

LISTEN—

YOU ARE about to make the acquaintance of one of the most unusual groups of authors it will ever be our pleasure to present. For the past seven months you have read in EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP articles from the pens of men and women who are at work in education or related fields. This month we bring you as authors the school children, themselves, hundreds of them. Our youngest contributor is 6, our oldest 18.

These boys and girls tell us quite frankly what they have learned and what they wish they *might* have learned, where the school has met their needs and where they feel it has failed to do its job, about their teachers and their classmates—in fact, about almost every conceivable phase of school living.

This issue of EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP is fun, but it is also provocative and, at times, startling. We believe that any teacher who thinks seriously about his work will find the opinions of youngsters worthy of his careful consideration. Whether or not we agree with what the boys and girls say, their statements are indicative of the way their thoughts are running and are, therefore, a clear reflection of the kind of job those of us are doing who are responsible for the education of children and young people.

The articles which follow have been assembled from the contributions of more than five hundred children. It is impossible to transmit to a formal printed page the full flavor and charm of the writing which these children have done for us. We cannot, for example, bring you the barely legible scrawls or the smudges from dirty fingers. But perhaps you will smile, as we did, at the circuitous spelling, the strange idioms, the garbled grammar, and yet be awed, as we were, at the deftness with which these youngsters state the simple truths that often have a way of evading adult minds.

There was scarcely a statement that we wouldn't have liked to publish. But clearly they could not all be squeezed into one magazine; so we have had to make choices. We were guided in our selections by several factors. In the first place, we tried to include those expressions which were most spontaneous, avoiding any that seemed too obviously teacher- or parent-inspired. We looked for naturalness and sincerity. In the second place, we kept an eye out for discussions of topics particularly pertinent to the problems and interests of today's teachers. And, third, we have tried to include discussions of subjects about which the children seem most concerned. When it was impossible to use contributions from all the youngsters writing on a particular topic, we chose those which seemed most typical of the various points of view expressed.

It is true that no one child can speak for all children and no one statement can be lifted from this material and used as evidence of the thinking of youngsters.

Yet in aggregate, the opinions carry weight. They represent ideas from youngsters in widely varying situations, from a one-room school with only six pupils to an urban high school of several thousand; from the underprivileged, the ill-fed, and ill-housed, to the children of the wealthy; from minority groups as well as from majority groups; from those in schools which provide little equipment other than a blackboard and a wash basin to those in well-supported, adequately equipped schools; from those who call for help in the solution of their personal problems to those who are making happy adjustments to growing up; from those in schools in the North, East, South, and West.

This is in no sense a statistical study. No attempt has been made to present quantitative evidence. We believe that you will agree with us that the words of youngsters themselves carry more conviction than any statistical compilation we might attempt. However, the reader should keep in mind that the statements represent the unusual as well as the usual, the minority as well as the majority opinions of children.

The implications of this material for school practice are many and significant. If we mean what we say about the importance of the "meanings" approach, of purpose, of needs and interests, we dare not ignore these reactions of children to their school living. For example, what teacher could take unto herself the responsibility of decorating the school room after reading the statement, "We Like are room because we decorated it are selves"? We cannot overlook the overwhelming evidence of the need for feelings of success when we read statements such as, "I don't like geography because I don't understand it" or "I work hard in arithmetic since I got good at it."

We are made aware that children are not deceived by our attempts to camouflage our practices with palatable language when a youngster states, "I would like a school with no opportunity classes, because there isn't anybody who is really dumb." Curriculum workers are made to face some real problems when young people demand vocational guidance, sex education, and more opportunity to participate in planning. No one who is interested in children can fail to see how unconsciously revealing of themselves children can be in their candid statements.

In fact, we believe that every statement in the following material presents a challenge to the thinking of teachers, supervisors, administrators, and parents. We hope this material will be read, studied, and discussed. We believe it would be ideally suited to parent-teacher discussions because it starts with the children themselves rather than with abstract theory, although there is no theory of educational philosophy or psychology that is not represented by the statements of these youngsters. We believe it would be useful in undergraduate classes in teacher preparation, as an insightful introduction to children and to education. We are convinced that even experienced educators will be stimulated to re-examine their practices.

There may be little that is new in these statements from children and youth. Youngsters always have expressed themselves and always will, but we have found the call of these many young voices a thrill and a challenge which we hope you will share with us.

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