IT didn't matter what groups started
talking about at the February conven-
tions. They ended by talking about the
cheaters of children who unjustly attack
American education.

They talked in the Grand Ballrooms,
and in scheduled sub-groups, and in
unofficial off-the-record confabs, and in
spontaneous get-togethers engendered
by the combustion of indignation. They
talked in the lobbies, over the coffee
cups, beside the exhibit booths, and
while dignitaries labored through end-
less greetings and introductions at gen-
eral sessions. Late at night in their
rooms at the hotels, they talked with
their closest friends. "You've run into
it too? Then it isn't something happen-
ing just in my home town. It's happen-
ing in your community too."

Independently they came to a recur-
ring conclusion. American education
since 1948 was under new fire. To com-
 municate democratic education to the
public was imperative. To meet the
propaganda of the cheaters of children
was inescapable. The local community
was now the field of battle—your com-

munity.

Education, a sleeping giant, was wak-
ing up. The giant had slept peacefully
through the warnings of the Jeremiahas
during the past few years. The warning
voices had said, "This is something
new under the educational sun. This is
the community-by-community attack.
This is the technique of picking off the
bravest and the best, of silencing a
thousand by shutting one honest
mouth. This is a way of cheating the
children of their right to a fine educa-
tion in a democracy." Yet the giant
slept on. One prophet 'not without
honor, save in his own country' came
back from talks with teachers worn in
spirit. "No one really seemed to care,"
he reported.

While the giant slept, several school
administrators and subordinates of un-
questioned integrity and ability were
singled out for attack. The familiar
libels were dusted off and circulated:
The schools don't teach the 3 R's; too
many fads and frills; the schools cost
too much; education develops delin-
quency, godlessness, subversion and low
intellectual achievement. Varied tactics
were tested: the "spontaneous" letters
to the editor; pamphlets available;
anonymous mass mailings; people with
genuine and with unjustified grievances
discovered; meetings of "indignant
citizens" including dupes; creation or
use of citizens' groups with impressive
titles; opposition to bond issues at the
polls; relentless pressure on the board
of education.

When some administrators weathered
the storm successfully, the sleeping
giant stirred uneasily. When some went
down, flags flying but still down, and
when some beat strategic retreats, the
sleeping giant awoke. The date was
1951.

Education Faces Its Difficult Task

Education, awake, knows now that
it will be a hard job to meet the at-
tacks. A hard job not simply because of the resources of the child-cheaters—which earlier were underestimated and now may be overestimated. A hard job because of cultural forces that encourage development of child-cheating. This is a time when America is confronted with the ugly totalitarianism of Soviet Russia. Since fear, suspicion and worry are rife, some people look for scapegoats and blame education for world ills. This also is a time when taxes are high for necessary defense. The tax-cutters move in on what they term “unnecessary expenses,” among which they classify support for one of the most essential services of all, education. At such a time, it is easy for children to be the losers.

Now that the giant is awake, he cannot afford the ostrich tactic of sticking his head in the sand. To avoid full, frank, continual public participation in school affairs would be suicidal. There must be renewed, invigorated, imaginative inter-communication in school and community through press, parent groups, radio advisory councils, magazines, visitation and other means. There must be a crusade to vaccinate communities against child-cheating. This must become a significant part of the job of each educator, preferably before unfair attacks on education are made in the local community. It must become central in the functioning of each local educational organization, each national educational organization. It must become the absorbing concern of a clearing house and coordinating organization such as an expanded and strengthened Commission for the Defense of Democracy of the NEA.

The cheaters of children are few and vociferous. Their voices should never be confused with the heavy majority voice of the people of your community. The people want good education for their children in your community.

The giant, education, now awake, has formidable allies. The giant, education, can handle his maligners if each of us, the atoms making up the giant, “lives right” with respect to communicating democratic education and vaccinating folks against the child-cheating disease.—William Van Til, College of Education, University of Illinois, Urbana.

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