

## Reviews

text of the original book. Recent photographs and a cartoon on the cover are effective, and the organization of the contents has been changed from straight numbering to a listing of chapters grouped under two major headings: 1) "The Teacher's Procedures" and 2) "The Instructional Instruments." In the chapter on the use of audio-visual aids, all of the sections on such traditional aids as chalkboards and duplicated materials are left intact, but a section on computer-assisted instruction has been added.

What has resulted from the addition of a third more pages is as inconsistent as the first edition. Although the authors espouse a synthesis of the traditional and progressive philosophies of education, their dependence on such activities as "drill" and their emphasis on the inculcation of "high morals" and "citizenship" belie their progressive posturing. In a radio unit used as an example, the teacher tells the grade 8 class: "This program is yours. I shall give you as much assistance as possible, but I want you to decide what the programs will be." Later, when students suggest "A Wild West Show!" and "A Trip to Mars!" the authors note that, "These ideas called for teacher intervention." Why not allow a Wild West Show with appropriate music, commentary, history, and sound effects or a science fiction trip to Mars which would feature as much scientific information as the students could assimilate?

Those beginning teachers, secondary as well as elementary, who want methods specifically explained will find what they are looking for in this book. However, they should be advised to make sure that these methods correlate with their philosophies better than they do with the articulated philosophy of the authors.

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Joseph Featherstone.

### AN INTRODUCTION: BRITISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS TODAY.

Toronto:  
Macmillan, 1972.  
62 pp. \$1.25.

*An Introduction* is a brief, clearly enunciated account of the British primary school system. It is the first of a series of 23 booklets dealing with themes such as science, art, music, evaluation, and rural school experience. The preparation of the series was inspired by the publication, in 1967, of the *Plowden Report*. This was a document of the Central Advisory Council on Education which called attention to the important changes going on in the primary schools, usually considered the "Cinderellas" of British educational systems. (The primary school in Britain refers to the 3-12 year age groups and includes the Infant and Junior Schools.) The work under review is a descriptive survey of the organizational and curricular changes now being carried out in the best of the 23,000 British primary schools. The only statistics provided indicate, that of this group of schools, 109 are performing outstanding work, 10% are doing "superb work" in a particular area and about 13 are performing good work along informal lines. (p. 13)

Effective change towards educational informality is initiated early in the school experience. Young children are encouraged to move freely and talk among themselves. Curriculum and timetables are not fixed. Nonetheless, the teacher's role does not become less central than in a formal classroom; rather there is a change of emphasis, with more effort being placed on setting the pace, offering advice, introducing ideas and materials, and acting as a catalyst and organizer.

Unlike usual curriculum changes handed down by outside administrators and planners, the British primary reform has developed a unified approach through the efforts of teachers working with the children. The teacher's work encompasses a thorough knowledge of developmental theory, Piagetian insights, and individual differences so that emphasis and encouragement are given to the child's strengths rather than to his weaknesses. "Freedom" of action in a classroom becomes a "planned environment" organized for individual work with provision made for suitable experiences, appropriate language development, and practice which follows, rather than precedes, child discovery.

In Britain there is a growing concern about the difficulty of evaluating children's learning in an informal setting. Joseph Featherstone suggests to his readers that although the British have been deficient in creating "measurable objectives," the Americans, on the other hand, are so engrossed in this practice that too many schools have put "the cart of conventional measurement before the horse of learning." (p. 39) The author admits that research is scanty, but some evidence points to the validity of the claim that reducing the formal

control over pupils, as carried out in British informal as well as in American "progressive" schools, has not impaired the acquisition of academic skills.

Throughout *An Introduction* there is a repetitive theme of the effectiveness of the British primary schools and how much personnel of the American system can learn from it. The author states quite clearly that this is not meant to make the American educator feel inadequate but rather it is an "invitation to begin rethinking a philosophy of education." (p. 9) Many of the comparisons made between the British and American schools are not justified in the light of the differences in the political and economic institutions of the two countries. Still, British reforms have a great appeal to American educators who are emerging from teacher, parent and pupil unrest and from a "general-staff mentality" of reformers and managers. Featherstone states that over the past 10 years, American efforts at educational reform have tended to be faddish and a hit-or-miss process without a coherent vision of the whole school environment and the child's role as an active learner.

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