

The Curriculum Commentator

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Helping Students Achieve Social and Economic Competence

Each month this column, written by a member of the Association, will be concerned with curriculum development: recent trends, issues, conferences, publications, experimental studies, and learning materials. This month's contributor is Helen Storen, Department of Education, Queens College, Flushing, New York.

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT curriculum change in the past twenty years has been the increased emphasis on social learnings. It took a depression to make us aware of our social and economic illiteracy and of the need to dedicate ourselves to social education as a major goal of the elementary and secondary schools. Although some progress had been made in the 20's in developing social studies courses which were functional, it was in the early 30's that we began, almost frenetically, to patch and piece our courses of study, and, in some cases, to start from scratch to plan a total curriculum geared to the development of social competence.

Intergroup Relations

Perhaps the most fundamental and comprehensive job has been done in that area of social living which we call intercultural or intergroup relations. Let's admit that we began naively, believing that a unit on *The Negro* or *The Contributions of the Immigrant to American Culture* would banish prejudice. But each year's research and experimentation have deepened our insights regarding the ways in which attitudes are formed and changed. More wisely now we draw upon the findings of psychiatry, psychology, and anthropology. More humbly we make no absolute claims for any one approach to improving intergroup relations. We know we are just beginning to find the answers. Otto Klinberg, describing the "UNESCO Tension Studies," at the annual meeting of the National

Council for the Social Studies, said that we have yet to determine how, why, and in what situations one approach is more effective than others. The newer publications for teachers stress myriad approaches: individual and group guidance and therapy; careful planning of school activities to prevent cliques from developing along racial, religious, or ethnic lines; visits to other schools and opportunity for joint projects; as well as curriculum accents which stress comprehensive factual information about various groups, and literature which deals with intergroup problems.

The wide variety of approaches to intercultural education is well illustrated in a new type resource unit entitled *Democracy Demands It* by William Van Til and others. (Published for The Bureau for Intercultural Education by Harpers, 1950, \$1.50, paper cover \$1.00) Two new publications of the National Council for the Social Studies are also worthwhile additions to the growing materials in this field. *Improving Human Relations* is an anthology of articles previously published by the Council in their yearbooks and their journal, *Social Education*. Articles describing curriculum experiments, research in group dynamics, and community projects are included. The other bulletin is a resource unit entitled *America's Stake in Human Rights*. It will be particularly helpful to teachers because of its excellent lists of reference materials and visual aids organized around specific problems of civil rights.

Although our major attention has been given to intercultural relationships within our own country, the recent war and the efforts to build "one world" have had considerable influence on selection of curriculum experiences and upon publications of materials. Countless books and pamphlets for both teachers and students are available from the *Information Service* of various countries, the United Nations, and numerous educational organizations.

Economic Understanding

An aspect of social living which has received less attention is the economic area. The fact that the study of economics has been confined chiefly to the college level may be responsible for the inability of the general public to have creative ideas regarding solutions to our complex economic problems. A desire to improve the general welfare will remain on the wishful thinking level if we do not all develop a keener understanding of the economic arrangements that are necessary to bring it about.

With the purpose of helping teachers prepare themselves to make functional economics an integral part of the curriculum, the Joint Council on Economic Education was organized in February, 1949. Financed chiefly by the Committee for Economic Development, the Council now operates as a service agency to schools. During the past summer, workshops for teachers were held at the University of Minnesota, Michigan State, and New York University. Materials developed by these groups as well as information regarding future workshops and consultant service may be obtained by writing Derwood Baker, Director, 25 Press Bldg., New York University.

Meeting Opposition

All of these efforts are encouraging signs that we are serious about giving education a truly social focus. Therefore, it is disheartening to note that since the war there has been evidence of concerted attempts to hamper our progress. Certain community groups and some national organizations are attempting to prevent the

February 1950

development of social and economic literacy by suggesting that schools prohibit discussion of controversial issues and restrict materials of instruction to books which conform to *their* ideas of "patriotism." (Often the fear that the schools are not educating for democracy arises from an ignorance of the purposes of the newer methods of education which are consciously designed to promote democratic processes.)

