

Appalling dullness of Ed courses

THE MISEDUCATION OF AMERICAN TEACHERS, by James D. Koerner. Penguin Books, 360 pp., \$1.25.

"Most education courses are vague, insipid, time-wasting adumbrations of the obvious, and probably irrelevant to academic teaching."

Sound familiar?

"I do not see how any observer . . . could fail to conclude that education courses fully deserve their ill repute. Like the textbooks, they suffer from a high degree of dullness and superfluity. In the lifeless, gray miasma of the typical education class, where the student never seems to exercise his right to expect stimulation . . ."

If it does sound familiar, it is probably because it is a slightly more erudite version of conversations occurring daily in our own education cafeteria.

James D. Koerner, however, has done more than talk about the state of this ancient Denmark. He has spent two years gathering material for his report—visiting teachers' colleges and schools of education across the U.S., interviewing hundreds of students and professors of education, studying transcripts, programs and course outlines. His report of his findings and conclusions is clear and to the point. He reveals the education institutions across the country as "weak faculties operating weak programs that attract weak students."

Mr. Koerner examines each of these areas of teacher-training at considerable length, supporting his conclusions at every step with the results of his research.

The quality of instruction in education courses, he says, is appalling. The courses, taught by "education professors who are known to be among the worst teachers on the campus," are redundant and uninteresting and carry "a good deal of indoctrination for the student, through sheer repetition if nothing else." The texts for these courses Mr. Koerner finds characterized by a scarcity of recognized authors, a low intellectual level, a high duplication of material within and among them, a strong strain of anti-intellectualism, and—especially in the area of methods of teaching—a pervasive banality.

The students themselves contribute to the poor quality of instruction. On the whole, he says, they are "resoundingly uninterested in much of what takes place" and contribute much to the general sterility of the courses." It is only the passivity and timidity of these prospective teachers that prevents the low level of instruction from being called more often to public attention.

Graduate work in education, Mr. Koerner found, suffers from most of the same faults as undergraduate work. The low quality of the Education faculty and the graduate student, "the ludicrous excess of course offerings," the lack of any clearly defined purpose, the disregard for the fundamental disciplines—all these reinforce the low status of graduate work. Discussing the doctorate in Education, Mr. Koerner disparages the popularity of the diluted Ed.D. over the traditional Ph.D. But the quality of both, he says, is notably below that of the arts and science doctorate; they represent "a kind of nadir of utilitarianism and triviality."

Mr. Koerner's criticisms are not, however, merely destructive attacks on education. He offers as well carefully-formulated recommendations for improvement. He proposes, for example, that the regular four-year undergraduate program remain standard preparation for new teachers; that serious academic participation be secured throughout teacher education; that undergraduate majors in education be eliminated, keeping only majors in academic subjects; that formal methods courses be eliminated and the work incorporated into the practice teaching program; that there be a drastic reduction in the number of specialities at the graduate level; and that most work for all graduate degrees be done in the liberal arts area.

Finally, the author ends with a satiric attack on the Newspeak of Education, which he calls Educanto. This corruption of the English language, he says—"marked by an excessive wordiness, by a genuine fondness for platitudes, by an irredeemable addiction to ugly coinages and meaningless jargon"—is both a symptom and cause of the poor academic health of education.

Mr. Koerner admits he is an ex-

pert on Educanto; unfortunately his experience in the jargon at times weakens even his best writing elsewhere in the book. Perhaps this is the most convincing argument for the danger of this insidious pseudo-language—that it has infected language so deeply that even those aware of its pernicious influence cannot purge themselves entirely.

There is not doubt, however, that Mr. Koerner's work makes its point clearly and emphatically. The American teacher training institutions are in desperate need of reform. His are no unqualified conclusions or recommendations; he is not a theorist who has tailored the statistics to fit his theory. His book is a book of facts, subjectively expressed, to be sure, but it would hardly be possible to discuss dispassionately and unangered the educational atrocities he has uncovered.

But ah, say the conservatives in Education at U of A (assuming their power for indignation is still slightly more than a vestigial remnant), what relevance can a study of American teacher-training have for our Alberta faculty? To say the implications of Mr. Koerner's study are negligible is to deny the obvious similarities between the U.S. and Canadian Education faculties, to deny our dependence on American textbooks and to deny that the questions raised are not ones that are being, or should be, asked here.

James Koerner's book is one every person interested in educational reform has an obligation to evaluate. Likely it is one which for most professors and students in education would have much greater value than those books they now are forced to buy.

To end with the comfortable cliché that it is a thought-provoking book underplays its significance. Hopefully it is an action-provoking book, to inspire similar research and possibly even reform of Canadian Education faculties stagnating in our own "complacent, monolithic Establishment."

That something is indeed rotten in the state of education is obvious by the smell. Mr. Koerner is unpinching our noses.

