

# Most Important Books on Education, 1961-62

AT THE beginning of this school year the editors asked a panel of distinguished educators and education editors to name the most important books on education published between September 1, 1961, and August 31, 1962. The titles and authors of the books selected appear below. Comments following each title are taken from the reviews which appeared in SR's Education Supplement.

## TWELVE VOTES

**SLUMS AND SUBURBS.** By James B. Conant, McGraw-Hill. Cloth, \$3.95, paperback, \$1.95. "Mr. Conant takes a look at both Scarsdale and Harlem and their counterparts in Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, and other cities. He is shocked and angered by what he sees and although his emotion is well con-

trolled it gives this volume a persuasive power that will make it one of Conant's most important contributions to American education."

## SEVEN VOTES

**THE EDUCATION OF TEACHERS.** By G. K. Hodenfield and T. M. Stinnett. Prentice-Hall. Cloth, \$3.95, paperback, \$1.95. (A chapter from this book titled "Nobody Asked Me, But . . ." was published in our pages in the issue of January 20, 1962.)

**THE AMERICAN COLLEGE.** Edited by Nevitt Sanford. Wiley. \$10. "This is a monumental work, consisting in part of research reports and in part of interpretive essays. . . . It probably contains more information about American colleges, their students and their faculties, than has ever before been brought together in a single volume. . . ."

The selection of the "Most Important Books on Education" was made by the following educators and editors:

William W. Brickman, Editor, *School and Society*, and Professor of Educational History and Comparative Education, University of Pennsylvania.

Robert N. Bush, Professor of Education, Stanford University, Editor, *California Secondary School Journal*.

William G. Carr, Executive Secretary, National Education Association.

Lawrence A. Cremin, Frederick Barnard Professor of Education, Teachers College, Columbia University.

Stanley Elam, Editor, *Phi Delta Kappan*.

Mildred S. Fenner, Editor, *National Education Association Journal*.

Terry Ferrer, Education Editor, *New York Herald Tribune*.

John H. Fischer, President, Teachers College, Columbia University.

Claude M. Fuess, Headmaster, Phillips Academy (retired), Andover, Massachusetts.

John I. Goodlad, Professor of Education and Director, University Elementary School, UCLA.

Eva H. Grant, Editor, *The PTA Magazine*.

Fred M. Hechinger, Education Editor, *The New York Times*.

Harold Howe II, Superintendent, Scarsdale Public Schools, Scarsdale, New York.

Edward Joseph Shoben, Jr., Editor, *Teachers College Record*.

Mortimer Smith, Executive Director of the Council for Basic Education and Editor, *Council for Basic Education Bulletin*.

Robert Ulich, Professor Emeritus, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University.

Benjamin C. Willis, General Superintendent of Schools, Chicago.

## SIX VOTES

**GRADUATE EDUCATION.** By Oliver C. Carmichael. Harper. \$4.50. "Carmichael's criticisms of the graduate schools are as sharp as any of those which have been directed at the elementary and secondary schools."

## FIVE VOTES

**FOCUS ON CHANGE: GUIDE TO BETTER SCHOOLS.** By J. Lloyd Trump and Dorsey Baynham. Rand McNally, \$1.25. "A report . . . urging revolutionary changes in the organization and operation of the nation's high schools."

**THE ACADEMIC PRESIDENT—EDUCATOR OR CARETAKER?** By Harold W. Dodds. McGraw-Hill. \$5.95. ". . . a systematic tour through the more publishable aspects of the duties of office . . . the recorded wisdom of a man who for a quarter-century ably conducted one of the dozen most important university posts of the nation."

**EDUCATION AND INCOME.** By Patricia Cayo Sexton. Viking. \$6. ". . . she writes with a fervor that comes of deep personal conviction rather than mere academic interest. . . ."

## THREE VOTES

**ON KNOWING.** By Jerome S. Bruner. Belknap Press. Harvard University Press. Cambridge, Massachusetts. \$3.75.

**AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES.** By Frederick Rudolph. A. A. Knopf. \$6.75.

## TWO VOTES

**FEDERAL INTEREST IN HIGHER EDUCATION.** By Homer D. Babbidge and Robert M. Rosenzweig.

**GUINEA PIGS AFTER TWENTY YEARS.** By Margaret Willis and Lou La Brant.

**AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION.** By Hofstadter and Smith.

**THE AMIDON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.** By Carl F. Hansen.

**THE WORLD OF UNIVERSITIES.** By Edward W. Weidner.

**INDIVIDUALIZING INSTRUCTION, Part I, The 61st Yearbook of the NSSE.** By Nelson B. Henry, Editor.

**THE DUAL PROGRESS PLAN.** By George D. Stoddard.

# A Doctor's Prescription

***"The Montessori Method: A Revolution in Education,"* by E. M. Standing.** (Academy Library Guild, Fresno, California, 1962, 209 pages, \$3.95), and ***"Learning How to Learn—An American Approach to Montessori,"* by Nancy McCormick Rambusch.** (Helicon Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 1962, 180 pages, \$4.50).

