

Reviews

The World We Created at Hamilton High

Gerald Grant
Cambridge, Mass.

Harvard University Press, 1988

—Reviewed by Frank L. Tout, Principal, Thomas Carr High School, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Gerald Grant provides a meticulous study of Hamilton High School (a pseudonym) from its opening in the 1950s to the present. The author assesses the school's present dilemma, attempts to define what went wrong with its vision of the American Dream, and charts a plan of survival for the American public school as an intellectual and moral force in today's society.

Grant carefully reconstructs the '50s era, when cheating was repugnant, editorials lambasted students who ate too quickly in the cafeteria, and God and Country were extolled equally with being good-looking and popular. Few school rules were written down; the expectations were simply middle-class standards of courtesy and respect. Teaching at Hamilton High was a choice assignment; more than 85 percent of its graduates went on to postsecondary education.

In the 1960s the school entered the "deconstruction" phase, when the staff felt unprepared for increasing numbers of minority students and the racial clashes that plagued Hamilton High from 1968 through 1971. In one year riots closed the school 10 times. The school "day" became half-day sessions to avoid cafeteria confrontations; assemblies and dances were forgotten for a decade. Many families left the district; by the fall of 1971, 72 percent of the staff who had taught at Hamilton High in 1966 had resigned, retired, or transferred.

In 1971 the violence subsided, but by then the "business" of school had changed dramatically. No longer was the authority of the staff unquestioned; teachers, uncertain and often despair-

ing, were on the defensive. In a school gone topsy-turvy, teachers were dealing with students who openly defied school rules, viewed vandalism as righteous protest, and dismissed traditional values as meaningless or hypocritical. Teaching became difficult—if not impossible—as students negotiated skillfully what they would or would not do. Drugs became a fact of school life. Later, increased numbers of disabled students and an influx of Asian students provided additional pressures.

By 1980 the school had entered a period of comparative stability. However, even today there are still concerns about truancy, tardiness, low levels of student performance, and the disappearance of the ideals and aspirations that bring meaning to an institution.

For those of us who experienced those years, Grant's account is a vivid and painfully accurate chronicle of a tumultuous time in American education. For those of us who didn't, his book offers special insights into the forces that have—for better or worse—shaped our public high schools.

Available from Harvard University Press, 79 Garden St., Cambridge, MA 02138, for \$24.95.

Preparing for the 21st Century: Thinking Critically about War and Peace

Rodger Halstead
Los Angeles
Churchill Films, 1989

—Reviewed by Richard W. Paul, Director, Center for Critical Thinking, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, California.

"Preparing for the 21st Century" is one of a three-part video series for teacher training called *Teaching Critical Thinking about Conflict Resolution*. The video was filmed during

sessions of an elective course on critical thinking about war, peace, and conflict resolution taught at Homestead High School in Cupertino, California. As a documentary, it combines these classroom scenes with insights into Halstead's philosophy of teaching. Halstead uses Socratic questioning to stimulate his students to develop their reasoning and to consider objections that can be raised against their thinking.

It would be hard to find a better video demonstration of how to use Socratic questioning with high school students. Inservice leaders will find this tape an important critical thinking resource. Comes with a teacher's guide by Rodger Halstead.

Available from Churchill Films, 662 N. Robertson Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90069.

Integrating Computers into the Elementary and Middle School

N. Roberts and M. Carter
Englewood Cliffs, N.J.
Prentice Hall, 1988

—Reviewed by Rebecca Bunch, Tarrant City Schools, Birmingham, Alabama.

If you could have only one sourcebook for ideas and software recommendations to promote the use of the computers already in your school, this text could be your choice. The authors' approach is to discover where the computer can be integrated into the curriculum. The summary of software used successfully in the field is excellent. But the creative uses teachers have put common spreadsheets and databases to will excite even those who are advanced users. Language arts, math, social studies, and science curriculum computer uses are highlighted through the better software available.

Available from Prentice Hall, 200 Old Tappan Rd., Old Tappan, NJ 07675, for \$22.00.

Messages From Home

Phyllis Levenstein
Columbus

The Ohio State University Press, 1988

—Reviewed by Dorothy Rich, *The Home and School Institute, Washington, D.C.*

Anyone writing a dissertation on the early history of preschool home visiting programs will want to read *Messages From Home*. It's a message from Phyllis Levenstein, one of the pioneers of the early childhood intervention programs. Begun in the 1960s, these federally funded programs were designed to prevent school disadvantage by reaching at-risk children and their mothers at home *before* these children went to school. Levenstein created the Mother-Child Home Program, which sent visitors into the home to use and demonstrate the use of toys to stimulate verbal interaction between adult and child.