In dealing with this problem, efforts should be made to form committees of educators and laymen including the opposing groups. The statement setting forth criteria for community evaluation of instructional material, developed by a joint committee of the Department of Instruction and the American Legion of Michigan, seems to be on the right track. The statement distinguishes between selection of textbooks and source material, stating that any document is admissible to a learning situation providing it contributes to the achievement of the purpose of the course, and providing the students have access to material on both sides of a controversial question. The criteria suggested for selection of textbooks are sound educationally in every respect. (Those interested in obtaining a copy of the bulletin should write the American Legion 602, Barlum Towers, Detroit 26, Mich.)

Also heartening was the action in December of the Board of Education in Scarsdale, N.Y. With the support of numerous lay groups, the Board turned down a proposal to allow a self-appointed committee to censor textbooks and library materials. The Board stated that "protection against subversive influences can best be achieved by vigorous teaching rather than negative methods of repressive censorship." To this we say "Hear, Hear!"

NEW MATERIALS FOR STUDENTS

TEEN-AGE PROBLEMS. Materials to help teen-agers obtain better insight into their personal, social, and economic problems is meagre indeed. It is no wonder that teachers and students throughout the country have welcomed so heartily the

publications of the *Life Adjustment Booklets*.

Written by outstanding authorities such as the eminent psychiatrist, William Menninger, and the well-known economist, Sylvia Porter, the booklets deal with practically all the common concerns of youth. (See list below). Unlike many books for adolescents, these pamphlets do not patronize the reader but discuss problems with considerable respect for the intelligence of boys and girls. Science Research Associates, publisher of the pamphlets, also provides a Guidance Service to schools which includes Instructor's Guides, News Letters, Posters, and other materials as well as one new Life Adjustment booklet each month. Available from the same source is the S.R.A. Youth Inventory, a check list of 298 questions to help teachers and counselors identify the problems that young people say worry them most. Write for complete catalogue.

LIFE ADJUSTMENT BOOKLETS

(Science Research Associates, 228 Wabash Ave., Chicago 4, Ill., 48 pp. each)

Dating Days—Lester Kirkendall

Getting Along with Others—Helen Schacter

How to Get the Job—Mitchell Dresse

How to Live with Parents—Gladys Jenkins and Joy Neuman

Should You Go to College?—W. Lloyd Warner and Robert Havighurst

Study Your Way Through School—C. d'A Gerken

Understanding Sex—Lester Kirkendall

Understanding Yourself—William Menninger

What Good Is High School?—E. F. Lindquist, Lauren A. Van Dyke, John R. Yale

Discovering Your Real Interests—Fredrick Kuder

Why Stay in School?—Florence Taylor

Work Experience—Thomas E. Christiansen

You and Your Mental Abilities—Lorraine Bouthilet, Katherine Byrne

Your Personality and Your Job—Paul Chapman

Growing Up Socially—Ellis Weitzman
Money and You—J. K. Lasser and Sylvia Porter

(Single copies 60 cents. Fifteen or more copies 50 cents. One hundred or more 35 cents. Instructors Guide & Poster free with 15 or more copies.)

HOW TO BE HAPPY THOUGH YOUNG by George Lawton. (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1949, 300 pp., \$3.00) is a collection of articles published in *Scholastic* magazine during the past decade in response to young people's questions about themselves and their relationship to others. Questions relating to sex, friends, family, school, and vocations are answered frankly by Dr. Lawton, a practicing psychologist, out of his long experience in counselling adolescents. Only one caution should go with such a book: students must be helped to see that although they may identify themselves with the students asking the questions, each person's problem has unique ramifications. They should, therefore, not accept Dr. Lawton's advice to Mary Q. as necessarily the right solutions to their problems.

