Significant Books

Column Editor:
Elizabeth Z. Howard

Contributors:
D. Bob Gowin
Bruce R. Joyce
John Sternig
Robert L. McCaul
Mildred Thurston

Basic Philosophies of Education. ***Christian O. Weber.*** *New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1960.*

Mr. Weber presents basic philosophies of education in terms of the main traits of special schools of philosophy. Each school of philosophy is then treated by a combination of philosophic issues and personal convictions of individual philosophers.

It has been customary in philosophy of education to present it as schools of philosophy labeled Essentialists, Idealists, Realists, Pragmatists. A shortcoming of this treatment seems to be that as soon as the commonalities are asserted defining the school, the individual philosophers supposedly representative of the school may be shown to differ on many issues. Mr. Weber recognizes this shortcoming and his focus upon individual thinkers helps to overcome the defect.

This new book presents little that is new to philosophy of education. Mr. Weber is aware of the tendency in current philosophy to explore more fully the nature of *inquiry* and to turn away from the nature of *being*. Using this as a criterion of currency, *Basic Philosophies of Education* is not current. The "schools" approach to the philosophy of education seems to present philosophy as a systematic body of knowledge (being) rather than as a collection of concepts useful in criticizing and clarifying educational issues (inquiry). Thus we see in Weber's book less emphasis upon the process of philosophizing (analysis, synthesis, and speculation) and more emphasis upon the products of philosophizing (the rhetoric of conclusions).

The book is written in a readable style, although one minor annoyance is the excessive use of exclamation marks. The intended audience is college juniors and seniors who are being taught by a teacher well grounded in philosophy.

Another feature of the book is Mr. Weber's frequent and pointed comments about relevant psychological research; indeed, Mr. Weber sees psychology as a bridge between philosophy and educational practice. Readers may be delighted with the reminder that John Locke formulated the principle of the conditioned reflex two hundred years before Pavlov, but Dewey followers can scarcely be happy with Weber's lack of concern with the philosophic significance of the nature of the problem in Dewey's writings. In sum, this is a contribution to the rapidly increasing number of textbooks for teachers of philosophy of education to choose from, but not otherwise a new contribution to philosophy of education.

—*Reviewed by* D. Bob Gowin, *Assistant Professor of Education, University of Chicago, Illinois.*

Curriculum Development in the Elementary School. *W. Ray Rucker.* *New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960. 405 p.*

The preface indicates that this volume was written for use in undergraduate and graduate instruction in elementary school curriculum. In the opinion of this reviewer, a book intended for this purpose should meet the following criteria:

1. It should be thoroughly conceptualized and documented, introducing the student to an orderly theory of curriculum and indicating where this theory is grounded in evidence and where evidence is lacking.

2. It should illustrate its concepts with careful research and the experience of the author.

3. It should expose the student to the current edge of experimentation in education, at least indicating to him the areas in which advanced thinking is taking place.

Mr. Rucker's volume meets the second criterion best. Part II, "The Elementary School in Action," is the product of a sound and wise student of education. His careful and imaginative selection of illustrative learning experiences provides a unique introduction to democratic classrooms in action. The beginning student in education can be shown, through this section, an excellent panorama of teaching procedures, materials, content samples, and cooperative planning and control procedures. The descriptions ring true and are illustrated profusely with children's writings, logs of projects, and the like.

These illustrations of elementary schools in action are "what is new and well done" about this book and represent its main contribution. The remainder of the volume is similar to many other general works about the elementary school and is beset by the problems which afflict nearly every attempt to "cover" this mammoth topic.

In terms of criterion "1" above, Mr. Rucker has attempted to conceptualize the elementary school in terms of American societal patterns, learning theory, and child development. He makes some telling points, particularly in reference to American core values. However, the whole effort does not hold together, partly because he flays Victorian educational methods at the expense of a positive and organized presentation. Frequent resort to caricature also weakens many of his best points.