Those early efforts showed gains for children, but as a group they were not funded past their development and demonstration period. The hope had been that other groups and schools would pick them up and replicate them. By and large, this has not been a dream fulfilled. There is a list of sites still using this program, but it is far too short. One current program that harks back to Levenstein's work is the Missouri Parents Are Teachers Program.

This book would be more useful to practitioners today if it had been written less as a case study and more as a how-to-do-it-now, but the references are particularly helpful for those who want to learn about the early days of mother-child intervention programs.

Available from Ohio State University Press, 175 Mount Hall, 1050 Carmack Rd., Columbus, OH 43210-6930, for \$22.50.

The Subject Matters

Susan S. Stodolsky
Chicago

University of Chicago Press, 1988

—Reviewed by Arnold Willems, *University of Wyoming-Laramie*

Based on intensive observations of 5th grade math (considered a basic subject) and social studies (considered an enrichment subject) classes, *The Subject Matters* convincingly doc-

uments that what is taught greatly influences the teaching/learning process and instructional arrangements. Individual teachers varied instructional goals and formats and the nature of pupil activities considerably from one subject to the other. Consequently, Stodolsky provides a rationale for the position that the subject matters so much that this is the fundamental reason our pervasive search for ideal teaching practices and effective schools is ineffectual.

Available from University of Chicago Press, 5801 S. Ellis Ave., Chicago, IL 60687, for \$27.95 cloth.

The Politics of Excellence and Choice in Education

Edited by William Lowe Boyd and
Charles Taylor Kerchner
Philadelphia

The Falmer Press, 1988

—Reviewed by Roy R. Pellicano, *Brooklyn, New York*

In *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Samuel Clemens' protagonist claims that nation building involves three primary factors: a patent office, a school system, and a newspaper. Each legitimates and controls knowledge, and will reinforce values that ground the nation. The value system is the republic, and Clemens created stereotypical characters dramatizing the bonds linking literacy, citizenship, and nation building. Schools function as the "man-factories" to defeat the power of inherited ideas and to create the self-actualized citizen. Clemens recognized schools, given agreement and consensus, as instruments of the polity, instilling and reinforcing values.

Boyd and Kerchner remind us that we need to focus attention on values and objectives as a starting point for school reform, offering a variety of perspectives on the goals of "excellence" and "choice" as both a warrant and a grounding for schooling. Fourteen articles analyze the understanding and the implementation of excellence and choice as policy goals, including issues of equity and social justice, with emphasis "upon the problems and inconsistencies."

Combined with *Closing of the American Mind*, this volume helps us

reflect upon the values and goals of our public policies as we define and shape our schools. To accomplish the latter, we need common definitions and objectives—thank you, Boyd and Kerchner.

Available from The Falmer Press, Taylor and Francis, 242 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA 19106, for \$22.00.

Learning and Loving It: Theme Studies in the Classroom

Ruth Gamberg, Winniefred Kwak,
Meredith Hutchings, and Judy Altheim,
with Gail Edwards
Portsmouth, N.H.
Heinemann Educational Books, Inc.,
1988

—Reviewed by William G. Wraga, *Bernards Township Public Schools, Basking Ridge, New Jersey*

Elementary school people excited in exploring an ambitious departure from traditional subject-centered instruction will find a rich store of practical advice in this sensible, informative, and interesting volume.

Theme study focuses learning on a central topic and engages learners in purposeful interdisciplinary activities and projects. Instruction combines a psycholinguistic approach to reading, a process approach to writing, a problem-solving approach to manipulating materials, and a discovery approach to science and social studies. With theme study, teachers can avoid the pitfall of becoming overly child-centered at the expense of addressing subject matter and the needs of society.

The authors explain guidelines for planning and implementing theme studies in classrooms. They offer a half-dozen detailed descriptions of successful large-scale and specialized theme studies. The volume is profusely illustrated with samples of student writing and drawing and with photographs of student activities and projects. The authors offer realistic answers to hard questions about how the three Rs, homework, discipline, and evaluation are treated under the theme study approach.

Available from Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 70 Court St., Portsmouth, NH 03901, for \$17.50 paper.

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