The Retirement of Revolutionaries

MANY persons, of late, have discussed the impending “revolutions in instruction,” or at least have been strong in their advocacy of the necessity of such revolutions. Terminology and the resultant dilemma of definition, of course, give great difficulty in such controversies, e.g., the recent cartoon suggesting a prodigal son who had become “a radical” and joined the Goldwater Conservatives.

There are several “revolutionaries” today in the field of instruction who are advocating a revolution in instruction based upon newer technology for teaching. Lindley J. Stiles, in particular, in his 1961 Charles W. Hunt lecture before the AACTE, entitled “Revolution in Instruction,” suggests that there are many signs and seeds of a revolution in progress and goes on to delineate certain characteristics of the “conservatives” who seem to resist the impending revolution.

But what, then, of the “conservatives”? An interesting commentary on human nature and the flow of history seems appropriate here. Many of the contemporary curriculum defenders can be easily identified as “progressives” of the 1930-1940 school improvement era. What were the characteristics of the earlier revolution? Did not the progressive education movement incite to revolution so that: (a) teaching could become more creative; (b) learning could become more insightful with “meaningful experiences”; and that (c) learning might become more self-directive? Was not this revolution a reaction, in fact, against an earlier rigidity and insensitive standards of teaching and school conduct? Was not, in essence, the progressive revolution of the ’thirties one which might be termed “child-centered”?

Almost everyone is in favor of improvement; most people favor change. All too often, however, change is considered to be synonymous with improvement—a conclusion manifestly impossible to justify. Almost every major curriculum innovation of the past half-century has been advocated as an improvement in the instructional process. Surveys have been made to sample the reaction of persons involved in this curriculum change—teachers, pupils, parents, etc.

The reported findings generally support the fact that the person involved in the experimental design approved of the new design, and has committed himself and his energies to it. He, therefore, has invested himself and his ego in the success of the project. One seldom will agree that something which he has committed himself to personally was either a poor idea or produced inadequate results. The “Hawthorne effect” is a serious problem which can seldom be removed com-
pletely from the research designs involving schools and the educative process.

Impact on Students

Many portions of the advocated changes in curriculum which are a part of the current "revolution in instruction" involve deep change in previous patterns of school and classroom organization. The earlier revolution—the progressive education revolution of the thirties—(being child-centered) laid great stress upon development of the individual, attention to and understanding of his individual needs and considerations.

Contemplated changes in school and classroom design in the current revolution suggest the trend now toward large group instruction, mass media instruction, etc. It is granted, however, that this large group instruction should be balanced with personalized teaching and small group opportunities. The question to be raised at this point is, then, do the new patterns of instruction enhance individuality and improve self-concepts, or do these new patterns actually deteriorate the mental health of students?

A concurrent trend in the present decade has been in regard to student creativity and attempts to measure and foster this in students. What are the proposed new procedures for instruction? Do they encourage creativity, or is the tendency to suppress creative aspects? Much writing has been done of late about the "tyranny of the multiple-choice test." Programmed instruction broadly conceived concerns itself also with multiple-choice test questions in relation to linear programming. Does this mean that teaching machines—and the programmed instructional material within them—may become tyrannical? Has anyone seriously considered researching the problem of

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creative changes in personality configuration as a result of use of programmed instruction?

In the tight step-sequence-frame arrangement of linear programmed instruction, the content material is laid out in a very formal and logical sequence. Facts are easily imparted through such a system, but what are the implications and applications of facts and the interrelatedness of them? May we not end up with well-trained, but uneducated, citizens?

The field of mental health enters into the discussion in another fashion. Some students are now shy and withdrawn; will their introduction into larger groups or, the reverse, their work with individual machines (perhaps even in individual booths) enhance or reinforce outgoing, more sociable attitudes?

Impact on Teachers

New definitions of teaching competence will have to be derived if the impending revolution in instruction is successful. Previously each "professional" teacher has been in relative isolation from his peers. In fact, it not only was not unusual, but also the accepted procedure that if five teachers were teaching at the same grade level in the same content area, there would be five different approaches to instruction. Does not the new revolution suggest and encourage conformity of the teaching act rather than individuality? Will not a teacher teach with one eye over her left shoulder to see what her colleagues are doing? May they not, in team teaching procedures, become more concerned about their professional status with other professionals than with their relationship to students?

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Curriculum Innovations

Textbook Complaints

Curriculum workers frequently find themselves with the public relations problem of handling complaints regarding the use of a particular textbook. A recent article in Supervisory News Notes of the Florida State Department of Education suggests a procedure for handling this serious problem within the school system.

