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Table of Contents

A Guide to the Study of Current Introduction to Education Textbooks	7
Charles I. Brown	
Synthesis of 4:6 Thio 1, 3, 5-triazine Derivatives II	10
Kamalaker B. Raut	
The Humanities	12
James H. Hiner	
The Influence of Religion on the Political Process in Burma	22
Johnny Campbell	
Creating a National Sense of Direction in Industrial Arts	34
Richard Coger	
The Teaching of Mathematical Induction	36
William M. Perel	
The Evolutionary Role of the International Labor Organization	40
Sarvan K. Bhatia	
What Motivates Students in the Choice of Subject Majors	48
Dorothy C. Hamilton	
A Device for the Improvement of Study Habits	55
Maurice A. Stokes	
On Variation of Velocity and Pressure Behind and Along a Shock Surface in Lagrangian Coordinate System	65
Nazir A. Warsi	
On Vorticity Behind a Shock Surface in Lagrangian Coordinate System	68
Nazir A. Warsi	
On Gradients of Specific Volume and Pressure Behind a Shock Surface in Lagrangian Coordinate System	71
Nazir A. Warsi	
The Community College: An American Innovation	73
Philip D. Vairo	
Force Field Calculations in Octahedral Water Complexes	76
Venkataraman Ananthanarayanan	
The Negro in International Affairs-Prospects for the Future	80
George L-P Weaver	
The Law of Karma as Reflected in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism	85
Samuel Williams	
Economic Growth and Income Distribution	92
Sarvan K. Bhatia	

Table of Contents – (Continued)

India's Experience in Developmental Planning Kanwal Kumar	98
Utilizing Emerging New Instructional Materials and Mechanical Devices-Implications for the Library Dorothy B. Jamerson	103
The Moynihan Report: A Critical Analysis Isaiah McIver	108
Modern Art: The Celebration of Man's Freedom Phillip J. Hampton	122
A Review of "The Use of Selected Technical Language as a Means of Discovering Elementary Teachers' Operational Definitions of Teaching" Thelma Moore Harmond	128
An Analysis of NTE Scores and Quality Point Ratios of Selected SSC Graduates from 1961 through 1966 Martha W. Wilson	141
The Man Behind "Trees" James A. Eaton	147
Watts: A Tragedy of Errors Elonnie J. Josey	153
Personal Characteristics in Secondary School Social Studies Student Teachers as Related to Certain Measures of Potential Teacher Behavior Shia-ling Liu	159
Some Possible Ways of Improving Instruction in Our Colleges Robert D. Reid	165
Needed: A Program to Save Freshmen! James A. Eaton	174

Creating A National Sense of Direction In Industrial Arts

by

Richard Coger

Recently, the American Industrial Arts Association stated that there are nearly 35,000 teachers of industrial arts in the United States. These teachers are instructing approximately three and one-half million students daily. One would think that since the field is a vital part of general education, its purposes and goals would be understood by almost everyone within the educational circle. However, if one were to closely examine this country's industrial arts program in relation to its body of contents, it is expected he would find that there is *no* commonly accepted and clearly understood purpose in the field.

He would also learn that the field does not have a working universal definition with which to identify itself. The lay public as well as educational administrators, to a degree, do not know the true meaning of industrial arts, its origin and purposes. This is the writer's rationale for the causation of the wide disparity that exist within the field between "what is" and "what ought to be". John Dewey, Charles Richards and recently, others too numerous to mention, have attempted to pave the way to unity. However, there are still as many variations of the subject as there are men teaching it. Without some type of national guidelines for continuity, industrial arts is destined for continuous mediocrity.

An industrial arts program should encompass values and a sense of direction. Our educational forefathers had such a vision. Since the era of Woodward and Runkle, industrial arts has been generally defined as that phase of general education which deals with industry, its organization, materials, occupations, processes, products, and problems relating to automation. It is one of many instruments of general education which provides the students with unlimited opportunities for the development of ingenuity, problem-solving skills, creativity, resourcefulness, and to a great degree, promotes individualism.

In countenance to the written definition of the field, industrial arts is "many things to many people", nevertheless, educators in the field have been defending the programs ever since it was introduced into the school system. Is industrial arts a part of general education? This question first appeared the day industrial arts was first introduced in the school system. As competition for a place in the schools' curricula increases, industrial arts is placed deeper in the defensive area. However, a position of this nature is not appropriate if the program is to attain and maintain the highest possible order of educational statesmanship.

Being on the defensive side, one tends to conceal his weaknesses even though he and others are aware of them. He is more likely to defend "what is" than to propose, work for or try to achieve "what ought to be." He is more likely to attack the forces which placed him in the defensive position than he is to examine the inadequacies in his field of work. If the industrial arts teacher is working in a weak program, the more vulnerable position will be within the school system. Programs of high quality are not likely to be vulnerable when they are attacked. Poorly planned programs in any field will find it difficult to gain and maintain administrative support.

Objectives and aims for industrial arts have been proclaimed and studied for approximately half a century. The earlier concepts have remained nearly the same throughout the years. This fact suggests that they were fundamental enough to withstand the test of years. Whether or not they were, they are still in existence. Research has shown that a set of regal aims or objectives alone is of little assistance. They must also be utilized within the perimeter of the field in full unison.

There are many excellent opportunities for students to develop skills in critical thinking in the laboratories of industrial arts, if industrial arts teachers, supervisors and administrators would work together for a cause, which is helping students to understand the social functions of industry. However, within the present programs, many students receive limited understanding of materials and processes. Works that were done in the homes or villages' shops are now performed in modern factories. At the beginning of this century, almost every child observed or shared in the work involved in the production of food, clothing, shelter, and other basic home needs. Today, many adults, as well as children, know little about the technology used by American industries in producing these goods. These industries play a vital role of importance in one's social, economic, cultural and political life. Therefore, one can say that the main purpose of industrial arts is to present to its students a realistic interpretation of American industries.

Sawers of wood and pounders of metal are fast becoming a thing of the past in industrial arts. Science, with its applications to industrial processes and to industrial products, has come to dominate industrial arts education. It is the duty of educators to accept this trend, because of its unique and useful foundation.

The diversity and disparity that exist within the programs of industrial arts must be and can be synthesized, if it is to make a meaningful contribution to general education. If it is to be of some significance and maintain an inclinable sense of direction, the field must have a commonly accepted and clearly understood purpose.

Industrial arts must drop its ageless connotation of teaching wood and metal of antiquity and commence to play a vital role in the interpretation of modern industry as a part of education. Only by assuming the responsibility for its new role will Industrial Arts' educators create a national sense of direction in Industrial Arts.