S. to the NEWS

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RELEASE: September 28

FUNCTIONAL ILLITERATES

A personal encounter or a good human interest story always drives home a point more **ettectively** than a rash of raw statistics. When the College Bntrance Examination scores dropped steadily for thirteen straight years, the educators tried to explain it away with academic doubletalk. Two dramatic examples, however, have illustrated the fact that a significant portion of our young people are simply not being taught the basic skills that our public schools were built and financed to provide.

A st. Louis television station recently aired an interview with a 20-year old white boy who went all the way through the public school system and received his high school diploma, but cannot read or write. Now, having realized **how a** functional illiterate is handicapped in the job market, he is attending an adult remedial reading program.

Jerry Doyle isn't retarded or stupid; he is merely untaught. On television he told how be was never given any grades in school; be was just promoted year after year. The school's attitude was: "Here's your diploma, now get lost."

According to the Literacy Council, which is now successfully teach ing him to read by the phonics method -- which he should have been given in the first grade - there are 70,000 functional illiterates in this one metropolitan area alone. The chief cause of this phenomenon is that they were culturally deprived of the opportunity **-t**, learn to read by the phonics method, the only proven technique of teaching anyone of any age to read the English language.

Washington, n.c. residents were shocked last month when the news papers reported that the valedictorian of an inner-city school was

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denied admission to George Washington University because b.ls .Scholastic Aptitude Test scores were only half as good as they should have been. Thus, the highest-ranking graduate of the public schools in our nation's capital hasn't been taught enough to get into his hometown college.

As the George Washington University admissions dean said, "He's been conned. He•s been deluded into thinking he's gotten an education."

This result bas been fostered by school administrators who franldy state that students who· cannot read should be awarded high school diplo- ' mas anyway, that diploma should be based on atten.dance and not on academic achievement. Under this system, there are no standards for getting out of public high schools.

r.rhe psychological frustration this causes cannot help but breed social problems. The students are led to beli.eve they are prepared. to face life, but when they apply for a job they cannot even fill out a job application.

The failure to teach reading, combined with a refusal to admit the failure to teach reading, has produced a healthy :reaction by some educators. In Chicago one school superintendent, Albert A. Briggs, discovered that,· of 296 eighth grad.ers heading for high s<Chool in his district, only 26 could read at a seventh grade level, and 38 could not read at even a third grade level.

Briggs is a black administrator of a school district tha.t is 88 percent blaolr, and he realizes that these pupils have the :right to lJe taught basic skills. If they cannot read or write, they will not be able to get J,obs and, as Briggs said, many will "wind up in jail. 11 He showed great courage in his willingness to face the protests of teachers, pa1·ents and students in inaugurating a new policy of mini.mum standards.

I used to think that the dollar blll was the piece o:f paper whose value has slumped the most in the past ten yea:1: s. It 110w appears that this dubious "honor" has been won by the high i3chool dtploma.

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