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My Country School Diary: An Adventure in Creative Teaching. *Julia Weber Gordon.* New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1946 and 1970. 270 pp.

—Reviewed by SARAH H. LEEPER, Professor of Education, College of Education, University of Maryland, College Park.

My Country School Diary is the story of four years which Julia Weber Gordon spent in a one-teacher school in an isolated mountain neighborhood in the late 1930's. One may well question the current reprinting of this book and ask, "Is it relevant to today's needs?" John Holt, in his introduction to this edition, assures us that this book has great meaning for today.

Holt points out that much time and money today are being spent on programs of education designed to help "children who are poor, in one or another racial minority, victims of prejudice, emotionally disturbed, and by these and other conditions blocked off from growing and learning" (p. xi). Such programs are not likely to do much good unless some important lessons are learned, many of which are to be found in Miss Weber's experience, recorded in her diary.

Holt quotes a friend as follows: "New programs, new materials, and even basic changes in organizational structure will not necessarily bring about healthy growth. A dynamic and vital atmosphere can develop

when teachers who are ready to move are given the freedom and support to innovate."

My Country School Diary tells what one teacher was able to do when given a chance and some effective help. Her experience tells us many things, which are briefly summarized here.

1. The teacher must get to know the children, something of their backgrounds, their needs, and their abilities. In her first year at Stony Grove, New Jersey, Miss Weber taught 28 children, ranging in ages from 15 years, 5 months to 5 years, 4 months; from the beginners to grade 8. Yet the teacher did not complain about the "quality" of the children she was teaching.

She observed and discovered needs; held personal conferences with the children; made home visits; planned for individualized instruction; provided opportunities for self-expression; adjusted the school program and provided opportunities for curricular experiences; utilized housekeeping activities; initiated parent-teacher cooperation; provided opportunities for the children to initiate and plan activities. And as the teacher and the children worked, everybody was important, everybody grew, everybody learned.

2. Enormous centralized schools and expensive equipment are not necessary in order to have a high quality of education. The teacher and children improved the qual-

ity of their school environment. Miss Weber and the pupils used the bare school grounds as a practical purpose for beginning nature study and science. Many resources outside the school were utilized; the county library, the state university, skilled carpenters; the older pupils helped the younger ones. The children produced a puppet show, a newspaper, dramatized the history of the township, and presented parents with a mimeographed copy of "Some Interesting Facts in the History of Valley View Township." School money here was well spent.

3. Children learn and grow best when their school is a part of the community, when their community comes into the school, "when their learning touches at many points the lives, work, needs, and problems of people outside the school building" (p. xvi). Mothers shared in evaluating the school program and wholesome recreation was provided for the young people; older people came into the school and the children went out into the community to learn of its history and life and work.

4. The wise teacher begins instruction where the children are and moves from there to other levels. In order to make such progress, one must, as Miss Weber said, "evaluate all along." Too often the teacher bemoans what the pupils *cannot* do. Miss Weber found what they *could* do. They could write answers to history questions—a dull procedure but a first step for the children. And after this first step they could take others until later they were able to make a firsthand study of the community.

5. Teachers need the help of competent resource persons in evaluating their teaching and in planning for curricular activities. Throughout the book Miss Weber relates how her "helping teachers" helped her to take the children on trips, to secure materials, to look at the daily program, to revise the program and to make future plans. The teacher was free, with their help, to build the curriculum around the interests, needs, and concerns of the pupils.

6. Adults who work with children need

competence—the ability to do things. Miss Weber was able to demonstrate her competence in many activities, for example, to play the piano, tell Indian legends, sew, cook, and weave. Each of us needs to be competent in some areas and be ready and eager to learn, along with the children, new skills.

This reviewer fully agrees with the words of John Holt, "Taken as a whole, this book should be a rich source of inspiration and imagination for teachers, and indeed everyone concerned with education" (p. xxii). □

Intervention Theory and Method: A Behavioral Science View. *Chris Argyris.* Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1970. 374 pp.

