

The Importance of People

Column Editor: Richard L. Henderson

Contributors: Harold L. Clapp and
Mortimer Smith

Our column for October last described our reaction to some of the activities and points of view of the recently organized Council for Basic Education. We took the Council to task for what we consider downright mean tactics. We sent our manuscript in advance of publication to the Council and offered it the opportunity to reply via this column.

DR. HAROLD CLAPP and MR. MORTIMER SMITH, the former and present executive secretaries of the Council, sent us a manuscript on which they collaborated, and a covering letter, both of which we reproduce below as our column for January.

The nature of the Council reply moves us to take the liberty of commenting, through footnotes, on its contents. Readers who like a complete story are urged to read, or reread, our October column, titled "A Council at War."

This reply by the Council deeply disappoints us. It does not appear to really grasp the fact that we are not protesting the divergent point of view held by the Council, but simply the Council's way of going about its business. It produces no convincing evidence in answer to the questions we posed in our October column. And its tone clearly indicates that the Council is no more ready to lend a helping hand now than it was when it turned to the National Manpower Council for support of its platform. The reasons it gives for refusing to join forces only confirm our conclusion that the Council is having too much fun making like Defenders of the Faith against the Barbarian Horde. The Council doesn't want to help education or educators.

RICHARD L. HENDERSON

Council for Basic Education
Washington, D. C.
October 15, 1957

Editor, *Educational Leadership*

Dear Sir:

Professor Richard L. Henderson has invited the Council for Basic Education to reply to the column he wrote in your October issue and tells us we may use up to 1500 words. Harold L. Clapp and Mortimer Smith, as former and present executive secretaries of the Council, have prepared the reply enclosed. I presume it will be used without editing or cutting.

Sincerely yours,
MORTIMER SMITH
Executive Secretary

The Council Replies

A Reply to Richard Henderson's Article in the October *Educational Leadership*.

"Phony tactic," "miserable fraud," and "outright fabrication" are strong words. We prefer to believe Richard Henderson used them in his article about the Council for Basic Education not because he really believes them applicable but because, as he says of himself and his fellows: "We get mad and say things we're sorry for." Perhaps we are taking an unjustifiably optimistic view, but we doubt that he would offer this column for our rebuttal if he thought we were merely fraudulent and phony. We are assuming he is offering us in good faith an opportunity to defend the Council's role in the current educational scene.

Unfortunately, before doing this we must correct some of Mr. Henderson's misstatements and misunderstandings:

1. He says: "The aim of the Council is to combat the insidious growth of the 'non-essentials' in Education, to utterly destroy any and all 'Educationists,' and to persuade the public that the only road to educational salvation is that which leads to the 'fundamentals,' the three R's, the liberal arts, the classics, to concern with the development of pure intellect; in short, to anything so long as it's non-Progressive."

Now this description of our aims—aside from the opening clause: we *do* hope to combat "the insidious growth" of non-essentials—is fantastically inaccurate. Far from wanting "to utterly destroy any and all educationists" (a charge so silly we probably shouldn't even consider it), we have many professional educators among our members who

share our concern over some of the current practices and attitudes of their profession.¹ We cannot imagine any statement of ours, made in any place, at any time, that would possibly lead Mr. Henderson to such a caricature of our aims as he has outlined. Where have we said that the only road to educational salvation is that which leads to the three R's and the classics, and to concern with "pure intellect," whatever that may mean? Nor have we condemned anything simply because it was labeled "Progressive," as Mr. Henderson could discover by reading some of the writings of those active in CBE where progressive methods have often been praised.

2. He makes much of the fact that CBE is underwritten by what he chooses to call an anonymous foundation. We have fully discussed the identity of our sponsor with anyone who has inquired and will be glad to do the same for Mr. Henderson. Because the founder of this particular charitable organization requested that no personal publicity be mixed with his philanthropies, we have only asked that his name not be printed. If Mr. Henderson doesn't know the name of our sponsor, and doesn't want to ask us, he could inquire of some of his colleagues in the National Education Association to whom we have freely given

Column editor's comments:

¹ We here contend that all professional educators share the Council's concern with some of the current practices and attitudes. This assuredly does not mean that they support the Council's method of attack on the problems, which is the whole issue under discussion.

