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are effectively applied to a wide range of dichotomies that characterize the curriculum field: dependence/independence; holism/reductionism; theory/practice; self/others; scientific/humanistic. The lenses work both to decompose these dichotomies further - to burn away the underbrush - and also to enlarge certain issues in curriculum. The important issue of the nature of the foundations of curriculum is writ large.

The limitations of empirical social science as a source-bed for curriculum theory are exposed; the errors of false dependence on the apparent authority of empirical research in education are documented. For those who consider science as a sacred cow in education, this book will no doubt be bitter fodder. So often in the literature, the experimental paradigm in curriculum is smuggled into discussions of curriculum theory. Not so here. The authors are careful to examine their assumptions about the relevance of the problems and methods they discuss. My only quibble, and it is a small one, is that the authors might have explored briefly, in the spirit of the book, their particular conception of rationality in relation to other conceptions of rationality, and their collective relationship to curriculum theory.

For those who seek a consistent and careful treatment of perennial problems of the curriculum field, and greater familiarity with a particular philosophical approach to these problems, the book is an excellent choice. To a large degree, these essays make good their promise.

John Olson
Queen's University

Peter Medway.

FINDING A LANGUAGE: AUTONOMY AND LEARNING IN SCHOOL.
London, England: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1980.
95 pp. 1.95 Pounds, paper.

Much of what Peter Medway has to say in this little book is of paramount importance to English teachers and others concerned with English curriculum. However, despite the fact that language is the issue at hand, Medway does not always use it to its best communicative advantage. For one thing, to uncover basic information, the reader must follow the author through an introductory maze (the book starts off with a student composition about rabbits in ditches). Well into Chapter One, the reader finally discovers important background information - namely, that the book is about the British system, the senior school, and students between the ages of 14

and 16. And whereas syntactic efficiency and clarity should be exemplary in a book of this nature, Medway produces sentences such as the following: "Are scientific concepts and procedures what one 'naturally' reaches for once one has gained, by writing in the way that owes more to literature than science, a certain level of control over one's own experience?" But do not let me unduly discourage those interested in the development of English curriculum from following Medway through his maze, for there are some insightful observations along the way.

In his introduction the author states that his book "arises out of attempts to get right that three-fold relationship: English, humanities, working-class students." The basic contention of the book is that competence in the English language can only be achieved by changing the role of English in the curriculum and the teacher-student role pattern in the English class. The changes Medway recommends are good and valid - namely, that English should be taught "across the curriculum", and that "language is, or ought to be, the concern of all (other subjects)." To this end the author believes in allowing the natural or informal language of students' intuitions, observations, and reactions to enter into all school subjects or disciplines.

The kind of knowledge which is promoted by English is not, as first appears, peculiar to it but is common to all the disciplines; the way the disciplines are taught, however, tends to conceal this underlying similarity. The separation in the secondary school curriculum of the scientific (in the broad sense) from the personal and intuitive ways of knowing fails to reflect the psychological realities of most of the students under 16 that I have known. It does not correspond to any achieved differentiation in their thinking; few of them have come to regard objectivity and the establishment of impersonal truth as values in themselves. Arrival at that stage appears indeed to be hindered by teaching approaches which insist on the outward forms of objectivity and which exclude the larger part of the child's response.

The methodological assumption Medway makes is that students' communicative abilities in English will improve if they are allowed to express themselves "autonomously" and under the least amount of pressure. Students are to be "coaxed along" and "rarely directed." Work is done in groups or independently. This approach rings of the progressive movement in education and suffers from some of its shortcomings and contradictions. In what direction is the autonomous student to be "coaxed along", and what determines whether students work independently or in groups?

The author attempts to deal with some of these difficulties by pointing out ways in which teachers can "propose" or hint at

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possibilities for student activities on a given topic in a particular discipline. However, the reader is left in the dark as to what is to be done if a student "autonomously" rejects a teacher's suggestions.

Another problem is that the book is virtually devoid of information on what (if anything) a teacher is supposed to do about students' writing errors. For the most part, written feedback to students' "log books and projects" takes the form of encouragement - "Great. You're doing very well on this one" - or unexplained, random responses (in colloquial spelling):

Teacher: When are you off? (referring to the student's assignment, which involves visiting city bridges)

Student: Never if I am put in a fridge. Next week probably, but how do I get there, walk, run, bike, car, taxi, bus, train, plane, ship, rocket, or shot out of a cannon?

Teacher: On yer bike.

What the author does provide of value are suggestions for activities, rich in language and communicative content, and in all the skill areas - reading, writing, speaking, and listening or understanding. But in the area of specific language curriculum content - the grammatical and rhetorical aspects of communication - the book provides little help.

In general, the strength of this book is in its overall sense of idealism and in the comments it provides regarding the role of English across the curriculum. And for those of us concerned with student apathy in English classes, Medway's remarks are of paramount importance.

Our ideal (is one) of an education voluntarily taken up (by the students) for the sake of the manifest benefits it offers...

Topics in the face of which students had switched off on conventional courses turned out to be successful with us when they were presented as material for exploration, evaluation and dialogue. What it needed was a different sort of process whereby they were able to take a more satisfying and autonomous role in relation to the material...

Ours was a curriculum devised to meet one overriding need: to get students actively involved in their own education...

The diffusion of "English" into other areas can produce great benefits without necessarily endangering the

distinctive core (of other disciplines).

Gerry Strei
Nova University, Florida

Dennis F. Fisher and Charles W. Peters, editors.
COMPREHENSION AND THE COMPETENT READER.
Inter-Specialty Perspectives.
New York, N.Y.: Praeger Publishers, 1981.
166 pp. \$23.30.

Six years ago the theme of the 19th International Convention of the International Reading Association was "The Teacher - Key to Excellence in Reading." From the 24th Convention comes a book entitled, "Comprehension and the Competent Reader - Interspecialty Perspectives." They've come a long way baby.

Any sign of excellence in thinking, organizing, and communicating ideas would be difficult to find in this collection of articles. The book comprises eight chapters, each submitted by a specialist, psychologist, or researcher either in the reading field or in an associated area of learning.

The preface announces the authors' joint concern that "very little information is being passed from the ivory tower of the basic researcher to the classrooms of the teacher and vice versa." The stated goal of the **project** (the word used, instead of book) is to "provide a forum of mutual concern about comprehension in the competent reader that would allow the basic researcher, applied educational researcher and classroom teacher to effectively 'inter-act' and 'to bridge the information gap'." Quite what is meant by a "forum of mutual concern" is not clear to this reader. It is clear, however, that no bridge could sustain the weight of the ponderous prose used throughout the book.

Chapter One, by Dennis Fisher, addresses the need to understand comprehension competency, to get "people who can read but do not read again and to effectively match research to text to method to reader." No comment.

In Chapter Two Bonnie Mahers describes basic research implications for prose comprehension from an "interactionist perspective." Chapter Three, by Nancy Marshall, addresses basic research implications for reading instruction. James Flood focuses on a particular aspect of comprehension known as "inferencing" in Chapter Four. In Chapter Five Don Nix comments on "The Teaching of Reading Comprehension" via a "Links" system he has developed to teach the theory underlying