

The Importance of People

Andy

William Van Til

Walter A. Anderson, one of the first presidents of A.S.C.D.—1948-50—is dead. You and I won't be seeing Andy anymore.

The two column obituary in *The New York Times* on October 26, 1964 told readers a great deal about the career of Walter A. Anderson, the distinguished educator. But the obituary said practically nothing about the Andy whom you and I will never see again.

The *Times* obituary told that at the date of Walter A. Anderson's death, he was Dean of the School of Education at New York University. Had he lived, he would have presided as president over the February meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

The *Times* told that he was a teacher in elementary and secondary schools in Minnesota, then an assistant director of the curriculum department of the Minneapolis schools, an instructor at St. Cloud, an assistant professor at Northwestern, a dean at Montana State, back to Minneapolis as assistant superintendent, finally with N.Y.U. as department chairman, associate dean, then dean. It listed some of his degrees, organizations, surveys, books, boards, chairmanships, consultations, directorships, memberships. Take only surveys and missions, for instance—Puerto Rico, Korea, West Africa, Iran, West Germany, all in the past six years.

All these things the *Times* told about Walter A. Anderson, the distinguished educator. But the words said practically nothing about Andy because no written obituary could catch his essence.

The essence of Andy was relationships to people. Andy smiled at people. Andy accepted people. Andy liked people. Andy believed in people. By just being Andy, he made people feel good—good about being with him, good about life, even good about themselves. Andy, beyond any man I have ever met, understood the importance of people.

That is why I am writing these words to try to communicate, however faintly, why Andy still lives in the warm memories of thousands of individuals.

Take Puerto Rican educators, for instance. Some deans have maps of the world in their offices. Some deans, I am told, have maps of the United States, speckled with pins tracing the upward mobility of doctoral graduates enhancing the prestige of Alma Mater. For years, the only map in Andy's office was a map of Puerto Rico.

Andy had originated and developed a graduate program in Puerto Rico which he happily referred to as "New York University under the palms." The Puerto Ricans, many of whom also understand the importance of people, took him into their hearts. As George Stoddard said to me, after we left the unpretentious ceme-

tery on the Westchester hill, "Who can ever forget landing at the airport at San Juan with Andy and how the people rushed to the gate to welcome him?" Nor could anyone forget the receptions in New York or on the island honoring Puerto Rican teachers. The big smiling Great Mainland Father, who never had time to master Spanish, exuded good will with each magnificent mispronunciation of their long and involved names. They loved every minute and every word. Why? Because it was Andy.

The Gift of Appreciation

He worked hard for people, too. When you worked with Andy on a survey, you didn't simply read documents in an air-conditioned room in the capital city. You got out into the field and traveled in wildly swaying cars climbing serpentine Puerto Rican mountain roads to villages nobody ever visited or you jolted in jeeps across the desert in Iran to border outposts and you talked to what sometimes seemed like everybody. You looked longingly toward the beach or the bar in late afternoon. But Andy was still working. So what could you do? You kept on working, though he never suggested you should. Eventually he stopped. Then with Andy, your friend, you swam or shopped and you shared some Barrilito or Pepsi-Cola and you found the best restaurant in the locality for a long meal and conversation. But the car or jeep remorselessly picked you up at an ob-scenely early hour the next morning.

Andy saw people as individuals. One of my students said, "I heard him only once. He talked to a large class. But somehow I felt that he was talking directly to me."

Andy dealt fairly with people. In Iran, the buyer is expected to haggle furiously

with the shopkeeper in the bazaar. Andy couldn't or wouldn't haggle. In his friendly way, he would discuss the merchandise, including bells for his and Dorothy's vast and beloved collection, or local schools, or any other topic in his wide world. Then he paid the merchant's asking price. One shopkeeper, aghast at the acceptance of his exorbitant price, pressed gifts on "the good man" whom he had so grossly overcharged before he would allow Andy to leave his shop. Andy demurred. The shopkeeper pressed further gifts upon "the good man." Andy left the bazaar carrying better bargains than the hagglers achieved. The merchant watched him down the length of the ill-lit alley and shook his head in wonderment. At Andy. But also at himself.

Andy believed in people. How often we must have let him down. How often we must have put the asking price of

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our cooperation too high. How often we must have failed to give the gift of appreciation. But he never said so and he might deny it if he were here now. He seemed to see only the good in us. And that made us better people.

We'll miss Andy. Something goes out of a person's life with Andy gone.

—WILLIAM VAN TIL, *Professor of Education and Chairman, Department of Secondary Education, New York University.*

Dropouts—Millard

(Continued from page 250)

ginal living or the inadequacy of mutually reinforcing social interaction.

The influence on human personality of these social and psychological agents lies in the fact that it stirs up easily aroused feelings of envy towards the self-adjusted, goal-directed school child, contempt for the adult figure and distrust and/or perhaps hostility toward everyone in comfortable identity with the cultural values and their expectant goals.

In consequence, all the satisfaction and experiential background which the school experience can offer the individual meets with only limited success and subsequent failure as the individual becomes more or less socially and emotionally isolated from the mainstream of socialization.

To the disinterested, unattached school child (as with most dropouts) the school experience becomes an abstraction in which he plays an uncreative role in the discovery of ideas and meaning (whatever they are). While he does not know it, his unresponsiveness or anti-learning behavior, is, in part, external dramatization of powerful instinctual urges, unhampered by self-regulating experiences.

Obviously, it is the school's responsibility to ascertain the cause or causes for the child's unproductivity and, once the reason is found, the school program must be adjusted to meet the child's needs, or the child must be helped to adjust to the program. This must bring into play the full resources of the school—the psychologist, vocational counselor, the classroom teacher, the guidance personnel, the psychiatrist and the social worker in one collective and concerted act.

To find the root cause for disinterest in learning is a critical point, for learning to find satisfaction and pleasure in the immediate personal-social situation of school is the basis of the maintenance of educational interest.

In terms of the individual's need to acquire an understanding of the harmony and workings of his social environment and its varied parts, one looks to education, for it is education that bestows comprehension.

This must lead us to a searching reappraisal of previously defined educational goals, of methods and content and of our present ability to impart the message to children in the earliest grades.

Only so can they understand that school is the place where they belong and that taking advantage of its preparatory experiences is prerequisite for any meaningful relationship in an automated, nuclear society which calls for abilities of the mind as contrasted with previous needs of brute strength.

Seldom, if ever, has education been the instigator of important social change. It has, in fact, reflected more closely the basic social, political and economic changes going on around it and, in this sense, it lends itself beautifully to the requirements of pedagogical change.

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