

## Significant Books in Review

Column Editor: Ruth Streitz

▶ Johnson, B. Lamar. *General Education in Action*, Washington, D. C.: American Council on Education, 1952, 409p.

One of the most rapidly developing trends in the public school system of America is that toward the junior college. *General Education in Action* is the report of a 14-month study of general education in the junior colleges of California. The book holds intrinsic value for future progress of the general education movement and clearly points up the importance of this phase of education in the present world crisis. It does a very effective job of showing the relationship between theory and practice in realizing the objectives of general education.

### Goals of General Education

The programs of the public junior colleges of California were found to have twelve specific objectives. While all the colleges included in the study have not implemented all these aims in their daily programs, the list will serve as guidelines in their future development and will prove useful to all institutions of higher education throughout America. These identified goals "constitute a seamless web of human development," no single goal being mutually exclusive of the others. For example, personal and social adjustment are attained through: (1) an understanding of the physical world and our cultural heritage, (2) possession of sound moral and spiritual values, (3) effective communication skills (both words and numbers) and

(4) creative activity. Personal and social adjustment, in turn, contribute to happy home and family life, to effective citizenship, to vocational success and to healthful living. Similarly, the capacity for critical thinking is vital to exercising the privileges and responsibilities of democratic citizenship. General education, then, is the process of achieving the above mentioned goals.

### Approaches to General Education

General education is concerned with the problems all men have in common and attempts to develop well-rounded individuals by re-establishing a proper balance between "general" and "specialized" studies. This does not claim that there is a "best type" of general education for all, but that each institution should adapt its offerings to the needs of its own students. This report shows great diversity of both content and method in the general education programs of the colleges included in the study.

After considering various patterns of approaches, the author lists the following characteristics of a program of general education:

- (1) The general education program should aim to educate the total personality.
- (2) The general education program should be planned for all students.
- (3) General education must permeate the total college curriculum.
- (4) Particularly recommended in this study is a functional approach to general education which builds courses

and programs directly on the basis of the needs and characteristics of students and of society.

(5) The general education program should include both required and recommended courses and other experiences.

Ten out of seventeen chapters of the report present in considerable detail varied but specific examples of the application of the above practices.

One of the most valuable sections of the book sets forth recommendations for specific lines of development that appear vital not only to California junior colleges but also to every institution concerned with general education programs. These recommendations include: "the need for giving increased attention to the special interests, goals, and characteristics of women; the importance of searching out student talents and abilities of all types and developing them to the utmost; the values inherent in increased attention to planning and administration of extra-class activities; the opportunities which the library provides for strengthening the general education program; the importance of breaking down departmental barriers as functional courses are built; and the need for college-wide coordination of activities in such areas as communications and family life."

*General Education in Action* demands the attention of all concerned with higher education in America. —James T. Moore, Jr., assistant professor of education, Univ. of Illinois.

► National Council of Teachers of English. *The English Language Arts*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1952, 501p.

*The English Language Arts* presents in a straightforward, non-technical manner, a clear interpretation of the

new approach to the teaching of the communicative arts. Prepared by the Curriculum Commission of the National Council of Teachers of English this volume may well serve as a guide for both curriculum committees and individual teachers in developing an articulated program of English applicable to all levels of instruction.

Beginning with a discussion of underlying philosophy the book presents a framework for planning a program based on this philosophy. Other parts of the volume describe programs at the various instructional levels, discuss problems faced by curriculum-makers and suggest methods of evaluating outcomes of instruction.

### **An Articulated Program**

This book faces squarely the questions which arise in planning a curriculum for the English Language Arts: Should the skills of language communication be allocated to successive grades? Are there certain essentials that should be mastered in each grade? If so, what are these essentials? Should pupils who fail to master them be retained until they have met the standards?

In answer to such questions the Commission presents a plan for articulation which is based on research and study—a plan based on the continuity of growth *rather* than on grade standards. Growth in the language arts follows "certain sequential patterns and continuities." To try to help a student to begin new development at some more advanced point "where he is supposed to be" usually results in a waste of the teacher's time and effort as well as in discouragement for the student. "Minimum essentials, objective standards, and non-promotion imply a uniformity of ability and attainment which does not exist among human beings."

Instead of arbitrary standards the Commission indicates the need for descriptions of systematic sequences in language learning which apply to all pupils. It is hoped that subsequent volumes of this series will provide descriptions of systematic sequences of growth in language.

The charts, included in Chapter IV, provide a framework for building a curriculum based on the continuity of growth. These charts offer valuable guidance to curriculum committees, not only in the language arts but in other areas as well.

### Curriculum Issues

Problems faced in determining the relationship of the English curriculum to the total school program are discussed. Programs in speech, writing, literature and listening are analyzed. Modern views of reading, grammar and linguistics are presented. The discussions are based on the combined criteria of "individual and societal need" and scientific data regarding the nature of learning. Illustrative material is used as a means of indicating steps and varied procedures in achieving this growth in the language arts.

The Commission indicates clearly that instruction based on continuity in the sense of haphazard or opportunistic teaching. Neither is it implied that systematic teaching of skills implies teaching in isolation. "When skills are learned in relation to the 'incident,' i.e., the situation calling for genuine communications, they are likely to be well learned." The term "incidental" is then taken to mean "instrumental" and becomes a means of purposeful learning.—*Sarah Lou Hammond*, School of Education, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida.

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