

Book Reviews



The McLuhan Explosion: A Casebook on Marshall McLuhan and Understanding Media. Harry H. Crosby and George R. Bond. New York, New York: American Book Company, 1968. 235 pp. No price given (paper).

You don't hear as much about Marshall McLuhan these days. Perhaps he was a flash in the pan, perhaps this is just the lull before another storm of attention, or perhaps McLuhan is just ahead of his time and students 10 to 20 years from now will read him with interest, understanding, and clarity though possibly with disagreement.

Harry Crosby and George Bond of Boston University have produced this book to keep McLuhan's name in the limelight. It's designed as a source of information about McLuhan and his ideas plus as a casebook for college students. It includes a 29-page excerpt from McLuhan's *Understanding Media* and 33 articles on McLuhan ranging from 1 paragraph to 12 pages. Most articles are followed by questions for discussion. There's also a list of suggested class projects and a glossary of McLuhanisms.

The choice of articles is well-balanced. Twelve defend McLuhan, 10 attack him, and 11 offer mixed reactions. Those praising him use such phrases as "enormous erudition," "the most seminal mind on the continent," and "a fresh, original view." Attackers characterize his writing as "fuzzy-minded," "infuriating," and "[full of] smug knowingness." Those with mixed feelings about McLuhan say: "His book is one that I shall treasure, although I confess unhappily, for the wrong reasons." "What might have been one of the most important books of its decade has been so poorly put together that its most realistic claim remains that of being a series of highly stimulating speculations." "McLuhan is a man of insights and his attempts to create a full-scale system out of them is [*sic*] not very successful."

It's precisely the colorfulness of the reviewers' prose attacking or defending McLuhan's books that forms the major strength of this anthology.

But its major strength is also its most debilitating weakness. The anthology consists mainly of short reviews of his books, which I must assert modestly isn't the best way to study a man's thoughts. It's far better to read and discuss the works themselves, perhaps with the aid of some searching and extensive analyses. The constant use of short reviews results in some boring and numbing repetition of concepts. After you have read 10 reviewers arguing about what McLuhan thinks is a medium or over what he calls "hot" or "cool," you get mighty tired.

Supposedly this anthology could either be the basis for an extension course on McLuhan or as a means for extension personnel to become familiar with the thoughts of an important intellectual figure. But, both purposes could be better served by reading McLuhan's own books and by supplementing that reading with a different paperback (which I suspect at 95 cents is far cheaper than the one under review). Get a copy of the Signet paperback (#03739), *McLuhan: Hot and Cool, A Primer for the Understanding of and A Critical Symposium with a Rebuttal by McLuhan*, edited by Gerald Stearn.

About the only uses I can see for the book are the questions at the end of the reviews and the section on suggested class projects. These might provide some ideas for an instructor of an extension course on the thoughts of Marshall McLuhan.

Perhaps you were expecting a summary of McLuhan's thoughts in this review. It would be presumptuous of me to try to summarize McLuhan's beliefs, especially utilizing an essentially secondary source. However, one concept did occur to me. McLuhan writes that media are "extensions of man." He includes such items as clothing, money, and clocks as media. Perhaps University *Extension* and Cooperative *Extension* are also media. It might be fruitful to study them in the light of some of McLuhan's provocative statements on the role of media in the electronic age. Happy hunting!

JOHN OHLIGER
The Ohio State University

Supervision: A Synthesis of Thought and Action. 2nd ed. William H. Lucio and John D. McNeil. New York, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1969. 329 pp. \$8.50.

This book is not a recipe of behavior for a supervisor to reach desired objectives. However, the serious supervisor or higher level administrator will find it worth reading. Using examples drawn from the elementary and secondary school system and relating the conclusions to this setting, the authors present their analysis of the "state of the art," the realities of the setting in which supervisors function, and judgments about necessary social

science research findings and theories useful in performing the supervising function.

The authors identify the "new image" of the supervisor as having ". . . a perspective of instructional tasks and the ability to synthesize data from many sources and to use these data in the formulation of better instructional programs The common dimension of supervision is the ability to perceive desirable objectives, and to help others contribute to this vision and to act in accordance with it."

This view of supervision predicts new approaches in selection and preparation. Success as a teacher isn't viewed as necessarily adequate preparation to supervise other teachers.

The authors point out that every supervisor functions within a definite social system with predictable relationships and behavior patterns that maintain the system. For the supervisor to effect behavior within a system, he must recognize the existence of social structures and be able to predict the consequences of various communication patterns and organizational arrangements. In addition, the authors discuss the need to be particularly aware of the political and legal realities associated with the social system.

The supervisor must have significant skills in understanding human motivation and behavior. In addition, he must understand his own psychological relationships to others. The existing interrelationships clearly affect the influence the supervisor has in changing behavior in desired directions. He must also set a consistent climate where staff members can afford and dare to be individuals, expressing opinions and ideas, even if they conflict with the supervisor's and others'.

