

# EDUCATION IN AMERICA

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## EDITORIAL 75

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR 76

THE REVOLUTION IN EDUCATION:  
IT DIDN'T START WITH SPUTNIK  
By Frank G. Jennings 77

THE SCHOOLS AND THE PREGNANT TEEN-  
AGER  
By Susan Strom 80

LEARNING TO BE NAVAHO-AMERICANS:  
INNOVATION AT ROUGH ROCK  
By Estelle Fuchs 82

THE "FAIR EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE  
ACT" IS DEAD  
By Eugene S. Wilson 85

VOICES IN THE CLASSROOM:  
SEPTEMBER SONG  
By Peter Schrag 87

## SCHOOLS MAKE NEWS 88

BOOK REVIEWS  
"When We Deal With Children,"  
by Fritz Redl, reviewed by  
Maxine Greene 92

## NEW BOOKS 94

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## The Schools as a Social Barometer

AS THE NEW academic year opens, after a summer of violence in our cities, we are reminded that the schools have often functioned as a barometer of public concern with the social issues of the time. When something seems to be wrong with our society, we are inclined to turn to the schools and say, "Fix it." Two or three generations ago, when our parents were coming to this continent from alien cultures abroad, it was the schools that were assigned the task of introducing their children to the American Way. When, early in this century, industry faced a critical shortage of skilled manpower, the responsibility for initiating vocational education programs was turned over to the schools. A decade ago, when Russia beat us into space, it was the schools that were ordered to remedy the nation's alleged deficiencies in the study of science and mathematics. And each time the schools assumed the new commitment and performed effectively.

More recently the schools were assigned the most difficult task of all—to overcome the cumulative effects of long-term deprivation among the nation's poor and disadvantaged. Our faith was strong that, given the necessary moral and financial support, they could do the job—and each September we looked forward, with varying degrees of optimism, to a report on the progress of desegregation and the success of the many special programs that have been instituted.

But this fall promises to be different. The social barometer has been falling. The more radical elements of the civil rights movement find education far too slow a process to minister to their impatience for change. The older organizations of the movement continue their efforts to further integration in the schools and to expand the special programs designed to help the disadvantaged—but even they have an air of disenchantment. And well they might. Some of our most cherished assumptions have been challenged by experience. Head Start programs do work—but, their effects are dissipated within a few months when the children move into standard classrooms. Many of the summer's riots occurred in our most forward-looking cities that have instituted "model" programs for the deprived. Not all of the rioters were dropouts—from school or society. And Congress appears more concerned with controlling violence in the ghetto than with coping with its causes. We have found that building the Great Society is far more difficult than we once conceived.

We have been reluctant to accept the obvious fact that the schools do not function in a vacuum. Education can be only half effective when the recipients remain locked in the ghetto. And motivation for learning comes hard when so many avenues to useful employment remain closed after the student emerges from the schoolhouse door. The schools alone cannot do the job.

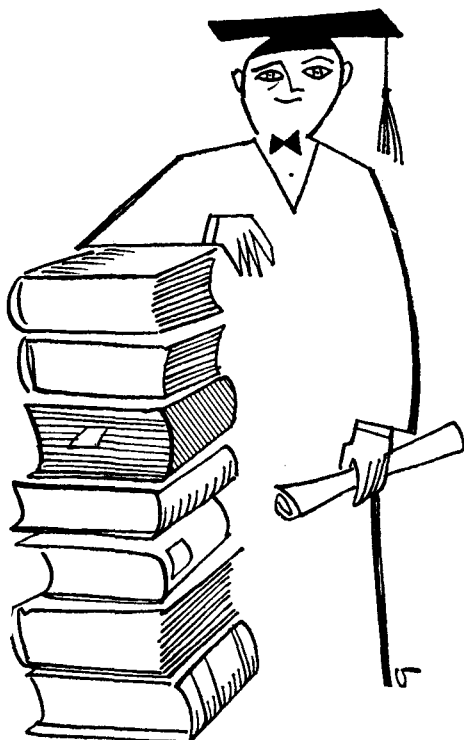
But our disenchantment should not lead us to the conviction that education can wait until other social ills are cured. Rather we should face the reality that there isn't any recipe for instant success. We should accept the fact that the scale of our effort to date hasn't begun to approach the

enormity of the task. A few additives to business as usual won't do it. A war on poverty and its attendant deprivations has to be an all-out war, not a series of skirmishes.

