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Rose, Ella Pohl

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Johannesburg College of Education
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BOOKS REVIEWED



Guiding the Young Child, from Kindergarten to Grade Three. Prepared by a Committee of the California School Supervisor's Association. (D. C. Heath & Co.)

This work is written for the use of students who intend to teach in nursery, kindergarten and the Junior Department of Primary Schools. For teachers it should serve as a refresher course on the latest American practices on working with young children and their parents.

Briefly, it deals with the growth and development of children, with the planning of a curriculum so that home, school and community all play their part in stimulating the young child, and with the responsibility of the home and school in guiding young children to successful personal and social adjustment. Whereas the developmental studies written by psychologists such as Arnold Gesell and Francis Ilg, are chiefly home-orientated, this study is school orientated.

The type of school advocated by this work is one to which the young child goes for from three to six hours during which he enjoys "properly balanced activity, rest and nutrition." Many of the ideas expressed by the Supervisor's Committee are familiar to those who have had anything to do with nursery school education in this country, but it is certainly revolutionary to learn that a child in his fourth year at school, who is there from 8.45—3.00 should spend less than two hours in what may be termed "formal" education. Thus from 12.20—1.20 is devoted to the "Development of skills in relation to reading", 1.20—2.40 to "Development of skills in relation to Arithmetic", 2.30—3.00 "Spelling and writing". The latter two subjects are only taught on demand. This is reminiscent of the Pestalozzi method, when the children want to know how to write or spell a word for the recording of some experience.

What then are the aims of such a school? Four types of experiences should be provided:

1. Those designed to contribute to physical development and emotional adjustment. To this end opportunity for play, indoors and out, for large-muscle activity by the availability of a variety of play-equipment, are provided, as well as health and medical inspections and the establishment of habits of rest, nutrition, relaxation, elimination and cleanliness.

2. Those designed to develop scientific and social understandings and attitudes. Children are given the opportunity of playing at homemaking, housekeeping and gardening in properly equipped centres. They are taken out to inspect markets, groceries or butcheries which distribute food; farms and dairies which produce it; as well as aerodromes, stations, harbours, truck yards which are instrumental in transporting it. During their early school years, children are gradually given the opportunity of becoming independent and at the same time of cooperating as a group in an atmosphere of acceptance, mutual responsibility and appreciation.

3. "Although the teacher of the young child is far more concerned with the kind of human being each child is becoming than with the acquisition of specific skills, the educational programme is one that provides: 'Opportunity for the extension of vocabulary, for the understanding of qualitative concepts, for experiences from which readiness for reading develops, for the developing of skill in the use of saw, paint brush, clay etc'."

4. Finally opportunities are provided for the child to express himself in his own way without the imposition of patterns by the teacher: He may express his ideas and feelings, release emotion and find satisfying outlets for such moods through creative media, books, music, drama or rhythm.

How does such a programme compare with Grades and Standard One practice in South Africa, and could any of these ideas be adopted profitably?

1. The Physical Development is all too often regarded as being of little concern to the teacher. The children are expected to stay indoors without moving much for about four out of five hours of their school day. In the playground there may be one or two swings and a horizontal bar, for fifty or so children. A few schools do have properly equipped playgrounds, but one feels that far more could easily and profitably be done in this field.

2. Again very few schools make provisions for socialising activities. Perhaps it may be argued that home-making play belongs to pre-school and out-of school activities. But it is felt that far more use should be made of community resources such as factories, police-stations etc. Projects, such as a bakery project for seven-year-olds is discussed in great detail in this book. Preparation by reading and discussion, the actual visit, dramatisation and reconstruction of the bakery should prove really useful to children. One cannot help feeling that American high school children should have far more idea of different vocations than South Africans, as a result of this early familiarity with their own community.

3. In South Africa it is the Nursery Schools which adhere to this principle of the whole child being more important than knowledge in any particular subject. Each teacher will decide for himself whether it is better to spend hours on drill every day in spelling, reading and arithmetic, or to create an attitude which is conducive to the acquisition of these skills when they are needed . One has to decide whether the first method might result in a blockage towards learning and school ,or whether the second method might produce children who would never be bothered to read, write or count. Incidentally all arithmetic learning for the young child is still based on concrete experiences, although the seven-year-old "can probably say the numbers accurately in sequence." On the other hand his social development is far ahead of the South African child, for when he is eight he should be able to chair a meeting of his peers successfully.

