

Preface

Several people whom I respect very much advised me not to write this book. "You can't prove it—even if it's true," said the first neuro-psychologist I called. "Why don't you write about something else?"

"Leave it alone. We've already had too much overpopularization of the brain. The public isn't ready to hear about these things," warned another.

"Don't give everyone more excuses to blame the kids," a thoughtful educator pleaded. "Teachers do too much of that already!"

I debated. Could I accurately explain to nonscientists that changing lifestyles may be altering children's brains in subtle but critical ways? Could I write a book that would tell the truth—without sounding like a crabby middle-aged academic? Should I go out on a limb with a thesis that available technology cannot test, much less prove?

On the verge of abandoning my idea, I scheduled more interviews, excerpts from which are included in the following chapters. These scientists had a totally different response. They got excited when I told them what I wanted to write about. Moreover, they convinced me that my ideas were not so farfetched after all. Some even told me to hurry up and get started. "These things need to be said—and the sooner, the better," one insisted.

They also goaded my own curiosity and provoked new questions. The process of tracking down the answers has been a rigorous one that has led me to offices, clinics, schools, and conference sessions in the United States, Canada, and Europe. Having produced some deeply troubling and eye-opening experiences, it has also yielded moments of refreshing optimism. I hope the reader will similarly be able to put the negatives into perspective and sense the promise as well as the obligation implied in the following chapters.

One of the most reassuring aspects of this search was the quality of the many people I met who are sincerely concerned about the intellectual development of children and teenagers. I would especially

like to acknowledge my gratitude to a number of thoughtful scientists busy pursuing research on how the brain grows and learns but not too busy to answer phone calls, schedule interviews, explain complex ideas, and offer helpful suggestions on the manuscript. Their names are found, along with some gleanings of their wisdom, throughout these chapters. Scores of school administrators and teachers cared enough to write, phone, welcome me into their classrooms, and talk earnestly about their concerns, while at the same time communicating their dedication to students and to the art of good teaching. Above all, I am grateful to the students—my own and all the others—who keep me continually reassured that they really are worth the best efforts we can give them.

Of course, I must acknowledge that any work I do is the product of a joint effort: Angela Miller and Carole Lalli got this book off the ground, and the secretarial talents of Jane Piszczor have kept it aloft. I am particularly indebted to Bob Bender for stepping in at a critical moment with much-needed support and direction. My sincere thanks, as well, to the friends and colleagues who interrupted their own lives to read and offer thoughtful comments on the manuscript. Above all, my mother and the four wonderful men in my life have provided wise counsel and a necessary backboard for ideas to an oft-distracted writer. Special thanks to my husband, Tom, for using his “big picture” skills to keep me aware of what I am really trying to say.