

Book Reviews

Notes from a Schoolteacher

James Herndon
New York

Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1985

Reviewed by Michael Gose, Pepperdine University, Malibu, California

James Herndon has, once again, captured the ebb and flow of the real world of classroom teaching in a way separate and apart from the current public debate about American schools. *Notes from a Schoolteacher* may be seen as something of a companion piece to John Goodlad's *A Place Called School*. Whereas Goodlad's book, based on extensive research, evidences the fine expositional style of a literate educator, Herndon's book, based on nearly three decades of public school teaching, evidences the brilliant poetic style of a literary educator. As an educator, I am proud that our profession has produced such an artist as Herndon.

As seen in his previous books about schooling (*The Way It Spozed to Be, How to Survive in Your Native Land*), Herndon has Vonnegut's unerring sense and eye for irony. For example, in his long-running feud with his students over every teacher's nightmare, the drinking fountain: "Mark says, 'Why do you insist on calling the water faucet a fountain?'" Herndon argues with his kids: "So I say you are all barbarians! Being that the class is called social studies, it is a word I get to use and I am fond of it."

Herndon also reminds me of Trudeau's "Doonesbury," where the last frame consistently undermines any chance of acknowledging the "way it spozed to be." Teachers might "spozed to be" apologetic for calling children barbarians, but Herndon is "fond of it." Recalling all teachers' battles over the drinking "fountain," pencil sharpener, hall pass, and tardy bell, Herndon iconoclastically, but systematically, exposes the woeful naïveté of the current raft of commissions, tables, reports, and proposals—from merit pay to the extended school day—that are spozed to improve schools.

Rightly, I think, Herndon captures the paradox that schools are worse

than we would like, but better than we have reason to expect, and that, for better and worse, teachers are the franchise without whom there is no season. "It works! I mutter to myself ... just as being alive works . . ."

Herndon warns us that he is "only here to remind you, readers, what a school is, and what it is for, and why it is there, and what goes on in it. It is only something to remember: there is nothing to learn."

Perhaps the only disingenuous comment in his book is that there is nothing to learn. As he deftly captures (in a scant 169 pages) what school is—really—about, he releases us from the darkness of Plato's cave to look at schools under bright sunlight. The improved vision makes it seem as though one has learned a great deal.

I tried to savor the book like a rare, fine wine (Herndon has written only three school books in three decades), but I lacked the discipline—something he'd surely understand—and consumed it at once. I can scarcely imagine anyone who ever went to school not loving this book.

Available from Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020, for \$15.95.

Research as a Basis for Teaching: Readings from the Work of Lawrence Stenhouse

Edited by Jean Ruddock and David Hopkins
Portsmouth:
Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 1985

Reviewed by William R. Martin, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia

Excellent main title! One most appropriate for teachers "who, in the end, will change the world of the school by understanding it." Understanding this book rests on considering its two basic principles: first, that teacher research is linked to the strengthening of teacher judgment and consequently to the self-directed improvement of practice; and, second, that the most important focus for research is the curriculum. Accordingly, the book is divided into two sections, one on the editors' view of research

and the other on their view of curriculum. Working through these uncovers stylishly worded views like "research should underwrite speculation and undermine assertion."

Overall, the readings are a challenging argument for classroom research by teachers as a basis for improving teaching. They should appeal to all educators, but more likely to those really concerned with school-based curriculum development, those taking higher degree courses in curriculum and research, and those in education research.

Available from Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 70 Court St., Portsmouth, NH 03801, for \$12.50.

The Schoolwork Protest Movement: 40 Questions and Answers

Edward B. Jenkinson
Bloomington, Indiana
Phi Delta Kappa, 1985

Reviewed by Rosemary B. Tobin, Emmanuel College, Boston, Massachusetts

Former chairman of the National Council of Teachers of English Committee Against Censorship Edward B. Jenkinson has provided readers with a practical and practicable handbook in question/answer form on the nature of the schoolbook protest movement. What books should be read in school, who makes the decisions, and the role of censorship are issues both complex and volatile, which this book treats, and which cut to the heart of the kind of education our children receive. Professional educators, parents, and potential teachers will all want to read this book, dealing as it does with a topic fundamental to academic and human freedom.

Available from Phi Delta Kappa, Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402, for \$5.00.

Rethinking School Improvement: Research, Craft, and Concept

Edited by Ann Lieberman
New York:
Teachers College Press, 1986

Reviewed by Sarah Caldwell, Webster

Groves School District, Webster Groves, Missouri

Both students and practitioners will find this an important collection of articles that provides fresh insight into the complexities of school improvement. Some of the 20 authors and researchers deal with critical analysis and refinement of their earlier research, while others offer creative ways of thinking about improving schools, staff, and curriculum.

Rather than advocating traditional thinking, which can cause schools to be operated as factories, Schlechty and Joslin suggest a new image of schools as knowledge work organizations. This shift in thinking would necessitate changes in roles for teachers and students.

