

THE LISTENING POST

What Popular Magazines Say About Education

WHAT POPULAR MAGAZINES SAY ABOUT EDUCATION—designed to help a select group, this important pamphlet by Van Til and Luecking may not get the widespread attention it deserves. Therefore we gladly seek to spread its heartening message.

Published by the University of Illinois College of Education, the booklet grew out of the John Dewey Society's drive to help educational writers go to the whole public instead of forever "talking to themselves." Utilizing NEA Research Circulars, its authors summarized what 233 postwar writers have said in 334 magazine articles and editorials.

What they said should be known and cherished by every educator working to build a better school program. For the great majority of these writers threw their weight squarely behind the educational liberal who is trying for a truly functional curriculum. They emphasize, for example, guidance—guidance that treats *causes* rather than mere symptoms of truancy, delinquency, and maladjustment. They decry the high schools that sacrifice the many to the few, and merely train for college, thus encouraging many toward professions which are overcrowded and which they are not capable of entering anyway. They back consolidations to provide high schools with rich, varied offerings.

They show a liking for family life education, especially when it is real and practical. Though they do not identify it with sex education, most of them support such instruction where it can be handled wisely by qualified teachers. Likewise, they appreciate education toward better human relations—education that develops human beings who can understand and live with others.

Approval is shown for a variety of school programs fostering international understanding. Mentioned are programs in which children live during vacation

with families of other countries, the projects carried on by the Junior Red Cross and like agencies.

Serious concern is shown over a felt lack of effective teaching of the communications skills. But even here the answer is not set in a "back to the three R's" movement. In fact, there is little emphasis upon mechanical drill toward skills as an end in themselves. Rather, there are proposals for wider use of films, radio, records, field trips, and other means to enrich the experience of the non-verbal. The writers back an extended use of the literature of the past and present, "so that students may learn the language of ideas, emotion, and life."

Of five articles devoted to learning government, every one plays up some active, experiential approach such as the Philadelphia Junior Town Meeting of the Air or the model legislatures sponsored by the YMCA through Hi-Y and Tri-Y. Not one leans on bookish verbalisms.

Other articles praise programs of education for health and safety. There is a significant pressure for a greatly bolstered use of the arts and music. And perhaps nothing else is stressed so much as a set of school-community relationships which sum up to what we educators call the community school.

Well, what shall we make of all this? These articles are by no means *all* that have been written about education, and even these show more disagreements than could be recorded in this summary. But they are a good sampling, and they come from popular magazines whose editors seldom venture far from the sentiments of their readers. And, in the words of the pamphlet's authors, they add up to "a climate of opinion favorable to functional curriculum, with real-life problems characteristic of content, and with active learning characteristic of method . . . a position well in advance of the formal

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that they were truly glad to have seen him again.

"He went with his former teachers to their classes and they taught slowly, laboriously, and lifelessly as they always had; their students sat mute, indifferent, and restrained, as they always had. The students rose when they were called upon and recited. They answered the teacher's questions on yesterday's assignment, then relapsed gratefully into their seats. They parroted the phrases of scholars. They stared gravely at the teacher or vacuously out the high windows at the grey gas tanks that rose pudgily on the marshes.

"Bells clanged and the teacher bent forward, gathering up books and papers. Noisily, the class eddied and surged through the doors. For tomorrow they took the next chapter. Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow crept in this petty pace from day to day till the last syllabus of recorded subject matter.

"So he went down to the office and past the yellow-curtained door into the sanctum to which he had never penetrated in his four years in high school and he said, "Why?" in a high impatient voice. And the principal heard him out and nodded sometimes. Then the principal said polite meaningless things and looked at the clock. The young man understood. For the principal, though young, was tired too and didn't particularly care any longer. And the young man went away from the graveyard."

* * * * *

He had never gone back again.

Via the yellowing paper, he looked down the corridors of time. He saw again the unhappy adolescent lost in the flood of the big school and mindlessly

memorizing the meaningless. He saw the angry, cheated young man in the principal's office.

Time and the river had slipped by since then. The human erosion of the great depression. The brutalization of fascism. The exterminations of total war. The ugly tyranny of communism. The race between education and catastrophe.

Also, the drive toward curriculum revision. The emphasis on the social scene. The Eight-Year Study. The Regents Inquiry. The heyday of the experimental laboratory schools. Teacher-pupil planning. Study of child and adolescent development. Bridges between school and community. Education for democracy as a way of life. Life adjustment programs. Public school experimentation with common learnings programs. Intercultural education. The state curriculum programs.

A ghost from the faded paper haunted him. Suppose he went back again now—back across the nation to the high school he had attended. What would he find? The same meaningless school he had experienced and revisited, a school where life begins at 4 p. m.? Or a school increasingly dealing with social realities, meeting the needs of adolescents, and clarifying value conflicts?

What would all the educators of America collectively find if they went back today to the high schools they attended? For a brief moment, while he returned the paper to the box, the collective answer seemed to him the crucial test of the effectiveness of curriculum revision, of the usefulness of thousands of lives.

If he went back. . . .

If *you* went back—what do you think you would find?

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traditional practice of many educators. . . ."

It seems a fair estimate that the articles represent in a rough way what the American people want. Politicians have made

a "mandate" out of far less. And we professional schoolmen may well take the heart to be bold.—*Fred T. Wilhelms, Associate Professor of Education, San Francisco State College.*

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