

Significant Books

Contributors: William M. Alexander
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The Changing Curriculum of the American High School. *Kimball Wiles.* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963. 331 p.

Kimball Wiles has produced another provocative book. In this new work he presents a consistently democratic philosophy of the secondary school curriculum and many guidelines for implementing the philosophy. His conception of a better American high school is one this reviewer considers both forward-looking and plausible.

In addition to an introductory chapter on major types of decisions that determine the curriculum, the book contains fourteen chapters grouped in four major areas. The first area, "The Bases of Decisions," describes social needs and youth needs. On these bases the author presents criteria for the curriculum needed in terms of growths sought, school atmosphere, courses, student activities, guidance, and community relations. The existing curriculum is presented in terms of a typical high school, "Centerville," with comments on deviations from its program found elsewhere. The second area, "Elements of the Curriculum," presents Wiles' ideas as to the present status and needed changes in courses, in-class experiences, guidance procedures, out-of-class environment and services, and student activities. The third, "The Process of Change," describes roles of various individuals and groups in cur-

riculum change, barriers to change, and steps and organizational procedures for change. The final area presents in one chapter the author's hopes for "The High School of the Future."

This reviewer can find much to applaud and little with which to disagree in Wiles' principles and recommendations. His basic philosophy of a curriculum designed for each pupil's optimum development needs wider acceptance and implementation. The point of view regarding each curriculum element is consistent in its concern for individualization, although some readers may wish for more detail as to specific courses and other provisions for various types of learners.

Certain chapters make especially helpful contributions. Chapter 3 on youth needs brings together observations and findings from several studies, and presents a useful outline of procedures to meet youth needs. Chapter 5 describes concrete and specific strengths and weaknesses of typical high school programs. The treatment of general education in Chapter 6 makes needed distinctions between general education and college preparation and also clarifies the meaning of vocational education. Chapter 7 insightfully and cogently relates teaching theory to classroom practice.

The third part of the book may be of greatest help to secondary school personnel, for here the author's wide experi-

ence in curriculum improvement programs yields a wealth of suggestions as to what does and does not work. The four chapters in this part could well be "must" reading for secondary principals and curriculum leaders, for here are given many specific guides that may be widely applicable in curriculum improvement.

Indeed this book may be of greatest use to in-service personnel and lay leaders seeking guidance and help in evaluating and improving their high schools. Nevertheless, the student seeking to achieve depth of understanding of the high school curriculum and to formulate his own judgments as to goals and means of curriculum improvement may need historical information, current data, and conflicting points of view, which are treated briefly if at all in Wiles' book. The excellent annotated references at the end of each chapter, however, provide guidance to such additional materials as needed.

Those concerned with secondary school curriculum improvement may not agree with all of Wiles' points, but more suggestions of as high quality could not easily be found in so few pages as his Chapters 11-14. The role of the curriculum consultant is depicted with great understanding by an author who has had much experience in this role. The many suggestions regarding pupil and parent involvement, including parents, membership on school evaluation teams, would give pupils and parents more opportunity to participate than most schools now invite.

"Barriers" to curriculum improvement are identified as sometimes including the public, professional agencies, and the local staff, with many illustrations of how these barriers operate. "Assets" in curriculum change are also described and specific suggestions are given both as to

overcoming barriers and capitalizing on assets. Local school personnel will find especially useful the descriptions in Chapter 14 of the work of curriculum committees and the process of experimentation.

Wiles' "High School of the Future" is a far cry from today's schools. He sees all youth participating in "small analysis groups" (each group consisting of 11 pupils and a counselor) for development of values; learning fundamental skills through machines; and exploring the cultural heritage through large classes (perhaps 500 to 1,000) taught by television, film, or a highly skilled lecturer. In addition each student would be encouraged to develop a specialization in creative activity, work experience, or independent study. Graduation would be eliminated, and students would leave the secondary school when they pass their college entrance examinations or move to a job.

The reviewer is very much attracted both to this conception of what the high school might be like in 1985 and to Wiles' description of the steps needed to achieve such a school. There are questions, of course: Can fundamental skills be divorced from the other curriculum areas, and can they be taught with no more human direction than Wiles indicates? Should work experience be only for the students not planning to attend college? Is physical education not to be provided in 1985 and some type of organized student government or other student-directed activity? Such questions are intended as items for study in connection with, rather than basic objections to, Wiles' proposal. Indeed this final chapter is the most stimulating portion of a very stimulating book, and might well be read first and studied again and again by the reader looking for new solu-

tions to the dilemmas of the secondary school curriculum.

—Reviewed by WILLIAM M. ALEXANDER, Professor of Education, George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, Tennessee.

Curriculum Development: Theory and Practice. *Hilda Taba*. New York and Burlingame: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1962. 529 p.

This is a very good book, and a very important one, destined to become a landmark in the development of curriculum theory. It moves back and forth across wide reaches of thought with a comprehensiveness and ease that reflect the career of its distinguished author. In sheer coverage it is the most ambitious book in its field to date, but far more important is the piercing penetration of its analyses.

A key word with reference to this book is *strategies*. For although the author struggles hard—and often successfully—for syntheses of apparently disparate materials and views, she is less concerned with answers than with ways of working toward answers. She is concerned with strategies of teaching and learning, of curricular selection and organization, and of leadership toward curriculum development, to name only a few areas. In each she exhibits that personal canniness which is almost the mark of the good curriculum worker, at the same time that she marshals up such data as there are and heightens our awareness of the data we lack.

