

Significant Books

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Teacher. *Sylvia Ashton-Warner.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963. 224 p. \$5.00.

It is seldom that one finds an author who can write engagingly about the life and learning of young children in schools and at the same time can reveal the enormous importance of teachers not only to a given group of children but also to the culture of the social milieu. Sylvia Ashton-Warner is one of those very rare authors. A few years ago her novel, *Spinster*, became an international favorite due to its artistry and its insight into teaching. The story was based in a school in New Zealand. Now comes this new volume which is a non-fictional account of Miss Ashton-Warner's work as teacher in the same school.

The locale of the school is among people predominantly of Maori culture. Two streams of emphasis are maintained in the account. One is apparent in the recurring description of the colorful, vibrant, emotional quality of the Maori people with a forward look toward their transition to European culture in which the children now in school will have a responsible role. The other emphasis, quite naturally, is on the children who are pictured as dynamos of energy with deep-dyed images and concerns characteristic of the Maori culture in which they live.

It is the teacher's determination that they learn to meet life creatively rather

than destructively and that they begin to do so in the "infant room" where they enter at the age of five and remain for at least two years. She has a remarkable insight into the inner life of each individual and she works with each as an individual, yet there is dynamic cohesiveness and interaction in the group.

The book has two main sections. The first describes in some detail the teacher's methods of creative teaching in which emerge the content and skills of reading, writing, number, nature, rhythm, music, art and living with each other. It is a joyous, noisy and, sometimes for the teacher, a backaching process but it is so full of zest and thoughtfulness that readers, very generally, will enjoy the account. Quite obviously the author's major passion is for creative use of language in which the children express themselves with vigor and color in contrast to those who are assigned to master the symbols of reading in synthetically prepared books.

Just one small sample of the creative process is the building of a key vocabulary by each child from his own experience and dictated by his own desire to include it. If any printed word in this key vocabulary is not recognized after one exposure it is discarded on the theory that its meaning is not potent enough in the child's own mind to be retained at this time. None of these flash-card drills! None of these reading-

readiness exercises! Eventually the children use paper and pencil for creative expression as easily and fluently as they do brush and paint.

The second section of the book is called, "Life in a Maori School." It is the teacher's diary in which the whole school takes on an identity.

One has a feeling that the inspired teacher in this account is almost too dedicated, that she sees things whole and undertakes more than one mortal should. And the author confesses to something of the same thought in the letter to her American editor in which she said: "How I longed to see some of these crack New Zealand infant mistresses here get hold of this thing and operate it; coolly without my creative fever, efficiently without my crises."

Now this message comes from New Zealand to America not to be repeated by rote but to be used as an inspiration to those who would cultivate in the new generation the power to create and not destroy. Ours is a nation of many cultures. Our children do not look forward to transition to a set, established cultural pattern but rather to the dynamic development of new ways of life—a rich opportunity.

—Reviewed by WINIFRED E. BAIN,
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Curriculum in America. J. Cecil Parker, T. Bentley Edwards and William H. Stegeman. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1962.

An unorthodox book deserves an unorthodox review. Only a short time ago appeared in this journal a review of an unconventional curriculum book which was one of the few recent original pieces of curriculum writing. The reviewer did not like it because it did not meet his

criteria of what a curriculum book ought to be. He missed entirely its uniqueness. I hope I shall not make the same mistake just because I would not (most likely could not) have written a book of this nature.

Only the superficial reader would call this book conventional. It contains the traditional organization of eight chapters devoted to the different subject fields. Philosophies and aims, curriculum development, and evaluation constitute some of its chapters. Yet such shallowness in reading is exactly what the authors deplore. The richness is there if you look for it.

The authors have taken an idea that could revolutionize education and have written a curriculum book about it. It is a simple one, as most powerful ideas are, the process of decision making. Education is considered as learning to make choices. The curriculum will be centered around process: utilizing knowledge, understanding, communicating, thinking, associating with others, creating, varying from simple skills to complex rational behavior.