Floridians, according to the article, are required to follow the following procedure for handling complaints regarding textbooks: (a) Individuals or organizations who wish to make their views known regarding a certain textbook must file their complaint in writing. The written complaint must contain the title of the book, name of the author, name of the publisher and citation of the pages or passages considered to be objectionable. (b) Individuals must present their complaints in person before a study committee established for the purpose of hearing such complaints. Not only must the individuals appear in person to cite their allegations, but also these criticisms must be presented in writing to the committee. (c) After hearing the complaints, the committee will take steps: (1) To notify the author and publisher about the complaint. (2) To request that they file replies or send representatives to answer the allegations. (3) That two or more members of the committee will read the book and prepare a report of their teaching is available and we have created "stars," who will wish to play the supporting roles?

Can the old labels apply? Who is a "conservative," and who is a "revolutionary" today?
findings. (4) That they will decide whether or not in the judgment of the committee the book is, indeed, subversive as alleged. (5) Report their findings to the State Board of Education through the superintendent.

While this procedure is designed for state control of textbooks, individual school systems might consider adopting a similar procedure for use within their own districts. Such a procedure would in no way conflict with the state responsibility for textbooks but would at least require personal responsibility from critics of textbooks in use in the schools.

Evaluating Programmed Instruction

The annual report of the Educational Testing Service contains a statement about a new project in the evaluation of programmed instruction. A newly proposed study comes as an outgrowth of the concern of a number of educators and leaders in the field of curriculum development and programmed instruction regarding the “proliferation of gadgets and inferior learning programs as a serious threat to the sound application of programmed instruction technique to education.”

An advisory committee has been established to assist ETS in developing quality control procedures. The committee will seek to answer such questions as the following:

1. Is the substantive course content that has been programmed up-to-date and worthwhile in the judgment of authoritative opinion in the given field of inquiry?

2. To what degree is the programming itself compatible with requisite standards of excellence?

3. What evidence is there that the procedure

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grammed material is effectively communicated to students? 2

Such an authoritative study is long overdue and may well produce useful guidelines for those engaged in the preparation of programmed materials, as well as for those responsible for the selection, purchase and utilization of programmed instructional materials and devices.

Curriculum Bulletins


An unusual little publication on supervision has been produced by the State Department of Education in New Hampshire. This delightful document gives, in easy and informative style, some of the latest concepts in regard to good supervisory practices. Profusely illustrated with sprightly sketches, the document delineates: the nature of supervision; the problems of personnel development; curriculum development and leadership responsibilities; working with teachers, substitutes, and other instructional personnel; an understanding of the multitudinous and conflicting expectancies for the supervisor; and closes with a short but well directed bibliography.

This document should be very useful for persons beginning supervisory duties, and, as well, may be found useful as a refresher for those who have been involved in supervisory responsibilities for some time. The publication is a result of a workshop of teachers, coordinators, consultants, and principals with responsibilities in the elementary school.

Curriculum Office, Providence Public Schools. A Syllabus for Art Education

* Ibid. p. 52.
in the Elementary Schools. Providence, Rhode Island: Department of Public Schools, 1961. 51 p. $2.50

One would expect an art course of study to depart from the usual—so, much can be said for this publication. It has verve and imagination in its format. The reader notes instantly that this is a curriculum guide which does not follow the general organization of subjects and grade levels. The bulletin does not place great stress on grade sequence in the introduction of artistic experiences—that is to say, the major portion of the book concerns itself with major art concepts and their usefulness in the learning program.

This curriculum guide proceeds to develop understanding of many media and forms of artistic expression, such as painting and drawing, color, lettering, modeling, constructing, abstract and nonobjective design, techniques in making a mural, and charts.

Suggested activities for special groups are listed along with appendices listing audio-visual materials, art supplies, and art terminology which will be useful for the guidance of the teacher. In addition, a very excellent and well chosen short bibliography for the inexperienced teacher of art is included. It should be noted that the teacher is not left exclu-

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sively to her own devices because certain art experiences and styles are indicated for various grade levels within the framework of different media.


Those new to teaching in any community will instantly see the value of such a publication as has been produced for New York City teachers. Other cities will not have the same resources or the same amount of resources as is indicated in this publication; however, such a resource list is important for all school systems. This guide shows those services offered by the curriculum centers in the school system, those resources available in community agencies and organizations, the resources of public libraries and teacher-training institutions, and other library facilities established by the school board.

The implication is loud and clear that the resourceful teacher is expected to use many approaches to instruction and that adequate learning resources have either been provided by the school system or are available within the community.

—CURTIS P. RAMSEY, Director, Learning Resources Center, George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, Tenn.

Interactive Spirit

(Continued from page 444)

the creative person sees himself as interacting in all of life's relationships as he looks upon himself as continually transforming the relationships in which he finds himself. When he is teaching, he is sensing his own spirit in action continually. He cannot fail, because of his honest concern about the processes of his interaction with his pupils, to inspire in some of them this same honest and intense desire for their own creative learning through discovery in their art works. Success in teacher training, from all that research shows in art, seems to be largely dependent on the discovery of this interactive spirit.

References


