

The Importance of People

William Van Til

The Climate of Fear

We welcome as a regular contributor to EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP William Van Til who will be responsible for this department during the 1949-50 publication year. Mr. Van Til is professor of education at the University of Illinois. Illustrations are by J. T. Futch, Washington, D. C.

PASSING PROFESSOR AMERICUS' abandoned desk, his colleague noticed some sheets protruding from a pigeonhole. Hoping he was unobserved, he pulled out Professor Americus' last manuscript and began to read:



"I don't know exactly when the horrid suspicion first came to me that the Communist Party in America, rebuffed by left-of-center organizations, had successfully infiltrated highly conservative right-wing organizations. By the summer of 1949, intent newspaper reading convinced me that there could be no other reasonable explanation of what was happening. Unsuccessful in their energetic bid to dominate the American left, the communists apparently had changed the party line again. Communists and their fellow travelers were now instructed to take over the key positions in the most respectable, patriotic, 100% conservative groups. They had developed a diabolic new tactic and they were rapidly gaining control of patriotic societies, the right-wing press, and anti-subversive committees of Congress and the state legislatures!

"I must confess that, up until the time of my horrid realization, I had always considered American communists to be singularly dim-witted and ludicrous dunderheads. With each reversal of party strategy, they skidded like burlesque comedians. Each new inanity was cloaked in pretentious, pseudo-scientific jargon. Their fronts were as transparent as Macy's display windows; a moderately intelligent seven-year-old could see through them. To put it in American folk-language, to me the communists just didn't seem real bright.

"Until late in the nineteen-forties, it appeared that in America their curious religion would remain the exclusive property of their small disputatious sect. They fought a losing battle in the CIO; their intellectuals jumped off the train at particularly tortuous turnings of the party line; their shenanigans with parliamentary rules were fathomed and overcome; their endorsement was the kiss of death for national political candidates. Direct attempts to teach Americans to accept communist principles and techniques were farcical failures save in a few isolated precincts of New York City. But then—alas!—some unknown, sinister, brilliant comrade developed the fiendishly simple tactic that is now working.

"The diabolic tactic was to teach Americans to adopt communist principles and approaches in fighting communism. While apparently combatting communists in this country, Americans would learn to accept communist techniques. For in-

stance, basic to communist policies and practices and repugnant to democracy are suppression of minority political parties when there is no clear and present danger, accusations of disloyalty without adequate opportunity for defense, past as well as present political orthodoxy as a condition of all employment, creation of confusion as to who really believes what. So, naturally, a first step in the diabolic new tactic was to apply these communist ways to American conditions in an attempt to create the climate of fear so characteristic of the communist state. When democratic-minded men protested these communist methods, they could be accused of communist sympathies, discredited, and removed from responsible positions. Eventually all loyalty to democratic principles and methods would be suspected as communistic. An unconsciously communist America could readily shift to conscious communism through communists in key positions in the conservative anti-communist crusade.

"I know it seems completely fantastic and unthinkable to believe that the communists are disguising themselves as conservatives in groups that have always asserted the highest patriotism, Americanism, loyalty, and anti-communism. I know it is completely incredible to believe that commie conservatives are spreading communist principles and techniques in the name of anti-communism in order to establish communism here! But how else can we explain the recent attacks on education?"

"Censorship of textbooks is advocated so that our boys and girls will not learn about countries wicked and stupid enough to censor textbooks. Is this not a trick to establish the Soviet doctrine that textbooks should be censored?"

We are urged to ban and bar and drop from reading lists and libraries a variety of publications, ranging from non-communist liberal materials to the tedious classics of the Marxist ideology, in order to protect ourselves from a police state education that bans and bars and drops from reading lists and libraries a variety

of publications. Is this not a sly trick to establish the Soviet doctrine of contempt for the method of intelligence?"

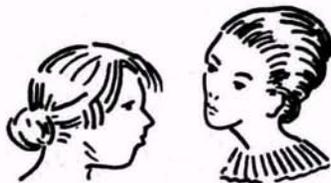
Legislative enforcement in one great American state contemplates having teachers 'report' on organizations and activities of colleagues while others report on the reporters. This is advocated to defend us from ever living in a spy state like the Soviet Union where teachers report others for suspected heresies. Another trick?

Pressure groups caution administrators and teachers against full and free discussion of certain controversial issues for the pressure groups fear such discussion will lead to that undemocratic day when controversial issues will not be freely and fully discussed.

What American would propose such policies and methods as these save communists, fellow travelers, or their innocent dupes? The guilt by association of the sponsors of these and many other allied steps seems inescapable.

"The result is the spread of the climate of fear. As in the totalitarian state, educators think to themselves, 'You can't be too careful, you know' . . ."

Here the manuscript of Professor Americus broke off suddenly, unfinished. Apparently he was in the midst of writing when he was brought up before the board of trustees on charges of subversive activities. Testimony brought out the facts that he had a foreign-sounding name, that he had once spoken critically of a member of the United States Senate (the late Huey P. Long), and that his wife occasionally dined with a woman whose sister was said



They say her sister . . .

to have contributed to an ambulance fund for the Spanish Loyalists. Currently Professor Americus is too busy for further writing as he attempts, so far without suc-

cess, to find a post following his dismissal. His colleague looked about, frowned,



and carefully tore Professor Americus' last manuscript into a thousand pieces. If someone had been watching, his own attitude toward the eccentric and unreliable Professor Americus was thus made unmistakably clear. Thought Professor Americus' colleague—you can't be too careful, you know.

From Our Readers

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or organizations should be invited to serve as staff members. A charming "world traveler" may not be an educator, and, while "minority group" leadership is desirable, even genuine interest in improving human relations is not necessarily sufficient qualification.

Space is running out—this is supposed to be a letter, not a thesis. I hope Dr. Shapiro observes many more workshops, over longer periods of time; we can profit greatly from his suggestions. Some day he may be able to contribute a second article entitled, "Some Good Things About Intergroup Workshops"!—Herbert K. Walther, University of Denver.

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Three resource suggestions for

YOUR IN-SERVICE TRAINING PROGRAM WITH ELEMENTARY TEACHERS

For a child-study workshop: *These Are Your Children*, new professional book on child development by Jenkins, Shacter and Bauer. With some teacher groups you might wish to go through this entire book on a study and discussion basis (discussion guides are suggested for each chapter). Or you might wish to group your teachers of six-year-olds, seven-year-olds, etc., and concentrate on exploring how an understanding of the characteristics and needs of each age group (see corresponding chapters in *These Are Your Children*) can make everyday classroom teaching happier and more effective.

For study of modern methods in word perception: *On Their Own in Reading* by William S. Gray. With this professional book as a discussion take-off, the what, why and how of an up-to-date program in word perception can be investigated; teachers can be helped to see phonics and other word-attack aids as means to an important goal—good reading, but at the same time can discover how to guard against overemphasis on the mechanical aspects.

For exploring ways of choosing and using children's literature in the classroom: *Children and Books* by May Hill Arbuthnot. Selected chapters from Mrs. Arbuthnot's comprehensive survey should provide valuable workshop material. Your teachers might select poetry for intensive study; the comics, movies or radio and their relation to children's reading; or the place of literature in child development—how good books can help to meet basic needs.

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