The opening chapter envisions a school in which the curriculum is organized according to process, "a new kind of school" whose role is to teach children to make choices. This utopia will, I am sure, be shrugged off by the pedestrian educator as "impractical" but will challenge those with a spark of creativity and excite their imagination. For this school has few activities at the request of the teacher; complete individualization of instruction with the help of instructional aids; all ages of children in one room; teacher specialists in different fields, including psychology of learning, electronics, and landscape engineering; a flexible time schedule; farm, rock-garden, forest, water, and modern factory-

like laboratories; cultural centers which are replicas of other countries; cumulative records which are regarded as children's responsibility and property.

Curriculum making is seen as a process of purpose, study, decision, action and evaluation. Pupils participate in curriculum decisions. The teacher's function is to help the child in decision making, not to get "his own personality, pleasantly or unpleasantly, between the learner and his studies." Problem solving and critical thinking are stressed.

I would judge that the book would be especially useful to beginning and in-service groups of teachers. The chapters on the subject fields are descriptive of the curriculum in America, with an interweaving of philosophy, child development, and method. Several contain principles as guidelines for a school staff. The authors become quite specific in using as illustrations what happened in a particular situation. For example, they describe how one California music teacher worked out a system of teaching music to younger children.

The authors are at their best in discussing concepts and experiences in the field of science, to which they devote one-fifth of the book. These two chapters are full of examples of what and how science can be taught to children. They tell how to demonstrate scientific concepts, using objects and materials familiar to the children. A unit on the harbor demonstrates specifically what science concepts can be taught.

In fact, much of the material on the subjects is presented as a unit with problems for study, references, methods, evaluation and suggestions for meeting children's interests and needs, selecting materials, teacher-pupil planning. Through this means, the authors illustrate how decision making can be put into practice.

It would be unrealistic to expect a book written by more than one author to be even in quality of style or content. One could wish that the chapters on subject fields would have omitted the outlines of content which seem to add nothing to the central theme. While there are only slight references to ongoing studies in the content areas, much of what is happening in science, mathematics, social studies, and industrial arts has as its objective seeking the answers and doing research on one's own. More of this information as integral parts of the chapters would have been helpful. Anyone who wanted to carp—which I have no desire to do—might object to the preponderance of examples from California schools. I found this information refreshing; for one thing, I know that the authors are thoroughly familiar with these situations.

There are some other distinguishing features. One is the perfectly delightful, unorthodox annotations in the bibliography; others, the lists of exercises and topics for discussion, the frequent comparisons with European education, the inclusion of the college curriculum, the stress on integration of subjects. Two strong chapters on "Evaluation of the Curriculum" and "Evaluation by Critics" are included. Only in places like the latter chapter will the reader find specific references to the findings of research.

Those who think only in terms of black and white in discussing criticisms of education will find little comfort here. The authors hit hard at educators who split hairs, refuse to write boldly, or confuse laymen with professional jargon. They make a strong case for the use of specialists in the academic fields to work with educators in curriculum making.

Their own nontechnical style of writ-

ing is refreshing, although uneven in the various chapters. It is colorful and a bit caustic at times. It is a pleasure to read authors who believe educational writing can have a style and a liveliness seldom found in professional books.

In putting into practice in writing a book the belief that the "main purpose of the school is to use ideas in making choices," I believe the authors have succeeded admirably.

—Reviewed by VERNON E. ANDERSON,
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New Trends in Reading Instruction.

Shelley Umans. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1963. 145 p.

Shelley Umans' useful book on trends should readily find a place on the desk-side shelves of administrators, curriculum directors and consultants who are concerned with reading at all levels. The title may be somewhat misleading in that the trends discussed will not be new to those professionally involved in reading instruction. The four topics presented as trends—Reading in the Subject Disciplines, Flexible Grouping, Programmed Materials, and Community Resources—sound familiar; they acquire new dimensions, however, as the writer translates her conceptions about them into action in the classroom.

Throughout the book the "present static quality of reading organization" is under fire. The writer willingly admits to difficulties encountered in upsetting traditional reading rituals, but determinedly gives reassurance by outlining exact procedures. Under each heading she presents her case for needed changes and then outlines step-by-step implementation. Like a good curriculum worker, she makes sensible recommen-

dations for school-wide and lay involvement in projected change.

The chapter on "Reading in the Subject Disciplines" is especially stimulating. Predictably, emphasis is on the need for teaching different skills for different reading tasks and subjects, but a series of excellent lesson plans indicate how this can readily be done. It will be heartening to those pressured by getting subjects "covered" to see the time-saving possibilities in the writer's creative approach.

