

Significant Books

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The Nongraded Elementary School.
John I. Goodlad and Robert H. Anderson. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1959. 248 p.

The American lay public is expressing great concern over the quality of today's elementary education. Voices from all sides are urging that higher standards be adopted and that the "unnecessary" emphasis on social adjustment be curtailed or eliminated. Many a professional educator finds himself in a position of having to defend current school practice or yield to these pressures from the public.

Current practice is difficult to defend, and the hue and cry for higher educational standards is not easy to answer without attention to a number of concomitant concerns. If we are to give major attention to quality, to higher standards of academic work, what will this mean for promotion and nonpromotion? for success and failure? for reporting to parents? for mental health of both children and teachers?

Goodlad and Anderson, in *The Nongraded Elementary School*, suggest that one place we may look for some answers to these questions is within the organization of the elementary school. Their book, then, proposes a system of organization which will take into account the things we now know about children, about

learning, and about curriculum. The first three chapters discuss pupil realities with which elementary teachers must deal, the problem of promotion and retention, and the historical development of the graded structure. The third chapter leads also into an account of the emergence of the nongraded structure in a number of places. The next four chapters are entitled, "The Nongraded School in Operation," with examples from several communities with nongraded programs; "Modern Theories of Curriculum and the Nongraded School of Today and Tomorrow"; "Reporting Pupil Progress in the Nongraded School"; and "Toward Realistic Standards and Sound Mental Health." Chapter 8, describing the establishment of the nongraded school, includes a short-story-like account of one (hypothetical) community's experience in making the transition to nongraded structure, and Chapter 9 deals with "The Elementary School of Tomorrow."

Throughout the book the authors stress the need for professional educators to take account of research findings. The twentieth century has given us vast amounts of new knowledge about children and about the learning process, yet much of this knowledge has not yet had any impact on school practice. While the nongraded elementary school is

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merely an organizational arrangement, the important consideration is that it seems to be an arrangement which helps teachers to take into account the things we know about children and about learning.

This is a book which, in the reviewer's opinion, should be called to the attention of every person connected professionally with elementary education programs—teachers, administrators, supervisors, others. It is more than a description of a plan of organization, for it points out and develops basic ideas about curriculum which must be considered within any organization. It is at one time both theoretical and practical. It gives a basis for many of the important decisions which teachers and administrators must make in elementary education, and offers specific helps in terms of necessary steps toward the improvement of the total elementary school program.

The content of the book itself is exciting. The results of all the available research on promotion and nonpromotion are summarized. The comprehensive bibliography alone makes the book one which professional educators will want to own. And an appendix, listing all communities in which nongraded programs are or have been in existence, will be of particular interest to those schools seeking to make organizational or curricular changes. This appendix is based on studies carried on by the authors by means of questionnaires in 1957 and 1958, and describes briefly the characteristics of each program and the person who might be contacted for further information about it.

The profession has needed this book for some time. Goodlad and Anderson have referred to the topic in articles in various professional journals during the past few years. Here their ideas are pulled together as a challenge to all elementary schools seeking to provide better instruction for their pupils. Whether or not a school is interested in nongraded organization, its staff will find in this book the issues which must be faced in moving toward the elementary school of tomorrow.

—Reviewed by ELIZABETH Z. HOWARD,
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of Chicago, Illinois.*

**The American Secondary School in
Action. Philip W. Perdue. Boston:
Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1959.**

In the preface the author makes the following statements:

To help the prospective teacher understand both the practical and the theoretical aspects of teaching, this book combines analyses of numerous hypothetical but realistic narratives of incidents in secondary

schools with discussions of various aspects of secondary education in America.

The preparation of this book on secondary education grows out of the author's experience in the instructing of college students preparing to teach in American schools. The students were involved in extensive laboratory experience in junior and senior high schools, but no textbook available related this practical experience in the schools to their education courses. This book was written to fill the need for such a book.

If this book is to represent the substance of the reading to be accomplished by the students, it seems to your reviewer superficial. If, on the other hand, it is to be used as a guide to observations which can be made, or ideas to be discussed after some reading in primary source material, it will serve better. The following paragraph is an attempt to clarify this generalization.

Chapter six is titled, "Guidance." In this chapter, among other things, the author lists the headings used for groups of items in the *SRA Youth Inventory* and the *Mooney Problems Check List*. He also lists the titles from a series of books and a series of pamphlets used in guidance work. If the students are but to read these headings and titles, the charge "superficial" seems justified. If, on the other hand, they are to study the work of Mooney or read some of the books or pamphlets, the text would serve as a useful guide to such procedures. Chapter nine, to take another example, is titled, "Philosophy of Secondary Education." This chapter contains neither a quotation from nor a reference to a work in philosophy, and the bibliography lists only works by modern American writers.

In contrast to the foregoing examples is the handling of the topic "Evaluation." Although this topic is discussed primarily

in the chapter, "Appraising Pupil Progress," there are additional useful thoughts about the topic in several other chapters. The introduction to evaluation afforded by the author is probably as useful as anything short of specialized work in the field can be. It seems quite appropriate for those planning to enter the teaching profession with the A.B. degree.

Your reviewer has but two major differences of opinion with the author. The first of these is with regard to learning theory. The author sees fit to include a "vocabulary" at the end of each chapter, for, as he says on page 19, "the reader will increase his understanding by reviewing the vocabulary carefully, making sure that each term has meaning for him in its application to education." I do not believe that anything short of the study of words in context will lead to the development of meaning, and one could readily contend that the following vocabulary (the list is the first ten terms from the "vocabulary" on page 19) already has meaning for college students: "Secondary school, Principal, Instruction, Instructional leader, Instructional program, Learning, Social worker, Planning, Curriculum, Extra-curriculum."