The greatest conceptual weakness, however, is that the discussions of society, child development, and learning theory are not woven together in a clear theory of curriculum. Even where the book is strongest (in classroom examples) it does not show adequate relation between curriculum theory and the school in action. Crucial topics such as the selection of learning experiences, so important to curriculum theory and the beginning teacher, receive much sporadic attention through the book, but not in a solidly conceptual treatment.

Documentation is on the whole selective and clear. The chief weaknesses are those common in modern educational and psychological writings (e.g., the tendency to equate authoritarianism with fear, a generality qualified by the enormous Muslim population of the world, to cite one example).

In relation to criterion "3," *Curriculum Development in the Elementary School* presents the familiar democratic, cooperative scheme for improving curriculum, exemplifies it well with the Delta County Curriculum Project, but fails: (a) To acquaint the reader with many of the

other current or recent experiments in elementary schools (notably the nongraded movement, which is not mentioned as such, even in passing); and (b) To discuss the more sophisticated problems of modern educational theory, such as the development of critical thinking and current problems in the selection of subject matter and themes in science, social studies, and mathematics. Although topics such as these could not have received detailed treatment in a volume like this, the beginning student in education needs to be oriented to them early if he is to participate fully as a better teaching profession is built.

—Reviewed by BRUCE R. JOYCE, *Assistant Professor of Education, University of Delaware, Newark.*

Science and Mathematics, Count-down for Elementary Schools. *Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: Frontiers of Science Foundation of Oklahoma, Inc., 1960. 71 p.*

What are we afraid of? We read of a new heavy-weight Sputnik and fear runs through us as we compare it with our smaller satellites. Why do we fear? Is there a pound value for the difference between Soviet and U.S.A. science? Or do we vaguely realize that hydrogen bombs are more easily carried by large missiles than by small satellites? The fear we feel is that of harm from a land across the sea. It is the same fear that men have always felt in the face of force.

Can this fear be eased by more science and mathematics in the schools? Or does its easing also call for more and better humanities which strive to make man more humane?

If this seems a strange way to begin a review it is only because the pamphlet so specifically deals with science and mathematics. Yet the men whose thoughts are recorded in the pages of this symposium, which was held in December 1959 in Oklahoma City, all show clearly that the matter goes more deeply than conventional ideas about science or mathematics. For the educator who feels that a new 1960 set of science or math books will take care of things, this booklet will be a shock. The definitions of science and math as given by Roller, Rosenbloom, Watson, Henry and Fisher bear small resemblance to the average teacher's definitions. These men are talking about a state of mind, a set of values, a search for truth, a way of living; not a mere set of facts or a house full of gadgets. They say we have many Edisons but few Einsteins. We have lots of technology but little science. We can describe many events but have slight understanding of phenomena.

These men plead for science and math as basic forces shaping views, minds and hearts, not as mere exercises or laboratory collections. The book goes to the heart of what should motivate us in seeking to join science to the 3 R's.

This booklet deserves the attention of all school persons interested in improving the quality of American education without merely adding more to an already overcrowded curriculum.

—Reviewed by JOHN STERNIG, *Assistant Superintendent, Glencoe Public Schools, Glencoe, Illinois.*

The Role of the School in American Society. *V. T. Thayer.* *New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1960. p. 530.*

The purpose of Mr. Thayer's book is "to survey the task of public education in the light of changes that have taken place in American culture from the colonial period to the present and to consider the impact of these changes upon the school . . ." (p. ix)

To achieve this purpose, the author adopts an approach that is divided into four parts. He begins by setting forth certain basic assumptions and ideas from the past (acceptance of change, equality of educational opportunity, etc.) that he believes still guide our educational thinking and practice. In Part II he analyzes fundamental transformations (economic, familial, etc.) in the status of youth and the implications these have for education. In Part III he traces varying views of the nature of the child and of learning and he sketches the influence of these views upon curriculum, method and administration through the past three centuries. In the final section, he discusses the most critical of the educational issues (federal aid, public money for parochial schools, etc.) that are being debated today. Part IV is the most extensive of the sections, comprising about 40 percent of the book.