The pages in "Programmed Materials in Reading Instruction" are largely devoted to samples of programing. This use of space might be open to question if all readers could claim familiarity with the several approaches to programing. The writer sees it as a very promising tool in flexible grouping situations, but she points out that many problems remain unsolved in the development of creative reading materials.

In the chapter on "Flexible Grouping," it is evident that "the number 30 is no longer magic." The writer sets up explicit plans for creative organization within schools; she suggests a variety of group sizes, each related to the nature of the learning situation; and she demonstrates that the talents of teachers working in teams can be used to advantage in these varied patterns.

An ambitious program for using community personnel is outlined in the final chapter. Again, not a new idea, this one burgeons into promise as the writer presents a plan for preparing authors, scientists and lay people to participate in enrichment experiences for students. She also recommends finding enough "warm stable adults who can establish a relaxed objective relationship with children" in order to help them with reading problems. One wonders if communities can supply enough people who will willingly

spend time in preparation for such important tasks.

This small book provides more than inspiration. It clarifies issues and gives needed assistance in a vital curriculum area.

—Reviewed by MILDRED HOYT BEBELL,
Professor of Education, University of Denver, Colorado.

Readings on Reading Instruction. *Albert J. Harris.* New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1963. 466 p.

This book is designed primarily to provide the college student of reading with a sort of portable reference library. Its editor, Albert Harris, Director of the Educational Clinic at Queens College in New York City, has managed to bring together nearly 100 different selections on reading for inclusion in this sizeable paperback.

Most of the recognized authors on reading are represented along with many whose names do not yet have a familiar ring. Articles from educational periodicals, research papers, scholarly summaries and how-to-do-it reports are organized into 16 chapters representing topics of both long term and immediate concern to reading specialists.

Providing students enrolled in courses about reading with a wide sampling of references is reason enough for a book of this type, but the similar needs of many educators will justify its existence, too. The bewildering succession of materials on all phases of reading instruction tend to be a continuing frustration to those who must "keep up" with current thinking and research. Surely there is comfort for all in having the abundant literature sifted for good materials, and then having the materials organized topically and made available in palatable form.

It would be difficult indeed to collect materials on any curriculum topic without reference to one's own point of view. Although the present collection probably reflects the editor's predilections, the volume seems to be in line with majority opinion on major issues in reading. Occasional items representing existing differences and suggesting areas of controversy, however, are purposely included. In Chapter VII, for example, several writers build up a strong case for individualizing reading instruction, and the final contributor to the topic then effectively undermines much of what is proposed.

Happily, no effort is made to cover the formidable subject of reading in this one volume. The chapter headings are largely those which appear in most of the major college texts. The selections serve mostly to support, to take issue with, to extend or to enrich the usual fare in college-level reading courses. "Individualized Reading," which appears as Chapter VII, is the only topic relatively new to reading texts. "Programed Materials for Reading Instruction" may deserve a chapter in a follow-up volume, if the programers have made convincing progress by then.

Many of the selections represent carefully organized formal research skillfully reported. Several selections are excellent research summaries contributing a sense of security and definiteness. Some items are teachers' chatty reports of action research within classrooms. Although the quality of the writing is uneven, the effect on the reader is similar to the pleasant experience of paging through a variety of materials in the library. Readers will agree with the reviewer that this valuable book deserves a sequel!

—Reviewed by MILDRED HOYT BEBELL.

Classroom Groups—Scobey

(Continued from page 154)

of belonging and worth. It takes a sensitive teacher to understand how children feel about themselves, about each other, and about the group situation.

Outcomes of Grouping

Grouping can produce effective instruction. Children grow academically and personally. They work toward a common goal and learn from one another. There is increased ability to think, communicate, solve problems, and to gather and organize information. They learn to plan with others and execute plans together. They learn to give a

helping hand, to cooperate and to accept responsibility. They become involved in continuous evaluation of their activities.

Some situations call for leading, others for following. With many opportunities to contribute, children come to recognize their own strengths and weaknesses. They accept and value personal differences and see themselves in relation to others. They learn to tolerate their own failures and be sympathetic with those of others. Both teacher and child understand what each has to offer, and they respect the rights of others. The fact that children learn to know themselves and gain self respect is one of the greatest assets of group interaction.

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