

YOOBHA SONGSIRI
SIGRID GAASKJENN
MASAKO SHOJI
FUAT BAYMUR
KYUNG CHO CHUNG

Educators from Other Lands Look at American Education

One approach to appraisal of our schools is through the eyes of educators from other countries who, as exchange teachers or scholars, have visited and become acquainted with American schools.

A Thailand Observer

HAVING read so much about the pragmatism of American education, I had expected to find a total absence of rote learning and lecturing work. But, to my surprise, when I first walked into an American classroom, I found these techniques in general use. My preconception was shattered. However, after visiting some secondary and elementary schools, I realized that, in fact, the system has been in use and has yielded favorable results, especially in the grade schools.

As far as my own observations have been done, I feel the American classroom system in action has led me to take a far from pessimistic view which is now prevailing over the American education circles. What strikes a foreign observer above everything else is the broad popular basis of education in this country, and the practical lessons in democracy

which its operation provides. It is remarkable how independent the American student is. In the classroom he is expected not to follow blindly what the teacher has said, but to show and bring to his work independent thinking and initiative. Moreover, the widespread use of the elective system and the practical democracy in student government has impressed me favorably. Democratic attitude is what American education achieves.

In my classes, I have been impressed by the lack of a computing competence on the part of students. A few students have shown their high and quick ability in this skill. This occurrence causes me to ponder upon what might be a flaw in the teaching device used in the classrooms the last two decades. I have also been impressed by the minority group of students who show interest and potentiality in science and letters, even though the largest enrollment is in the School of Arts and Science. What is sur-

prising to me is that in my country, Thailand, science and engineering would be the first choice of almost every student. Through my observations of some elementary schools in the United States, however, science has a great appeal to the children. One of my friends, a second grade schoolteacher in Missouri wrote me:

My children at school have become very interested in space travel. They are the same age in 1958 as Columbus was in 1458. Perhaps by 1992 they will be discovering new things, too.

Recently, various causes for the United States' deficiency in scientific training have been alleged among the American educationists. This, I think, was due largely to the launching of Sputnik soon after my arrival here and the current preoccupation with the missile race between the United States and Russia. But, I conclude, as long as the American people can preserve their ancestors' will of giving an equal opportunity in education to every citizen, they should be proud of themselves, since democracy had built up their country.

—Mrs. YOOBHA SONGSIRI, a member of the staff of the College of Education, Thailand, is presently studying at Indiana University under ICA sponsored contract between Indiana University and the Government of Thailand.

A Norwegian Observer

THROUGH a Fulbright-Smith-Mundt scholarship given me in 1954-55 I had the fine opportunity of visiting American schools—especially elementary ones—and learning to know teachers and school leaders.

I was at once struck by the great stress you put on planning, discussion, group work and the teaching of units.

And I admire how this has helped your pupils in gaining interest and knowledge in subjects that naturally belong together, has been assisting in teaching them problem-solving, evaluation and working together, in giving them great cleverness in speaking before an audience and a good, friendly behavior, all of which are precious factors in this our world of technic, science and ever closer contact between people.

The many wonderful, well-equipped school buildings, display cases and nicely arranged tackboards together with your very fine text books also greatly help in making your children interested and eager to learn. I was surprised, however, why the pupils often did their arithmetic work on loose sheets of paper instead of in scribble books.

The many instructive and well planned courses and meetings for the teachers, the good teacher-periodicals and magazines as well as the many strong parent-teacher associations are without doubt a very great help for everybody in care of children. Your numerous kindergartens as well as the nurseries are also of great value.

I admire the American teachers for fine teaching in often over-loaded classes and for their low, pleasant voices, and it seems strange why the teachers, working with the most valuable thing that a land possesses, its future generation, often are paid low. I suppose this underpayment is one of the reasons why there are so few men teachers in your schools.

Another interesting factor was that one teacher very often was teaching the same grade year after year, thus gaining a very great knowledge of that year level. She is lacking, however, the rich experience of following her pupils' growth and development up through the

different years, as for instance we do in Norway by having a class—in some subjects—from the first grade up through our seven-year elementary school.

When I, in these few lines, have been looking back upon my unforgettable stay in the U.S.A., it is with great gratitude to all the teachers I met, for all the fine things I saw and learnt in your friendly, beautiful country.

—SIGRID GAASKJENN, *elementary school teacher in Grimstad, Norway.*

A Japanese Observer

AS ONE who has had the privilege to observe the state of education in the United States and to meet the educators there for three months in 1951, I might venture some frank comments.

I found the educational set-up, curriculum, and method there firmly founded upon ideals beyond the variance of sex, race and faith. The younger populace, bred upon the spirit and principle of humanism will grow to constitute communities and a country inevitably democratic. We shall no longer need to shout such words as "World Peace," when all the nations attain the height of American educational standard.

The recent development in the south duly misgave us here. But recalling my visit to a grade school in Denver, where children representing some twenty-seven nationalities were in perfect harmony, I trust that the American educators will solve the problem and make democracy prevail.

While the teachings of Pestalozzi and Froebel yet need much emphasis in Japan, I saw in America, thousands of teachers, hardly knowing these names, performing exactly what these great teachers did and taught. Kindergartens and grade schools were spheres of life

and work, of play and learning set to each developmental stage, where teachers teach so little and the children learn so much and without forced supervision—clear evidences of the legacy of Stanley Hall, John Dewey and other educators of the nation.

