

The Importance of People

Column Editor: Richard L. Henderson

WITH this issue "The Importance of People" column comes under guidance of Richard L. Henderson. Dr. Henderson brings to its preparation very special talents and a choice attitude. As to the first attribute, he is professor of education, Agnes Scott College and Emory University, Decatur, Georgia. As to the second, he brings to his editorship of the column an attitude of charity and of good humor toward all. Do you have a manuscript you believe to be suitable for this column? Why not send it to Dr. Henderson in care of this journal?

Creativity for What?

TAKING OVER this column from so distinguished a predecessor as Peggy Brogan is a good deal like following Babe Ruth at bat. It brings on things. Mild tremors, for instance. But the editor's letter of invitation is generous and hugely permissive. "Just point your comments in the general direction of each month's theme, and don't mind veering a bit if the spirit moves you."

So here you are, really free-lancing at last, with the freedom to write as you've always wanted to write. And for the first few sittings the wine is heady. Days pass, though, and with each sitting the flavor diminishes and the lees grow more potent. All sorts of veerings come about, and all sorts of wild ideas spring up that elude catching and pinning down. But a column is to be written, and in the shadow of this vast freedom, the urge to create begins to lose weight. Fromm's thesis of *Escape* appears a lot more tenable, and your undergraduate course on *Paradise Lost* begins to make sense after twenty years.

So you finally confess to a thumping authoritarian personality, push aside the piles of half-grown ideas, and begin happily where any self-respecting, other-

directed columnist ought to begin: with the Theme-of-the-Month.

Definitions generally make good starts. They are in the spirit of this scientific age, and they let readers know at once that you propose to be intellectually tough about the matter. Yet there are dangers here, for definitions have a way of getting between you and the real thing. Sometimes they don't hold up under cross-examination, either. Especially definitions of such mysterious forces as creativity. So I propose to be intellectually soft and begin with a thoroughly home-made and unscientific definition.

To Make, To Become

There is within us all, the least and greatest of us, that which makes us need to prove ourselves, that says, "Make something, do something, and in the making and the doing you will become something." And this something that we become is different from all the other somethings that others have become.

This is creativity. Perhaps not the complex, unfathomable creativity of the genius-artist so much as the simple creativity of the child. And yet, within

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each is the same mysterious something
that seeks release.

But there is more. Creativity, like
patriotism, is not enough. I remember
writing, in an undergraduate English
course, that a Titian hanging from the
limb of a nut tree at the headwaters of
the Amazon is no longer art, no longer
a creation. This simple figure saddened
my professor, and he flunked me. What
I was trying to say is that art, creativity,
like all of man's activities, has a social
function, and that art for art's sake is
a mockery of man's creative powers. I
believed then as I believe now, that art
is communication of experience, and
that the final object of this communica-
tion of experience is the brotherhood of
man.

Yet now, as a teacher, I find myself
less concerned with art (creativity) as
communication of experience. I am much
less sure now than I was then, that men
become brothers merely by communi-
cating experience. Too many of us, for
too many reasons, are not free to receive
the kinds of communication which would
really make important and worthwhile
differences in our lives, and thus in the
lives of others. We seem to see and to
hear, but we do not receive.

Now if we question this function of
creativity as communication of experi-
ence because it does not really build
brotherhood, how then can we justify
it as an activity to be encouraged in our
schools?

We must begin with the idea that the
real aims of education are ultimately
largely social. This appears to be a safe
assumption, for while many quarrel with
means, few seem to dispute the end.
And proceeding from this assumption,
we would ask of education, as we would
ask of the creative act, has it therefore
sharpened the child's sympathies, made

sacrifice of self come more easily, developed understanding? In the long run, will it enable the man to perform more courageously in the forum, think more clearly in times of stress, fight more readily for freedom? In short, will it help him give to life rather than suffer it or take from it? These achievements constitute the real aims of education and must therefore be the justifications for the creative acts which we encourage in the schools.

At the heart of these real aims of education lies the power of understanding. Not of science only and the beauty of the ode, but of people, of those who live with and around us, who make up our world. Understanding means the power to feel as others feel, and so to share joy and to visit compassion. It is understanding which we seek, and it is the creative act which, unlike mere learning, frees the child to understand. Here is the heart of the matter.

Now we know that understanding of others must begin with the understanding of self. The child cannot come to terms with others until he comes to terms with himself. Creativity, the putting of self on paper, crudely and simply; the singing of one's self, the writing and the carving, all bring the deep, inner self up into the world of men and give it meaning. The child becomes himself, unique, and in every sense living and being. He proves himself. He becomes somebody. He satisfies that inexorable force within him which impels him toward self-hood, different and worthy of dignity. It is as though the child, creating, were saying, "This is what I am, deep down. Now I can see myself, and you are beginning to see me. This makes me feel good, and now I can begin to see you."

Knowing this keeps the *teacher* in us

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down, and brings out the *person*, the warm humanity in us. We are no longer concerned with the quality of the child's creation. (Indeed, we shall have quality enough if we give children freedom enough!) The child's clumsy pasting and coloring take on a new meaning. We see them now as the first uncertain steps toward discovery of self, without which there can be no discovery of other selves. These simple acts of creation, these searchings for self, begin the child's slow moving into the world of people which the child and the man must help to make one, or perish.

Who among us, then, in what school, shall sit in judgment? Our need is not for the standard and the judgment, but for a warm, encouraging world which accepts all the creations of all the chil-

dren. The question can never be one of whether process or product. There is always product. The question must be, what kind of product? So, while we may appear to stop with the carving and the painting, we must think beyond crayon, brush, the word and the rhythm, to the real goal of self-understanding. We must look forward into the realm of the spirit, into the dimly-seen world of human relationships where two and two are no longer four, and where the brave man defies dissection. We must look from the child to the man, who will seek, with understanding, to find with other men the ways of life that make the First Creation worth while.

—RICHARD L. HENDERSON, *professor of education, Agnes Scott College and Emory University, Decatur, Georgia.*

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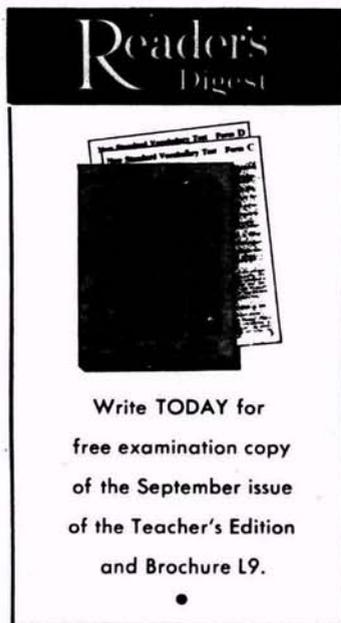
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