

# The Importance of People

Column Editor: William Van Til

## Cheaters of Children

IT didn't matter what groups started talking about at the February conventions. 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 endless greetings and introductions at general 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 happening just in my home town. It's happening in your community too."

Independently they came to a recurring conclusion. American education since 1948 was under new fire. To communicate 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* community.

Education, a sleeping giant, was waking up. The giant had slept peacefully through the warnings of the Jeremiahs 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 education 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 unquestioned 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 delinquency, 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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