

The Importance of People

Column Editor: Richard L. Henderson
Contributor: Warren E. Gauerke

The final reply to our old question, "What in Education burns you up?" comes from the pen of WARREN GAUERKE, associate professor of educational administration at Emory University. Warren warmly warns us to check the skeletons in our own closet.

RICHARD HENDERSON

Look Who's Talking!

IT'S THE RAGE now to take potshots at the American public schools. Hordes of woodpeckers call attention of the people to what they think is wrong. Daily we see accounts of facts being mustered alleging that educational theorists are refusing to define the purposes of the school in terms of intellectual training. Titles catch the eye: "Are We Less Educated Than Yesterday?" and "Still Looking for a Teacher Who Teaches!"

There is something wrong, and seriously so, with some aspects of professional education. And we suspect that it's not altogether what the titles of articles by potshotters imply. As burned up as we get at the snipers, we get positively incandescent at having to listen to admonitions and preachments from our own colleagues, knowing that few if any of these will carry over into action. Remember the sermon, then watch the antics of the congregation!

ITEM: We read in PR materials from colleges and universities that teaching is a highly technical undertaking, the success of which is based upon the possession by teachers of "those concepts, skills and values basic to the guidance

of learners." But poor old Professor Pilt-down at Meatball Tech, who attempts to get at whether Teacher X possesses merely *one* such concept is nearly defrocked by outraged students and staff. His conduct is distasteful, offensive and lousy, if not downright undemocratic. Just why should the teacher or student have to take a test, when he'd so much rather "talk through the real problems" which he faces in the classroom? Anyway, Prof, don't you know that graduate students must have the X, or the 5 to receive graduate credit in the course? Come now, Prof, why keep records of tests? One doesn't fail graduate students. They've proved themselves. They're adults who must be worked with as adults. Not only that, Prof, but they're all you've got to make your teaching load. So how about playing a little catch? There's a good boy.

ITEM: Professional journals shout to us that teaching must be fundamentally an intellectual activity. So must Saturday "work" sessions for county teachers. Yet a magazine article which exhibits a table involving simple arithmetic computations is vigorously rejected because it's just too hard for a mere teacher. Paper-

and-pencil tests inflicted on pupils by these same mere teachers stress lengths of rivers, state capitals spelled properly, and getting right remainders to long division exercises. When, oh when, was the last time we saw a written test in which pupils were given a set of facts from which implications could be drawn, to indicate some depth and breadth of understanding? Or a written test in which children were given an unfamiliar passage to which they were to apply concepts and generalizations for a solution? But oh, dear! We shouldn't fret. Aren't certificates the real safeguards against teacher incompetency?

ITEM: We see at professional gatherings demonstrations of "groups at work." A mighty significant activity these days. So what happens? Look at one panel discussion on the subject of what undergraduate courses in teacher education are the most helpful to the beginning teacher. The leader, usually appointed because he's totally ignorant of group operation and therefore doesn't threaten anybody, uses 20 minutes of the allotted 60 to welcome newcomers, recognize old cronies, and to conjure up hoary jokes for pepping up the audience. Finally he turns to one of the consultants who reads

inaudibly from jumbled notes taken from his forthcoming book which deals with the problem of improving school gas heaters.

By this time, several people in the assembly room have pushed their way past legs and piles of coats to reach an exit aisle. So one of the panel members, in a desperate effort to save the situation, takes over by referring to some data he has painstakingly gathered from a thesis he has borrowed on the topic for the day. In a matter of seconds, he is interrupted by a distressed voice from the far end of the panel table, "I didn't know we were supposed to bring materials with us. I thought this was just something to kick around among us to start discussion!"

The data-gatherer places the rubber band around his pack of cards, tucks it into his brief case, and turns off his hearing aid. The questioner relaxes, the panel leader breezes off into another joke, and the audience starts checking its program for coffee break time.

We know who's on third. But just what league are we in?

—WARREN E. GAUERKE, *associate professor of education, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.*

NATIONAL CORE CONFERENCE

October 17-19, 1958

Muncie, Indiana

Program, which will take place at Ball State Teachers College, Muncie, Indiana, will include small discussion groups and general sessions. The core staff of University School, The Ohio State University, will conduct a symposium on core practices in the laboratory school.

Keynote Address: Harold Alberty

For information write to:

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