

Reviews

Competency Based Education: Beyond Minimum Competency Testing.

Ruth Nickse, editor.

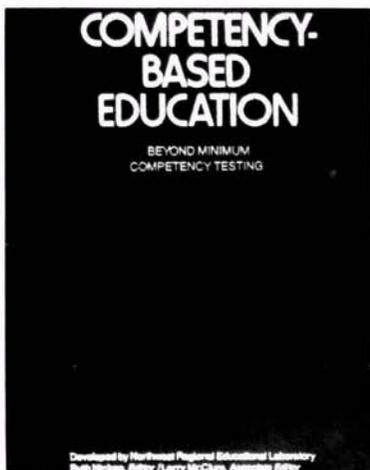
New York:

Teachers College Press, 1981.

—Reviewed by William G. Spady, Associate Executive Director, American Association of School Administrators, Arlington, Virginia.

Alas for us educators and Ruth Nickse, this book's title reflects more a goal yet to be pursued than a goal widely realized. If the contents of this book are any indication, few examples of authentic CBE practice exist in our public schools. Nevertheless, the intellectual foundations for building them seem substantial. CBE practice has gone well beyond Minimum Competency Testing (MCT) in educational settings in which the custody/control of minority-age youngsters is not the overriding concern of either the educators or the policy boards that govern their own programs such as adult education, the military, and private industry or even the Scouts. One clear intent of the book is to get educators to examine the richness and complexity of both CBE theory and practice without falling into the simplistic reductionism of equating it with either basic skills, objectives-based instructions, or "standards-based" examination and promotion schemes, all of which abound in our schools.

In a complex, eclectic first chapter, Arthur Chickering and Charles Claxton provide a conceptualization of competence that identifies many kinds and levels and suggests that while survival skills and life skills are its most pragmatic manifestations, ego-development and self-determination are its essential foundation. The inescapable conclusion of this chapter guides the rest of the book; in other words, CBE is different from conventional schooling experience in part because it seeks to develop and assess *real competence* in learners—not just academic skills. Much of the remainder of the book is about this distinction, particularly the thoughtful chapters by Louis Rubin on "How Can Competencies Be Taught?" and by H. Del



Schallock on "How Can Competencies Be Assessed?" Both base their analyses on factors that educators need to consider if the competencies being taught and assessed involve "life-role performance" as well as school skills. While neither suggests that the available alternatives are simple, both stress that at least there are available alternatives for educators to examine.

The remaining chapters illustrate three important aspects of those alternatives: operational, conceptual, and political. Larry McClure and Joanne Leigh describe the philosophy, operational features, and ongoing concerns of 13 highly diverse examples of CBE programs. This operational diversity is, unfortunately, never systematically analyzed and distilled into dimensions, components, or criteria that give this particular set of programs their unique "CBE" character. Each is described as having "elements of CBE," but neither in this chapter nor in the rather disappointing one on "What is CBE?" is a systematic set of essential characteristics developed.

Scott Thomson analyzes CBE in his chapter "CBE and Secondary Schools" and comes close to embracing MCT as an adequate manifestation of CBE. That, from my perspective, is precisely what the book as a whole tries to avoid. Thomson's analysis, however, beautifully illustrates the political character of CBE

implementation. He offers three scenarios about what could happen to CBE in the future: (1) secondary schools will eventually embrace its life-role, time-flexible character; (2) schools will remain tied to current MCT policies; (3) the entire competency-related accountability movement will be abandoned in the face of budget cuts and marginal program effectiveness. Thomson makes a good case for the viability of the first scenario. I believe, however, that this will happen only when educators abandon their love affair with subject matter definitions of educational goals and Carnegie Unit requirements for graduation, and I see few signs of that happening in our current era of fiscal and philosophical conservatism.

Reviews of National Policies for Education: United States Federal Policies for Education for the Disadvantaged.

Paris, France:

Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 1981.

—Reviewed by William Leary, Rockville Centre Union Free School District, Rockville Centre, New York.

When visitors from other countries view compensatory education programs in the United States, they bring the experience of their own countries to the scene. For example, "guestworkers" in Europe parallel the problem of ethnic minorities here.

Perhaps the major point of this study is that even though education "pursues goals of its own," it cannot be separated from the world of work. No matter what reforms occur in educating the disadvantaged, none will be successful as long as large numbers of graduates cannot find jobs. The observers contend that the American education system cannot conduct reforms in a social vacuum, and wider social and economic reforms are necessary.

Although the difficulties facing those involved in educating the disadvantaged are numerous, the foreign observers noted the "strong confidence" that continues among American educators and the general public.

Available from OECD Publications and Information Center, 1750 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20006 for \$8.50.