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it—and who have promptly violated that confidence by printing the name.²

3. Mr. Henderson's charge of "miserable fraud" is prompted by a review of Michaelis' *Social Studies for Children in a Democracy* which appeared in our *Bulletin*, and here we confess the cause of his indignation escapes us. This book plainly belittles textbooks and logically organized subject matter, but Mr. Henderson apparently thinks our reviewer

Column editor's comments:

²This question of anonymity is really a small matter, but we *still* think it significant. Offhand, we can't think of another charitable educational organization so set up, and people *do* like to know who's providing money and/or policy, *especially* in the field of education. Also, we checked with our colleagues in the National Education Association, concerning this rather harsh charge. They stated that to the best of their knowledge this charge is not based on fact. It is our understanding that they secured the name of the sponsor elsewhere than from the Council and merely checked this information with the Council office, which made no comment as to its confidential nature.

was dishonest in choosing a strong word and saying that Michaelis "dismisses" them—a point that seems to us rather semantic than ideological. Perhaps the most interesting thing here is that Mr. Henderson gets all wrothy about the editor of the *Bulletin* who he states wrote the review, whereas it was a contribution, and plainly so marked, of Dr. John C. Hutchinson, a social scientist—one of those people that Mr. Henderson accuses us of ignoring. Less choler and more care would seem appropriate advice here, especially to one who makes bold to charge others with disregarding "the usual formalities of scholarly attack."³

Column editor's comments:

³We sincerely apologize for incorrectly ascribing authorship of the review to the editor of the *Bulletin* (see "Correction," *Educational Leadership*, December 1957, p. 182), and we hope that our readers will not label us "un-scholarly" in the bad sense of the word. We had no motive in the original statement other than to point out what we *still* consider a "miserable

4. Mr. Henderson hints that we are blind to seventy-five years of "psychological research" and too immured in our ivory tower to learn the real facts of life from biologists and sociologists and the like. When he calls round to find out the name of our sponsor, we will be glad to give him the names of several psychologists, biologists, and sociologists who are good friends of the Council, men who are as concerned as we are that this country may not be winning the race between education and catastrophe. They (and we) are not unaware of the potential usefulness to education of modern research; they (and we) merely think educators too often inclined to run a good hypothesis into the ground; to act on the principle that if a little is good a lot is better; to ignore the limits within which recent findings about the human animal are properly applicable.

5. One particularly painful bit of misinformation is his statement that CBE's *Bulletin* "costs nothing." It does, too, cost something (albeit a modest sum) and if anyone will write to us at 208 Union Trust Building, Washington 5, D. C., we will be glad to mention the amount.

But enough of forensic retort. We wish it were possible to convince Mr. Henderson and the readers of *Educational Leadership* that while they may have little ideological sympathy with us, CBE does represent a serious point of view in education and was called into organized being in answer to widespread

fraud." The review says that Michaelis "... surveys and classifies the 'types of programs and approaches' in a way that makes it possible for him to dismiss textbooks, subject-matter, and 'teacher-directed' activities." Now Michaelis really says, "... this fact does not mean that textbooks, purposes, generalizations, and studies of other cultures have no place in the program. They do..." Regardless of one's "semantics," the contradiction could hardly be clearer.

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and sincere discontent with the present state of education. Mr. Henderson lists a number of "fundamental weaknesses" in education which professional educators need help in correcting. He lists them as poorly equipped teachers, personally and professionally (we would prefer to have this word "professional" clearly defined); teacher education programs that need overhauling; incompetent administrators, myopic trustees, inadequate buildings, crowded classrooms, short supplies of teaching materials and books. CBE would agree that where they exist all these weaknesses need correction. And where they touch on our basic aims, as does teacher education, for example, we are trying to do something about them. But we think perhaps the essential difference between professional educators such as Mr. Henderson, and CBE, lies in the fact that in his list of fundamental weaknesses he never so much as mentions in passing what is the heart of the matter in education—the purpose of the school and the program necessary to carry out that purpose.

