The Queen's English

To observe Britain's first American-style National Education Week, the London County Council, Britain's largest educational authority, announced that "many of its schools and colleges will be holding open days and exhibitions by which the press and the public will be able to see for theirselves just how London Education works." Like in grammar classes, for instance?

The Teacher Image

Dr. Kildare has long bolstered the medical ego, and Perry Mason has been a boon to the law profession, but until this year schoolteachers were represented in mass media, almost exclusively, by rather pathetic and comical types. Now, at last, with NBC's "Mr. Novak," the teachers have an image with which they can live.

To George Gerbner, professor of communications at the University of Illinois, Novak is "not only shyly attractive, boyishly lovable, and winningly bungling, but he is also endowed with a mind, a will, and a strong sense of values." And in the first year of the series, Mr. Novak "will reach more Americans than will all real-life high-school teachers combined."

On Tuesday nights, almost 20 million viewers watch "Mr. Novak," which was written and researched with the advice and comments of rotating panels of teachers and administrators selected by the National Education Association. In each hour-long show, a handsome but inexperienced young English teacher named John Novak, played by James Franciscus, and his principal, Albert Vane, played by Dean Jagger, cope with a typical run of problems at Jefferson High, a large secondary school in an unnamed Midwestern city.

In one show, Mr. Novak tries to keep a boy with creative talent from becoming a dropout. In another, he and Vane try to resolve a conflict between student pacifists and the school ROTC. Last week, bachelor Novak went off for a visit with an old sweetheart and her family. When Mr. Novak goes wrong, says Gerbner, "he usually manages to do it the 'right way': one feels that he lost a battle but might yet win the war. If he goes wrong the 'wrong way' . . . he is a handsome failure, nevertheless."

Ten Countries: The Gerbner rating of "Mr. Novak" is part of a two-year study by the University of Illinois's Institute of Communications Research on "the portrayal of teachers and schools in the mass media of ten countries." Financed by grants from the university and the U.S. Office of Education, Gerbner and teams of student researchers have studied Mr. Novak, Mr. Peepers, Miss Brooks, and 2,800 other fictional characters in movies, TV plays, and magazines and read 4,000 pieces of education reporting in the popular press —on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Gerbner's report will not be made public until April 1964, but last week he reached some tentative conclusions. "We often see the teacher portrayed in fiction and entertainment as noble but impractical," he said. ". . . Much fiction has fostered the popular conception of a teacher as a poverty-stricken creature . . . Teachers, we've found, appear in a far greater proportion in comedies than in serious settings . . . I have a notion that, as far as the U.S. is concerned, we'll find something like this: teachers [in the various media] are harmless and kind of funny when they're being funny, but when they're serious, they're most likely subversive of morals and politics.

"The kind of insight you get from this kind of study doesn't tell you what's good and what's bad," concluded Gerbner. "But it does tell you what a country values and why."

Novak and Principal Vane: Boyishly lovable but endowed with a mind

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