The Journal of Educational Psychology

INCLUDING EXPERIMENTAL PEDAGOGY, CHILD PHYSIOLOGY
AND HYGIENE, AND EDUCATIONAL STATISTICS

Published monthly except July and August by

WARWICK & YORK, INC.

HERSHEY, PA. BALTIMORE, MD.

Board of Editors

WILLIAM CHANDLER BAGLEY,
J CARLETON BELL, Managing Editor,

CARL E SEASHORE,
GUY MONTROSE WHIPPLE.

COLLABORATORS

Sydney Alrutz,
J. R. Angell,
J. W. Baird,
Bird T. Baldwin,
W. Van Dyke Bingham,
E. F. Buchner,
W. H. Burnham,
Ed. Claparede,
S. S. Colvin,
W. F. Dearborn,

H. H. Goddard,
Joseph Jastrow,
G. E. Johnson,
E. A. Kirkpatrick,
E. H. Lindley,
Anna J. McKeag,
D. P. MacMillan,
Adolf Meyer,
J. B. Miner,

Will S. Monroe,
E. C. Moore,
M. V. O'Shea,
W. B. Pillsbury,
S. H. Rowe,
Santé de Sanctis,
E. G. Sanford,
W. S. Small,
E. D. Starbuck,

L. William Stern,
G. M. Stratton,
G. D. Strayer,
E. L. Thorndike,
E. B. Titchener,
J. B. Watson,
W. H. Wunch,
H. K. Wolfe,
A. H. Yoder.

Manuscripts for publication, books or other material for review, and news items of interest to educational psychologists should be addressed to The Managing Editor, J. Carleton Bell, 1032A Sterling Place, Brooklyn, N. Y.

THE JOURNAL is issuing a series of Monograph Supplements for the publication of more extensive researches in educational psychology. For details prospective contributors may apply to Warwick & York, Inc., Baltimore, Md.

The price of the JOURNAL is \$3.00 per year of ten monthly issues, if paid in advance. Single issues are 50 cents each. Back volumes are \$3.50 in original wrappers and \$4.75 bound in library buckram. Foreign postage is 20 cents extra for Canada and 30 cents for other countries in the Postal Union.

Subscriptions and correspondence concerning business matters should be sent to Warwick & York, Inc., 10 E. Centre St., Baltimore, Md.

VOLUME IX

FEBRUARY, 1918

NUMBER 2

EDITORIAL

The recent change of administration in New York City carried with it a very considerable reorganization of the school system. **SCHOOL POLICIES IN NEW YORK CITY** One of the chief issues of the campaign was the retention or the rejection of the so-called Gary plan. The overwhelming character of the vote gave the new administration a mandate to eliminate the Gary plan root and branch, and to undo all the work done in that direction in the past six years. This is not easy, and it is to be hoped that some of the good features of that scheme may be retained or brought back into the system under another name.

One of the first tasks confronting the new mayor was the appointment of a school board of seven members to take the place of the old board of forty-six members. The selection of the personnel of this board was obviously a matter of some moment, since upon it would rest the responsibility for the administration's educational

policy, and upon the success of its measures would depend the public approval or disapproval of the change from the large to the small board. Of the mayor's appointees only two had ever been on the school board before, and only one, Mr. Arthur S. Somers, subsequently chosen president of the board, had seen continuous service in recent years. Thus most of the members were new to the educational public of the city, and their attitude was a matter of no little speculation. Within a few weeks Superintendent Maxwell, who has served the city faithfully for more than a quarter of a century, and who is now in poor health, was made superintendent emeritus under generous conditions, and the board began its search for a new superintendent. The selection of the proper man for this position increases the burden of responsibility upon the new board and is fraught with momentous consequences for the schools of the city.