It is our contention that a large portion, possibly a majority of those who manage American schools, have lost sight of the school's primary and historic purpose, which is to provide an education that cultivates the intellectual values for all students, bright *and* average. Note that we say *primary* purpose, not *sole* purpose, and do not deny that the school may legitimately address itself to the fulfillment of other objectives. But in education all things are not of equal value; CBE asks only that we put first things first.⁴

Column editor's comments:

⁴ This section is apparently the heart of the Council reply, and we wish its authors had elaborated. Such an elaboration is the sort of thing we had hoped for in the reply. As it is, this section exemplifies precisely the kind of thinking which lies behind the CBE methods of at-

We most earnestly desire the cooperation of professional educators. Indeed we realize that no attempt to improve the schools can ultimately succeed without the active participation of the men and women who run this vast enterprise. But we represent a point of view which is generally unacceptable to a very large segment of professional educators—to many of those who head the state departments of education, staff the leading schools of education, run the professional associations and edit their journals. Under the circumstances, it seems to us that no reasonable person could expect us to offer assistance and cooperation to groups which obviously find our viewpoint repugnant. We feel it is far more appropriate and honest to state our position forthrightly and publicly and hope that individual professional educators of like mind will seek us out. We repeat that this has happened to a gratifying extent.⁵

tack which we are protesting. This section suggests that we are unconcerned with educational function, obviously because we do not subscribe wholeheartedly to the Council's aims. It suggests that intellectual values are the ultimate, taking for granted that ethical and moral behavior result automatically from "mind training." It postulates the school's primary and historic purpose (to cultivate the intellectual values) as a kind of golden target without consideration of directing activities without which any target is meaningless, continuing the fallacy of divorcing ends from means. It speaks of "other objectives" as though they were distinct and of a lower order rather than as part and parcel of the whole educational process. And it fails utterly to grasp the plain fact of the horribly disrupting effects of unstable, dynamic political, social, and economic (to say nothing of religious) conditions upon the efforts of educators to do all they know and want to do.

Column editor's comments:

⁵ It is not the viewpoint of the CBE which we find repugnant. We repeat that it is not the viewpoint of the CBE which we find repugnant. Education, like any other institution, must have and encourage differing points of view if it is to improve. There are current within education strongly divergent points of view, and we give

Even more gratifying, perhaps, is the extent to which teachers have rallied to the cause—although there is a disturbing element here: a distressingly large number of teachers ask us not to use their names for fear of official disapproval or retaliation, indicating that there is a hardened and formidable orthodoxy in professional education. That is just one of the things that has made organized educationdom, notorious for its lack of self-criticism, look to us so monolithic and defensive that the approach suggested by Mr. Henderson (over a cup of coffee) would only be ineffectual and naive.⁶

What we are asking is discrimination, a soul-searching reappraisal of our schools. In what quarters is such a request welcome? We noticed no rush to cooperate when the National Manpower Council, before us, called for a reassessment of things in which secondary (and

we would add elementary) education "... will want to distinguish as sharply as possible between the primary responsibilities and the host of collateral objectives it has accumulated during recent decades. In a period of serious teacher shortages and vastly expanded enrollments, secondary education must utilize its limited resources to accomplish its primary missions and must beware of dissipating its facilities on peripheral undertakings." (A Policy for Skilled Manpower, Chapter V.)

Had we known of any associations that subscribed wholeheartedly and unswervingly to that platform, we would have come humbly with an offer of any help in our power. Since we did not know of any, we thought it worth trying to start one.

—HAROLD L. CLAPP and MORTIMER SMITH, former and present executive secretaries of the Council for Basic Education, Washington, D.C.

Column editor's comments continued:

them all voice. What we find repugnant is the line of attack followed by the CBE. We can only say again, as we said in October: "If a fellow is serious about improving the aberrant behavior of a co-worker, does he begin by tongue-lashing him? Or by over-simplifying the whole matter? Or by suggesting medication without knowing the nature of his disorder? Or by collecting all the atypical samples of his behavior and presenting them as a description of his normal way of life? And does he distort

samples for dramatic effect, believing that the end justifies any means? Is this the way of the healer? It's the way of the CBE."

The Council, in this reply, does not answer questions.

Column editor's comments:

If trying anything in one's power to improve education is being naive, we plead guilty to the charge. As to the need for suppression of teacher's names, we have no information on which to base a discussion of the charge. If such situations exist, they are to be deplored.

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