Language and Concepts in Education. 

Any well-established discipline has a language of its own. The study of genetics, medicine or astronautics involves the use of terms not found elsewhere. The field of education, if it is to develop harmoniously and wholly, must also have a language of its own. As an applied social science, it naturally includes terms from psychology, sociology, anthropology and other areas. Should it not also have a unique vocabulary? How can accurate and comprehensive meanings be established?

A few writers have poked fun at the jargon sometimes heard in educational meetings or seen in educational journals. It has almost been fashionable to scorn such “pedagoge” and yet this reviewer maintains that there is a place for technical words, exactly used, which have significance for scholars. The error has been, not in using specialized or technical terms, but in using them at the wrong time. We must be able to talk about curriculum design, reinforcement, or concept. These terms may be out of place at a mothers’ tea sponsored by the PTA but they, and others like them, must be part of serious scholarship in education.

It is stimulating and instructive, therefore, to pick up a new book which explores some of the problems of an educational vocabulary and the reality, or lack of it, the words represent. Smith and Ennis’ selections in the book, Language and Concepts in Education, examine such fundamental terms as “learning by experience,” “needs,” “subject matter,” “verbal interaction,” and “equality of educational opportunity.” In their preface, the editors state clearly the need to re-examine these and other concepts. They feel that considerable parts of the discourse of education are made up of obsolescent phrases, words that were developed in protest against the evils of an earlier day, conditions now “ameliorated if not corrected.” They see an overhaul of educational terminology as a “step toward the development of a theoretical framework within which the valuable elements of both the old and the new can be reconciled.” Accordingly, they have compiled 13 essays which are philosophical but belong to no one school of philosophy. They are, instead, “an attempt to examine some of the more central and pervasive concepts in educational thought.”

The 13 chapters examine many facets of education, yet the emphasis in the book generally is on curriculum and teaching rather than on administration, psychology or other areas of educational thought. The first chapter by Hanson gives a valuable analysis of the different meanings of the phrase “learn by ex-
perience” which are pertinent to the controversy still resounding over progressivism in education. The second chapter by Komisar analyzes “needs” as a basis for curriculum and thus continues the work of Doane (1942) and other writers. Two other chapters, by Henderson and by Roland, make use of Gilbert Ryle’s concept of knowledge as “know-that” and “know-how.” Henderson’s classification of “know-that” into analytic statements, contingent statements, prescriptions and value statements has hundreds of applications to the curriculum. In chapters with greater sociological emphasis, Ennis suggests that the schools’ neutrality or decision in controversial matters must depend on previous examination of the basic issues, while Lieberman has a discussion on equality of educational opportunity with many implications for the segregation problem. He suggests that integration involves not mere admittance, but what happens to a student after he enters a school or college, and then lists eight possible steps toward a greater realization of equality. One of the most interesting chapters to this reviewer was McClellan’s analysis of the logical and psychological and the difficulty he has in establishing any clear distinction between them.

The foregoing sampling of chapters neglects some authors who have important things to say but is sufficient, perhaps, to give a little of the flavor of this volume. The book leaves untouched many of the words and phrases of educational theory or current jargon, but it succeeds in its aim of illuminating some of the “central and pervasive concepts” found in this and other educational journals. The book is not always easy to read, perhaps because of the philosophical orientation of many of its authors.

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christian education

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but it is consistent and thorough in its analysis of some of the semantics of education. It is still a few light years away from establishing a thorough and coherent theory of education, but it makes available several building blocks for such a theory. The task of getting some of these interconnected concepts into generalizations which show their relationships is a formidable one. In the meantime, here are steppingstones for persons concerned with curriculum construction or with the development of courses of study.

—Reviewed by David H. Russell, Professor of Education, University of California, Berkeley.


This new study promises to be a very important contribution to a better understanding of collective behavior as a field of sociological inquiry. The volume, published as a textbook for courses in collective behavior in departments of sociology, is a valuable addition to a very meagre literature on a subject that is becoming increasingly important if we are to understand better the character of a mass industrial society. The authors have taken a creative approach to collective behavior. They examine those patterns of social action that are relatively spontaneous and unstructured, that cannot be explained by such items of social structure as status and role, and that must be looked at as social action which cuts across social structure and has not yet formed into a structure of its own.

This analysis of collective behavior seeks to get at some of the more difficult to understand transformations of social life which may emerge from vague rumors, waves of excitement, fads, fashions or crowds. A typical sociological analysis of group behavior will seek to study the traditions, customs, habits of mind in the group, the character of the division of labor, the nature of status and role, etc., in order to understand any group. Many of these features, however, are either lacking or are not determining factors in the spontaneous development of a system of collective behavior. For example, not every aspect of behavior is determined by social structure and, therefore, many areas of human behavior must be analyzed by use of concepts more suited to spontaneous forms of collective behavior. This the authors have done in a very effective way.

After discussing various approaches to the study of collective behavior, the authors provide a creative synthesis of several approaches, which is the method of presentation in this volume. The authors seek to give some unity to the field of collective behavior by presenting various processes, such as definition, demoralization, defense, conversion and crystallization, which are found collectively to transform behavior. Five chapters in Part II deal with these five basic collective processes under the following titles: rumor, the process of collective definition; demoralization and panic; crowd behavior-defense process; mass conversions, changes in group norms; and crystallization, the active nucleus.

Part III deals with the problem of participation and participants, which usually requires an understanding of the dynamics of individual behavior. This section of the book, therefore, relies heavily upon findings from psychology and social psychology. Four chapters in
this section deal essentially with the problem of leaders, leadership, and followership. What kind of person will become a leader or follower? What factors operate to involve individuals or allow them to remain aloof from collective behavior situations? Why does the hero become an object of worship and emulation, whereas the scapegoat becomes an object of hatred? These and many other questions are fully discussed and analyzed in this volume.

Six chapters are devoted to a discussion of how collective behavioral processes lead to collective change not only in interaction on a face-to-face level but also on a societal level where there is no physical contact. Such topics as mass behavior, public opinion, mass communications, fashion, and social movements are fully and clearly discussed. These final chapters are very important because they incorporate a discussion of the mass of mass behavior and the mass society. While our society is increasingly becoming a mass society, there is little agreement as to an appropriate definition of the concept of mass. Our society is a mass society because it reflects some of the conditions which characterize a mass society. Some of these conditions are functional interdependence, acceleration of the pace of social change, and the growth and bureaucratization of large-scale organizations, leading to the exclusion of the masses from any kind of meaningful participation in the vital areas of decision making. Such exclusion often leads to alienation from the dominant values of the society and results in discontent, disaffection, and a breakdown of consensus. The rise of juvenile delinquency and crime may be, in part, a reflection of existing tendencies of our society to become mass-like in character.

The chapter on public opinion will be very useful to the educator interested in learning more about the character of public opinion. Various definitions of public opinion are given, and the authors present a critical appraisal of existing theories in the behavioral sciences. Public opinion polls are evaluated; how opinions are formed, the movement of public opinion, its effects, etc., are considered. The last chapter analyzes why this field of study has been neglected, existing progress and prospects for the development of new knowledge in collective behavior, and the way in which a number of studies have been carried out in studying collective behavior.

All educators will profit from reading and rereading this volume and reflecting upon the implications of its content for the existing institutions of education.

—Reviewed by Jack London, Professor of Education, University of California, Berkeley.