

Significant Books in Review

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The American High School Today. By James B. Conant. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1959.

There is much in James B. Conant's first report with which we are in agreement. Section One, "The Characteristics of American Education," is an eloquent case for the comprehensive American high school. With reason and historical evidence it cuts the ground from under the selective academic schools and the class-perpetuating European system so dear to the nostalgia of Admiral Rickover. The Conant Report calls on the comprehensive American high school, "first, to provide a good general education for all the future citizens; second, to provide good elective programs for those who wish to use their acquired skills immediately on graduation; third, to provide satisfactory programs for those whose vocations will depend on their subsequent education in a college or university." Thus the Report rejects the Robert Hutchins philosophy which prizes the academic for all who manage to stay in school and which heaps anathema upon vocational learnings.

James B. Conant states as his top priority the elimination of the small high school, thus joining the legion of modern educators who have fought stoutly for consolidation. In an era of the flight to centralized authority, he quietly asserts "that three things are necessary to have a good high school, provided it is of sufficient size: first, a school board composed

of devoted, intelligent, understanding citizens who realize fully the *distinction between policy making and administration*; second, a first-rate superintendent; and third, a good principal." (We suspect he wouldn't mind if we added the forgotten fourth and fifth, "good supervisors" and "good teachers.")

In addition, the Report supports an expanded counseling system (Rec. 1), individualized programs (Rec. 2), required programs for all (Rec. 3), expansion of writing (Rec. 6), diversified education programs (Rec. 7), remedial reading (Rec. 8), provision for talented and gifted (Rec. 9, 10), prerequisites for advanced courses (Rec. 13), avoidance of ranking (Rec. 14), developmental reading (Rec. 16), tuition-free summer schools (Rec. 17), offering a third and fourth year of languages (Rec. 18), science courses (Rec. 19), homerooms (Rec. 20), a problems-oriented 12th grade social studies (Rec. 21). Surely, all of these sound reasonable.

With what in the Conant Report, then, do we fundamentally disagree?

First of all, the Report conceives the vital matters of curriculum as quantitative. For instance, for the academically talented 15 to 20 percent, the Report strongly recommends as a minimum "Four years of mathematics, four years of one foreign language, three years of science, in addition to the required four years of English and three years of social studies; a total of eighteen courses with homework to be taken in four years.

This program will require at least fifteen hours of homework each week." The Report continues, "Many academically talented pupils may wish to study a second foreign language or an additional course in social studies. Since such students are capable of handling twenty or more courses, these additional academic courses may be added to the recommended minimum program."

The Report assumes, without questioning, that proliferation of many subjects is better than concentration upon fewer, that four of something is necessarily better than two or three, that twenty or more courses during the high school years are better than sixteen, that a seven or eight period day is better than one with a block of time for a core, that fifteen hours of homework of undefined quality ("hard work") is necessarily better than any other family or community learnings.

Almost completely neglected is the crux of the curriculum problem: what goes on *within* the courses. Untouched is the vital matter of the meaningfulness of the learning experiences to the young person. Unexamined is the quality of the learning. Thus the report repeatedly deals with the shadow, not the substance, of the curriculum.

Sometimes the Report is frankly superficial. The adequacy of general education for all is judged by "adequate" instruction in English composition, "adequate" instruction in social studies and, in required subjects, students grouped by ability. There are no other tests of the adequacy of general education, despite the libraries written on its characteristics. And how is the meaning of "adequate" judged? As to English composition, "First was the work load of the individual English teacher" (again the quantitative reliance). "Second was

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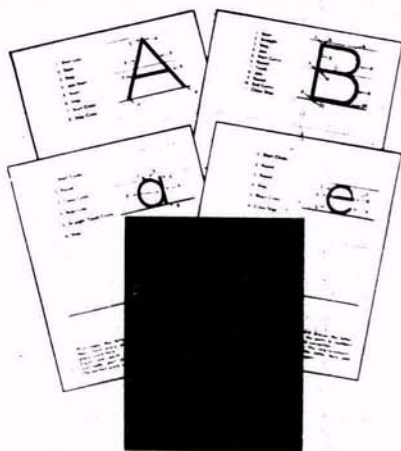
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the attitude of the English teachers toward the importance of English composition." Nowhere was "adequate" related to the meaningful experiences of students in writing about personal and social problems and insights. The general education test for social studies turns out to be "three years."

