

The Importance of People

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Let's Communicate Democratic Education

SAID *Time*, February 20th, speaking of educators meeting in Denver, "Unfortunately much of their talk would be meaningless to non-professional ears. At a time when United States education had extended its mission to embrace more lives and for a longer time than ever before, it had paradoxically moved farther and farther away from the public grasp."

Whether you applauded or deplored some of the copy that accompanied the historic first appearance of a school superintendent's physiognomy on a *Time* cover, the validity of this quotation deserves acknowledgment. *Time* may well cry touché, as did the James Thurber fencer on cleanly slicing off his opponent's head.

We need translation by American educators. It is absurd to use the elaborate apparatus of American education—its theories, research, teacher-training, personnel—to produce good educational experiences for children and youth, only to sit by passively as these experiences are misinterpreted by minorities within communities. It is absurd for a profession to invest substantial time and money in Thirty School studies, in evaluative summaries and surveys which answer many public doubts, only to allow these to remain the exclusive property of graduate students, locked from the general public.

It would be different if educational ideas were not translatable. But they are. Certainly they are more understandable than scientific ideas which draw on complex mathematical and physical data. Yet what a laudable job has been done in communicating scientific developments to the public.

Under the elaborate verbiage of modern education are horse sense ideas. Under

the sonorous research titles are the verification of many of these horse sense ideas. Ideas like studying problems that are important to young peoples' lives. Learning the 3 R's better through having a purpose. Helping youth get ready for a vocation. The value of varied interests and hobbies. Learning democracy by living democratically. Learning at different speeds because no two people are exactly alike. A good education for those not going to college rather than college entrance dominating all.

The pragmatic American people are fond of horse sense. As recent election results show, they support what seems reasonable to them. They are willing to have the schools make sense. Some studies even seem to indicate that the public—not the noisy little minorities—may be more pragmatic about education than the educators!

Let's translate. Let's take the public into our confidence. Modern education has the better arguments and the evidence to back them up.

Let's not fall into the trap of defensively refuting libels. "We do so teach the 3 R's!" The libels stay in the public mind. The refutations are often forgotten. Knute Rockne was right when he insisted that the best defense is a good offense.

If I were an education dean—a fate which merciful providence has happily spared me—I'd hire me a few potential Stuart Chases. I'd instruct these professors of popularization to resist the seductions of original research and the further refinement of theory which engaged most everybody else on the faculty. I'd tell them that their tenure depended on their ability to speak United States about education over the radio and in film shorts

and to write United States about education for the popular magazines and press. They might even look forward to full professorships of popularization when they wrote the Book of the Month!

If I were a superintendent who saw beyond his city limits, I'd communicate the forward-looking practices of my school system not only to my own PTA and local newspaper. Public opinion in the local community largely depends on the opinion-shaping nation-wide mass media. A free-lance journalist might collaborate with me on a magazine article. A radio station might carry into many homes the discussions of a panel of teen-agers from my high school. A documentary film of good practices might pay for itself.

If I were a foundation—it would be an interesting feeling to be a foundation, wouldn't it?—I'd found a magazine on education for the lay public. There are magazines for the general public on hosts of matters—religion, science, sports, mechanics, politics, needlework, intercultural relations, and model railroad building. But where is the popular magazine on education for John Q. Public who isn't a PTA officer or a school board official? My magazine, *American Education*, might be pocket-size, but it would not be a reprint affair. Instead, it would contain skillful popularizations by educa-

tional journalists like the members of the Educational Writers Association and by those educators not yet entirely corrupted by academesque, pedagogue, and gobbledygook. Plenty of pictures. Case studies. Profiles of the nobler Romans among us. Maybe even some of the jokes told at Denver and Atlantic City—but not all.

If I were an executive secretary of an educational organization, I'd never hold a convention in an American city without sponsoring at least one meeting especially for the public. I'd go all out with the newspapers and the school system to get a good audience for my most intelligible members and to get press coverage for the convention. Back in the home office, leads for good stories and scripts on modern educational developments might be fed systematically to journalists, radio stations, aspiring writers.

If I were a professor of education—but wait—I *am* a professor of education. Can this heretical doctrine apply to me too? Must even a professor communicate through such vulgar media as popular magazines, press, radio, rather than exclusively through monographs, yearbooks, and the "little magazines" of education? Give me a bit more time and I feel confident that I will work out an adequate rationalization, exempting me. Even as you, dear reader?

The Challenge of First Grade Teaching

(Continued from page 492)

- Those children who were not able to learn to read in the first grade were not considered failures by themselves or others
- Those children who were able to learn to read quickly were not considered unusual by themselves or others
- Those children who became fluent readers took advantage of the opportunity given to read extensively and widely
- In many cases reading problems were prevented from developing
- In many cases personality problems were resolved or prevented from developing
- Children's creativity was fostered and revealed in their original writings
- Parents gained understanding of how children learned
- Principals indicated their support of the entire program and their intention of continuing it in the future
- School-wide interest in the first grade program on the part of all teachers was noted.

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