

The Importance of People

Column Editor: Richard L. Henderson
Contributor: Newton Hodgson

When we asked NEWTON HODGSON, of Emory University, what in Education burns him up, he took Sunday off and came up with the following.

RICHARD L. HENDERSON

Interview

Questioner: Good morning, Professor Bushmaster. May I have a few minutes of your time?

Professor B.: Yes, indeed. My larder is well-stocked, my house is in order and my ducks are, so to speak, in a row. You might say I am loaded for bear, not barely loaded. Ha! Ha!

Q.: You certainly seem in fine form. Now, what is the state of affairs in the educational world today?

Prof. B.: We are at a crossroads. It is a time of crisis. Ours is a complex society. We live in an era of rapid technological advance, of Social Change. The social sciences, unfortunately, have not kept pace with the physical sciences. Yet, there are promising practices and the atomic cloud may have a silver lining. Still, the struggle is for men's minds, and of course there is conflict.

Q.: What about conflict?

Prof. B.: It rages. Occasionally it is rife.

Q.: And what does it rage over?

Prof. B.: Issues. Usually issues are significant. Sometimes they are pressing. Occasionally they are critical. These issues involve opposing, but perhaps not wholly irreconcilable points of view. One should, however, avoid eclecticism—especially if it is mere. Personally, I find myself faced by the forces of Reac-

tion. They are ranged against me. In serried ranks.

Q.: And what about your opponents, Professor?

Prof. B.: They are well-meaning but misguided. They erect straw men. They are, naturally, worthy. But they tend to mix fact with fancy. They are confused. They distort. They inevitably quote me out of context. On occasion they argue *ad hominem* and they frequently extrapolate beyond any observable trend in the data. Their conclusions are usually not warranted. In a fit of pique, I might refer to them as unmitigated.

Q.: You are certainly, to venture a phrase, in rare fettle today, Professor. Tell me, how would you describe yourself?

Prof. B.: I am not ashamed of the venerable title of pedagogue. I am a member of the happy profession, one of those dedicated, underpaid souls whose commitment and devotion to my task . . .

Q.: I see. And would you say you were progressive or traditional?

Prof. B.: I like to think of myself as progressive—with a small "p." Recently, though, I have begun to combine the best elements of both. There is something to be said on both sides. Fashions in educational thought come and go.

One man's meat is another man's poison. *Sic transit gloria mundi*. Be not the first by whom the new is tried, nor yet the last to . . .

Q.: I think we're getting a little off the subject. Would you care to comment about what you teach?

Prof. B.: Certainly. I teach children, not subjects. I teach the whole child. I am concerned with the emotional as well as the physical and intellectual aspects of his experience. Excuse me, I meant to say experiencing.

Q.: Experiencing?

Prof. B.: Of course. We should not forget the importance of process values. It is always helpful to add an "ing" or a "ness" as in "selfness." Sometimes we can do both, as in "belongingness." Which reminds me—as a cigarette should.

Q.: You have me a little confused, Professor—but impressed. Tell me, what aspects of experiencing do you teach to the selfness of the whole child?

Prof. B.: (Somewhat impatiently) I have already stated clearly, indeed succinctly, my concern with process rather than product, with means rather than ends, with the pathway rather than the goal. I will go further and point out that we foster desirable attitudes and cultivate critical thinking.

Q.: But what do you teach them to think about?

Prof. B.: Problems, of course. Real Life or Persistent.

Q.: And do these problems have both a personal and a social reference?

Prof. B.: You are thinking of needs. Needs always have both a personal and a social reference. Sometimes they are emotional; sometimes imperative. Occasionally, they are psycho-socio-anthropological. I have even heard them referred to as societal. Whatever they may be, we endeavor to meet them.

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Q.: Do you teach anything else?

Prof. B.: Well, we assist children and youth in the accomplishment of their developmental tasks.

Q.: And do they thereby become task-oriented?

Prof. B.: An admirable phrase! Of course they do. They also interact. With their environment, that is, and interpersonally. In this way they acquire mental health learnings.

Q.: That last word seems an unusual use of an "ing," a sort of pluralized gerund.

Prof. B.: Oh, yes. It's quite a favorite of mine. If I were permitted to coin a phrase, I might say that children acquire learnings by their doings.

Q.: Say, that's pretty good! Tell me, Professor, do you like your students?

Prof. B.: Well, I wouldn't put it quite that way. I would say, rather, that we have a healthy, supportive pupil-teacher relationship. Our rapport is good. Naturally, however, there are individual differences.

Q.: And what do you do about individual differences?

Prof. B.: I take them into account. I allow or provide for them. When I am feeling democratic, I value them. When I have forty children in my room, I become intensely aware of the problems posed by the fact of them.

Q.: I see. By the way, what is your feeling about the I.Q. score?

Prof. B.: I do not set too much store by it. In the past, I have tended to over-emphasize it. I am moving away from too much dependence on it. Especially

when it is alone. As I think I have pointed out before, I try to consider the whole child, his needs and interests, his personality structure, his growth patterns, his family background, his relationships with his peer group, his occupational concerns, his probable life-direction, etc., etc. In short, I try to put his individual behavior into relationship with his entire psycho-social matrix.

Q.: Matrix?

Prof. B.: Certainly. Or context, if you prefer. Cultural context.

Q.: Oh. And to what end do you consider the whole child in his matrix?

Prof. B.: I'm glad you asked me that. My aim is to foster the optimal development of the child. Also to realize his fullest potential. And furthermore, to develop his capacities to the maximum.

Q.: Thank you, Professor. That clarifies everything. Before you leave, though, tell me where you are going from here?

Prof. B.: To a meeting. A meeting of forward-looking educators.

Q.: And how would you characterize this meeting?

Prof. B.: It will certainly have involved cooperative planning by all concerned. Quite possibly it will be interdisciplinary. (Reflectively and a little nostalgically.) It probably won't be intercultural; that's sort of old hat. But it will assuredly have groups into which we will break up, as you might say.

Q.: Sounds like an unusual affair. Thanks again, Professor, and good luck.

—NEWTON HODGSON, *acting director*,
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