What seems to have happened is that a gifted and good man has visited some American high schools, including "in many cases, a visit to one or more classes," and has recommended particularly for the academically talented a program which reflects his own cultural background and life experiences. Dr. Conant is an eminent scientist who knows the complexities of higher mathematics. To him it is self-evident that the policy to be adopted to serve as "a guide" to the counselors of the talented should include four years of mathematics and three years of science. So self-evident is this that nowhere in the Report is the all but required extensive mathematics and science program for the talented specifically supported, save by one reference to vocational uses of the sciences. Yet other gifted and good men regard four years of social studies (not recommended as a minimum by the Report) and four years of the varied arts (not recommended as a minimum by the Report) as at least as defensible as a minimum for the talented, if the standard is to be quantitative.

Dr. Conant was U.S. High Commissioner, then U.S. Ambassador to West Germany. To him it is clear that guidance should "strongly recommend" to the academically talented "four years of one foreign language." His first defense of the proposal is that mastery of a foreign language is "an educational experience of the first importance." Yet just what are the educational experi-

ences of first importance? Such a defense only reiterates the point on which men of equally good will are debating.

James B. Conant and his staff have prepared an earnest and provocative contribution to the Great Debate. A scholar of Dr. Conant's quality knows that his inquiry has human and scholarly limitations as well as deep insights. Let us hope that the razzle dazzle of publicity which has surrounded the Report will not result in the Twenty One Recommendations (however useful many will prove) being mistaken for the Ten Commandments.

—Reviewed by WILLIAM VAN TIL,
chairman, Department of Secondary Education, New York University, New York.

Personnel Research Frontiers. By Cecil E. Goode. Chicago: Public Personnel Association, 1958. 176 pages.

This book reports a study conducted by the Public Personnel Association with the financial help of the Ford Foundation. The purpose of the study was to "find out the extent of inquiries into human problems of organized effort." A survey of personnel and human relations research throughout the United States and Canada was conducted, both by questionnaire and by personal interview. A group of noted social scientists and government officials acted as an advisory committee.

"Personnel research," says Mr. Goode, "includes all research efforts that are aimed at improving worker productivity, satisfaction, and service."

To an educator, the report is both interesting and puzzling; interesting in that it presents a good deal of significant data that has marginal, if not direct application to education; puzzling in that

representatives of the educational profession are so conspicuous by their absence!

As a member of the profession, the reviewer is under the impression that educators, both collectively and individually, are vitally concerned with personnel research. Yet of the 185 individuals interviewed by the director of the study, only two are listed as "educators." It is quite possible, of course, that many of the 62 psychologists interviewed were educational psychologists. Yet the listing of personnel research facilities that cooperated in the survey includes only one educational psychology department, and the only school or college of education listed is Teachers College, Columbia University. The American Council on Education and the National Education Association are the only professional education organizations listed, whereas one might expect to find listed such organizations as the American Personnel and Guidance Association and the National Society for the Study of Education. One can only conclude that the amount of personnel research being conducted by educators and educational

organizations is rather insignificant; that such research *was* covered by this survey but is not clearly identified with education; or that the survey was not adequate. The reader is invited to look at the report and decide for himself which conclusion is indicated.

The report includes a chapter on each of the following topics: personnel research in a scientific age; facilities for personnel research; current personnel research efforts; scanty attention to the personnel problems of government; and personnel research needs of the future. It also includes a rather comprehensive and well-annotated, selected bibliography.

It is to be hoped that the report of this investigation will be studied by educators. If, as implied, the educational profession is not adequately represented in the nation's personnel research efforts, it is also to be hoped that the appropriate people within the profession will do something to correct the deficiency.

—Reviewed by HENRY L. ISAKSEN,
associate professor of education, Boston University, Massachusetts.

Expectations

(Continued from page 505)

In relation to this, the teachers also strongly reacted to the question:

If a choice had to be made, should the supervisor work most with:

Weak teachers to help them improve

Strong teachers to advance education

Any teacher interested in working with the supervisor

Every teacher regardless of interest or not in working with the supervisor.

Twenty-nine chose "any teacher interested in working with the supervisor." I felt reassured by the responses.

Even if one concludes that here is a rare group of teachers who coincidentally shared their supervisor's values without being influenced by the supervisor's style of operating, it was comforting to learn how much we seemingly agreed about the kind of leadership to be expected from supervision. Regardless of who influences whom, the evaluation gave me not conclusions so much as peace of mind and fresh energy for the work ahead—meeting mutual expectations for dynamic leadership through supervisory services.

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