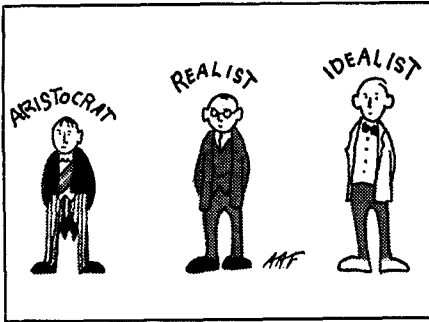


## II. First Principles



**"The Revolution in Education,"** by Mortimer J. Adler and Milton Mayer (Introduction by Clarence Faust; University of Chicago Press. 196 pp. \$3.75), is primarily concerned with "asking the right questions" about some fundamental principles of education. Arthur Mizener, our reviewer, has been professor of English at Cornell University since 1951.

By Arthur Mizener

THE title of this book is eye-catching, but perhaps a little misleading, for its authors are talking, in a special way, about something which has happened to us, rather than about something we can be said deliberately to have done. This is the revolutionary idea to which we got committed—probably without much real awareness of what was happening—in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, an idea which led, among other things, to universal education.

Messrs. Adler and Mayer demonstrate clearly how little universal education in the modern sense was a part of Jefferson's idea of democracy or of any early American's. They also make it clear that we were very slow to recognize what we had committed ourselves to. Their conviction is that we still have not fully realized the problems we have created for ourselves. Their primary concern is to formulate these problems, "to find the right questions," or, in another of their phrases, "to strip the issues for action." Their idea is that, if we go back to first principles and find out what we are disagreeing about philosophically, we can then, presumably, see why we disagree about curriculums, etc.

They, therefore, delineate three major attitudes toward education, what they call the positions of the aristocrat, the realist, and the traditionalist. In fact, however, the position of the aristocrat has almost no relevance in a country committed to

universal education for an industrialized democracy; its conception of education is essentially that of a slave, or semi-slave, society and is never advanced in this country except by a few extreme segregationists. The realist position is the one, common enough at all times, of those who think the present state of affairs is about as good a one as we can hope for and had better be left alone.

We are thus left with the idealist position and, according to Messrs. Adler and Mayer most of our arguments about education grow out of a disagreement in principle between two kinds of idealists, the modernists and the traditionalists. Both groups are committed to universal education of the best quality available, but they hold "flatly opposed views of the nature of inquiry, an opposition which, in turn, arises from differing concepts of the nature of reality and the nature of intelligence." The views of the modernist on these questions may be summed up, in John Dewey's words, by the assertion that education must go either "backward to the intellectual and moral standards of a pre-scientific age or forward to a greater utilization of scientific method in the development of the possibilities of growing, expanding experience." The heart of this, Messrs. Adler and Mayer point out, is the idea of "experience," the idea that "the mind is not a faculty for knowing the features of an independent reality but a biological instrument which . . . functions to maintain and advance the living process." To this, they say, the traditionalist replies that "practical wisdom or knowledge of moral values cannot be acquired in the same way as scientific knowledge," that education therefore requires other modes of inquiry than Dewey's "scientific method," though it certainly requires that, and other objects of inquiry than "the possibilities of growing, expanding experience," though it certainly wants that.

It is quite clear that Messrs. Adler and Mayer agree with the traditionalist, who in fact takes a position familiarly associated with Mr. Adler's name. But as nearly as one who agrees with neither position can see, they are eminently fair to the modernist and traditionalist impartially. The one objection that might be made to this book is that it is so preoccupied with "asking the right questions" about first principles that it seldom gets down to cases. For the vulgar mind with its concern for the actual events in which first principles are realized, the glimpses of the minute particulars of experience the authors give us are all too rare.

## III. Educational Ills



**"Schools Without Scholars,"** by John Keats (Houghton Mifflin. 202 pp. \$3), sees life-adjustment curricula, vocational education, and teachers' colleges as the culprits in today's schooling. The president of the Bank Street College of Education in New York, John H. Niemeyer, weighs the author's protests for us.

By John H. Niemeyer

THERE could profitably be a national committee to try to get a copy of "Schools Without Scholars" into the hands of every citizen who is troubled about American education. There should be two requirements, however, of each person who receives a copy.

First, the reader should have to spend some time actually visiting the classrooms and studying the problems of the schools of his immediate community. Critics like Milton Eisenhower, Admiral Rickover, and the editorial writers of *Life* seem to people out on the firing line of the public schools to be living in a never-never land. John Keats has done at least some digging in the reality of schools—although even he has apparently not ventured far from the privileged, college-minded minority. This fact makes his book less helpful to persons concerned with other millions of children who also must somehow be dealt with by our schools—those who do not have anything we would call "homes," those who are handicapped with low intelligence, illness, or special learning problems.

Second, the recipient of the free copy would promise to read "Schools Without Scholars" complete. The author has a neat way (an excellent gadfly device) of expressing what seem to be his feelings, but then, when his excellent mind refuses any longer to overlook the fallacies of the position, he ends by saying that he did not quite mean what he had said after all. So we are led to see the hypothetical

Miss Alpha, in her concern for social development, conditioning her pupils to become identical peas in a Riesman-defined pod of togetherness. Miss Omega, on the other hand, who in keeping with a popular romanticism has desks screwed to the floor of a rickety school building, "trains the mind" and educates "the individual in his own right." But if the reader stops here and skips to the next chapter he misses Mr. Keats's studied judgment, which starts with the statement: "The point is, both Miss Alpha and Miss Omega have something to offer." It is precisely at this point that the citizens committees recommended by Keats ought to begin.

