

Significant Books in Review

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American Education through the Soviet Looking Glass. By George S. Counts. New York: Bureau of Publication, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1951. 48 p. 50¢

At long last, an important number of Americans are rubbing their eyes and taking a second, more puzzled look at the Soviet Union. Like Alice in Lewis Carroll's classic, people are exclaiming, "I can't believe *that!*" Fortunately, too, people are examining Russia more closely than before.

In this powerful pamphlet George S. Counts makes available to the non-Russian-reading audience a definitive Communist portrait of American education. Taking a long, important statement on American education from *Sovietskaia Pedagogika*, which is the authoritative organ of the Soviet Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, he gives a careful translation into English, appending vivid and illuminating corrections in a smaller type face, while adding in 42 places his own comments. The result is that the Russian document, although written to expose rotteness in American education, actually reveals to the critical American reader the dangerous malignancy which is at the heart of Russian education. Consequently, in connection with current comparison of Soviet and American school systems it is a very useful item.

Significantly, the Russian article is entitled, "The School and Pedagogy in the

USA in the Service of Reaction." It has the form of a careful, scholarly treatise. It was obviously based on extensive examination of writings on American education. In some 70 passages, statements about American education are quoted or paraphrased or summarized. Many are dishonestly altered to make the picture ugly. All are adversely critical. To the compliant reader who does not know the real United States, the result must be a devastating portrait of American education and the American way of life.

For example, the Russian writer proclaims that John Dewey "sees and understands" "very well" that

... "democracy" à la America means persecution of workers' organizations, checking on the loyalty of employees in state institutions, race discrimination and the lynching of Negroes, the destruction of the sovereignty of peoples and states, the preparation of war against the USSR and the countries of people's democracy, etc.

The bitterness exhibited on page after page toward Dr. Dewey constitutes an extreme about-face from the position held by Russia not many years earlier, that in the entire world Dewey was the educational thinker most suitable for the Soviet Union to follow!

To prepare by biased selection an indictment of American education is not difficult, considering the flood of American publications that include critical materials about schools, teachers, meth-

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ods, and materials. "Turned loose on the stage," writes N. K. Goncharov, the author of the Russian article,

... are such hardened bison as the 90-year-old John Dewey, former professor at Columbia University, George Counts, Professor at the same University, Dean William McGucken, of the Catholic School of Education in St. Louis, Kilpatrick, Phillips, and others. They all experience an animal fear of the crisis of the capitalist system and strive to find the most skilful and subtle ways of stupefying the toiling masses.

Carefully avoiding the great accomplishments and strong points of American education, and distorting his materials, Goncharov builds an appalling picture from the shortcomings. To the uninformed readers in Communist or backward countries, American education obviously is ruled by a horrible widespread conspiracy that enslaves and degrades not only the pupils, but also the teachers

and the rest of the American "toiling masses." Yet to mature American educators, the article could hardly be further from the truth. In short, it is a fraud.

Indeed, various topsy-turvy allegations remind the reader of Orwell's 1984. Like the government's "double-speak," in that work, the Russian statements are peculiar, revealing inversions of the truth. It seems as if the nailed-shut windows of the Communist nations have a curious mirror-like quality, resembling the one-way-vision windows of psychological laboratories. The prisoners within, like Goncharov and Khrushchev, in looking out upon the free world, are unwittingly deceived by their own limited frame of reference, and the shortcomings that they see in the world outside are, in fact, a distorted reflection of the shortcomings, defects, and interpretations of Communist society itself, seen in reverse, just as a looking-glass reverses right and left.

Thus the Russians hopelessly confuse political right and left, and educational right and left, abroad. One example is Dewey's "understanding" of democracy, quoted above. Actually, with very little transposition and interpretation the "understanding" attributed to Dr. Dewey can be seen as a statement of *Communist* practice, of "people's democracy," rather than American "democracy."

Other similar inversions in Goncharov's article are these: "Militarism has swept thru the entire educational system of the USA." "At the present time [1949] the persecution of progressive teachers and leaders of public education is increasing more and more." "Materials of instruction are falsified and employed to instill in the pupils the idea of the unique historic mission of the USA." "The authors of the report hypocritically assert that it is imperative to preserve the peace." In such ways the pot calls the

kettle black. The mote seen in the eye of another is but the reflection of the mote in the eye of the viewer.