In view of these facts the inaugural address of President Somers, who by his experience and his position has a preponderating influence in shaping the policies of the board, is a noteworthy document. The old board in spite of its large membership was always overwhelmed with a mountain of work, and was thereby greatly delayed in the transaction of business. Many of those in close touch with the New York schools contended that a board of seven members was entirely too small, and could never do the work that necessarily devolved upon the board of education in such a large city. On this point President Somers takes a wise and statesman-like position: "A board of education of seven members cannot undertake, in the same manner, to do the work that a board of forty-six members did. The mass of unimportant matters and detail that came before the preceding board, because a system of standing committees encouraged it, we shall not set out to consider. We shall be a policy-making body. We shall not undertake to run the schools, but we shall make it our duty to see that they are run properly. To do this effectively we must abandon standing committees. They encourage the reference to the members of too many matters of routine. They lead department heads to seek committee approval before proceeding to action and thereby make for divided responsibility. If seven members are to undertake to render the largest possible service to the city schools, they must leave to the paid officers all matters too detailed for the consideration of all the members meeting together. They must work through a committee of the whole, rather than through standing committees, but

when occasion demands, or a particular problem is to be solved, it may be necessary to call upon a smaller number, as a special committee, to study the proposals. This board of education must, as I see it, determine policies, leaving to department heads the duty of carrying them out. We must hold our paid officials, all of them, to a strict accountability for results, and we shall not undertake to do other than give them the largest measure of freedom." This is in accord with the most approved findings in educational administration, and augurs well for the New York schools.

But not only are the members of the professional staff promised freedom from interference by board members in administering the work of the schools, but they are urged to free themselves from the burden of petty detail, in order that they may more intelligently study the problems that confront them. "As this board of education will not undertake to do what the large board that preceded it tried to do, but will consider problems and policies and not details, just so our board of superintendents and our district superintendents, our board of examiners and our directors, would do well to study ways to rid themselves of the burden of considering petty matters and numerous details. It has occurred to me to suggest for the consideration of the superintendent of schools and the board of superintendents that the members of that board be assigned to particular problems rather than to certain parcelled out branches of the service. When a superintendent is assigned to a committee on elementary schools or to a committee on high schools he gradually becomes submerged in a mass of routine and detail that hampers his vision of bigger problems. Similarly, our district superintendents have become too much examiners of details of organization and too little leaders in the solution of great school problems. The tendency is to become more expert in rating teachers and classes than in improving the teaching of children. The former, to my mind, is a relic of antiquity that should be among the first customs to be discarded. I believe that much time is spent in examining and rating teachers who are fully qualified. If that be so, why should not the principal's rating be sufficient? In any case where there is a doubt or where injustice is claimed, appeal may then be made to the superintendent, but only in such cases. Far more important is it that they concern themselves with the contents of children's heads than of teachers' desks and plan books. All this is a big problem for the board of superintendents and the district superintendents to study,

and I earnestly invite such study. Possibly it would be well to test a reorganization under which district superintendents would be assigned not to districts of varying size and unequal register, but to associate superintendents directed to study particular school problems."

Let us hope that this will mean the beginning of an era of the scientific study of educational problems such as New York has never seen. The problems lie in abundance on every hand, and there are many men on the supervisory staff well able to conduct such scientific studies. What is needed is a consistent and rational policy that will encourage such studies, and will demand them as part of the routine of supervision. The recent action of the board of superintendents and the board of education in authorizing the publication of 30,000 copies of the new New York penmanship scale, so that a copy may be posted in every school-room, is a step in the right direction. But let us also have studies of oral and silent reading, fundamental operations and reasoning in arithmetic, of spelling, of geography, of history, of literature, of elementary science. Let us actually determine the things that groups of children are able to do under definite school conditions; let us grapple with the problems of the bright child and the dull child and modify our school work to meet individual needs; let us ascertain to what extent school brightness and dullness are general traits and to what extent they depend upon specific characteristics; let us, in fine, demand that our educational procedure be based upon ascertained fact rather than upon traditional belief and vague opinion.

J. C. B.