AMERICAN LIFE

Written for young southerners, *Exploring the South* by Rupert B. Vance, John J. Ivy, and Marjorie M. Bond (New York: Van Rees Press, 1949, 404 pp., \$3.50), emphasizes not only the needs of the South today but its potentialities. Recent achievements in conserving and developing natural resources and building up new industries are stressed. This is one of the few books written for the South that mentions some facts of segregated life. Without imposing upon children a feeling of guilt for conditions not of their making, the authors frequently point to the need for *teamwork* between negroes and whites if the South is to become a better place in which to live. There is no reason why the use of this book should be restricted to southern schools; it would assuredly help northern students to a better understanding of the South.

Nina Brown Baker in *Ten American*

Cities (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1949, 225 pp., \$2.50) succeeds in giving students a much more interesting impression of life in our great cities than does the traditional social studies book. The events described are lively and often humorous. However, the author's selection of events might have included more of the less familiar incidents and fewer of those which are well known to most elementary school students. For example, in the story of Chicago, less time could have been devoted to the famous fire and more to events like the Hay Market riot.

For younger children Lois Lenski's regional stories are among the best. Her latest, *Cotton in My Sock* (New York: Lippincott, 1949, 191 pp., \$2.50) was written as the result of her experiences with the cotton-picking children in Arkansas.

The deplorable social and economic conditions of the Spanish Canyon dwellers in New Mexico are vividly portrayed in Florence Crandall Means' story, *The House Under the Hill* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1949, 184 pp., \$2.50). The teen-age heroine solves her own problems by helping her neighbors obtain a health clinic and other needed services.

Something Old, Something New (New York: William R. Scott, Inc., 1949, 192 pp., \$2.50) is a collection of nine of Dorothy Canfield's best stories of real Americans yesterday and today. The stories deal with problems of human relations that have a timeless quality.

True understanding of a region can often be achieved through a knowledge of folklore as well as from straight historical facts. In trying to help students understand the whys of human behavior, we have often ignored the local legends. N. Jagerdorf in *UpState DownState, Folk Stories of the Middle Atlantic States* (New York: The Vanguard Press, Inc., 1949, 299 pp., \$2.75) gives us a delightful collection of such stories for children in the upper grades or junior high school.

TWO BIOGRAPHIES. Gollomb, Joseph, *Albert Schweitzer: Genius in the Jungle*, (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1949,

249 pp., \$2.50). This is the first biography of Albert Schweitzer—doctor, philosopher, musician—written particularly for young people. As the story unfolds, the drama of Schweitzer's struggle against the poverty and sickness of the natives in equatorial Africa is as exciting as it is inspiring. This book makes the reader want to know more about the man whose expressed and lived creed is "reverence for life."

Masani, Shakuntala, *Nehru's Story* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949, 87 pp., \$2.50) Another biography of a man who has completely devoted his life to bettering the conditions of others. Written first for boys and girls of India, the author has now revised it for American children. Suitable for middle grades.

MARCH OF TIME FILM

Fight for Better Schools tells the story of Arlington County, Virginia, in their efforts to revitalize their schools. It is billed as dramatic, timely, important, an "A-B-C lesson in how to start and carry on a campaign to get better schools."

NEW MATERIALS FOR TEACHERS

Portfolio of Teaching Techniques. (New London, Conn.: Education Washington Dispatch, 31 pp., .75) A summary of new facts and techniques relating to group dynamics. For the classroom teacher. 75 cents.

Norton, Edith N., *Parent Education in the Nursery School*. (Washington, D.C.: Association for Childhood Education, 1949, .50) We are in the habit of expecting excellent material from ACE. Here is another fine pamphlet.

What Popular Magazines Say About Education, 1946-1948. William Van Til and Evelyn Luecking. (University of Illinois Bulletin, College of Education, Urbana, Ill., 1949). The results of a study of articles on education in popular magazines show that such articles predominantly favor newer trends in education as well as better salaries for teachers.

Teachers and Behavior Problems, by E. K. Wickman, The Commonwealth Fund, 41 East 57 Street, New York, N. Y.

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