

## ● Selected for Review

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**Teaching Disadvantaged Children in the Preschool.** Carl Bereiter and Siegfried Engelmann. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966.

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This is a manual and closely reasoned justification for what the authors call "an academically oriented preschool" with an "intensive, fast-paced, highly structured program of instruction." Bereiter and Engelmann predict that "some educators will be downright horrified" by their narrow educational objectives and by the deliberately forcing devices they recommend for achieving the objectives. This is a sound prediction. They could have as easily and as accurately predicted that many psychologists, psychiatrists, pediatricians, social workers and others concerned with good education will also be troubled.

The authors might not have predicted that research workers would also be "horrified," but I suspect that many of them will. Although there is a vague reference in the Preface to other experiences, the book seemingly is based on one year's work with one group of fifteen children. This small sample, limited ex-

perience, and the skimpy evaluation built in make one wonder why there was such a rush to get into publication. A reader finds himself wishing for more in-depth studies of the fifteen children: their feelings and attitudes, their behaviors outside of the adult-dominated group.

Research of this nature should never be confined to the few areas that can be statistically measured, with no effort to probe some of the side-effects that may be deeply meaningful to the humans involved. One finds himself wishing for evidence of any kind on the long-range impact of the academically-oriented preschool. Research of this kind should never be a one-shot affair but carried out longitudinally over a period of years. One wishes the experiment were replicated by others less committed to the outcome, to check out the Hawthorne or halo effect.

The hurry for national, popular publication is the more inexplicable since the results are less than breathtaking. Bereiter and Engelmann are very critical of the usual nursery education for the small IQ gains that result. The IQ gains they report for their children are only about par for the course, although the course they lay out is a very rugged one.

The book does have several areas of strength which ought to be widely appreciated. One such area is a fundamental premise implicit throughout, the complete assumption that "regular" school is incapable of making sensitive adjustments to children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The authors see public education as an unbending, narrowly academic institution with rigid grade standards for all. One can quarrel with their solution, which is to move this dreadful monolith down so it hits children earlier. But one can also be grateful for the clarity of their challenge. They state that "the threat of school failure that hangs over disadvantaged children is sufficiently grave so that, if it is not dealt with (in advance), practically everything else that (the usual) preschool might accomplish stands to be wiped out, including emotional health, social adjustment, interests, and favorable attitudes toward school."

Recent reports indicating that Head Start graduates do not hold their summer gains as they move on into public schools support their statement of the problem. An academically-oriented preschool may be one answer. It is easy to think of other possible answers: better Head Start programs of longer duration, better primary programs. . . . but the implicit assumption—school will fail these children because school is school—is an important, needed, direct challenge to educators.

The authors are helpful and provocative, too, in their insistence on the need to identify the goals of an educational program. "Claiming no divine wisdom" they set up fifteen targets—in language and arithmetic and reading—which in

their judgment a child about to enter the inevitable-inelastic first grade must be able to hit, if he is to have an adequate chance of succeeding. Without agreeing on the fifteen goals, one can praise this clarity and directness.

A third strength is the author's insistence on small class size for culturally disadvantaged young children. Instruction in their program is carried out in groups of five. Without buying their kind of instruction or their kind of teacher, one can applaud this awareness of the need for decent class size. Head Start has made a major contribution by insisting on fifteen as its class size; Bereiter and Engelmann go a lot further, and they may well be right.

Some parts of the book have a note of newness, especially those relating to the organization of the school. Bereiter and Engelmann recommend that the total group of fifteen preschoolers be divided into three "study" groups of five children each. Each group spends 20 minutes each day on language with Teacher A, 20 minutes on arithmetic with Teacher B, 20 minutes on reading with Teacher C. Ten minutes are scheduled for "unstructured activity"; 30 minutes for toilet, juice and music; 20 minutes near the end of the morning in semi-structured activity. This departmentalization is new for nursery education but even the authors recognize how old the basic idea is. In their refreshingly direct and open way they state that the school should "resemble more nearly a high school than an elementary school." This may be progress, and the way to improving education.

Many other parts of the book are frighteningly old hat, obviously old hat, and certainly not the royal path to

curriculum improvement. In fact many of the suggestions sound like the very procedures that have in the past been responsible for dropouts, for lack of interest in learning, for loss of self-respect, for alienation from society. "The children should, except when otherwise instructed, be quiet and restrained." . . . "They should be required to walk in single file." . . . "They should sit in assigned seats." . . . "Especially during the first month of the program punishment may be necessary to clarify the rules of the school situation. . . . The punishment should hurt. . . . Sometimes the best (punishment) comes in the form of anger: a slap or good shaking." . . . "The child who acts up in the classroom should not be viewed as the victim of trauma. The withdrawn child will not break or retreat from reality in the face of effective punishment. He will conform. So will the obstreperous child and the good-natured pretender." . . . "The teacher should plan on going over basic statements perhaps hundreds of times. There is no substitute for sheer repetition in teaching basic patterns. Repetition is the backbone of the program." . . . "The teacher should not be particularly concerned with the individuality of the children. As a rule of thumb the teacher should assume that while she is working with one child individually, the others in the class are not learning anything. Accordingly she should use unison responses whenever possible."

Many books have sensitized us recently to the terrible conditions of slum living. This book ought to make us all thank God that we are not slum children having to endure this kind of manipulation earlier in life because our society

has now discovered early childhood. The prayer should be the more heartfelt if one happened to be a somewhat retarded child or a youngster with an emotional problem or some physiological defect (although reading the book one might think such children do not exist—there is simply the lump known as "disadvantaged children").