Elsewhere in these pages Frank G. Jennings writes that the explosive forces of the inner city may "blow down all the school walls and let the whole of urban society into the classroom." Possibly a start in this direction has already been made with the three experimental school districts in New York City slums where a substantial degree of control has been delegated to local school boards composed of parents, community leaders, and staff members. It is possible that a partial solution may be found in area-wide school systems that include not only the poverty-stricken inner city, but affluent suburbs as well. Perhaps we are wrong in confusing education with schooling, and should assign significant parts of the task to other agencies—business and industry, labor, welfare organizations of many kinds—that have special knowledge and skills to contribute. It is even possible that as we recognize the central role of continued learning for all in the world of the future, we will see, as Mr. Jennings suggests, that "the cities themselves must be re-created as giant learning centers."

Today, in short, is a time for realism and creative experiment, not despair. We cannot turn away from the overriding problem of our generation. We can only seek new means for solving it effectively, on the basis of hard experience.

—J.C.



## Letters to the Editor



### EDC

CONGRATULATIONS on another fine education section in the August 19 issue of *SR*. In James D. Koerner's article, "EDC: General Motors of Curriculum Reform," however, somebody goofed but good in reporting that "125,000 students were studying physics in the 1966-67 school year." This figure is off—too low—probably by about 400,000 students.

Reliable data on science enrollments indicate that approximately 525,000 students, or about 22 per cent of the twelfth-grade enrollment, studied physics in 1964-65. Perhaps Mr. Koerner meant that 125,000 of these students were studying PSSC (ESI) physics, which probably is about the correct figure for this statistic. During that same year, 1964-65, enrollment in high school biology was approximately 2,700,000 students, while in chemistry it was about an even 1,000,000. These figures, respectively, are equal to nearly 90 per cent of the total enrollment in grade ten and about 40 per cent of the eleventh-grade enrollment.

ROBERT H. CARLETON,  
National Science  
Teachers Association.

Washington, D.C.

### The Promise of Learning

THANK YOU for publishing the sensitive and perceptive article, "Learning in a Lonely Place" [*SR*, Aug. 19], in which Anne Fischel expressed so beautifully the way so many Head Start children have been "taken . . . out of limbo and exposed . . . to pain."

For those of us who are more than twice seventeen and still believe in the world, it is the hope that we can fulfill the promise in kindergarten and first grade, after Head Start, for children like Sandra. We often do, or we couldn't keep on trying.

BERNICE H. FLEISS,  
Associate Professor of Education,  
Hunter College.  
New York, N.Y.

ANNE FISCHEL's "Learning in a Lonely Place" is tremendous. I hope her sensitive insight will continue to be shared through *SR*.

It is to be hoped that there will be a happy sequel to the story of Sandra and her family through others with insight and caring equal to Miss Fischel's.

J. RUSSELL CARPENTER.  
Newark, N.Y.

### Guide for Librarians

I CAN'T HELP but wonder what knowledge and experience made Frank Jennings feel that he was qualified to write a scathing review of Dr. G. Robert Carlsen's helpful

guide to adolescent literature, *Books and the Teen-Age Reader* ["A Guide for Word Consumers," *SR*, Aug. 19]. The book is intended as a guide primarily for teachers, librarians, and parents, not teen-agers. Dr. Carlsen's evaluation, I know, is a result of many years experience working with young people, studying literature for different stages of their development, and helping them develop good reading habits through interests while molding ideas toward mature development.

For quite a number of years as a school librarian, I have found the principles of guidance in book selections that I learned from Dr. Carlsen, which he sets forth in his book, to be both helpful and valuable. I do not believe that I am a "menace to the literary health of our society."

MARY F. HUBER.

Tipton, Ia.

I WISH to congratulate *SR* and Frank Jennings for the review of G. Robert Carlsen's *Books and the Teen-Age Reader*.

It takes considerable mettle to review a book "sponsored by the National Book Committee with the professional endorsement of the American Library Association, the International Reading Association, and the National Council of Teachers of English," and even more mettle to be objective.

As a public librarian, I am quite concerned with encouraging younger people to read, and with providing them with books that are both worthwhile and absorbing. It was therefore quite disappointing to read Dr. Carlsen's book for I found it as stimulating as cold porridge. It was even more disappointing to read laudatory reviews of the book in other publications.

DENIS LORENZ,  
Head of Circulation Department,  
Bridgeport Public Library.  
Bridgeport, Conn.

### More on Kari

HOW MANY other teachers were angered by Robert E. Samples's article, "Kari's Handicap—The Impediment of Creativity" [*SR*, July 15]? Approaching the article with anticipation, I hoped for some specific insights or perceptive thoughts, at least on teaching creative students. Instead, I found Mr. Samples's writing brimming with unsupported generalities, including stereotyped criticisms of teachers. He verbally deplores stereotyped, unimaginative thinking while continually demonstrating that very thing.

How many schools and teachers has Samples visited in the last five years? How can he refer to schools without qualification as "the term in court served by each child"? Is he uninformed about honors courses in which creative students are urged to think for themselves (but also to use their cre-

(Continued on page 100)