Recently I translated into Japanese Dr. R. Havighurst's *Human Development and Education* in which education is defined as the timely assistance to individuals in solving the developmental tasks and I recalled that such educational psychology and sociology had been already incorporated in actuality in American Education. Whenever and wherever these ideas are substantiated, education finds itself closer to its ideal.

Today, education in post-war Japan faces severest trials and democratic education is threatened to be plucked short before its time. We look to American education to grow and lead the democratic education of the world.

—MASAKO SHOJI, *faculty of education, Hiroshima University, Hiroshima, Japan.*

A Turkish Observer

TO MY MIND some of critics of the American Schools appear to have overlooked some of the basic principles of the American education.

One of the most important characteristics of the American secondary school is its availability to all youth, through its flexible curriculum which is designed to meet various needs of different individuals in one type of "comprehensive school." This is certainly economical and practical as well as democratic. It makes it possible to extend general education to all masses of people including those who live in smaller communities.

Thus education of all youth in the same kind of institution with a flexible curriculum which can meet their different needs, makes it possible for the students to postpone their major decisions about their further education until the ages of 14 and 15. In other countries the students who continue their education beyond the elementary school have to make their decision between the ages of 10 and 12, since at this level they are classified and placed in different schools which give academic or vocational education. This two ladder system makes transfer from one type of school to another very difficult.

The nature of the organization and the curriculum in American high schools is suitable to provide for the needs of high aptitude groups. If the school is sufficiently large and adequately staffed, introduction of the courses on advanced mathematics, sciences, and foreign languages is not difficult. A more sufficient guidance program in these schools can always stimulate and encourage such gifted individuals to learn how to work up to their capacity. I have seen many schools which provide these facilities to the talented students.

In my opinion, the American secondary education is a healthy and effective reflection of a democratic way of life, although it may need improvements in accordance with that concept.

—FUAT BAYMUR, *member of the National Board of Education, Ankara, Turkey.*

A Korean Observer

THE capability of the Soviet Union to be the first to place satellites into outer space has brought deep concern to the public of the United States. The highly publicized shortage of

scientists has almost overshadowed another critical scarcity—that of skilled linguists in America. The American public should now be more keenly aware of the fact that the future of the nation rests in considerable measure upon communication between peoples through language as well as upon the scientific achievement. This is particularly applicable to the Asiatic languages.

The broadening global commitments of the United States since the Second World War necessitated the establishment of institutions to train the great number of linguists in Asian languages, but a serious lack of adequate language training facilities exists in the academic institutions of the United States. The text materials, such as Asian languages' books and dictionaries, are inadequate for the study of Asiatic languages. Apparently, there is not a single American university equipped to provide a speaking, reading and writing knowledge of the five important Asiatic languages: Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Hindi-Urdu, and Arabic. The vast majority of American educational institutions of higher learning ignore the Asiatic studies.

Today, Asia contains as many people as the entire world contained half a century ago. Approximately half of the world's population is centered in geographic Asia, more than half in the broader Asia of the non-western world. In this nuclear and missile age, Asia has become an important and often crucial focus in the gravest international problems. In a rapidly shrinking world, wherein Asia could become the axis of balance between East and West, the fate of the world may well be decided by the fate of Asia.

In spite of the problems facing the West in Asia, there is a lack of scholarly

(Continued on page 263)

devices. The fairly extensive bibliography is keyed into the text, thus facilitating further reading.

The teacher evaluation programs of two school systems are described and a brief chapter deals with supervisory practices in business. The weakest section of the pamphlet is the six-page chapter entitled, "Toward a Philosophy of Evaluation." This is found, strange to say, at the end of the pamphlet and seems to bear little relationship to the material presented earlier. This provides a clue to the chief weakness of the pamphlet as a whole. Although the collection of practices may be of general interest, there is a disturbing lack of basic rationale or underlying philosophy of teacher evaluation that otherwise might guide the reader in selecting one practice over another.

Curriculum and the Elementary School Plant. By *Helen Heffernan and Charles Bursch.* Washington,

Educators from Other Lands

(Continued from page 214)

and factual books concerning the countries of Asia in Western languages. This again may be traced to the language barrier which has tended to curtail research. It is doubtful if the West and Asia can ever understand each other until the implements of communication have been acquired. There can be no effective solution to the problem of communication with Asians until the West recognizes the necessity for meeting them half-way linguistically.

Considering the gravity of the problems involved, the preparation and training of specialists on Asia would seem to be imperative. This must be a matter of equal priority along with science in American education. Survival

D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, a department of the National Education Association, 1958. 71 p.

The pictures of new buildings, classrooms and facilities alone would make this pamphlet worth examining. The most important central idea that runs throughout the text in unequivocal fashion, is that schools should be designed and built around educational objectives rather than to have educational objectives fitted into whatever school facilities have been built.

Readable, attractively written, this is the type of pamphlet that should be purchased in quantity for members of boards of education. For persons interested in a brief presentation of the relationship of elementary curriculum to school plant this is well worth reading.

—Reviewed by HOWARD B. LEAVITT, associate professor, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts.

in this nuclear-missile age may be staked on science, but the building of peace calls for knowledge, insight and abilities to understand many other Asian and African countries' problems through languages.

After this intensified training in Asian language and its affairs, Americans will become not only able linguists, but also worthy representatives of the United States, who can effectively interpret to foreign cultures, not by word alone, but, more important, by communicating the true meaning of American democracy and the sincere desire of the United States for good will among the nations of the world.

—KYUNG CHO CHUNG, Korean scholar and author, now a faculty member of the U. S. Army Language School, Presidio of Monterey, California.

Copyright © 1959 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.