

'Quality' Lag Seen In Education

UA Physicists Urge Reforms

The charge that the educational system is failing to produce "quality" was put before an education honorary fraternity yesterday by two University of Arizona physicists.

Phi Delta Kappa includes mostly teachers in the Tucson public school system but also members of the UA College of Education.

THE TWO PHYSICISTS who presented the critical case were Dr. James E. McDonald, senior physicist in the Institute of Atmospheric Physics, and Dr. John W. Robson, member of the physics department.

In the debate that followed, some of the educators said that the public would not tolerate student failures caused by higher standards. Others said the schools have been accused unjustly. And some agreed, in part, with the charges of the scientists.

"Both the able and the average students are getting far less training in important fundamentals than they deserve," McDonald said. "This is a nationwide problem as well as a problem in Tucson."

He then gave what he said was evidence of failure in the schools.

A personnel representative of the Arizona Public Service Co. said that high school graduates don't know what a good day's work is. This may be because of the tendency not to require really hard work of students.

A philosophy teacher at the university said that students can't handle a simple sentence.

Members of the UA College of Business and Public Administration say that students can't use simple arithmetic.

MUSIC TEACHERS say students don't know how to read music.

"Fundamentals again and again are lacking," McDonald said.

"There is a need for sectioning of some kind that permits the slightly better students to move ahead of those who have no interest."

"Also, there must be absolute standards of attainment and hard work. And counseling must be graded up. Parents often try to persuade students to take easier courses."

"There must be more home work."

Robson said that there has been a much greater impact by science on the world of ideas than anybody realizes.

This raises the question of "content" in classes. And the only way a teacher can communicate science is for him to be, to his best ability, a scientist.

"How would you section classes?" an educator asked McDonald.

"I would do it on ability basis," he replied. "Much more complicated things are being done by the schools."

"At the high school level there is a need to put people of like ability together," an educator agreed.

NOBODY IN EDUCATION feels he can teach without knowing what he's teaching. The staff of the university is concerned about content work.

Then he said that educators feel they have been unjustly blamed for inadequate teaching. At the university, only 24 of 125 hours are required in education courses. The rest can come from liberal arts.

Robson said that those getting education degrees are not majoring in physics courses.

"Scientists today are doing better on tests than they did some decades ago," another educator said.

"There has not been deterioration in recent years."

"We'd like you to contemplate a higher flunkout rate?" another educator asked. "What would you do about parent objections?"

"Why not stand up for something," said McDonald. "Are you suggesting that public opinion is so strong that Johnny must be financed at any cost?"

"If you think we have trouble getting tax money now, imagine what it would be then," replied an educator.

"What is the percentage of failure at the university?" an educator asked.

"Fair too low," said McDonald. "Standards are too low."

"Do we want to educate only the top 10 per cent?" asked an educator. "Are schools of today responsible for not getting spunk up in the air? That's the product of another day."

"The real question is, are students learning all that they are capable of," McDonald said.