

# Significant Books

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**Elementary School Curriculum: Theory and Research.** *Aubrey E. Haan.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1961. 363 p.

The maturity of any profession is marked by increasing reliance upon evidence substantiated by research. This book points the direction and need for certain important efforts in the area of elementary curriculum.

The author shares the concern of many people that a lack of knowledge as to how children learn threatens a balanced curriculum program for the elementary school child. As stated by Dr. Haan, the book emphasizes not so much the status quo in education but where we, as educators, need to experiment, to grow. The text is reality-oriented and not at all remote from the practical situation. It stresses the fact that the greatest source for research in education is in the classroom itself and in the relationships which exist there.

Arranged in four parts, this book approaches the study of curriculum development in our kind of free society. It deals in Part One with a comprehensive theory of human growth and its relationship to the elementary school curriculum. The author discusses the problem of school learning and the many factors involved.

Part Two of the text deals with the development of curricular research, with the sources of research problems and the

tools of such research. It deals also with the evaluation of pupil growth as an aspect of general research. It supports the idea that a concept of total evaluation is one important factor leading to the adequate understanding of the job of education by the community as well as by educators.

Part Three is concerned with frontiers in curriculum development in the subject areas of science and mathematics, social studies and language arts, including foreign language, the arts, music and physical and health education.

The author indicates that in a text intended for the student in curriculum work, it is unnecessary to review comprehensively the subject areas. Instead, the material is devoted to the growing edges or frontiers in each field.

In regard to each subject, the frontier problems are discussed in terms of questions, as indicated by these examples: What changes are taking place in the scope of the subject in the elementary field? In the light of newer criteria, is the established sequence for the area defensible? What are the materials problems of the curriculum worker in each area? What is the job of improving teacher competence?

Part Four of the book stresses additional practical aspects of the elementary school curriculum. It deals with problems including teacher personality and curriculum, organization for curriculum

development, school organization, buildings and their relation to curriculum, the lay public and curriculum and the role of the curriculum director and consultant.

Physical aspects of the book are conducive to good study techniques. Topical headings and subheadings make it possible for the student of curriculum to locate, grasp and retain ideas readily. Selected references and footnotes follow each chapter.

Dr. Haan closes the text with an epilogue in which he reiterates the theme of the book. Balance in the elementary curriculum is achieved when we concern ourselves with understanding the complex process of individual growth.

The book should prove to be of significance to teachers, curriculum consultants and administrative personnel.

—Reviewed by DOROTHEA E. COX, Coordinator of Elementary Curriculum, San Mateo County Schools, Redwood City, California.

### Curriculum Planning for the Gifted.

**Louis E. Fliiegler, Editor.** Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961. 414 p.

It is a pleasure to note that here is a well-written authoritative volume directed to a specific and much needed area—curriculum for the able. The 13 chapters include definitive statements on each curriculum area by recognized authorities who usually have something concrete, worthwhile and sensible to say. There is also an introduction and a summary by the editor, who is well grounded in research, having co-authored the most recent review of research in the area of the gifted in the December 1959 issue of the *Review of Educational Research*. In addition to the editor's credentials, the names of Pregler,

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Strang and Barbe, well known in the literature on gifted children, are also found among the contributors.

Especially strong chapters are those by Moredock dealing with mathematics, Soeffieti dealing with foreign languages, Barbe dealing with reading, and Capusco dealing with music. Each of these papers is well supported with up-to-date research citation, and reveals a sound knowledge of the particular field. Strang's chapter on creative writing, although otherwise good, is somewhat blunted by an incomplete discussion of creativity which ignores Taylor's reporting of the Utah conferences on creativity or the work of Torrance at Minnesota. Perhaps the weakest chapter is the one on science which omits any reference to the notable activities of the Physical Science Study Committee in reorganizing the secondary curriculum in science, and



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in fact is not researched beyond 1955.

While this book has accomplished a good deal, three general criticisms seem in order. The theme of creativity which runs through the volume and is reproduced in each chapter heading, while discussed in detail specific to each subject area, is never really pinned down as it applies to *all* curriculum areas; nor are the problems encountered in teaching for creativity really explored. The implications of the experiments on inquiry training at the University of Illinois are an example. Second, the book might have been strengthened by more coordination and articulation with the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, which figures little if at all in the text, although it has issued much valuable material. Third, the impact of the revolution in curricular practices is not explicated. If, as Bruner avers, curriculum material on any subject may be

devised at some level for any child, then the concept of readiness has been dealt a mortal blow, and the implications with regard to curriculum change are multifarious (and not confined to the able alone). The summary chapter would have been strengthened by inclusion of a general review of the changing state of the curriculum area.

These technical considerations do not, however, seriously detract from a useful volume which most educational personnel concerned with the academically talented will find highly helpful. It is a pleasure to recommend it as something specific in curriculum to a public whose needs in this area have not until now been sufficiently satisfied.