—Reviewed by RODNEY P. SMITH, Visiting Fellow, Center for the Study of Education, Institute of Social Science, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

Because of our highly fragmented society, there is the possibility that those primarily in education may not have heard of Chris Argyris, Beach Professor of Administrative Science at Yale University. Nor, in this age in which a kind of knowledge-based Vesuvius threatens to bury us all under uninterpreted data, should the *complete educator* be expected to have read all of the 14 books and monographs this outstanding research practitioner and scholar, Dr. Argyris, has written. Yet in the introduction to this latest book, destined to make its impact on all organizational life during the remainder of this century, Argyris, quoting from "America in the Twenty-Third Century" (*New York Times*, July 27, 1968), allows John Gardner to provide the *raison d'être* for this latest work, *Intervention Theory and Method*:

Men came to demand more and more from their institutions—and with greater intransigence. But while aspirations leapt ahead, human institutions remained sluggish.

Even in the United States, which was then the most adaptable of all societies, the departments of the Federal Government were in grave need of renewal; State government was in most places an old attic full of outworn relics; in

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most cities, municipal government was a wax-work of stiffly preserved anachronisms; the system of taxation was a tangle of dysfunctional measures; the courts were crippled by archaic organizational arrangements; the unions, the professions, the universities, the corporations each had spun its own impenetrable web of vested interests.

Such a society could not respond to challenge. And it did not.

Of such stuff is the urgency of Argyris' study framed. That he accepts the challenge and puts forth a general field theory designed to bring those sluggish human institutions back to health is a message worth reading by those who have responsibilities in schools, universities, and other educational institutions.

Essentially, the framework of the Argyris book is one of large system management based on organizational theory and behavior, interpersonal and small group dynamics, and intervention theory and method. Intervention theory concerns itself with an action program addressed to a client system, a program to meet change and more positively to direct any change rather than react to it.

In a way, this book is a summing up of the past decade of personal, group, and large organization theory. Argyris takes tenets applicable to individual or small group psychology and relates these to the management of a larger institutional context. The theories themselves have been explored in the author's work with large systems throughout the United States, France, England, Norway, Sweden, Holland, Italy, Greece, and Germany. The problem-centered activities have been devoted largely to executive development and productivity.

Argyris writes of what he often finds in a "sick" organization: a penalty and reward system based on conformity; psychological failure, disconfirmation, and nonessentiality leading often to absenteeism, withdrawal, and dropping out of the system; a lack of openness and owning up; rigid adherence to rationality above feelings in a milieu which does not lead to helping others.

After this diagnosis, the author sets

about helping the system design new tasks and roles leading to a support of individuality, trust, greater responsibility in roles, and aware intergroup relationships. True, these declarations are not new. They have formed the program of countless educational conferences; but that Argyris has set this favored design, a fairly well supported agenda, into a theory and methodology text which is written as a scholarly and scientifically supported work—this is new and it is this reviewer's guess that the book will be widely discussed in the coming years. For the book has much to say to teachers, principals, and district office staff as well as professors of administrative science and state education agency personnel.

One word of caution: the book itself is a "concentrated" one. Its content presupposes a knowledge of interpersonal and group psychology and dynamics. Yet in small study groups under the guidance of a person who has kept up with organizational theory or has some understanding of this field, the book could prove unusually rewarding. □

Research in Elementary School Curriculum. *A. Montgomery Johnston and Paul C. Burns.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1970. 543 pp.

Teaching in the Elementary School. *Marcella H. Nerbovig and Herbert J. Klausmeier.* New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969. 612 pp.

The Beginning Elementary School Teacher: Problems and Issues. *Walter S. Foster and Norman C. Jacobs.* Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Company, 1970. 404 pp.

—Reviewed by ROBERT WILLIAM WOOD,
Assistant Professor of Education, University
of South Dakota, Vermillion.