Teacher performance evaluation is an essential responsibility of the supervisor—not of those less skilled or remote from the teaching process and organizational goals. Other administrative levels must not take over the evaluation function. Likewise, no teacher can be allowed to consider the classroom his sanctuary where he alone determines how and what to teach and appraises his own performance. New teachers particularly, must know their skill will be evaluated according to how they perform and not on how they impress others with their social graces.

The authors conclude with chapters on techniques of research and curriculum development concepts with which the effective supervisor must be familiar.

The book's limitation may be the extent to which conclusions drawn can be transferred to the extension education setting. I believe, however, the authors adequately discuss the major variables associated with the supervision-teacher-institutional relationship so they can be translated to the extension education setting. Therefore, this limitation is minimized.

The breadth of coverage of the supervision field is this book's strength. New supervisors, administrators, and experienced supervisors will benefit

from the study of the theories and concepts explored in this book. These ideas, familiar to social science disciplines, are a valuable contribution to the field of extension supervision. This book is worthwhile reading for anyone concerned with supervision in extension education.

WILLIAM A. SHIMEL
University of Wisconsin

The Temporary Society. Warren G. Bennis and Philip E. Slater. New York, New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1968. 147 pp. \$4.95.

"Change" is the one thing in American life that seems to be a stable entity. Bennis and Slater point out that the more rigid, authoritarian systems that have pervaded our past aren't equipped to cope with the constancy of change. Continuing and accelerating democratization of organizations is one hope for the future. The movement toward shared decision making and power, based on knowledge or ability rather than position, are cited as examples of what's taking place within the business sector. Where profit can be utilized as a measure of success, ability to adjust and capitalize on change is a positive ingredient. Consequently, the move toward more democratization within this sector is being forced. Other units of society must also heed this cue if they're to survive in this era of change.

The authors show that their use of "democracy" doesn't have any political connotation, but that it's a "system of values—a climate of beliefs governing behavior—which people are internally compelled to affirm by deeds as well as words." They advance the proposition that "democracy becomes a functional necessity whenever a social system is competing for survival under conditions of chronic change."

The family as well as the complex organization is competing for survival in our modern world of chronic change. The key hope for the family is the continuing democratization within the family structure that has its roots in the emerging equalitarian family.

As technology continues to develop, individuals with certain technological skills will identify more with that skill than with a particular employer. Therefore, we'll see an acceleration of geographic mobility within the blue-collar as well as the white-collar classes.

For the Extension professional who considers himself a change agent, this book will be useful in developing programs and plans for organizations and families who need help not only in adjusting to, but capitalizing on impending change. Many would say our society has been permeated by relationships and organizational structures that have been relatively stable in the past. But, the authors say there has been accelerating rate of change since the beginning of the industrial revolution. They also present evidence

showing that these relationships and structures will be even more temporary in the future.

For some, "the profession of a wife in an era of change is to provide continuity, the portable roots. For others, a profession, work, the church, or some group may emerge as the source of fidelity." Our task then, as Extension professionals who are also change agents, is to help these organizations and units of our society create the flexibility within their structure that will provide the basis for these portable roots.

This look into the future should be high priority reading for all Extension professionals. It's our task not only to prepare individuals, but organizations, for these changes so that more of us can say: "We carry our homes within us which enables us to FLY."

MAURICE E. VOLAND
University of Kentucky

Working with Low-Income Families. Francena L. Nolan *et al.* Washington, D.C.: American Home Economics Association, 1965. 239 pp. \$2.00 (paper).

Reading this book is like a "listen-in." You get the feeling of being one of the 218 participants hearing 22 authorities share their experience and knowledge about working with the poor. The workshop on *Working with Low-Income Families*, held in Chicago in 1965, was sponsored by the American Home Economics Association.

For extension staff members deeply engrossed in working with the disadvantaged, and seeking further insight, this book gives inspiration, cites examples of successes, and tells about some pitfalls to avoid.

Outstanding educators discuss the nature and scope of the problems of poverty; the culture of low-income families; problems arising as a result of poverty, particularly health, welfare, and education; programs of organizations and agencies that serve the poor; and a challenge to educators to bring about needed change.

Perhaps the greatest strength of the book is the list of references made by each speaker—studies, books, actual work, successes. These are recorded at the end of each speech. The resource list in the back of the book includes films shown at the workshop and the sources of many publications that can be most helpful for our own self-teaching or for a workshop for extension professionals.

Extension staff members will find themselves underscoring ideas for subject-matter teaching, jotting down agencies concerned with the poor, noting ways to involve people so they can reach more of the disadvantaged, and evaluating the importance of working and planning together in community effort. Several of the speakers cause us to pause and look at our

efforts critically: Are we spending our time on the most important things? Are we teaching the most appropriate subject matter? Should we change our methods of teaching to reach more of the unreached? Do we involve low-income people in planning programs to fit their needs? Do we really try to understand how the world looks to the disadvantaged person we're trying to help?

Although the effort of the workshop was directed to the home economist, the material presented applies to all of us who are helping people solve their problems.

VELMA M. MCGAUGH
University of Wyoming