

The Importance of People

The Critical Shortage of Educationists

Fred T. Wilhelms

WHAT does "educationist" mean? For years it was an epithet hurled derisively at something like the group Conant now calls "the establishment." But that doesn't make sense if—as thoughtful people from the President on down are daily proclaiming—education is Number One on America's agenda. It is nonsense to cry the need of physics for physicists and of biology for biologists, and then to deny that the foremost of all our enterprises needs its own students and scholars—and that is what educationists are.

Why do we not make the title a proud one by defining it with tough realism and raising high the qualifications to earn it? I propose three basic tests:

That one is a lifelong, career student of the educating of human beings

That he looks at it whole, and is dedicated to its entire improvement

That he is *engaged* in it, working actively with its realities.

This is an exclusive definition. It will not admit to the title many of those behavioral scientists who make studies of learning, for example, or of group relations, but do them in isolation from the general context of education. Neither will it admit most of those scholars from other learned disciplines who labor so vigorously to improve the content of some curricular field. The contributions of both groups are great and they are powerful

allies; educationists depend upon them, and should be lastingly grateful for their work. But, as psychologists, anthropologists, historians, or linguists, they are best identified by their own proud titles.

Neither, regretfully, will the definition admit to the title many of the practitioners in education—classroom teachers, administrators, supervisors, etc. Again, their contributions are enormously valuable, and educationists depend upon them for steady, responsible proficiency as well as for a wide range of inventive innovations. But, under the grinding pressures of their daily tasks, all too few of them take that ultimate step from educator to educationist which depends upon the career-long, deep study of the educating of human beings.

Finally, the title is not to be bestowed automatically upon all those professors who teach in schools of education. Far too many of them are making a career of mouthing a few eternal generalizations which they learned in graduate school; far too few are genuinely engaged either in pushing out the frontiers of theoretical insight or in the hard, grimy business of solving the real problems of real schools.

Who are left, then, to earn the name? A small, tough-minded, hardily idealistic band! They come from every source: Some of them are classroom teachers, administrators, and supervisors who somehow—despite the demands of their daily

realistic whirl—keep boring into the eternal inquiry, combining scholarship and public statesmanship with their practical skill. Some are behavioral scientists and members of other learned disciplines who, having perhaps begun on a narrower base, become identified with the whole enterprise. Some are professors and researchers in the schools of education who spend their lives expanding and mobilizing what is known and thought, and getting the best of it applied to reality. And some, one is tempted to add, come from the ranks of the laymen—in citizens' commissions, for example, and in the PTA—individuals so driven by their zeal and their divine discontent that ultimately they make themselves authentic experts.

It does not greatly matter whence they come—there are all too few of them. We are in a time when the general commitment to education towers to unimagin-

able heights. But the very excitement of fine, devoted men leads to precipitate ventures, to shooting from the hip, to near-reckless promotion of pieces without regard to pattern, to answers without questions. In terribly short supply are educationists able to move from clearly articulated questions and problems, through the best that is known in theory and practice, toward integrated solutions. It is as if one suddenly had to staff an enormous enterprise and there were plenty of people with the know-how to do this or that part—but no one who knew what the whole thing was about. "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few."

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the money, it may not be too hard to find excellent specialists, field by field. But where will you find sufficient supply of those who can see even the social studies whole—let alone their place in the entire curriculum—while at the same time bringing to bear what is known from the behavioral sciences and from experience as to learning and teaching and evaluation, as well as the whole philosophical *corpus* of what schools are for? To produce fragments is easy if one is willing to settle for narrow objectives; to produce a whole is something else again.

It is no wonder that educationists are few, for the true educationist is a weird and wonderful combination. He has to be a gritty realist. He is the one who always has to remember all the youngsters. Others can go off for a few years' luxurious kick on behalf of the gifted—and then, just as suddenly, become sob-

sisters for the dropout; he was remembering both all the time. Others can seize onto one simple, pat answer—the phonics method, team teaching, nongraded schools, or whatnot. He always has to go the hard, lonely way, living with uncertainty, knowing that the evidence is all too scanty—and yet be willing to place his bet on *some* way of moving in the meantime.

To assess even the evidence there is, he has to cover an enormous amount of ground, not only by study of theory and research but also by alert awareness of pioneering practice. Haunted by the desperate need for research, he lives in a world that respects research in almost every field except his own; tortured by his knowledge of what is already securely possible, he lives with a mass of mediocre performance in schools stifled only partly for want of money; zealous to live by the best findings of research and practice, he

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has to subject himself to the interminable politics of the catch phrase and the sententious tradition.

