

The Importance of People

Column Editor: Fred T. Wilhelms

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Column Editor

"The Importance of People"

Educational Leadership

Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:

Several times I have admired the contributions to "The Importance of People." Recently it occurred to me that a foreign people can be important to a teacher or supervisor in a way he may not suspect. That is why I wrote the following. Also, of course, I wish to give what I hope is a more accurate picture than most Americans have of the Chinese, the most numerous of the nations.

I went to Formosa on a Smith-Mundt grant in the International Educational Exchange program and as visiting professor taught in National Chengchi University in 1955 and 1956. I spent some time on Quemoy where 45,000 civilian Chinese have been doing an amazing job of agricultural and educational rehabilitation despite frequent shellings. It was even then "the most bombarded island in the world." Also I made observations in Japan, Hong Kong, Vietnam, and Thailand.

Sincerely yours,
CARLTON CULMSEE

Through Bamboo Leaves

THROUGH the bamboo leaves the Formosa moon shone with a brittle loveliness. But the thickets and palm trees arching over the road cast shadows which did not let me see much of the persons I met. If one was monstrously malformed I could know that he was carrying a bulky burden. For the most part, I knew only that they were bare-footed or sandaled human beings, from the slap or shuffle of their feet in the dust.

There was uneasiness and more in me because of stories of cobras with venom for which there was yet no effective serum, because a young knife-murderer had been captured on the other side

of the paper wall of my room in the little hotel called Hsin Hsin, because a loved one lay ill in a small hospital on this foreign mountain. But deep down in me there was little fear of those who passed me in the night; at least, probably, no more than they might feel of me when they heard my hard foreign soles strike against a stone.

For I had progressed considerably since coming to Formosa on the educational exchange program a year previously. Although intellectually I had known better, or should have, emotionally I distrusted all Chinese because of "scratches on the mind" from shards of

fact and legend gathered in childhood: their appetites for rats, dried octopus, nests made by birds spitting out some unpleasant substance; their assumed addiction to opium; their "stagnant" culture. Over all this played the lurid light of the Fu Manchu mysteries and *American Weekly* features on tong wars in Chinatown. This stereotype of degeneracy and evil separated me from the most numerous nation on earth by an ocean wider than the Pacific.

To the extent that my conception of the Oriental was fallacious, it was a weakness in me as a teacher. I do not refer to the danger that I would misinform American students, that I would contribute to international misunderstanding, that I would violate abstract truth and justice. I refer to this fact, which was all the stronger for the reason that I did not recognize it: no man, as Donne wrote, is an island. And the suspicion that was horror of a great people on the other side of this globe I clung to—how much did that feeling affect me? That one of earth's races could be thus and do thus said something inescapable about my own people, about me and what I might be and do.

This type of ignorance is probably of greater consequence for a teacher or supervisor than for most persons. For the core of a teacher's power, the warm pulsing heart of it, is faith in human nature. Faith not in an unalloyed goodness, not in an impossible perfection, but in improvability and universal responsiveness to good influences. And the feeling that the other half of the world, or any race, is essentially perverse and evil must consciously or unconsciously lessen a teacher's faith in what he is striving to do. Anything that impairs an educator's confidence in his mission reduces by that much his sincerity and

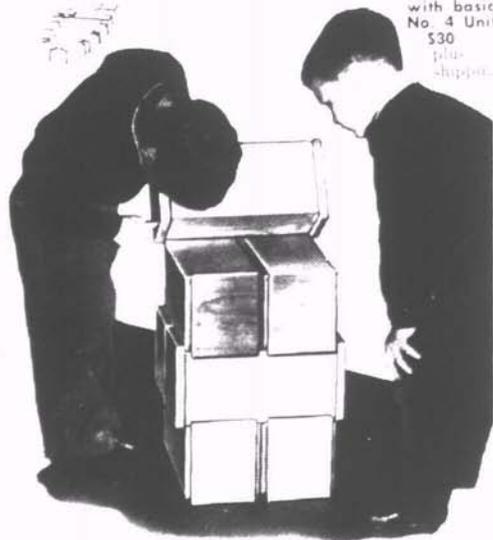
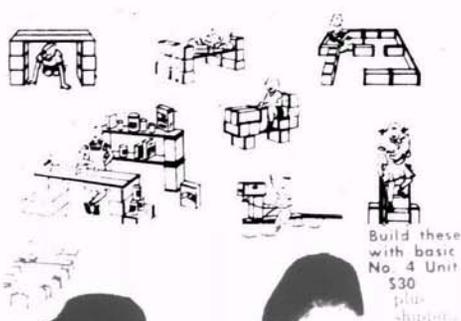
strength, and makes him less a teacher. Anything, on the contrary, that adds to that faith makes him better able to transmit the higher strength of humanity to the young.

That is why I am grateful that I came to know something of the Chinese in their own land. I grew to admire many of their traits, especially their exuberant vitality, affection for children and parents, and, at their best, genius in harmonizing cooperativeness with persistence in advancing their own interests. One incident early in our stay may be worth relating because it is illustrative of one of their engaging qualities.