The second major difference of opinion is about a number of statements which the author uses in connection with his development of the term, "adolescence." Admittedly these are out of context here, but in or out of context these seem to tend to underestimate the experiences and observational powers of college students: (a) Page 27, "The development of sexual maturity is inevitable in all persons except the most abnormal." (b) Page 30, "How often actions of adults are called 'childish' simply because that is what they are! Not all adults are mature." (c) Page 33, "Adolescent awk-

wardness is readily observable in a junior high school." (d) Page 34, "The shape of the body alters as young people go through adolescence." (e) Page 35, "Normal development in adolescents has a wide range." (f) Page 38, "Heterosexual relationships can be a source of great pleasure or severe disappointment for adolescents." Also on that page, "Our society expects young men to acquire masculine characteristics and behavior and young women to be feminine."

For some purposes this volume will probably serve well. If you have these purposes in mind you may find that Mr. Perdew has written a book which you will want to use.

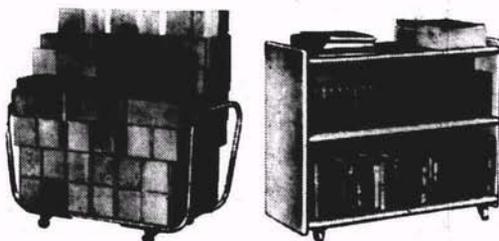
—Reviewed by JOHN R. GINTHER, assistant professor of education, The University of Chicago, Illinois.

Dynamics of Curriculum Improvement. Philo T. Pritzkau. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1959.

This volume, written for classroom teachers, administrators, curriculum workers, supervisors, parents and students involved in advanced and graduate study, has as its guiding principle ". . . that curriculum improvement is equated with teaching." Through treatment of such topics as Some Principles of Curriculum Improvement, Conditions for Continuous Curriculum Improvement, Developing Conditions for Learning, Developing Direction in Instruction, Using Children's Values to Promote Learning, and Developing an Environment of Ideas, the author attempts to give direction to curriculum improvement.

We may expect that a volume dealing with curriculum improvement would meet certain criteria: (a) It would con-

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cern itself with those problems which are identified as curricular ones—selection and formulation of objectives, selection and organization of learning activities, and evaluation of the educational program; (b) It would present a conceptual framework which allows the reader to see all the "parts" of curriculum and its improvement and how they fit together to make the whole; (c) It would present ideas in clear and understandable language which reflects careful, logical reasoning.

Pritzkau's volume falls short of meeting these criteria. It identifies and deals with only one of the curricular questions listed above, that of learning activities. How this is related to the remainder of the questions or in what way is not discussed; there is no over-all framework in which to place this piece of the curriculum puzzle. The reader must be willing to forget that there are considera-

tions other than learning activities and assume that situations in the classroom, like Topsy, just grew, or he must read between the lines and try to infer some theoretical basis for the ideas developed in this volume.

Furthermore, it is hard at times to follow the reasoning in the text. Even if the reader accepts the author's point of view regarding curriculum improvement and attempts to follow his development of it, the reader is confronted with such statements as these: "Any set of conditions which is provided by teachers, children, principal, and citizens to improve learning experiences for children can be classified as curriculum development" (page 4); "In some school systems, the staff has already equated the task of curriculum development to teaching" (page 4); ". . . classroom practices are synonymous with curriculum improvement" (page 98); and "The conditions for learning are equated with curriculum development" (page 33). It seems safe to say that conditions for learning and teaching are not the same, but in the instances quoted they are equated with the same thing, which might lead one to believe that somehow they are equated with each other. This shift in meaning makes it difficult to know just what is meant at any given time by curriculum improvement and how other ideas developed by the author may be related to it.

Another kind of distraction found throughout this volume is the belaboring of obvious points without making clear the relevance of the point to the discussion, or ultimately to curriculum improvement. For example, after stating that one way in which values are acquired is through various kinds of inter-

personal relations the following illustration is given:

The "back fence" relationship may be productive of meanings for educational direction. A form of face-to-face relationship which is all too frequently lost sight of and which seems to be disappearing from the neighborhood scene, is that of the "back fence" relationship. This is a situation wherein one person casually at work with some backyard duties looks and observes that his neighbor is engaged in a similar occupation. After some effort with these duties, one or the other senses that a breaking point is in order. Consequently, one or the other goes to the fence and throws out some casual remark which eventuates in a sort of "passing the time of day" chatter. . . . As the concern over plants or some other idea continues, one can conceive of a situation of complete absorption which may result in the expansion of interests which can be pursued together. In any event, it is obvious that there are in this neighbor relationship some ingredients for mutual productiveness of ideas and satisfying value patterns. (p. 141)

The author is to be commended for his concern with the necessity for improving learning conditions, for dealing with more significant ideas, for recognizing the importance of teacher involvement in curriculum improvement, for exhorting educators to take into account values, human relationships, emotions, and communication in curriculum improvement. But his failure to develop a conceptual framework into which these and other considerations are systematically fitted will be a disappointment to those seeking theoretical and practical guidance in curriculum improvement.

—Reviewed by MARGARET AMMONS,
research associate in curriculum, The University of Chicago, Illinois.

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