

A MATH TEACHER'S VISIT TO THE SOVIET UNION

Motivated by the literature about the mathematics program in the schools in the Soviet Union [February 1981], I traveled to Moscow in October 1981 to see first-hand what was happening. Isaac Wirszup indicated that the Soviet general school math program is quite comprehensive and extensive as compared to the public school math program in this country. Furthermore, he reported that more students complete the Soviet program (about 98 percent of the school age population finish) than complete high school in the United States (about 75 percent). Reportedly, arithmetic is completed by the end of the fifth grade, and algebra is begun about the same time.

During the week of October 5-9, I visited a "general" school in Moscow and an institute responsible for the preparation of math teachers for the general schools.

All information about the school and the institute was provided by Soviet professionals. Staff people from Intourist, the government travel agency, advised me that the school I visited was of the "general" type and not a special school. The operational data about the school and about the math curriculum were provided by the teachers and the staff at the school.

Based on my observations I conclude that, indeed, the Soviet math program at the secondary level is much more comprehensive and extensive than the program with which I am familiar. The activity in the fourth grade in the Moscow school seems more like corresponding levels of our ninth graders. Also, the demeanor of the Soviet students—their academic attitude—appeared to be of high quality.

VANN LATHAM
Ninth Grade Math Teacher
E.B. Aycock Junior High School
Greenville, North Carolina

TEACHERS WHO DO NOT COMMUNICATE

Shirley Raines' article (March 1982) correctly focused on the lack of communication between teachers and administrators. Raines assumes this is because "teachers are intimidated." However, she stated six examples of the real cause, which is that teachers simply do not communicate concerns, questions, and good ideas.

No one can intimidate others unless they allow themselves to be intimidated. Teachers need to be more open, more direct, and more questioning. Teachers can offer the most to improve education—but they cannot do it if they remain silent.

WILLIAM D. SMITH
Superintendent
Alsip, Hazelgreen, and Oak Lawn
Elementary Schools, Worth, Illinois

READING THROUGH WRITING IS NOT REVOLUTIONARY

I have just discovered "On Reading, Writing and Computers: A Conversation with John Henry Martin" [October 1981]. Martin appears to say, rightly enough, that integration of language arts instruction (reading-spelling) is a preferred practice. There is nothing revolutionary about this approach, despite your claim for it as such. Good teachers have used it for decades. And, while the advantages of computer-assisted instruction are widely accepted, the fact that Martin uses this procedure does not excuse the questionable remarks he made to you about reading instruction.

First, Martin misjudges modern phonics instruction when he accuses it of paying no attention to the fact that words stand for meanings. Good phonics programs always keep uppermost in mind the importance of this consideration.

Second, Martin refers to sight-word instruction as a reasonable alternative to intensive phonics instruction. The research on the relative merit of the look-say versus the phonics approach gives him no support here. There is convincing evidence, moreover, that denies the very notion of sight words (words recognized without any attention given to their letters as cues to their recognition).

Third, Martin says "there is no orderly way to teach decoding of English given the semi-rational nature of it (English spelling)." How does he account for the overwhelming evidence that decoding instruction meets its goals? In addition, I have just completed a study whose findings contradict Martin. The second graders I studied were able to apply phonics rules to irregularly spelled words and then successfully infer the correct pronunciations of these words.

Fourth, there is no empirical evidence to support Martin's claim that learning to spell is easier than learning to recognize printed words. All mature readers know, in fact, that they can read correctly many more words than they can spell accurately.

Finally, the lack of consistency in Martin's remarks underscores the inaccurate views he holds. For example, he says at the start of his article, "I teach children to understand that the sounds they make when they speak can be made visible; that (spoken) words made visible are writing." By the end of his commentary, however, he says that children in his charge were taught to spell "with little evidence that they understood the alphabetic process of constructing the word from three phonemes; . . . before they came to understand that visual sounds—that is, letters—are interchangeable parts that can be used to make new words." The contradiction in these statements is obvious: If Martin believes that children can learn to spell without the knowledge that letters represent phonemes, why would he teach

them that spelling is phonemes made visible through writing?

I believe there is a more satisfactory way to present ideas in EL which you judge to be revolutionary. Why not submit the expression of such material to some critical analysis and print this critique as an accompaniment to the so-called revolutionary material in question?

PATRICK GROFF
Professor of Education
San Diego State University
California

Index to Advertisers

BigToys	Cover 2
Charles C Thomas · Publisher	46
Corinne A. Seeds University Elementary School, UCLA	76
Harper & Row	55
Kranz Talent Identification Instrument	35
McGraw-Hill Book Company	13
Pocket Books	27
Random House	37
Scott, Foresman and Company	Cover 4
Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company	26

Writing for Educational Leadership

We welcome manuscripts on any aspect of curriculum, instruction, supervision, or leadership in elementary and secondary education. Papers should be written in direct, readable style and be as brief as possible (five to ten pages typed double-spaced). We reserve the right to edit for brevity, clarity, and consistency of style.

References may be cited as footnotes or listed in bibliographic form at the end of the article. For examples of either style, refer to a recent issue or to Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers* (University of Chicago Press). Double-space everything, including questions and footnotes.

Please send two copies. Rejected manuscripts are not returned unless the author provides a self-addressed envelope with the necessary postage.

Editor's note: Comments on our articles are welcome. Address letters to Editor, *Educational Leadership*, 225 N. Washington St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Letters accepted for publication may be edited for brevity and clarity.

Copyright © 1983 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.