As is typical of many curriculum books, the volume opens with a consideration of the foundations of curriculum. It begins with societal factors: popular ideas as to the functions of the school, and the analysis of culture and society as one base of

curriculum. It moves next to theories of learning, intelligence, and development, with major sections on transfer of learning, social and cultural learning, and the nature of knowledge.

All this is by now almost to be expected at the front of a comprehensive work on curriculum. What distinguishes this book is, first, the sheer wealth of allusion to important studies and opinion, with the author quoting or summarizing materials from an amazing diversity of sources; second, the systematic synthesizing, step by step, of much that is generally left piecemeal; and third, the delightfully penetrating flashes of personal comment. All in all, this foundational section could only have been done by a powerful mind, enriched by decades of studied awareness, and seasoned by years of hard work in the front lines. If the book had gone no further, it would already have been a great contribution to educational literature.

The second major section is on the process of curriculum planning. It is notable, in the first place, for common sense and clarity. A beginning teacher could read Chapter 16, on informal diagnostic devices, and feel comfortable about doing much that is suggested. Such distinctions as that between the selection of curriculum experiences and the organization of content are drawn so lucidly that confusion evaporates. Chapter 20, on the development of a teaching-learning unit, is a model of clear procedure.

In the second place the section does a wonderful job of keeping the multiple dimensions of purposes and planning always before one's eyes. The author has a deep impatience with curriculum planning that talks about a variety of goals such as critical thinking and creativity, but actually provides for only narrow,

one-dimensional learning—usually limited to the acquisition of information. Her practical sense rebels against plans that are not backed by resources for teaching.

If there is a weakness, it lies in an overly exclusive concern with a purely cognitive and intellectual process. Throughout the book, examples come mostly from science and mathematics, less from the social sciences, hardly at all from literature and the arts and music. The treatment manages best the sort of thing H. C. Morrison treated in the "science-type" unit (not, of course, merely science, but the kind of material that can be handled in a systematic intellectual way). When literature is mentioned, it is almost always with a view to a utilitarian use of the material, as in the reasoned development of social values. There seems to be almost no awareness of the direct artistic experience in its own right. Neither is there any hint that the author is pushing beyond intellectual areas into such matters as work experience or such activities as a "domestic peace corps" might concern itself with. The book is pretty single-minded about how to select and organize and teach subject matter effectively, so that it will function as it is meant to function.

Part Three deals with curriculum design, opening on a critical review of patterns to date, in an insightful analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, and problems in each. Its central feature is "a Conceptual Framework for Curriculum Design." Culminating the long build-up of the varied elements in curriculum development, this chapter is aimed at putting-together. Moreover, it must surely be viewed as a deliberate attempt by the author to reach forward to a coherence

in curriculum theory and methodology not previously achieved. Even though it does not achieve that ultimate synthesis which the curriculum world seems to be waiting for, it is a solid and workman-like chapter.

Finally, Part Four, on the strategy of curriculum change, finds Dr. Taba on her own familiar home ground: the mobilization of leadership, the long, systematic use of group involvement, the development of perspective, and the laying out of tasks. As might be expected, the treatment is as hard-headed and sensible as it is theoretically expert.

Throughout the book, the author employs a valuable and interest-provoking technique of quoting from or condensing important works, simply giving the writer's name in parentheses at the end, thus avoiding cumbersome footnotes. The resulting cumulative bibliography at the back of the book is rich in a fascinating variety of fresh, generally untapped material.

It is imperative that this vivid, forceful book be widely read by leaders in educational thought and action. Psychologists, sociologists, and other scholars could use it to catch the scope and the swing of the whole educational enterprise and shake themselves loose from one-dimensional oversimplifications. Supervisors, administrators, and curriculum workers will find it invaluable to strengthen their theoretical bases and at the same time their operational know-how. It should make an excellent textbook for graduate classes, and parts could be read profitably by preservice students. But, above all, we need to use it for what it is: a strong thrust forward toward a coherent theory and methodology. There is no one in American education who, after reading it, will not have

added to his vision and his fund of answers. But, what is more fundamentally important, this is a book which will help us all to ask better questions.

—Reviewed by FRED T. WILHELMSEN,
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What Values

(Continued from page 506)

3. Spread, under the labels of "liberalism," "conservatism," "Americanism" and others, ideas and concepts which are really in opposition to our democratic way of life.

4. Create dissension for the purpose of reducing educational efforts and expenditures.

5. Reduce the development of ethical character by opposing the teaching of everything which can be called religion or religious.

6. Emphasize the vocational and monetary values of education to the extent that liberal education with cultural values would be seriously impaired.

7. Machinate, mechanize or regiment education to the detriment of personality development and critical thinking.

8. Reduce pride in accomplishment and validity through superficial and vague programs designed for "adjustment" and "individual differences."

9. Provide programs which tend to develop pseudo-intellectuals and pseudosophisticates who have little real understanding of and appreciation for virtues and values which have made America great.

10. Ignore the need for balance between the local, state, regional and national functions of education, with the result that the need for stability and/or mobility would not be served.

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Such possibilities as those listed here do not, in most cases, grow out of the sinister or evil nature of men. They usually grow out of the fallibility of human nature, the complexities of highly institutionalized society, and the difficulty of obtaining understanding and cooperation through comprehensive study and effective communication. In short, those who would operate the educational enterprise must ever be alert to the breezes and hurricanes which blow from every direction. School people must be able to set their sails to move with little assistance or to remain on course in troubled waters. Such alertness calls for man's full potential.

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