And yet he is no good at all if he loses his vision, if he cannot go on pressing after each rebuff, if he cannot take his ideas down into the marketplace of educational politics and mobilize campaigns he may never wholly win, wringing the sustenance of his life out of some small inches of gain.

Miraculously, a few do manage the combination. Scarred by many a conflict, they are as idealistic as the day they came out of college dewy-eyed and sure that they were going to reform the world. Even if they are practical schoolmen pushed by every day's exigencies, they still carry on the great inquiry and acquire a remarkable depth of insight. Or, if they are specialists in inquiry, they still retain a remarkable awareness of what is going on in the front lines and regularly move out there to fight for real effect.

I submit that this handful of seasoned students and campaigners—the real educationists—are a national resource unparalleled. It is time that they learned to speak with a firmer voice. It is time that the public learned to listen. It is time that we moved to produce more of them with at least the concern we show for producing more medical experts. It is time that the teachers colleges—particularly those with great graduate schools—be seen for what they are: the nerve centers and the generative dynamos of the best it will take to create a worthy education.

It is time that every school system—partly by the planned release of time and money, but even more by the creation of a climate—make itself a comfortable home for those educators who wish also to be educationists, to study as well as

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to act. It is time to end school reform by cliché and hunch and guess, and to put together a combination of all the resources it will take to develop sound inquiry and apply it to integrated action.

ASCD is not the only home of educationists—like gold, they are to be found where they are. Yet it is the outstanding home. It has never been away from the thick of action, but it has never wavered in its respect for inquiry, and it has never cravenly reefed its sails in the face of winds of contrary opinion. Yielding very little to any quest for popularity, it has persevered in tacking its way into those winds as best it could. The headway may be small at times, great at others, but it keeps on going. The typical ASCDer has joined its ranks precisely because his intellectual honesty drove him to love both inquiry into the truth and vigor in apply-

ing it. And his position tends to be one that gives him a better than average chance to see education in the large, to study it, and at the same time be engaged in action.

One could read this in self-congratulation, to say, "What a wonderful organization ASCD is!" We had better read it in the sobering thought, "What an awful responsibility ASCD bears!" We do not need to think ourselves alone. We do not even need to think invidiously of other organizations which serve their own groups and purposes well. And yet the fact remains: No other organization has put together quite the same combination of people, to push the frontiers of educational thought and knowledge and apply what is learned unflinchingly to the whole of education. No other large organization has developed quite the same tradition of using all its membership and staff resources democratically to work its way through the toughest problems without giving an inch because of timidity.

And if this be so, what do we do now to use the brain and muscle we have grown? Within our own ranks we are an exceptionally congenial group, good at even painfully honest intercommunication. Can we consciously build on this resource to get ourselves more adequate preparation for a role so demanding that it is terrifying? (As I wrote this I questioned increasingly whether I met the qualifications; I wonder whether you haven't had the same reaction.) Can we consciously facilitate the mutual interpenetration of inquiry and practice, of specialization and wholeness?

Beyond our ranks, how can we best give our nation the help it needs in these days of high demand and short supply? Can we, and should we, deliberately build up the image of the educationist who is more than practitioner, more than

abstract scholar, a person with a unique contribution? Can we bring him to be sought for by the public and by officials, so that he will be used where he is most needed? And can we make the unique role so attractive to the profession that more and more of the best young educators will also aspire to meet the tests of the educationist?

New Direction—Nelson

(Continued from page 295)

should provide opportunity to demonstrate the interrelationships among disciplines. The social studies pattern should blend with the total school curriculum.

Utilization of Talents—The teachers' areas of competence should be taken into account as the curriculum is planned and should be coordinated through employment practices of the district. Teachers should be involved in the planning, executing and evaluating of the curriculum.

Skills Development—The pattern should promote the development of social studies skills on increasing levels of abstraction as student maturity increases. Skills in social scientific reading, writing, speaking, critical thinking, and listening should be specifically noted in the pattern.

The foregoing criteria for a social studies curricular design do not deal with the subject content or the specific purposes of social studies education. They are offered as a basis for direction in planning a curriculum to overcome some of the defects noted earlier in this paper.

Other subjects in the schools have experienced dramatic and extensive change, some of which is still under scrutiny by scholars in the subject and by educators utilizing the materials, but much of

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