



The Animal School

by George H. Reavis

With a Foreword and Epilogue by
Char Forsten, Jim Grant, and Irv Richardson

Illustrations by Joyce Orchard Garamella

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The Administration of the School Curriculum with References to Individual Differences

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Dedication

Dedicated to those children and adults who have unjustly suffered the fate of standardized tests and inappropriate curriculum and standards.

Foreword

In the early 1940s, George H. Reavis, then assistant superintendent of Cincinnati Public Schools, wrote a call to action. He called it The Animal School. Originally written for the Public School Bulletin, The Animal School became a timeless and, as the reader will discover, timely allegory about the dangers inherent in blind reform policies.

Our message to you: Believe that children learn best when we, their teachers, develop and challenge their strengths and identify and nurture their weaknesses.

Take action.

THE ANIMAL SCHOOL

Once upon a time . . .

The animals decided they must do something heroic to meet the problems of a “new world.”

So they organized a school.

They adopted an activity curriculum consisting of running, climbing, swimming, and flying.

To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all the subjects.

The duck was excellent in swimming — in fact, better than his instructor.

But he made only passing grades in flying and was very poor in running.

Since he was slow in running, he had to stay after school and also drop swimming in order to practice running.

This was kept up until his webbed feet were badly worn and he was only average in swimming. But average was acceptable in school, so nobody worried about that except the duck.

The rabbit started at the top of the class in running but had a nervous breakdown because of so much make-up work in swimming.

The squirrel was excellent in climbing until he developed frustration in the flying class, where his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of the treetop down.

He also developed a charley horse from overexertion and then got a C in climbing and a D in running.

The eagle was a problem child and was disciplined severely. In the climbing class he beat all the others to the top of the tree but insisted on using his own way to get there.

At the end of the year, an abnormal eel that could swim exceedingly well, and also run, climb, and fly a little, had the highest average, and he was valedictorian.

The prairie dogs stayed out of school and fought the tax levy because the administration would not add digging and burrowing to the curriculum. They apprenticed their children to a badger and later joined the groundhogs and gophers to start a successful private school.

Does this fable have a moral?

As educators, we spend our entire careers affirming the fact that each student is a unique and individual learner. Mandatory assessments, achievement-test scores, and IQ screenings confirm this knowledge. We document, read about, attend conferences on, teach to, and publicly acknowledge these very differences. But to what end? Despite indisputable results, many districts continue to mandate that educators teach the same curriculum in the same way to all students, regardless of ability.

Thankfully, current brain research, foremost including Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory, is opening doors ever wider to our understanding of how we learn. George H. Reavis believed, as do we and thousands of educators around the country believe today, that solutions to our education dilemmas can and must be found.

We believe that public funds should be used to make our schools places where children are held to high, yet different, standards, because "covering the curriculum" won't advance us far as a society if we fail to recognize each child as an individual learner. Remember: There is no one correct way to teach all children, but there is a correct way to teach each child: one at a time. If you know a policy maker, share with him or her a copy of this book.

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Summary : Fable in which animals illustrate the dangers of students being forced to conform to developmentally inappropriate practices. A timeless fable that contains a powerful, universally understood message: Sweeping education reforms that neglect to recognize students as unique individuals and learners, will, undoubtedly, set our students up to fail*

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