

The Curriculum Commentator

Column Editor: Prudence Bostwick
Contributor: Harold Alberty

PROGRESS IN CURRICULUM REORGANIZATION

AT the end of World War II, there was considerable optimism in educational circles with respect to the probability of rather widespread curriculum reorganization in the high schools. The Eight-Year Study had shown rather conclusively that conventional curriculum patterns had little to do with college success and that a basic reorganization might result in vitalizing the program. In 1944 the Educational Policies Commission in cooperation with the National Association of Secondary School Principals issued and distributed widely *Education for All American Youth*. This publication pointed the way to a common-sense reorganization in terms of a larger block of time in which many areas of subject matter might be utilized in meeting the "imperative needs of youth."

The U. S. Office of Education has recently issued a pamphlet entitled, *Core Curriculum in Public High Schools, An Inquiry into Practices, 1949* (Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D. C. 15 cents), which examines the present state of this program. The author, Grace S. Wright, estimates that out of approximately 24,000 public high schools, 833 have programs which meet in some degree the liberal definition. Only two restrictions were specified: courses must "involve the combination of two or more class periods of subjects which ordinarily would be taught separately," and they must "cut across large areas of the curriculum." In other words, all courses were

included which "met for at least six periods a week and combined subjects which cut across major areas of the curriculum." This liberal element apparently represents only three and one-half per cent of all the public high schools of the United States. A further discouraging fact disclosed by the study is that most of the reorganized programs are in junior high schools and involve little more than putting subjects together.

From the data presented, we must conclude that most high schools are not moving toward basic reorganization of general education. Undoubtedly new subjects are being added and old ones revamped, but the basic structure remains very much the same as it existed before World War II—indeed, before World War I.

It is easy to enumerate many "blocks" to basic curriculum reorganization. Failure of teacher-education institutions to prepare teachers adequately, adverse attitudes of parents, dearth of materials and lack of leadership in the principal's office have all been mentioned prominently and each one presents a serious problem. However, the key to a dynamic program of curriculum reorganization may be designated as *leadership*. When the principal is an effective leader all the other blocks tend to disappear. In-service education programs help teachers solve instructional problems. Teachers, like students, learn through *doing*.

Studies indicate that parents want for their children the kinds of values which

are claimed for core programs, and that parents will support changes when they cooperate actively in working with professional groups. Materials of instruction have not always been readily available but are now becoming more plentiful. When the teacher finds it possible to draw upon and use current publications, the community and the rich storehouse of visual aids, much that is worth while can be accomplished.

Leadership Aids

Instructional Supervision, by William T. Melchior (D. C. Heath and Company, Boston, 1950) contains a wealth of descriptions of actual situations in which supervision is fulfilling a leadership function. Each area of supervision is well treated in this thorough and systematic work. Resources readily available to supervisors and the techniques by which they can be brought to bear upon curriculum change are represented in this volume. Ample bibliographical references are given also.

Community Leadership (American Association of School Administrators, 1201 Sixteenth St., N.W., Washington 6, D. C., August 1950, 25 cents) is a valuable pamphlet for school administrators. It tells how the administrator can work with various community groups. Another pamphlet, *County Educational Leadership* (Department of Rural Education, 1201 Sixteenth St., N. W., Washington 6, D. C., 50 cents), prepared by C. O. Fitzwater, analyzes the job of the county superintendent and the resources which he may well use in improving the schools.

Good Schools Don't Just Happen (distributed by Science Research Associates, 228 South Wabash Ave., Chicago 4, Ill., single copies free, less than 100 copies 10 cents each, 100 or more copies 5½ cents per copy) was prepared for

the Commission on Life Adjustment Education for Youth by staff members of the U. S. Office of Education with the assistance of a lay advisory group. This pamphlet was produced in response to requests by leaders who wish to use life adjustment education materials in working with their organizations. It discusses goals of a good school and problems which must be solved by school and community if life adjustment needs of their youth are to be met more satisfactorily. An excellent bibliography is given also.

Curriculum reorganization is inseparably tied up with the nature of the individual and the learning process. Without a sound theory of learning, the curriculum is bound to look like a patchwork quilt. Timely, therefore, is *Educational Psychology*, by Lawrence E. Cole and William F. Bruce (World Book Company, Yonkers-on-Hudson, New York, 1950). This large volume (768 pages) is one of the New World Education series. According to the editorial board, this book is based upon the premise that "today enough is known of our culture, of man and his behavior, and of the first principles of conduct to provide the makings of a great education" (p. vi). The authors deal fairly and comprehensively with all the theories of human behavior but find Gestalt theory most congenial to a democratic frame of reference. Rightly they contend that philosophy and psychology cannot be divorced. Consistently the authors drive toward a psychology which will help the teacher to implement the "style of life" which we call democratic. The goal is development of "the mature person" in such a culture. Part 4, which deals with "putting psychology to work in the schools," is especially suggestive.

Democratic Teaching in Secondary Schools, by Lindley J. Stiles and Mattie

F. Dorsey (J. B. Lippincott Company, Chicago, 1950), takes essentially the same basic point of view as that developed by Cole and Bruce but deals extensively with all the various facets of instructional procedures. The approach to problems is practical, though theory is not neglected. Throughout the book are actual illustrations from the field. Perhaps the most suggestive section is that treating group dynamics. Successive chapters deal with "Establishing Group Rapport," "Teacher-Student Sharing," "Examples of Teacher-Student Sharing," and "Developing Group Thinking and Action." These chapters draw heavily upon recent research in the field of group process and show effectively the classroom implications of this research. Excellent bibliographies are included.

The curriculum maker will certainly want to examine *Human Relations in Curriculum Change*, selected readings with special emphasis on group development, Bulletin No. 7, 1949, Illinois Secondary School Curriculum Program. (It may be obtained from Vernon L. Nickell, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Springfield, Ill.) This bulletin, prepared by Kenneth D. Benne and Bozidar Muntyan, includes the gist of the writings in the field. Commentaries on the readings by the authors are especially helpful. This bulletin should be a "must" for curriculum workers.

In striking contrast to the other contributions presented in this column is *Modern Educational Practice*, A Handbook for Teachers (McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York, 1950). The authors, Paul R. Mort and William S. Vincent, present very little formal educational theory, but are content to organize for the reader, illustrations of "modern educational practice" drawn from thousands of classrooms. The au-

thors make no claim of excellence for these practices. They are for the most part taken directly from teachers' descriptions or reports from observers. Criterion for inclusion of a given description seems to have been the "workableness" of the practice. In a section on "how to use this book," the authors point out that "the good school is not a hodge-podge of practices such as those described in this book."

Instructional Materials

Readings for the Atomic Age, edited by M. David Hoffman (Globe Book Company, New York, 1950) is intended to give teachers and students alike some realization of the significance of atomic energy for peoples of the world. Selections from the writings of such outstanding authorities as Lilienthal, Oppenheimer, Bush and Einstein are included. "The dramatic impact of the bomb" is given extensive treatment. The vocabulary is within the range of high school students.

United States Civil Defense (Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D. C., 1950, 25 cents) is a report prepared by the National Security Resources Board. It "provides an outline of the organization and techniques which should be developed by the state and local communities on which rest the primary responsibility for civil defense."

What About Communism? is Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 164, 1950 (available through Public Affairs Committee, Inc., 22 Thirty-Eighth St., New York, 20 cents). Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., has performed an excellent service in presenting this readable discussion. He presents all sides of each issue. The vocabulary is considered to be not too difficult for advanced high school students.—*Harold Alberty*, Ohio State University, Columbus.

Copyright © 1951 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.