By MIRIAM L. GOLDBERG, Associate Professor, Teachers College, Columbia University.

**A**MID the great array of new proposals for reshaping American education, it is not surprising to find some old stalwarts once again asking to be considered. By-passed by the mainstream of educational reform and practice in their own time, they, nevertheless, have held on tenaciously in one or more places, and thus have added a body of experience to theory in their current bid for acceptance. One example of such a re-entry into the educational debate is A. S. Neill's current book *"Summerhill"* which presents a modernized version of *"That Dreadful School"* (London: Purnell and Sons, 1937) in which children are truly "free to learn." Another example is the revival of the Montessori method, a venerable and, in its time, influential educational movement which is presented to the American public by E. M. Standing, a former associate of Maria Montessori, in *"The Montessori Method"* and by Nancy M. Rambusch, headmistress of the Whitbey School, in *"Learning How to Learn."*

Although its origins are remote in time and place—the Montessori method was developed in the first decade of the twentieth century in Italy—its current proponents are no less zealous in presenting the "Method" as a panacea for contemporary American education than was Maria Montessori in her time.

Dr. Montessori conceived of education as composed of three elements: the child, the "prepared environment," and the directress. As a physician and as a product of her times, she viewed the young child as a biological organism which passes through a series of age-related stages, each of which is uniquely

associated with a particular learning need and readiness. These E. M. Standing refers to as the "sensitive periods." If the experiences appropriate to a sensitive period are omitted, then the particular "faculties" for which the sensitivity exists will not reach full development. Thus poor handwriting is attributed to a failure to provide preparation for writing at age four, the sensitive period for touch; or poor pronunciation is assumed to result from an "imperfect lingual environment" when the child is "at the sensitive period for picking up words." Of particular significance in the Montessori concept is the sensitive period for "order" which is most prominent at age three and which seeks gratification in a highly ordered environment. To provide the child with opportunities to make best use of his sensitive periods, Dr. Montessori evolved the "prepared environment," replete with a wide range of materials graded in difficulty and varied in purpose so that the child could find for himself at each developmental stage the teaching materials suited to his learning needs. The third element of Montessori's tripartite conception was the "directress," who sets the social limits of the environment, demonstrates (rather than explains) the standardized use of the materials to the individual child as he selects his "work," and then keeps out of the child's way. Since the materials and procedures of the "prepared environment" were intended to be self-teaching, and since the child's tempo of work was to be interfered with as little as possible, the role of the directress was seen by Montessori as different from that of the usual classroom teacher.

While predicating her educational theory on the child's need to be free to learn and to learn at his own pace and through his own efforts, the materials which Montessori prepared are highly structured, and the strictly prescribed

procedures for their use allow no deviation. The rationale for the invariant approach to the didactic materials as well as for the lack of materials on which the child can impose his own structure, such as paint or clay, lies in Montessori's conception of the need to impose "order" on the child's confused and disorganized world. Creative behavior is expected to follow at later stages, after the child has mastered the prescribed tasks.

But as one reads the detailed descriptions of procedure (a beautiful example can be found on pages 106-107 of *"Learning How to Learn"* in which the seventeen steps involved in learning to wash one's hands are detailed), one wonders whether children trained in this method can ever become original thinkers and bearers of creative ideas, or whether they must remain compulsive performers of tasks, even when these are on a high conceptual level.

**N**EITHER Standing nor Rambusch presents any objective evidence of the effects of the Montessori method on children's personality and cognitive development. They present no comparative studies, no systematic analyses. What they present, instead, are assurances that the method is good; that all children develop to their maximum capacity; that academic competence is achieved earlier than is usual; and that the classroom is devoid of disciplinary problems. Mr. Standing's convictions are almost mystical in quality, layered with sentimentality and an evangelical concern for the souls of little children. The nineteenth-century flavor of his pronouncements is unmistakable and hardly palatable to the mid-twentieth-century seeker for educational reform. Only in the middle section of the book, where Mr. Standing presents illustrated descriptions of the various materials used in the classroom, is the reader rewarded by a clear picture of the method in action.

Rambusch, on the other hand, presents the four sections of her book in straightforward prose. In the first, she discusses the Montessori concepts of the child—his "rhythm of life," his "absorbent mind," and his "social and emotional development." She uses contemporary concepts such as "motivation," "the sense of self," and "self-mastery" in building a rationale for the Montessori method. Her second section deals with the "prepared environment" of the Montessori system. Unfortunately, this section contains more theory and rationale than it does actual description of procedures, and one is left wondering just what a classroom situation is really like. The third part discusses the adult—both teacher and parent. Here the