Bereiter and Engelmann urge that teachers say to children: "If you work hard, you get a cookie. If you don't work hard, you don't get a cookie." The sale of the book ought to bring the authors lots of cookies so perhaps they too will work hard. They have a lot of work to do: studying their children more carefully and over longer periods of time; becoming more informed about poverty living—they make some questionable generalizations about child life in the slums; testing out alternative solutions to the problem as they see it; developing less rote approaches to academic learning, if academics must be the sole goal of school. There is a lot of work to be done by humble, patient, sensitive-to-children investigators.

**The Teaching of High School English.** *J. N. Hook.* New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1966. 488 p. \$6.00.

**Better Reading in the Secondary School.** *Ned D. Marksheffel.* New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1966. 272 p. \$5.00.

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Hook's volume is remarkably comprehensive. The other omits essential points.

Changes in the national scene affect the teaching of English and reading in our schools. During recent decades the immigrant population has declined while in urban areas the numbers of young people who are unfamiliar with standard English are increasing. As the linguists, language scholars, have explained their science, emphasis upon traditional grammar has been replaced by linguistic theories of grammar. As the trend toward world orientation continues, the study of British and American literature is found sharing the curriculum with African, Asian, or non-Western literature.

The increase in publication of all kinds, increased knowledge in the sciences and other areas, and the fantastic consumption of mass media products demand that students today excel well beyond the achievement of past generations in reading and in all the other language skills. These and other changes present a major challenge to all teachers of English and reading—experienced classroom teacher or neophyte.

There is no simple solution to this challenge. Teachers of English and reading at all levels can seek answers from various sources including educational television or films, college courses, experimentation and research, or recent publications. The two books which are the topic of this review have a unique contribution for the teacher of English.

*The Teaching of High School English* gives major emphasis to practical applications for teaching literature, language and composition at the junior and senior high school levels. Throughout the book, attention is given to how

students can be helped to think, analyze and discuss the ideas found in literature and how to develop their use of language in such a way that these ideas or concepts can be expressed in written compositions and oral communication. This is accomplished, in part, by focusing attention in one chapter upon the improvement of reading but also by recognizing that reading cannot be isolated from the selections which are read. Consequently, the chapters discussing literature—fiction and drama and poetry and nonfiction—focus directly upon close reading activities which aid in unlocking the meaning and in increasing the comprehension of the ideas which are presented.

Since language, and in this case the English language, is the medium through which literature, composition and speaking are expressed, the study of language is of prime importance. Language is much more than a study of grammar; it includes, in addition, semantics, usage, vocabulary development, and the historical development of language. Any teacher who would like a concise yet accurate, complete yet brief, and practical yet scholarly description of grammar (or grammars, to be more precise) should read the section on "Grammar(s): A Rationale." Any teacher who would like to know how linguistics can be used in his own classroom should read this section, which is undoubtedly one of the great strengths in the volume.

With a broad and basic understanding of English and of the techniques or strategies for teaching its many facets to young people, the teacher might wish to investigate the specific skills which contribute to the process of reading. In-

deed this inquiry should not be limited to the English teacher since the teachers of other subjects in the school curriculum expect their students to know how to read. Unfortunately, too many of our high school teachers are not aware of the process of reading and its components.

With the increased emphasis upon the high school dropout during the past decade, plus the fact that the lack of reading ability has been considered a major contributing factor, many teachers are seeking information on developmental, corrective and remedial reading. This information has been presented in *Better Reading in the Secondary School*. The author, Ned D. Marksheffel, is a reading consultant who has worked with high school students and so is able to cite case studies based upon his clinical experience in California, Mississippi and Oregon to illustrate essential points for reading instruction at the high school level. Particularly helpful to both the experienced teacher and the neophyte is the author's attempt to define terms and to compare his use of terms with the use by other authorities on reading.

Many teachers will find valuable the explanation of critical reading and how it can be developed in the content areas. This book further describes word-recognition skills, basic principles of reading, and how to plan a developmental reading program. Oral reading is discussed as a diagnostic device but not as effective oral interpretation of literature for communication and enjoyment.

While spelling is not presented in many reading method books, it is included here as a segment of language

and its use. Certainly many teachers will recognize this as one of the outstanding chapters in the book although the relationship between spelling and reading is not stated. Another section which will be of value to teachers seeking to identify a student's instructional and frustration levels describes the planning for an informal reading test and an informal spelling test. However, contributions from linguistics, programming, and reading machines are not mentioned.

Mr. Marksheffel has penetrated deeply into the basic reading skills which make it possible to engage in the more complex skills needed for critical reading. He has shown how a good reader must have command of many reading skills to be able to read successfully his high school assignments because reading and subject matter cannot be completely separated. Considerable care was given throughout the book to show the need for a developmental reading program at the high school level.

Mr. Hook has presented a coherent theory for teaching the English language and its literature. The many practical applications which serve as illustrations of his theories together with the invaluable suggestion for teaching in The Idea Box found at the end of each chapter are reflective of the author's own rich background.

No one knows now what the change in direction for teaching English and reading will be in the next decade. But we do know that we must make the best use of the tools and aids we have today. However, the only real measure of the value of the books reviewed is to be found in improved practice. ☞

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