

Significant Books

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Theory and Practice of Supervision.
*J. Minor Gwynn. New York: Dodd,
Mead and Company, 1961. 473 p.*

This volume represents an ambitious project on the part of a well-known and respected educator. The author's objective was one of providing a manuscript which might serve as a college text and as a reference manual for the practicing supervisor. Moreover, he has sought to relate practice and theory, as well as to document the historical evolution of both. In many ways the book constitutes a somewhat encyclopedic compendium of information regarding the process of supervision. The magnitude of the approach and the effort to catalog and fit a great number of ideas, many of them of involved abstractness, into a reasonable structure, results in much of the book being relatively dogmatic.

Part One, the first of six sections, treats the historical development of supervision and describes major job functions of the modern supervisor. The second section, "Helping Teachers To Plan Their Classwork," concerns itself with effective use of textbooks, teaching units and an extensive discussion of curricular aids. Part Three, "Helping Teachers To Work with Children," offers three chapters on pupil diagnosis, supervision of student activities, and evaluation. Part Four is perhaps the most comprehensive section of the work and documents a great variety of special supervisory prob-

lems. The section includes chapters on supervision in the elementary, junior high, and senior high schools, suggestions for helping the beginning teacher, and methods of helping the teacher with personal problems. Chapters 11, 12 and 13 are rich in curriculum background and the reader will find an array of useful material. Part Five is specifically directed toward a consideration of techniques pertinent to the improvement of the instructional program. The content presents a well-organized and relatively comprehensive description of common patterns in the organization of programs, a thorough treatment of routine devices employed in supervision, an expanded delineation of a variety of specialized techniques such as group process, action research, workshops, and a chapter on "How To Organize and Implement a Supervision Program." The concluding section involves evaluation of instruction and the future of supervision. Of major interest here is the author's excellent handling of Chapter 20, "Teacher and Merit Rating in Supervision." The material is both concise and thorough, and is treated in scholarly fashion.

While it is regrettably necessary for an introductory text to read with considerable authoritativeness, much in supervision is the sort of thing that one cannot, with any degree of equanimity, speak authoritatively about. For example, page 14 reads, "When the controversy

became acute between those who advocated scientific supervision and those who supported democratic co-operative leadership, the concept of creative supervision came into its own. Offered as a compromise between democratic and scientific supervision, creative supervision was based on a simple, sound assumption with which all agreed—that teachers need to improve their teaching while in service and that every facility and device that can make each individual into a master teacher must be available to them." One must take such a paragraph with considerable salt. Admittedly, an author must employ labels in order to communicate his thoughts, but it is questionable whether most active supervisors would define creative supervision as a compromise between scientific and democratic supervision.

Happily one is able to find in the content many of the contributions of previous writers in supervision, effectively organized into a workable pattern. Ideally, it would have been desirable to find more staples that were not quite so much a statement of yesterday's thinking. The author's treatment of human relations and leadership, as an example, fails to touch on much that is newly significant to the supervisor. A goodly amount of research dealing with the influence process, the components of leadership, sensitivity training, communications, and the cultural perspectives of human interaction is now available. Nevertheless, the book should be of genuine interest to all who are concerned with supervision. There are many good things about Gwynn's *Theory and Practice of Supervision*, and it is undoubtedly an addition to the professional literature.

—Reviewed by LOUIS J. RUBIN, Assistant Professor of Education, San Fernando State College, Northridge, California.

Diary of a Russian Schoolteacher. F. Vigdorova. Translated from the Russian by Rose Prokofieva. New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1960. 256 p.

Whenever a book comes freely out of Russia and is readily available, the temptation is strong to regard it as propaganda. The feeling becomes even stronger as one finds in it characters who are concerned with respect for individual personality and who maintain that if one is to be an educated human being, he must think for himself. This sense of needing to read between the lines, of remembering that even the English words may not communicate the real meaning haunts the reader from beginning until the end.

The diary reveals the school life of a 23-year-old Russian teacher of 40 12-year-old boys. The story, which unfolds in a series of short episodes, reflects a

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warm and tender relationship, not the lock-step, mechanized process which we have tended to believe characterizes the education of children in the Soviet Union. The scene is laid in Moscow in the first year after World War II, when the heart-break and lessons of that catastrophe are uppermost in the minds of both teacher and children. The heroism of the young men and women who died for their country and the sorrow of the bereaved form the background for the story. Against this the everyday events of the classroom unfold.

Work consists of a combination of formal academic training under the leadership of the teacher and informal project building, study and camping under the leadership of a member of the Komsomol who organizes the boys as Pioneers. A poll of the class to discover what they most want to find out in this informal aspect of their education reveals questions very much like those we would find in a survey of the interests of our own 12-year-olds:

- Is there life on other planets?
- Will the sun ever grow cold?
- How did the first man appear on earth?
- How do you mend an electric kettle?
- How can you assemble a radio set?

As Marine Nikolayevna struggles with her pupils to inspire the indifferent and lazy, to win the hostile, to deal with parents and to build a spirit of unity among her pupils, she realizes that her basic problem is one of understanding each one as an individual. "It was only necessary to find the right approach to each child," she writes, "to discover where his interests lay, to search carefully until you found the secret spring that governed his behavior." This she does, not with any obvious desire to manipulate, but rather in the patriotic hope that these

children will become good Pioneers, good Komsomols, and good Communists. There must be no lying, no shirking of lessons, no weaknesses—only straightforwardness, staunchness and courage. "One can accept suffering and sacrifice if it is worth while, if it is for some great and noble goal." And so the episodes follow, one after the other, each one adding to the picture of growing understanding between teacher and pupils and of the developing sense of what it is to be a young person in the Soviet Union, a potential hero, who must constantly examine himself to see if he is becoming a worthy member of his society.

The author of the book is a teacher herself. She writes on education for the Soviet press, and in connection with her writing has studied classroom methods in many parts of Russia. In the early days of her teaching, she kept a diary of her experiences. From this diary she has drawn the vivid pictures of the boys who people her book. Undoubtedly there is much of herself in the person of Marine Nikolayevna and much of her own point of view.

For readers in the United States and more especially for teachers, the book is what Robert Hutchins in his introduction calls "an important contribution to international understanding" . . . a way of discovering "what goes on when a dedicated teacher and 40 12-year-old boys try to learn together what the community has decided they ought to know." And yet, for us there is the haunting question—how much of what we read can we believe or even understand? What is meant in the Soviet Union by teaching boys to think for themselves?

—Reviewed by PRUDENCE BOSTWICK,
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