The Way I See It

CHARLES L. MITSAKOS

TEXTBOOKS NEED TO CHANGE

Frances FitzGerald has received much acclaim for the charges against textbooks made in her book, *America Revised*.[1] FitzGerald focused on the changing nature and quality of American history textbooks since the turn of the century. She characterized today's texts as bland, boring, somewhat homogenized, and lacking in intellectual quality. She decried textbook publishers' response to pressure.

FitzGerald claimed that "textbook histories have changed—some of them to such an extent that an adult would find them unrecognizable." My response to this statement is simple and blunt: It's about time. Those textbooks needed changing.

Consider the impression most students had of American history in the 50s and 60s. A poll by the Louis Harris organization for Life magazine in the 60s found that high school students described history as their most irrelevant and the second most boring subject (edged out by English grammar). Polls conducted by the School of Education at Boston University in 1948, 1957, and 1968 produced similar results: when asked which subject they preferred to study most, middle school students ranked history 11th out of 12.

We're all aware of changes in society in the last 30 years and the impact these changes have had on the content of American history. We've had the Cold War and Watergate, the resignation of one president and the assassination of another. Technology has grown tremendously, putting Americans on the moon and raising serious moral and ethical questions such as whether to establish a sperm bank for Nobel laureates. It is naive to believe, with these changes in our society, changes in the nature of the students we educate, and changes in what we know about teaching and learning, our textbooks should retain a constant vision of America and a consistent style from generation to generation.

For example, laws now require equality for women and minorities. As a result, so-called "star" editions of textbooks for various parts of our country have been abolished. Before that, racism, sexism, and propagandism were rampant in history texts.

American history textbook authors are caught in the dilemma of responding to change or being intellectually dishonest and morally unethical in their attempt to present a well-balanced social, political, and economic history of the United States. Keep in mind that in addition to telling the American story or presenting content, the history text is charged with developing concepts; helping students see relationships; and developing scholarly and social attitudes as well as data gathering and processing skills. And from the student's point of view, all this must be as relevant and readable as possible.

Allow me to elaborate based on my personal experience. As a social studies consultant and former teacher, I had serious reservations about some of the material being used to teach junior high American history. For example, I was concerned about the schism among history teachers between an inquiry or source materials approach and a more expository or narrative style; between those who favored a conceptual focus and those who believed strongly in "one-damn-thing-after-another." When asked by a publisher how I would do an American history text, I had some definite ideas.

As a coauthor of *America! America!*,[2] I teamed up with two noted social studies educators, JoAnne Buggey and Fred Risinger, and an accomplished historian, Gerry Danzer. In a series of planning meetings we agreed on an outline for a junior high American history text that would have a balance of social, economic, and political history; make use of narrative and source materials; and provide a comprehensive view of the American experience. We talked at length about our intended audience, junior high school students—how they learn, how American history can become meaningful to them in an intellectually honest fashion, and what works in the classroom. After we divided the labor, we reviewed and reacted to one another's manuscripts. True, an editor kept things moving, but so does the editor of any publication.

Our depictions of women and minorities were not a response to pressure from the public or the publisher as FitzGerald charges, but an honest feeling that any other approach would be unconscionable. No editor directed us to include or reduce anything. At times we did have difficult choices to make in order to stay within the page limits of the book. We realized that our work was reviewed carefully for historical accuracy, standard practice for any publication. We were sensitive to the general reading level of our intended audience and occasionally we made adjustments in the selection of some

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Barth so believably describes in *Run School Run* because the former principal draws from the wealth of his own experiences. His well organized account of current issues in education is as readable as a story, yet as informative as a textbook.

Barth presents a design for solving problems created by a diversity of values and needs of today's society—a design that will reduce the friction of running a school while increasing its productivity. Principals particularly can make good use of the common sense approach that Barth has tested so successfully.

Available from Harvard University Press for $16.50.

Educating The Worker-Citizen: The Social, Economic, and Political Foundations of Education.

Joel Spring.
New York:
Longman, 1980.