The Essential Middle School.

Jon Wiles and Joseph Bondi.
Columbus, Ohio:
Charles E. Merrill Publishing
Company, 1981.

—Reviewed by Ann Moniot, *Pittsburgh Public Schools, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.*

During the 1970s the middle school movement entered a new decade of maturity, bringing new insights for planning the middle schools of the 1980s. The key to the success of today's middle school is the people within the school. This is the main theme of *The Essential Middle School*. Wiles and Bondi examine roles and responsibilities for developing and/or maintaining a middle school environment that places emphasis on the learner, the teacher, and the parents and community.

The authors intend this book to be a resource for undergraduates, post-graduates, and practitioners interested in bettering middle school education.

Available from Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company for \$16.95.

Working With Troubled Children.

Victor Savicki and Rosemary Brown.
New York:
Human Sciences Press, 1981.

—Reviewed by Sylvester Kohut, Jr., *Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, Tennessee.*

Based on their experiences in training counselors, social workers, parents, and pre- and inservice teachers, Savicki and Brown have written a practitioner's guide for breaking down barriers and establishing better communications with children labeled as habitual delinquents, mildly retarded, or emotionally dis-

turbed. Information and skills activities outlined in the book range from the use of verbal and nonverbal cues, values clarification, self-disclosure, physical restraint, and tantrums to group dynamics and play therapy. Interwoven throughout the narrative are numerous examples, cartoons, and drawings that highlight key mastery skills for the reader.

Available from Human Sciences Press, 72 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011 for \$24.95.

Improving Assessment of Schoolchildren.

Carol Schneider Lidz.
San Francisco, California:
Jossey-Bass, 1981.

—Reviewed by Phil Vik, *University of South Dakota, Vermillion, South Dakota.*

The message is—assessment is a tool, not an alternative to consultation. Lidz writes a comprehensive guide for school psychologists for evaluating cognitive, emotional, and physical problems in school children.

She focuses on alternatives to traditional assessment procedures, including those criticized as discriminating against ethnic minorities and other assessment techniques such as: psychosituational, interview, play, drawing techniques, and criterion-referenced procedures. Besides giving modifications of the WISC, Stanford-Binet, Bender Gestalt, and projective measures, Lidz also uses case studies and analyzes PL 94-142 in relation to assessment.

Available from Jossey-Bass for \$14.95.

The Philosophy of Schooling.

Robin Barrow.
Somerset, New Jersey:
Halsted Press, 1981.

—Reviewed by Malcolm Evans, *Montgomery Township Schools, Skillman, New Jersey.*

In *The Philosophy of Schooling* Barrow models the tools of the analytic philosopher for students, theorists, and practitioners and applies analytic philosopher's skills to educational concerns.

Intended as an introductory text for students of educational philosophy, this book may also increase the quality of educators' discussions about the purposes and organization of schools.

Available from Halsted Press, John Wiley and Sons, Inc., One Wiley Drive, Somerset, NJ 08873 for \$16.95.

The Mathematical Education of Exceptional Children and Youth: An Interdisciplinary Approach.

Vincent J. Glennon, editor.
Reston, Virginia:
The National Council of Teachers
of Mathematics, 1981.

—Reviewed by Jane Hamlin, *Behavior Education Center, Wheeling, Illinois.*

How often is heard "Don't give me theory. I need something practical." Well, here it is. Not only is it a splendid text designed for professionals teaching mathematics to exceptional children and youth but it is also valuable for all teachers, support personnel, and teacher educators.

Problems in teaching mathematics arise from a lack of sound knowledge of the learner's characteristics, the mathematics itself, or the variables in an instructional psychology.

Practical models, lists of suggestions, and definitions abound in this readable compilation from mathematics educators and special educators.

Second in a professional reference series, preceded by *Research in Mathematics Education*, the sound scholarship evident in these publications whets the appetite for more.

Available from National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 1906 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091 for \$28.

Prison or Paradise?

James and Marcia Rudin.
Philadelphia:
Philadelphica Press, 1980.

—Reviewed by Rebecca Brandt, *Central Technical Community College, Hastings, Nebraska.*

Which of your students will someday join a religious cult? The Rudins say most of the two to three million current cult members are white middle class youths (18-26), frequently intelligent and well-educated. They assert that in the U.S. alone over 1,300 new cults have appeared since 1965. Their descriptions of the characteristics and frightening practices of nine major cults, including Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, ring true; they confirm my own observations during the three months I was a "moonie" in 1974.

Educators should read *Prison or Paradise?* so they can alert students to this insidious threat to their freedom.

Available from Fortress Press, 2900 Queen Lane, Philadelphia, PA 19129 for \$8.95.

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