

Significant Books in Review

Column Editor: George W. Denemark
Contributor: Abraham Shumsky

Education for a New Morality. By Agnes E. Meyer. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957.

In the brief span of 91 pages Mrs. Meyer presents the most insightful, provocative identification of the central issues of contemporary society and of education that this reviewer has read in the past decade. *Education for a New Morality* is the latest volume in the Kappa Delta Pi Lecture Series—a series which includes such well known statements as George Counts' *Education and the Promise of America*, Boyd Bode's *Democracy as a Way of Life*, and John Dewey's *Experience and Education*. Mrs. Meyer's book is a worthy companion volume to these and other writings of some of our most distinguished American educators.

Education for a New Morality has as its central thesis the idea that what contemporary society needs is a new concept of science as the most successful organ of social progress—a concept that is “neither materialistic nor theological but one that is profoundly democratic and profoundly humane.” With simple clarity and force Mrs. Meyer points out that we live in a new world, a world transformed by a second industrial revolution. To cope with this new world, she holds that we need new minds, minds that can “foresee the consequences of these explosive new forces and by careful scientific observation of the connection between cause and effect, begin at long last to guide our human destiny.”

In a world in which coherence and

unity are increasingly difficult to establish in the experiences of men, Mrs. Meyer presents a point of view that is notable because of its unifying qualities. In a world which encourages compartmentalization of thinking, a world in which human equality can be espoused on the one hand while discrimination against racial and religious groups is conducted on the other, a world in which certain moral values seem peculiarly and tragically restricted to special days of the week, this volume's attempt to present a point of view that gives the broad outlines of both an educational and a general philosophy to meet the demands of our times is of special significance.

Mrs. Meyer affirms John Dewey's idea that the “systematic deliberate use of scientific method for the promotion of social well being and a free creative culture is the greatest problem which civilization has ever had to face. It is without exaggeration the most serious and profound issue of contemporary life.” At this and many other points throughout the volume, Mrs. Meyer's commitment to an experimentalist, pragmatic philosophy as exemplified by John Dewey's writings is most apparent.

Mrs. Meyer is at her best in pointing out the absurdity of the separation between the humanists and scientists in modern life. It is her view that the false “either-or” between science and humanism has resulted in many of us being “split personalities torn between conflicting thoughts and emotions.” It is her

thesis that we must effect a union of knowledge with the nonrational elements of human nature so that "impulse will be guided by reason and reason fired by spontaneity."

To those who would argue that Mrs. Meyer's emphasis on the employment of scientific method in the solution of societal problems is a rosy, ideal one without roots in the reality of our present, frequently nonrational, world there is a clear response to be found in the volume. Mrs. Meyer points out that neither she nor any scientist or scientific philosopher would hold that our world will ever be completely under the control of intelligence, reason and scientific method. This is because the elements of chance, unforeseen events, and the pressures and passions of group life cannot ever be wholly eliminated. It is her view, however, that although "human wisdom, knowledge and intelligence will not

necessarily save us from destruction and ruin . . . they are at least the essential conditions of progress."

Education for a New Morality goes beyond a purely philosophical analysis of modern society's need for a new emphasis on scientific method applied to social problems and for a spirit of humaneness applied to scientific inquiry. The author translates these ideas into their implications for education in a dramatic and forthright manner which should challenge every American educator to look again at what we do and why we do it. Mrs. Meyer suggests no easy compromises or minor remodelings of our educational system. Instead she holds "that subject matter is important only as it opens up new vistas of thought. The learning of this, that, or the other subject is less important than methods of learning that will lead to a desire for more learning. Yet never has our school system

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The Teacher's Role in American Society

Edited by LINDLEY J. STILES, University of Wisconsin

The civic and social no less than the educational role of the teacher is the subject of this analysis by a distinguished group of educators. In light of the recent transitional period of confusion and frustration for the public school teacher, the contributors seek to clarify his altered status, the social forces he confronts in his life and work, the professional problems he faces, and the progress in status gradually being made. They give fresh insight—for teacher and layman alike—into the complexities of the teacher's social and professional relations, conduct as a private person, and responsibilities and special limitations as a citizen. *14th Yearbook of the JOHN DEWEY SOCIETY.* \$4.00

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developed and sticking by them blindly and obstinately. The intelligent alternative . . . is to revise, expand and alter them. The problem of education and of life itself will henceforth be one of continuous readaptation."

The space here available does not permit a review of the very stimulating step-by-step discussion of the introduction of the young child into the discipline of scientific thinking. There is in the span of four short pages a masterful description of continuity and of growing maturity in the experiences of children, experiences which have been deliberately designed to foster a scientific attitude. Educators concerned with problems of articulation between elementary and secondary schools and with a continuous program of instruction can see in these pages the outline of the conception of education which would insure such continuity and articulation because all phases of the school experience of boys and girls were organized around the objective of learning to apply scientific method to a larger and larger circle of social-moral problems.