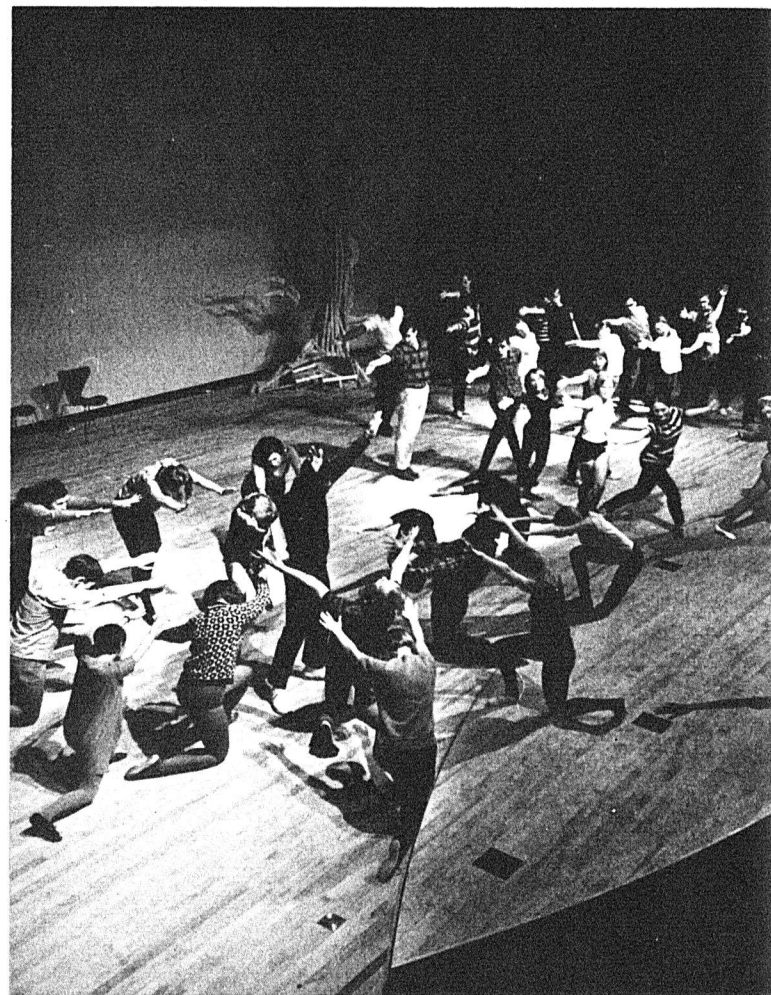
—Leona Gom

Free concerts at Con Hall

There are two more free concerts in Convocation Hall on the University campus this weekend. On Friday evening at 8:30 the Department of Music will present pianist Albert Krywolt in a recital of music by Chopin, Sarlati, Prokofieff and Liszt, as well as the Mozart Quartet in G Minor, K. 478, assisted by violinist Jerry Ozipko, violist Nicholas Pulos, and cellist Lois Upright. This piano recital was originally scheduled for Friday, January 26.

On Sunday evening at 8:30 the Department will present the first of its spring series on Sunday night chamber music concerts. A string quartet will play three fantasias for string quartet by Henry Purcell and an early Haydn quartet; and Broderick Olson, violin, and Ernest Kassian, viola, and the University Chamber Orchestra will play the Mozart Sinfonia Concertante. There is no charge for admission to either of these concerts, Friday and Sunday evenings at 8:30 in Convocation Hall.

Judith Short will give a piano recital in Convocation Hall on Wednesday, February 14 at 8:30 p.m. She will be assisted by Catherine Corneliussen, violin, and Barbara Fraser, violincello. She will present a selection of Bach, Chopin, Mendelssohn, Hindemith, and Mozart.



THE IRISH UPRISING ON STAGE—Not quite, but there's an Irish element in the musical play *Finian's Rainbow*, being rehearsed here. The Jubilaires' production will run next Thursday through Saturday at the Jubilee, so you'd better get your tickets now. There is a 50 cent reduction on Thursday tickets.

leftovers

On the whole of a dull, dark, and dreary day in the winter of the year, a young man went into Rutherford Library looking for a book. He couldn't find the book, of course (one seldom can in the University Libraries), but he found one like it and decided to check it out.

He filled out the call slip, including the name of the book, its call number, its serial number, the name of the author, his blood type, the date of the next solar eclipse, and his mother's maiden name. Then he took the library card out of his wallet and fearfully approached the circulation desk.

"You'll have to sign the call slip," insisted the woman behind the desk.

"Why?" asked the student.

"Because it's the rules," answered the woman gruffly.

So the student signed the call slip and handed it to the librarian. But she wasn't satisfied yet.

"Give me your library card," she demanded.

"Why?" he asked, thinking that in most places his signature was considered adequate identification.

"Because it's the rules," she replied.

"Well," the young man went on, thinking that there must be some logic behind rules, "why do you need my card *and* my signature? Is there more than one student with my name, address, and identification number? Or conversely, is there more than one student with my signature?"

"It's the rules," she replied.

"One could almost get the impression," the young man went on, "that you don't trust me."

"It's the rules," she replied. "We're not allowed to trust anyone. We remain convinced that all undergraduates are dishonest enough to forge signatures, carry false identification, and perjure themselves in any way in order to steal our valuable books. And so, you sneaking, miserable, sinful and dishonest little vermin, please give me your library card to I can check you out and get your stinking undergraduate carcass out of my sight."

And so the young man left, wondering why he paid tuition fees, why he and ten thousand undergraduates allowed themselves to be bullied by a library system which supposedly belonged to them, and why he didn't have the courage to bend, fold, spindle, and mutilate all the IBM cards in the books under his arm.

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