4. If funds permit, art materials are provided in South Africa, and it has long been recognised that they are a legitimate part of the education of the young child. On the whole, there is far more direc-

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tion of painting, percussion bands etc. here than in America. They are taught the correct way to use tools etc. in Californian schools though, and both boys and girls learn the techniques of handling such things as trysquares, mitre-boxes, rasps, clamps, brace and bit etc. at seven.

The volume is illustrated by lively photographs of various activities enjoyed by children of different ages, examples of children's conversations and spontaneous chants, and detailed descriptions of the teacher's role in providing materials and suggestions for various projects.

In addition there are chapters on the Child's Experiences in Social Living, Language Expression, Literature, Art, Music, Personal-Social Adjustment as well as a chapter on Teachers' Work with Parents. A School Day and a School Year for fives, sixes, sevens and eight, should prove most illuminating.

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E.P.R.

An American assesses the intentions of Russian Education.

The Challenge of Soviet Education by G. S. Counts (McGraw-Hill).



Sputnik marked the end of an age: and the end of a Western Myth that no real science or literature could emerge from a totalitarian state. Certainly men who can plan the theory and later attain the actuality of launching Sputnik have achieved a very real scientific advance that no counter-propaganda can destroy; and the achievements of writers such as Boris Pasternak raise problems in that aspect of creative life that rests more squarely on value judgements and emotional involvements. In the U.S.A., Admiral Rickover, backed by the Edison Institute, launched a series of attacks on current inadequacies in American education, and even if this reached an occasionally hysterical note, it led to a re-thinking of the intentions of American schools that could not escape the hard fact that the wealthy U.S.A., spending an estimated three per cent of its national income on education, was running far behind the Soviet Union, which spends ten per cent. And the fact, which George S. Counts again emphasises in **The Challenge of Soviet Education** (McGraw Hill), that during latter years the Soviet has been graduating two or three times as many scientific technicians as the United States, has destroyed the popular complacency in the minds of many Americans. "No society in history," says Dr. Counts, speaking of Russia, "has ever committed itself so unreservedly in words to the mastery and development of mathematics and the natural sciences. Each youngster who completes the full middle school, takes ten years of mathematics, six years of geography, six of biology, five years of physics, four years of chemistry, and one year of astronomy. This is a formidable offering."

Dr. Counts is not concerned with a descriptive account of the Soviet Educational System. The reader who approaches this book looking ror elementary factual information would do better to start with Deana Levin's "Soviet Education." Dr. Counts's work is crammed with fact, but rather with the intent of deriving a final evaluation of aims and achievements and of establishing grounds for comparison. Dr. Counts accepts passionately the tenets of a free society and analyses Soviet education with the clear view of exposing even its more enticing achievements.

There is an historical review of the gradual order imposed by earlier Soviet leaders on an amorphous and collapsed society often opposed to their politics — and in the case of teachers, frequently actively opposed to them in such an effective way that, since the whole profession could not be liquidated without bringing the national life to a halt, the early Party Committee set out to win them over. Dr. Counts considers the goals of Soviet Education, the use of indoctrination to obtain complete obedience to the Party, and the growth of a class of intellectual élite, originally from peasant stock but nowadays reverting appreciably to the original class intellectual. He has much to say about political indoctrination, the re-education of deviates, and the technique of bolstering morale.

Whilst he freely admits the incomparable achievement of Soviet education, the understrutting fear and authoritarianism is most lucidly demonstrated. If our colleagues might envy a system in which children selecting leaders for The Young Pioneers enquire into their school marks, and boo those below "good", there is the horror of the purge, which the interested reader may discover in a book written by a Russian professor and a German scientist, who were jointly purged and lived to escape. ("Russian Purge and the Extraction of Confession"; Beck and Godin, New York, 1951.) Women political prisoners never leave correction camps without losing "the human image", for males have the inalienable right to violate any of them. The worst of all crimes, far worse than murder, is actual or suspected political dissent. The lowest of all criminals is the man accused of treason. The Communists have perfected such a system of inquisition that confessions can be extracted from everyone from simple artisans to a cardinal of the Church. Political re-education starts with an arrest at 2 a.m. and proceeds without definite charge until fatigue leads to desperation and the admission of any suitable confession to escape from the non-stop insistence of the inquisition. One Young Pioneer achieved immortality, including becoming the hero of a ballad that ran into a circulation of 100,000 copies of his praise. This Sepan Shchipachev in 1951 turned over his own parents to the political police.

If there is much to admire technically in Soviet education, and only the most biased person could deny this, there is much in its philosophical implications to horrify. **The Challenge of Soviet Education** is thus a timely and mature book which adds to the growing literature on this colossus. Education, one realises again and again in the modern world, is a means to an end.

P.B.