

The Listening Post

Column Editor: C. Glen Hass
Contributor: Fred T. Wilhelms

The Listening Post appears this month under guidance of a new column editor: C. Glen Hass, assistant superintendent and director of instruction, Arlington County Public Schools, Arlington, Virginia.

As its first contributor of the year, The Listening Post proudly presents its former editor, Professor Fred T. Wilhelms, San Francisco State College.

"GOLD is where you find it"—and I've found some! I want to tell you about the healthiest piece of writing on education that I've seen in a long while. It comes from a public relations firm, Hill and Knowlton, Inc. You'll use it for a different purpose from theirs—but they won't mind.

Their first problem was a limited one: to guide their clients toward real effectiveness in producing the sponsored teaching materials that industry offers to schools. But, somewhere along the line, vision set in. They set up a "Study of Education-Industry Cooperation" under the direction of Warren Nelson. They went after insight through 5000 questionnaires from teachers and administrators, 800 personal interviews, and "depth interviews" with educational leaders. The results are still only mimeographed, but if you want an eye-opener—a reassurance in these times of educational tension that American laymen can still think straight and idealistically about our schools—write to Room 5401, Empire State Building, New York, and ask for this study.

Remember when you read it that these are hard-headed businessmen talking to other hard-headed businessmen. Here are a few of the things I think you'll see.

▶ *They See What We Are Trying To Do*

Take just three sentences from many:

- "Of first importance in the community-centered school is: Here students learn about their own community, its productive base, its businesses, its government, the whole range of its organized life, and the varieties of its human relationships."

- "Life adjustment education is based on recognition by educators that students leaving school will expect to locate jobs, earn their living, raise families, buy homes, goods, and insurance, pay taxes, look for recreation. The first responsibility of the school, consequently, is to help students prepare for these activities."

Throughout the whole volume runs this emphasis on a close-to-life curriculum geared to our society as it really is. It is an explicit recognition and acceptance of the finest things we are trying to do.

▶ *They See Education as a Science and a Developed Art*

Imagine how much easier our work would be—how much more we could produce—if the public as a whole accepted the idea that follows:

- "New methods and techniques in education are not just fortuitous ideas; they are the product of knowledge produced by years of psychological research which has been tested by extended ex-

perimentation . . . both in developing formal skills such as reading and in teaching more general behavior, such as citizenship."

- "Just as new techniques in industry are frequently not understood except by the few who work directly with them, so the public does not always understand new methods in the schools, methods which, like new processes in industry, may be much more effective than past procedures in achieving desired goals."

Not everything the authors say is— or should be—so flattering to educators-as-experts; but steadily they hold to a deep respect for our learned profession.

► *They Are Confident of Our Devotion to America*

- "Teachers fundamentally believe, defend, and work to promote understanding of accepted American principles and institutions. Teachers' criticism of materials has reference to specifics of these materials. They are not intended to be a challenge of the principles of the business economy."

- "The teaching profession has been greatly concerned with education for citizenship. Teachers are therefore especially sensitive to careless charges regarding their supposed failure in this area."

► *They Call for Teamwork, in a Partnership of Equals, Aimed at Genuine Education*

Remember that the basic subject of this report is commercially sponsored teaching aids. With reference to these, the authors bluntly warn against "dictation or undue pressure." They set educational needs as the only justification for programs. "Sponsors of programs should approach the problem with the question: 'What body of knowledge, of skills, and of special un-

derstandings is there in my organization which is significant and important to all?'" They ask sponsors to invite teachers, administrators, and professional organizations into "prior planning" to stop the present financial and educational wastage. Their keynote is this: "combining the skill of the educator with the best information available from industry."

I am aware that one swallow does not make a spring. I know that one expertly written, tough-mindedly idealistic report will not stop all the dubious ventures in "educational aids" or resolve all the tensions between the public and us. Nevertheless I am tremendously impressed. I see evidence of a statesmanship which has risen above shrewd self-interest to a higher conception of a permanent, responsible contribution to the enlightened self-interest of us all. I think I see here a foundation for new understanding, new cooperation. Coming as it does from an old, respected firm, the document will have added meaning to the whole business community and I believe we should make use of it.

Speaking of attacks on new educational techniques the authors say:

- "In industry and business such restrictions are often felt to be attacks upon individual enterprise—which means, in the best sense, release of the individual's inventive skills and energies. . . . Just as individual enterprise bespeaks the need for autonomy of the individual in business and industry, so academic freedom bespeaks the autonomy of the teacher and his profession in the search for new truths, new ideas and new techniques. Neither carries with it the implication of complete individualism or the negation of community obligations. The maintenance of one is implicit in assuring the security of the other."

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