

Reviews

Myths in Education. Arthur W. Combs. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1979. —Reviewed by John Prasch, Superintendent of Schools, Lincoln, Nebraska.

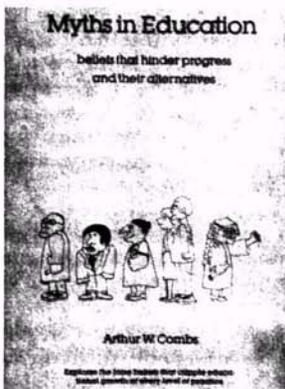
There are a lot of people who ought to read Arthur Combs' latest book.

I've known some school board members, for example, who sorely need to read Combs' short, but convincing, destruction of the myth of our competitive society and the myth that competition is a great motivator. There are also some hard-headed businesspersons in my town who think they know how to run schools because of their own success, but who should first read Combs on the myth of objectivity and the myth of the industrial model.

All of us in education have been attacked by some right wing types who have much to learn from Combs' exposure of the law and order myth, the myth of the value of punishment, or the myth of the affective domain. They could also profit from examining with Combs the myth that knowledge is stable. Doomsayers need to read of the myth of irresponsible youth or the myth that human organisms cannot be trusted.

There's a fraternity of parents of so-called gifted students in almost every school district who need to peek into Combs' book to read the chapter on the myth of fixed intelligence and the myth of the neglected gifted child. We'd hope that they would read far enough to also cover the myth of the value of grouping.

However, it isn't only laypersons who should read Combs. Some of our central office consultants and supervisors need to review the chapter on the myth of the right method. Educational specialists of all kinds should understand the credentials myth, and personnel specialists would be helped by Combs point of view on job descriptions. School principals ought to look at the chapter on grade level and class size myths and the attack-appease mythology. There might even be some education professors who



could profit from reading about the behavioral objectives myth or the credentials myth.

Teachers need to read Combs not only to destroy the myth of the power of parents or the myth that teachers are the fountainhead of knowledge, but more importantly to be assured that the accountability movement is better understood through the exposure of the myth of teacher responsibility. Indeed, it's comforting to read that teachers can make a difference and that "methods must be understood as individual matters that teachers must explore and discover for themselves." The good news for teachers is "they can be who they are, do their own thing, teach in their own best ways, and still be good teachers."

Finally, tired, harassed down-trodden superintendents should read "Myths in Education"—not because superintendents don't already know the difference between myth and fact, but because this systematic exposure of the common myths that hinder progress in education adds up to a strong common sense defense against the variety of uninformed factions that seem forever to sidetrack public education from its more lofty goals. Combs' process of exposing myths

helps put the pretty and mundane in proper perspective and kindles the more zealous and risk-taking spirit that once gave thrust, power, imagination, and confidence to the mission of public education in this land.

A prime example is Combs' suggestion that creating intelligence become a new goal for education, once we dispel the myth of fixed intelligence. Old-timers will seek shades of John Dewey and the more militant progressives in this small book and should welcome it as a new call to arms.

This is a timely and needed book. Overall it has a positive, up-beat, optimistic slant that makes broader goals seem possible because the assumptions are rooted in common sense rather than myths.

One is seldom encouraged about the task of getting everyone who should to read a book. However, in this case Combs has helped. The book is written in simple, concise, easily-understood language. Chapters are short in outline-type logical sequence. It's easy and quick reading for layperson or professional.

The introduction states that calling attention to myths is not enough and promises that the author will provide "more accurate, supportable basis for action." Although this objective is met well in some chapters, it is slighted in others. One would have hoped this aspect of the book had been given more attention. It would also have been useful had the author shown some relationship, either distinctions or parallels, in his discussion of the myth of the value of punishment compared to the need for dealing with consequences. Finally, except for the accompanying cartoons, the book is devoid of humor or the lighter touch. Debunking myths ought to produce a laugh or two.

Shortcomings of the book are slight compared to the overall impact.

We are tremendously indebted to Arthur Combs for drawing upon his long experience and keen insight to give us this gem. Yes, there are many of us who should read and re-read this book—and take it to heart.

Research on Teaching: Concepts, Findings, and Implications. *Penelope L. Peterson and Herbert J. Walberg. Berkeley, California: McCutchan Publishing, 1979.* —Reviewed by **Richard M. Brandt**, Dean, Curry Memorial School of Education, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

Research on Teaching is an important book. The first three chapters offer both a synthesis and critique of the findings and related theory from hundreds of teaching effectiveness studies of the process-product variety, which were conducted during the last two decades.

The bulk of evidence favors direct instruction over open teaching styles, if reading and mathematics achievement tests are the primary criterion measures. Even higher order cognitive processes, self-concepts, and other affective learnings apparently do not suffer from such instruction and in some instances may actually prosper. Evidence that more pupil-oriented, open forms of instruction lead to greater self-assurance, independence, and creativity is much less clearcut.

A fourth review chapter reports on the long history of research on college teaching methods, most of which have produced inconsistent, contradictory findings and few measurable differences among the major distinctive methods. Only with the emergence during the last decade of individualized instruction (the Keller Personalized System of Instruction, in particular) have such indicators as end-of-course performance, retention and transfer of information learned, and student satisfaction consistently

avored an alternative to the traditional lecture form of teaching.

While practitioners may find Part I—research reviews—to be the most valuable of the three sections because of the extensive research backing for or against specific teaching patterns, equally important findings appear elsewhere. After years of classroom observation data-gathering, for example, two process-product researchers, Robert Soar and Ruth Soar, indicate that careful distinctions have to be made between: (a) classroom climate and teacher management; and (b) different forms of each, if one is to understand what promotes and inhibits pupil gain. For example, the expression of positive affect is unrelated to pupil gain; on the other hand, the avoidance of negative affect is positively related to it.

Particularly important are recent studies of allocated, engaged, and academic learning times. No variables correlate more highly with student achievement; most resultant teaching implications are self-evident. One that is not comes from Berliner's report that young children do better working with relatively easy learning materials where the error rate is low, rather than with those of moderate difficulty. Differences in student time on academic tasks probably account for some of the teaching effectiveness research findings favoring direct instruction.

The last section focuses on the direction that current and future research is likely to take. Studies of teachers' judgment and decision making seem needed, as are those of pupils' perceptions of instructional content and events as they are experienced. Particularly impressive is Doyle's chapter on the shortcomings of process-product research and the need to analyze the structure of classroom tasks and materials, student mediating responses, and other contextual factors.

The classroom is a complex setting; teaching is a multifaceted array of activities; and learning is an inte-

grated response involving many abilities and attributes. Early classroom research defied easy conclusions. Results were inconsistent from one study to the next. No simple, precise picture emerged of what effective teachers did and did not do.

Now, as this volume clearly shows, real understandings about the teaching process have been achieved. While much more needs to be known, how one is taught makes considerable difference in how much one learns. Some research-supported guidelines now exist to help us establish the kinds of classroom conditions that will optimize learning. This is a book to buy and study if you want to extract those guidelines.

Reviewers



John Prashc



Richard M. Brandt

Copyright © 1980 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.