Resilience and Wonder

We were picnicking on the beach of the East China Sea. When we spread out our lunch, a cluster of urchins from huts of fishermen gathered about us to watch the long-nosed outlanders nourish themselves. The semi-circle of youngsters crept closer and closer until their black-eyed curiosity was within arm's length of our faces. At the end of the meal we gave each a sandwich. They ate the not-rice strangeness, some of it containing the, to them, unappetizing cheese, with varying degrees of relish. Not all found it savory and, after eating, they quickly disappeared. Apparently they had been fascinated only by our food. But no; soon they came running back to give the children of our party bright-banded seashells, a sidewinder crab, and other bits of beauty and oddity from sand and sea.

This is typical. The Chinese, high or low, appear to feel a strong obligation to return a kindness. What's more, they seem to delight in making that return. This is evidently part of a sense of duty characteristic of a worthy Chinese. Far from being degenerate, he articulates



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more or less smoothly with the moral structure of the universe as he sees it. As Frederick S. Drake of Hong Kong University has written, Chinese civilization has taught the supremacy of the moral in man and nature. He believes that probably "no civilization in the world has emphasized so consistently this supremacy. . . . The cultivation of moral character is regarded as the first requirement for human beings. Hence it follows that performance of duty is more important than the claiming of rights."

To one who wished to nurture belief in sustained mental development, the "stagnancy" of a culture which once produced richly had been disturbing. But I learned that the Chinese had not exhausted themselves in one or two bursts of creativeness, then fallen into lethargy and dry rot. The theory that Confucian principles had enervated the Chinese long ago is faulty. There have been several long periods of astonishing fertility and creativeness since Confucius and Mencius. The latest great chapter, the Ming, rose to genuine heights in the arts, often achieving a chaste loveliness anticipating much that we esteem in Japanese contemporary. Oppressions by the conquering Manchus and later resentment against arrogant exploitation by Western powers helped cause a decline in enterprise and innovation. But even well into the 18th Century the Chinese equalled aspects of European culture and were in some senses ahead.

Rather than lassitude we noted an ebullience and resilience among the Chinese, even in the face of large discouragements. The more perceptive Chinese of all classes have large capacity for wonder. By the thousands they delight in equipping themselves with camera and lunch and immersing

themselves in nature. Their zest, their splendid vitality, their ingenuity are proved on every side. For millennia in the dozen countries that made up the federation of nations which was China, they amassed wealth in history, poetry and philosophy, in jade carving and porcelain, in painting and calligraphy, and in the arts of cooking.

But perhaps we were most reassured by their whole-souled pleasure in family life and associations with friends. Having heard tales of Chinese disappointment at the birth of daughters and of ways in which poorer Chinese had disposed of girl babies, we were pleased to see the joy which parents of all stations took in children of both sexes. With other foreigners we marveled at how Chinese youngsters could be indulged with lavish affection until they were six or seven, and still emerge unspoiled, well-mannered, charming. Despite evidences of monotonous diet, overcrowding, much poverty, we learned of little juvenile delinquency. On the other hand, we found their better students to be alert, happily thorough and diligent, with a genuine love of learning.

Lest the reader become cloyed with this account, let me state that we were not sentimental over the Chinese and blind to deficiencies. I was nettled more than once by a landlord who refused to repair the sketchy plumbing in our little house. I was often annoyed by the pedicab boys who, having been hired by the hour, would overplay the role of exhausted, under-paid beasts of burden. I met a few Orientals whom I suspected of viewing American aid and advice with cynicism as gifts from lucky barbarians. But we found them, as a race, adaptable, fertile of expedient, persevering, industrious, loyal and affection-

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provisions of Title V which deals with guidance, counseling, testing, and the identification and encouragement of able students, he has a base for making judgments and establishing priorities.

Sound judgments involving curriculum values and purposes are also required as one confronts action proposals derived from Title VII which has to do with research and experimentation in more effective utilization of television, radio, motion pictures and related media. The same is true if one is concerned with Title VI which focuses on modern language development, and Title VIII which provides assistance in the establishment of more extensive area vocational programs.

No one of these titles deals directly with curriculum. Yet, all have implications for curriculum. The point made here is that individuals will need to be aware of these implications and will

need to sensitize others. Faculty groups faced with decisions growing out of the Act can work together to develop their own platform of beliefs.

We have discussed briefly how a statement such as the ASCD Platform of Beliefs might serve. Individuals and faculty groups will also find the broad outlines of ASCD's CAPCI to be increasingly helpful.

As ASCD members throughout the nation continue to plan co-operative action in the three large problem areas—reaching toward a balanced curriculum, providing for individual differences, and evaluation of learning, the values and purposes which give direction to such action will be clarified. This clarification will, in turn, help each of us to take a more effective leadership role in shaping the plans and actions of the new National Defense Education Act. CAPCI is under way at a most significant time in American education.

—PAUL R. KLOHR, *assistant dean and coordinator of instructional program, College of Education, The Ohio State University, Columbus; and chairman of the CAPCI Committee of ASCD.*

Importance of People

(Continued from page 247)

ate. Chinese civilization, as Professor Drake has further observed, emphasizes family ties to make human values the basis of society. As a race they contribute much to one's vision of human potentiality and faith in human nature.

Thus when the gongs shuddered in Green Hill temple, they tolled for me, and not dolorously. For my island had ceased to be an island; it had formed an isthmus with the main of a mighty people.

—CARLTON CULMSEE, *dean, University College, Utah State University, Logan.*

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