Another exciting portion of the book is that which attempts to clarify the relationship of modern scientific knowledge to the values of democracy. Particularly stimulating is the support which the author sees science giving to democracy and in turn the dependence of democracy upon the development of a scientific attitude in its citizenry. Throughout the book there is an urgent plea that man more fully awaken to his own potentialities and those of his brothers for transforming the environment in which he lives and for creating a new ideal of man and his capacities for growth. In all this, Mrs. Meyer sees education playing the central role, an education which is dynamic and responsive to the world

been more cluttered with an enormous body of unrelated subject matter, a suffocating atmosphere rather than one that excites curiosity and the creative imagination." She further points out that our youth "must be trained not as in the past for specific occupations, since these occupations may be obsolete by the time they graduate from high school or college. Nor will a return to the good old days of the 'three R's' and the liberal arts prepare them for a world of perpetual change whose far reaching effects nobody can wholly envisage. The stale humanist regurgitations will no longer do. Analysis of past traditions, habits, and morals is essential in order to observe how old principles actually work under totally new conditions and how they must be modified in order to become more effective instruments in meeting new situations. The choice is not between throwing away ideas previously

around it. Without such flexibility in education, Mrs. Meyer warns, "our schools will remain what they always have been—a reflection of a society that has been left behind."

Education for a New Morality represents a stimulating evening's reading which you cannot afford to miss because it is as well a magnificent statement of values that can give new meaning to the daily life and work of each of us.

—Reviewed by GEORGE W. DENEMARK, assistant dean, College of Education, University of Maryland, College Park.

Action Research: A Case Study. By *Hilda Taba and Elizabeth Noel.* Washington, D. C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA, 1957. 58 p.

The project described in this challenging booklet was undertaken because the Yolo County, California,

Schools, wanted to improve their in-service program. Working with teachers individually, the supervisors often felt themselves in a position of "supplying expert answers to unanalyzed problems" and of creating "dependence instead of making teachers self-propelling." Group work was limited to large meetings in which the training constituted "short term undertakings, not developmental."

Realization grew in the system that when planning and communicating stem from a single source—from administration out, when teachers have no part in planning the program, when the emphasis is on materials rather than on teacher growth—the in-service education program has no chance.

The study under review is a thoughtful illustration of the promise of action research as an approach to in-service education. The discussion emphasizes the two interrelated aspects of action

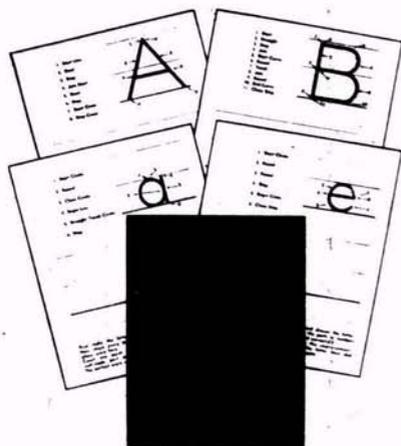
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research: a research methodology and an understanding of the dynamics of teacher re-education. From the very beginning of the study, the reader realizes that the equation of the processes of action with conventional research is somewhat misleading. The basic difference stems from the fact that the teacher is investigating the quality of his own teaching.

The conventional researcher perceives the experimental field as a temporary ground; he raises the question of what will be the impact of the experiment on others rather than on himself. Being "detached" and "objective" the traditional researcher is not threatened by conflicting attitudes. His ego investment in the old way of doing things is not challenged; resistance is not built up and is not expressed in direct or disguised forms.

In contrast, the teacher-researcher

does not see himself as an observer, but rather as a participant. Operating in a group, the teacher does not stand by while things are happening — he is an integral part of the happening. What happens impinges on the action researcher as a person. Researching means that the teacher's ways of teaching, his relations with pupils and subject matter, his field situation are in transition.

The fact that the action researcher plays an involved participant role means that his part as a factor in the situation must be studied. The authors have made an important contribution in this direction. For instance, in discussing the step of problem identification they say:

Different teachers bring to their concerns different dispositions. Some are shy and insecure, which makes it hard for them to accept new perceptions. Other teachers bring to their problems definite and sometimes mistaken convictions.

The conclusion is that "it is as impor-



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tant to determine what blocks the teacher's perspective toward his problem as it is to diagnose the nature of his problems."

Speaking about the step of experimentation, the authors say:

There are psychological hazards in experimentation . . . it always involves a risk. Teachers need to be freed of their fears of making mistakes. . . . They need to feel free to admit what they do not know, to secure help, to ask questions.

Again, the major contribution of this study is the attempt to develop an action research methodology based mainly on two elements: the logic of research and the problems involved in teacher re-education. The major limitation of the study stems from its conciseness and brevity. The feeling is that, of the rich consultative experience the authors had, only part is reported. For instance, questions like the following await description: What is the impact of hypothesis devel-

opment on the teacher's educational philosophy? What are the difficulties involved in movement from a verbal ideology (hypothesis) to an action ideology (implementation of the new curricular innovation)? What happens when the teacher wants to test a hypothesis contrary to the consultant's belief? How can teachers be helped to view their perceptions of action research as an integral part of their attitudes toward the improvement of their work?

To conclude, the educator who believes that curriculum change cannot be realized by remote control and push-button techniques, will find the action research consultation described in this pamphlet promising and rewarding.

—Reviewed by ABRAHAM SHUMSKY, research assistant, Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, N. Y.

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