—Reviewed by Richard Diem, The University of Texas, San Antonio, Texas.

Historical perspectives of American education often become simple one dimensional treatises that do not relate societal, economic, and political factors in a cohesive manner. This is not true of Joel Spring's latest effort. He joins together all of these factors in describing the relationship between public education and its oft-mentioned goal of equality of educational opportunity.

Questions about the nature of our educational processes are raised throughout this work in a manner that suggests more issues that need more thought and fewer pat answers. Among these are the financing of public education, the nature, direction, and infrastructure of the American educational research community, and a dissection of the role of the professional administrator.

Available from Longman for $8.95.

Values, Curriculum, and the Elementary School.

Alexander Frazier.
Boston, Massachusetts:
Houghton Mifflin Company, 1980.

—Reviewed by William R. Martin, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia.

I choose; I prize; I act with regard to my valuing this entry in the library of Humanistic Education.

You may also after you set your priorities to read the author's analysis of the current state of knowledge about valuing. You may when you consider choosing for your professional efforts those values "most important" in the education of children. You may when you weigh the discussion of three areas presented as crucial to a values oriented curriculum: the world of basic skills, the cultural heritage, the moral-ethical-political realm. You may when you evaluate with the author some of the problems in your behaving to bring about fully functioning value-centered schools.

For me, for instance, I write this review using the language of valuing. For you, you may better help children learn, themselves, to value—which Frazier concludes is what school ought to be all about.

Available from Houghton Mifflin for $8.95.

Educational Futures I: Imagining and Inventing. Educational Futures II: Options and Alternatives. Educational Futures III: Change and Reality. Educational Futures IV: Updating and Overlapping.

Don E. Glines.
Millville, Minnesota:
Anvil Press, 1980.

—Reviewed by Phil Vik, University of South Dakota, Vermillion, South Dakota.

Future Shock! Culture Shock! Education Shock! The author has compacted his views, and those of many other futurists, toward creating a visionary futurism in education into four volumes, as well as pinpointing the necessity of planning in today's schools for the changes of tomorrow.

The prologues to each volume entice the reader to gaze into a crystal ball and match a personal scenario of the future with those of many writers in the field. Although the books explain the implications of trends such as the "electronics revolution" and "life support systems," the author never loses sight of the importance of "humanness" in education. Book I describes the global and societal conditions facing people in the next ten decades. Book II discusses the reasons for changing current school systems. Book III provides the story of the innovative Wilson Campus School. Book IV serves as a bridge from the previous three to Book V which has not been published.

Available from Anvil Press, Box 37, Millville, MN 55957, for $26.

Solving Discipline Problems: Strategies for Classroom Teachers.

Charles H. Wolfgang and
Carl D. Glickman.
Boston, Massachusetts:
Allyn and Bacon, Incorporated, 1980.

—Reviewed by Thomas McDaniel, Converse College, Spartanburg, South Carolina.

Behavior mod? TET? Reality Therapy? Punishment? What approach should a teacher use to solve discipline problems? The authors of this compact yet comprehensive text say: "Our position is that teachers today need *all* of the techniques available in working with diverse populations of students, and that by combining and using the elements of each approach, a teacher can truly become more effective." What's more, the authors show teachers how to translate various theories of discipline into practical strategies that promote good pupil-teacher relations.

Teachers, supervisors, and teacher educators will find this integrated synthesis of major discipline theories and strategies readable and useful.

Available from Allyn and Bacon for $16.95.

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of our readings. We strove to make the text engaging and readable, not only in terms of its literary appeal but also in terms of the ability of our readers.

Frances FitzGerald's criticisms may cause schools to consider their rationales for teaching history and for selecting American history materials. Not all textbooks are the same. Social studies departments really have choices to make. They should choose wisely, taking into account what FitzGerald has charged but also what they know about teaching and learning. ■

[1] Frances FitzGerald, *America Revised* (Boston: Little, Brown/Atlantic Monthly, 1979).

[2] L. JoAnne Buggey and others, *America! America!* (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1980, 1977).

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