hold dear in the academic arena. Consider the irony,

then, when students who are living examples of that very principle are burdened, as a result, with the rinky-dink stigma.

Far from regarding these folks as mere institutional pimples, we should accord them the respect and praise they are due. For these are the students who are willing to tackle the odds. They aren't getting any credit, they aren't involved in the gpa race, they aren't adding the kind of filigree to their resumes that will open the gates to the yuppie kingdom.

These are students with a purpose. They are here even though the evidence suggests that they shouldn't be. They are here because their high school careers were undistinguished, but now they want to try again. They're here because their first chances were interrupted by finances, marriage, pregnancy, health, or family responsibilities. They are here because they served their country in the armed forces before attending to their own careers.

They are mothers, bricklayers, cocktail waitresses, nurses, aspiring teachers, secretaries — and, yes, there are some former ne'er-do-wells and party animals. But they are here and they deserve our respect.

Every developmental education program should exist within the definitions of a single word: *Pride*. For it is developmental education that stands at the forefront of our most cherished educational principle — education is man's most noble enterprise and it knows no boundaries, no limitations. It should be denied to no one, regardless of age, circumstances, or past performance.

Developmental educators, like all educators, experience meteoric fluctuations in their workaday lives. But through the agony of failure and the exhilaration of success remain pride and respect: pride in what we do, respect for those with whom we do it.

How much greater our success might be if all faculty joined together in principle, in attitude, and in support of some very heroic people. ♣