

Uniting Forces To Improve Education

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Let's Look at Our Critics

THROUGHOUT the history of public education criticisms have been hurled at the public schools. While the danger of these criticisms can not be minimized, we must remember that the greatest danger of these could be a termination of all criticism, which would allow educators and citizens to drift into a state of complacency.

In recent years the public schools have received much irresponsible and unwarranted criticism from an increasing number of "professional agitators and shabby pamphleteers." This increase in criticism from such sources has caused many educators to lump all critics of public education into one category. Many critics do not fit into this one category and are offering criticisms of public schools which must be met—criticisms which must be answered because of the very nature of their source if not for other reasons.

Controversies over recent books and articles have often "muddied the waters" for clear thinking and weakened the lines of communication. It is the primary purpose in this short article to direct attention to some sources which may be helpful as one studies recent criticisms of public education.

Maurice R. Ahrens comments upon Alfred Lynd's book in *Saturday Review*, September 12, 1953. He says: "The criticisms of modern education which permeate almost every page of his book are based largely upon subjective judgement. Personal experiences and talks which he has had with

businessmen and others play an important role in his expressions of disapproval. I do not question the integrity of the author or of those with whom he conferred, but such subjective evidence simply is neither sound nor acceptable in formulating generalized statements critical of modern education."

R. L. Duffus, writing in the *New York Times*, September 13, 1953, warns us of the convincing power of Mr. Lynd's "strange language." He says he is "too much inclined to use such words as 'piffle' for doctrines with which he does not agree."

Kenneth Winetroun in *Phi Delta Kappan*, January 1954, reacting to Mr. Lynd's book says "quackery is at its minimum considering everything."

"A Scholar's Documents," "Reply to a Scholar's Documents" and "Comments on a Scholar's Reply," which appeared in *The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals* in April and December of 1953 will prove helpful in meeting many of the criticisms our schools face today. These articles, presenting the opinions of Harold C. Hand and Charles W. Sanford as opposed to those of Arthur E. Bestor, Jr., include many of the controversial issues in education today.

The above articles, along with many others which have been written by persons interested in the future of public education, will help in clarifying questions which have been raised by the critics.

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While one can not question the sincerity of many of the critics of public education, an educator must develop criteria by which he can evaluate criticisms of this kind. Some such criteria as the following may be useful:

- What about the evidence? Much of the material being circulated contains sweeping generalizations based upon little information. Often this information has been personally selected.

- What about constructive solutions? Too few of the critics offer any real constructive solutions to the criticisms made of the schools.

- What about "color" language? The use of "color" words such as "Educationdom," "Educationese," etc., often distracts one from the real issues of the problem.

Despite the increasing number of criticisms being hurled at public schools, it is encouraging to see that educators are recognizing the value of the contributions of lay citizens and are securing their participation in resolving problems facing the schools. It is through this democratic planning that misunderstandings, misinformation and many misgivings of public education are being eliminated in some areas and criticisms are stimulating lay citizens and educators to expend their energies for a better educational program.

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