As this brief description suggests, Mr. Thayer has posed a formidable organizational problem for himself. In all candor it must be said that he has not solved this problem very successfully, for the four parts of the book tend to be independent units and there is not even a final summarizing chapter that attempts to draw the parts together. Nowhere, in fact, is there a full-scale, systematic presentation of what the author conceives the "role" or "task" of American public education to be. The weakness in organization and the miscellaneous nature of the contents make it difficult to determine where the book would most appropriately fit into the education program.

However, I do not wish to dwell on formal shortcomings. Mr. Thayer is interesting and stimulating and has many sage and valid things to say on the multifarious topics and issues he treats. He is an outstanding educational liberal. In my opinion, his heart is in the right place and he is nearly always on the side of the angels. Perhaps this provides a clue to the kind of contribution his book can uniquely make. It can, I think, communicate to our young prospective teachers some of the idealism and optimism that inspired the educational fellowship of the 1920's and 1930's and can give them a strong faith in the mission of American public education and in the worth of the profession for which they are preparing.

—Reviewed by ROBERT L. MCCAUL, *Associate Professor of Education, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois.*

Adventures with Children in Nursery School and Kindergarten. ***Elsa Barnouw and Arthur Swan.*** *New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1959.*

In this book the authors make the reader extremely aware of children and of the ways in which they react to the variety of experiences they are having. The authors discuss both the purpose and importance of nursery schools and kindergartens. They carefully and thoroughly touch the many areas provided for in the teaching of young children. Attention is also given to descriptions of incidents and problems in connection with children, parents and teachers and how these were handled.

Through the vivid accounts of children's behavior in encountering different personalities, being presented with new materials, having to share with others, and being separated from parents, the authors point out the importance of an understanding teacher. Good teachers create an atmosphere that conveys to the child that he is expected, provided for, wanted and loved. Unlimited opportunities are given to the children to experiment, to explore, to ask

questions and to have their questions answered. Emphasis is placed upon the fact that children are different and that adults working with them need to be sensitive to their individual needs.

Generally, it seems that nursery school experiences prove to be a very good supplement to the home. However, it is pointed out that all children are not sent to a nursery school for the same reason. Some go because of lack of play space; some who are an only child go for companionship; others go for the opportunity to have a variety of materials and equipment; some because the mother is away from home; and others because there is an urgent need for the child to be under the direction of a trained, sensitive and understanding adult.

Attention is given to the difference in the needs of nursery school and kindergarten children. Time, growth and experiences have caused the five year old to be more aware of his peers, more of a conformist and readier for more complex situations than the four year old.

Parents are given major attention. Nursery school is a new experience for them, too. The spontaneous and unexpected behavior of the children creates real tension. The parents are anxious and afraid that their children will not be acceptable even though they are doing what any child of that age does under like circumstances. As the parents observed their children with the teachers they were gratified to see that the teachers were kind and consistent, that they respected the individual rights and differences of each child and, most important of all, demonstrated a genuine love for the children. Under these conditions the parents were willing to relax and to leave their children at school.

Because of a very realistic approach to child development and behavior, to suitable materials and activities for children, to involvement of personalities of children, teachers and parents, this book can be used very extensively. Teachers, parents and students can profit greatly from reading it.

—Reviewed by MILDRED THURSTON, *Principal: Nursery School, Kindergarten, and Primary Education, University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, Chicago, Illinois.*

Director of Instruction

(Continued from page 108)

of instruction. In addition, utilizing such statements, each school system should regularly provide for group definition of roles and group discussion regarding the ways in which directors of instruction, principals and supervisors, as well as others, may be most helpful.

New teachers, particularly, should be informed and encouraged to discuss their role perceptions regarding these positions as a part of their orientation in the fall before school opens the year they are employed. Teachers handbooks for the school system should contain, in written form, regularly revised statements regarding the local perceptions concerning each of these roles. These perceptions should regularly be reviewed in the light of our larger setting, the values of a democratic society.

The clarification of role perceptions is important to morale and productivity in any group. Curriculum workers, particularly directors of instruction, can increase their effectiveness through improved definition of their responsibilities, role perceptions, and role relationships.

Copyright © 1960 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.