American Education through the Soviet Looking Glass thus provides many anomalies in the form of ironic paradoxes to chew on. A basic problem to the thoughtful reader is whether Goncharov, a leading USSR textbook-writer on Soviet education, deliberately distorted his materials, or instead relied on overzealous assistants who vied for favor by furnishing him with juicier morsels from the literature than the original warranted. The ultimate result of either situation, if it characterizes Russian leadership generally, can be guessed at.

The reviewer, who discusses this pamphlet with each of his classes, knows of no more vivid brief introduction to the Soviet system of social science research and distortion. With Counts' notes, the document is a gem. Indeed, George

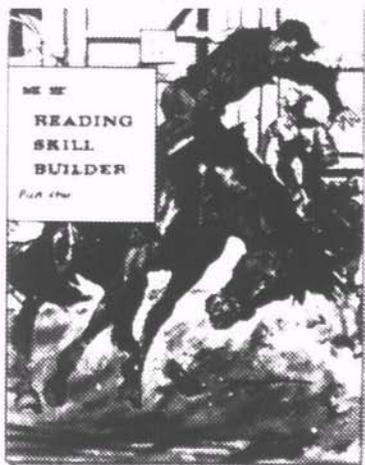
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Counts, out of his 40-year study of Communism and Russia, has presented American educators with a timely, invaluable, and challenging treatise that very few if any other persons could produce.

—Reviewed by HUBERT PARK BECK, associate professor of education, The City College, New York, N. Y.

Science for the Elementary School Teacher. By *Gerald S. Craig*. New York: Ginn and Company, 1958. 894 p. \$6.75.

This volume is designed as a source book for elementary teachers. It does not assume a background in science but rather represents an effort to present basic information from the fields of science and teaching suggestions both in one text. In this reviewer's opinion, the book succeeds admirably in doing this.

The first part of the book explains the relationship of science to children, to society and to the rest of curriculum. Throughout the book it is emphasized that science is a tool to improve the lives of people and cannot become, in itself, an end of instruction. Science is defined as the interpretation of the universe, an activity that begins almost at birth and is continuous throughout life. The content and activities associated with the teaching of science become, therefore, an effort to improve and refine this interpretation.

Children attempt to relate their experiences to problems and to new experiences. It becomes important, therefore, to realize that science teaching involves both the doing and the studying or contemplating about what has been done. Since scientific truth is held to be relative, the content of science involves better interpretation and a greater variety of experience rather than the accumula-

tion of facts which may be disproven. Science teaching is concerned with the development of certain attitudes and traits such as openmindedness, critical-mindedness, desire for accuracy and willingness to change ideas. The content of elementary science, then, becomes the development of this type of intellectual skill and behavior rather than "watered down" or simplified notions relating to physics or chemistry.

The latter part of this section presents in some detail suggestions for the teaching of science. The teacher is seen as one who guides, directs, suggests and organizes so that the learner himself is able to more intelligently arrive at answers to problems. The rote memorization of names, labels and facts denies to elementary science its basic purpose.

The three middle sections of the book present a clear and concise description of the "content" of science relating to "The Earth and the Universe," "The Life of the Earth" and "The Energy of the Universe." The vocabulary used in this section is greatly simplified, yet the ideas do not appear distorted or incomplete. The organization of the content reveals great insight into the types of questions children commonly ask and the explanations are clearly stated. Included in these sections are numerous suggestions for experiences which may be utilized to help children discover explanations for phenomena which they do not understand. The illustrations are numerous and aid greatly in improving the readability of this section.

The final section of the book is devoted to an overview of the scope, continuity and evaluation of elementary science. The major portion is devoted to suggestions for the grade levels up to eighth grade and includes a guide as to where the answers or related content may be

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found. In the opinion of this reviewer, the placement of many of the topics appears quite arbitrary and without particular logic. This listing of "content" by grade level seems to lack harmony with the first section of the book and may indeed negate the earlier position of the author. The section on evaluation is also quite incomplete. It contains almost no reference to the development of intellectual skills described in the first section of the book but rather settles for specific questions about how the children are behaving. Great emphasis is given to the statement that "evaluation is an integral part of teaching."

This book, in my opinion, constitutes a significant contribution to the teaching

of science in the elementary school. The first section of the book does an outstanding job of relating science to the development of children and their efforts to interpret their environment. The middle three sections present a comprehensive overview of the content of science without resorting to abstract and technical terms. The final section presents suggestions for grade level placements of topics and suggestions for evaluation. The author succeeded in one book the information needed for teaching science in the elementary school.

—Reviewed by *JESSE GARRISON*, assistant professor of education, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb.

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