Especially important is Little's follow-up to earlier research on successful staff development. She offers compelling evidence on the principal's influence as a staff development leader and clarifies the concept of school-based staff development for school improvement.

Available from Teachers College Press, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027, for \$12.95.

What They Don't Tell You in Schools of Education About School Administration

*John A. Black and Fenwick W. English
Lancaster, Pennsylvania:
Technomic Publishing Co., Inc., 1986*

—Reviewed by John Gilroy, Seattle University, Seattle, Washington.

Machiavelli couldn't have said it better.

From the opening chapter on Power and Politics to the Guidelines for Success provided on the last few pages, this wonderful, witty book tells it like it is. No purely scholarly approach to administration here. These two experienced administrators tell you what school administration is *really* all about—how to deal with the media, PTAs, unions, school boards, incompetent faculty and staff; how to "use" the budget, the community, the bureaucracy.

Through it all, the authors communicate a deep commitment to their profession and stress that the administrator's prime responsibility is to ensure that students get the best possible education.

Put this one on your bookshelf beside *The Prince*.

Available from Technomic Publishing Co., Inc., 851 New Holland Ave., Box 3535, Lancaster, PA 17604, for \$29.00.

Sex, Schools, and the Law

*Fernand N. Dutille
Springfield, Illinois:
Charles C. Thomas, 1986*

—Reviewed by James T. Sears, University of South Carolina, Columbia

While few educators would question the legitimate role that schools have in providing sex education in the curriculum or including controversial books of scientific or literary merit in school libraries, they might well hesitate at using sexually oriented materials in the classroom, supporting homosexual men and women in teaching positions, approving student publications on sexually related topics, or admitting unwed, teenaged mothers to school.

This authoritative, up-to-date book straightforwardly addresses these and other legal issues. Detailed discussions regarding specific factors the courts often consider in assessing the merits of such cases and the author's recommendations for sane school policies are particularly useful. *Sex, Schools, and the Law* will assist board members, administrators, and teachers in developing a contemporary curriculum while avoiding expensive, divisive, and lengthy litigation.

Available from Charles C. Thomas, 2600 S. First St., Springfield, IL 62717, for \$26.75.

Child Development and Education in Japan

*Edited by Harold Stevenson, Hiroshi Azuma, and Kenji Hakuta
New York:
W. H. Freeman and Company, 1986*

—Reviewed by John Cogan, Global Education Center, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis

The last decade has witnessed an extraordinary interest in Japan by Americans. Stemming largely from the so-called "economic miracle," this attention recently has spread to education as well. Surveys consistently show Japanese students outdistancing their American counterparts in overall educational achievement, especially in math and science.

This collection of essays by the Japanese and students of Japan offers clues as to how the Japanese have used the educational system to become a fully modern, industrialized society while reinforcing the traditional values of hard work, dependability, and responsibility. Those seeking insights into how we might rethink some of our child-rearing and educational practices will appreciate this volume. Perhaps it is time for the teacher to seek the wisdom of a former student?

Available from W. H. Freeman and Company, 41 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10010, for \$24.95 (hardbound) and \$14.95 (paperbound).

The Neglected Majority

*Dale Parnell
Washington, D.C.
The Community College Press, 1985*

—Reviewed by Lucien Ellington, Center for Economic Education, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Almost all the recent studies of high schools seem to focus on improving the knowledge base of four-year college-bound students while, if present trends continue, 65 to 75 percent of our young people will not receive a bachelor's degree. *The Neglected Majority* explores possible partnerships between high schools and community colleges and offers a different perspective on educational reform.

The author argues that general track students, who constitute a plurality of all high school enrollees nationally, are largely ignored in state and local educational improvement efforts. The problem is compounded since these students are the most likely candidates for mid-level positions, such as computer technicians, that are so valuable to both the public and private sectors.

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Parnell proposes a radically increased number of coordinated partnerships between community colleges and high schools. While some sections are repetitive and two-year colleges seem to be idealized at times, the book provides useful information on the community college option for high school educators.

Available from the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, National Center for Higher Education, 1 Dupont Circle, Suite 410, N.W., Washington, DC 20036, for \$17.95.

Taking Advantage of Media: A Manual for Parents and Teachers

*Laurene Krasny Brown
Boston:*

Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986

—Reviewed by Peter Wagschal, National University, Vista, California.

At a time when too many authors are engaged in a fruitless debate over which medium is best, Brown has provided a delightful little book that teachers and parents will actually find useful. Focusing on fiction, Brown summarizes in readable terms the latest findings regarding the impacts, styles, limitations, and possibilities of different media.

Spanning the gamut from oral storytelling to interactive video as media for presenting fiction to children from toddlerhood through the teens, *Taking Advantage of Media* argues convincingly for a balanced "diet" in the use of media for children. The "Hands-On" sections at the end of each chapter will prove valuable to parents and teachers alike.

Available from Routledge & Kegan Paul, 9 Park St., Boston, MA 02108, for \$18.95.

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