Improvement of instruction and teacher competence is a paramount objective in the minds of educators across the nation. These three books reflect the authors' views and suggestions in widely different and selected writings and research studies. They emphasize various aids invaluable to the educator while

he makes those decisions necessary for improved instruction in the elementary schools.

Research in Elementary School Curriculum is a book of readings constituting various research studies in the areas of reading, language arts, social studies, elementary school mathematics, natural science, and administration of the curriculum. The authors contend that examination of the research studies will stimulate both the novice and veteran educator to study and evaluate new trends, develop new ideas, and, where deemed promising, to initiate new practices.

Too many times it is difficult for the elementary school administrators or teachers to locate research articles that will substantiate some of the practices which they are initiating in the schools. Eye-catching topics included in the book are: "What Have We Accomplished in Reading? A Review of the Past Fifty Years," "The Relative Efficiency of the Various Approaches to Writing with the Left Hand," "An Explanatory Study of the Development of Social Sensitivity in Elementary School Children," "A Study of the Comparative Reading Achievements of Early and Late School Starters," and, in addition, 40 other research studies that should whet the appetite for those interested in research encompassing the elementary school curriculum.

Excellent bibliographies are provided for those interested in pursuing further in-depth reading of additional selected studies. This book would be an asset to the educational literary shelves of every elementary educator for immediate reference and stimulating reading material.

Teaching in the Elementary School contains specific types of information of a practical nature dealing with foundations of curriculum, areas of instruction, and progress of the individual student. Within each of the sections are several informative chapters that would greatly enhance the learning of teachers-to-be.

This readable book includes topics of which every elementary school teacher should be aware. In the first section the authors present background material of child development, conditions of learning, concepts of

curriculum and organization, and directions on organizing people and resources. These chapters are definitely the strong points of the entire text. Novices as well as experienced educators should familiarize themselves with the specific elements presented here.

The many facets and areas of instruction are examined in the second section of the book encompassing separate chapters on reading, language arts, foreign languages, mathematics, science, social studies, art and music, and physical science. Many worthwhile ideas are disclosed but, as is found in a large number of other books, just the broad points are emphasized and there is inadequate depth material for veteran educators. The third section contains chapters considering exceptional children, concepts of mental and social guidance, and reporting pupil progress. The latter adds the least amount of knowledge to the entire book.

The focus of this book is directed toward the preservice or beginning elementary school teacher. The inclusion of so many divergent topics makes this an excellent reference book, but it lacks the necessary in-depth analysis needed by many experienced educators. Nevertheless, every elementary educator would profit from reading this book if for no other reason than to reinforce many obvious but forgotten concepts.

The Beginning Elementary School Teacher is a book of readings that includes topics and questions that many beginning elementary school teachers find unanswered as they prepare to assume professional responsibility.

The edition contains over 75 selected

subjects that should be of concern to neophytes as well as experienced teachers. The readings will facilitate answering questions relating to securing a position, practices, procedures, problems that arise during the first years of teaching, specific teaching skills, and developing appropriate attitudes and capacities necessary for productive teaching in a rapidly changing society. Subjects dealing with discipline, grouping practices, individualization of instruction, working with parents, utilization of teacher aides and volunteers, self-evaluation, professional organization, and initiating educational change are discussed in a very candid and focused manner.

The book is divided into four major sections. Each section has an introduction that sets the tone for the selected readings. The topics are varied and arranged in a logical manner for easy reading and sequential growth. An excellent bibliography for suggested additional reading is provided as a sectional summary.

The inexperienced as well as the experienced educator will find this a very informative text enveloping many essential ideas and suggestions. This book should be on the "must list" for all beginning teachers. It is one of the finest collections of readings utilizing practical and timely topics that has been assembled in quite some time.

If elementary educators are to remain abreast of the field, then the cited books will provide a wide coverage of reading experiences. Research studies, a compilation of selected readings, and a basic textbook each will provide answers to the numerous questions that arise every day in the area of elementary education. □

Selecting New Aids to Teaching

By RICHARD I. MILLER

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