"Schools Without Scholars" is an effective and at times devastating criticism of many of the weaknesses of our public schools. The fact that volumes could be written about our educational strengths in no way lessens the value of this criticism.

The chief weakness of John Keats's criticism, and of the statements by most of our lay critics of education, is that, by finding convenient devils—life-adjustment curriculum, vocational education, teachers' colleges—as the cause of all our educational ills, they suggest that if we would only exorcise these devils all our problems would be over. A recent *Life* editorial, in large measure inspired by Keats's book, stated flatly "... most of our teachers' colleges should be abolished at such. . ."

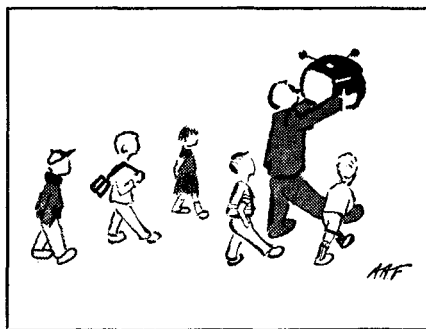
Unfortunately, even though there are glaring shortcomings in the existing pattern of professional training and certification of teachers, the solution is not as easy as Keats and the others suggest. The experimental work in training liberal arts graduates for elementary school teaching which has been carried on at Bank Street College of Education in New York—an institution which in spite of its name bears very little semblance to the teachers' colleges now under attack—indicates clearly that four years of liberal arts plus a desire to teach do not alone make a good teacher.

Teaching requires at least two ingredients other than knowledge: artistry, which is a personality-emotional complex that probably cannot be "taught," and craftsmanship, which can. If we are to have teachers who will train the minds and promote the inner strength and the moral fiber needed for a democratic society, we shall have to do much more than shift from one type of college to another. John Keats has some practical suggestions to offer. In addition we shall have to spend much more money for on-the-job learning by teachers and

for research to find more effective methods for selecting and training our teachers.

Used critically, "Schools Without Scholars" can be extremely helpful to all educators and laymen who wish to improve our schools. Let us hope that this author will carry his study of the problem to greater depth and three or four years from now get after all of us again with the lash of his provocative mind. Incidentally, for a brilliant rationale of the type of teaching which Keats describes as ideal, we recommend "Experience and Education" written by John Dewey.

## IV. A Gadget Cure



**"TV and Our School Crisis,"** by **Charles A. Siepmann** (Dodd, Mead, 198 pp. \$3.50), urges that video be widely adopted in classrooms as a solution to the school crisis. Reviewer **Richard D. Heffner** is a former teacher who is program director of the Metropolitan Educational Television Association in New York, as well as producer-moderator of the WRCA-TV program "The Open Mind."

By Richard D. Heffner

**T**HIS is truly a brilliant book—perceptive, challenging, witty, timely, and to-the-point. But it is sadly wrong, too! Wrong in its need to oversell television as a "clean" solution (no fallout of harmful effects) to the present "school crisis" of too few good teachers and classrooms.

To be sure, there are frequent disclaimers on this point throughout the slim volume. But for every statement that none but the foolish would hold television to be "the *deus ex machina* to 'solve' the crisis," there seem to be whole chapters subtly devoted to overselling the medium as precisely that.

More's the pity in that one might have hoped that the very last person to be oversold on formal, in-school education by television would be

Charles A. Siepmann. Formerly director of adult education for BBC, a onetime consultant to our own Federal Communications Commission, and now chairman of the Department of Communications in Education at New York University, Professor Siepmann is a man not only of great charm and intellectual balance, but of great influence as well. And, up to this point at least, he had been counted among those who attest to the myriad uses to which television can be put for educational purposes but who, at the same time, quickly and positively recognize the dangerous shift in values our educational system may experience given the inevitable widespread imposition of this mechanical gadget upon the classroom. Now, however, Charles Siepmann seems to be oversold himself, and one must fear that he may become the Pied Piper of in-school education through television.

In truth, no thinking American, deeply troubled with the situation of our schools, can help but be impressed by much that Mr. Siepmann writes. The facts and figures he quotes to illustrate how many students we have (and will shortly have) and how few teachers we have (and will shortly have) are truly appalling. And he goes on to point out how television can be used to bring to ever-increasing numbers of young people great teachers where they are not now to be found and even basic courses where they are not now given. ("Forty-eight per cent of this country's high schools offer no physics courses. In twenty-three per cent no physics or chemistry are taught. In twenty-four per cent the students learn no geometry!")

In light of these statistics—and others equally shocking—there seems to be no question but that in the very near future we Americans must turn to television to make up for the teachers we simply do not have and cannot hope to train. Like it or not, as an answer to the *quantitative* educational crisis of our times, television must, in many instances, serve as a substitute for rather than as a supplement to the schoolmarm.

**B**UT no real response to a major crisis can ever be as smoothly devoid of pitfalls and possible catastrophic side effects as Mr. Siepmann seems to imply. The weight of numbers may be too great for us to do anything other than use television to teach our children. However, we would be tragically naive to assume that, necessarily, this can be done with impunity.

We can accept the statement that