—Reviewed by J. C. GOWAN, *Professor of Education, San Fernando Valley State College, Northridge, California.*

**The Schools.** *Martin Mayer.* New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961. 446 p.

Martin Mayer's latest venture into the field of writing depicts him as an analyst of American education. His book entitled *The Schools* is already stirring up a controversy among educators and laymen. On the basis of 30 months of work in traveling throughout the United States and Europe, visiting classrooms, interviewing school people and reading professional literature, the author gives his conclusions and interpretations about education. Few of his generalizations are favorable.

A statement in the preface leads the reader to think that the book was written to give an account of what is actually taking place in the public schools in the United States. After reading the introduction, one may feel that the author is playing the role of an interested observer and impartial reporter. Comments regarding the organization of the book may

be further misleading. Part one is referred to as background material; part two is presented as a running record of what is taking place; and part three is concerned with some important issues as the author sees them.

Under the guise of an objective layman, Mayer laces his background material heavily with personal opinions and misconceptions. He steps doggedly into the realms of psychology and educational philosophy, stumbling over some basic premises and making invalid conclusions.

Among his more valid criticisms of education today are the abiding faith in the IQ and the confidence in standardized tests; the amount of factual emphasis and drill which characterize the teaching-learning process; the amount of homework assigned students; and the use of marks (grades) as motivating devices.

Although there might be some justification for the criticism of the extent of standardized testing going on and the use of results, Mayer attributed the cause to the wrong source. This practice occurred a number of times in his book. The reason given for this malpractice is that the teachers have been influenced by behavioristic psychology. The truth is that this reflects a lack of understanding of educational psychology or a complete disregard for psychological principles of effective learning. There is doubt about the emphasis on upgrading and making the curriculum more rigid as contributing to the increasing number of tests being administered to students in the high schools.

An educator will agree with Mayer concerning the extent of Dewey's influence on American education. Many critics of the schools have attributed to Dewey the weaknesses in education. The author of *The Schools* suggests that pro-

gressive education did not influence the secondary schools to a great extent because it could not "conquer the entrenched subject matter" of the high schools. Few teachers in secondary education have ever accepted the basic ideas of progressive education, nor have they been influenced widely by Dewey's philosophy. "The tragedy of American education in the twentieth century," says Mayer, "is not that Dewey's influence has been so great, but that it has been so little" (p. 70).

Many of Mayer's criticisms are built on shaky foundations. Mayer often turns the reader from a situation or an issue to a conclusion loaded with personal opinion. He frequently dismisses whole fields of study with dazzling generalities: "American practice in teaching the beginnings of reading is much better than most critics believe, but the practice has been hampered by bad theory and unintelligent theoreticians" (p. 183).

Oversimplification of ideas and "ready-made" solutions to problems appear throughout most of the chapters. Teaching manuals enable the teacher "to give her daily performance without a moment's thought for the little individuals in the classroom" (p. 7).

Attempting to play the role of the "all-round" critic was too much for the author as far as maintaining consistency in regard to his generalizations and conclusions. The following are some of the more glaring inconsistencies and examples of absence of straight thinking:

According to Mayer, the science program is weak because it concerns itself with factual knowledge and rote learning and gives little attention to processes and critical inquiry; yet the author levels his attack at the schools for teaching values which center around processes. The au-



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thor states that schools can't teach values, yet says that this has been going on for two generations.

Mayer chides education for giving attention to children's interests, but complains that students in high schools are pulled away from things they would like to do in order to follow preplanned activities and rigid schedules.

He accuses school people of having little interest in what is taught other than that of pleasing businessmen who may be critical of the student's abilities in spelling and writing. Efforts to improve the schools by providing for the academically talented come in for their share of criticism. Concerning the school's role in this connection, the author remarks that ". . . the schools are giving the kids something they would do anyway."

The author deplores a lack of standards. He says, "There is no such thing as 'the' secondary school in the United

States," yet he talks about the schools being too rigid and "lock-step" in their procedures.

Life adjustment education and citizenship education receive their share of negative comments; yet, Mayer suggests more clubs and extracurricular activity for the high schools. "Even though the clubs and 'extracurricular' activities are quintessentially aspects of community life," remarks Mr. Mayer, "the clubs could probably carry more of the weight of the secondary program" (p. 324).

The idea is presented that the schools cannot be tailored to individuals; therefore, they could not be agents for citizenship education. In another place, the author says that we ought to have different books in schools to individualize reading. In addition, the elective system is criticized for not being elective "enough."

Evaluation of any idea, issue or practice must be related to a particular value orientation. The reader will find that the most-used criterion for appraising the schools is the subjective opinion of the author. A good many of his statements are not what he found out or what he heard but the interpretation of what he saw and heard about education.

In conclusion, it may be said that school people should read *The Schools* carefully and critically. A number of important issues are discussed. One of the more important is in the area of teacher training and certification. Another challenge to school administrators is the author's idea that school people are too busy with paper work, too much harried by the immediate and trivial to chart a course for education.

—Reviewed by D. H. WILKINSON, Supervisor, Secondary Schools, El Paso, Texas.

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