

WHO'S LEFT?

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Everywhere one goes, whoever one meets, there is the lament on everyone's lips for anyone's ears: "All of our best people are dead--Itard, Strauss, Werner, Seguin, Montessori, Binet, Doll, Kephart, Hungerford. Who's left? And even I'm not feeling too well myself." There is also the egalitarian idea around that those still around, the "second best," are peculiarly irrelevant. We seem to believe that scholars in special education write (other than for each other) for nonexistent audiences--that they have little to say to clinicians and consumers. Those attitudes are not only self-defeating but are simplistic and, while partly true, are mainly untrue. Probably, never in the long and sometimes stormy history of this field have we had as many outstanding people as there are today--in our most prestigious colleges and universities, administering exemplary programs, creating genuine educational environments in the schools. Despite low SAT scores of our teachers (which have always been low), despite the perceived "second-class" status of our professors (which has moved up from "third-class"), some of the finest books ever written in this field were published since World War II, and some of the finest practitioners in our schools were born after World War II. Notwithstanding, we must find ways to encourage and retain capable and highly motivated colleagues to this work. But it isn't simply a matter of paying them higher salaries (which a decent and even practical society would), or giving them more recognition (which is their

due) or high honors (which some deserve). As with virtually everything else, we must not be diverted from the fundamentals--the history of our field, a guiding philosophy, sound scholarship, and practices which work. Out of the application of those fundamentals will be found the resources to move the field forward. Much more needs to be asked of the professors, the teachers, and the other practitioners. And we have to ask different things of ourselves. What?

1. Inspiration gets one going, but work gets something done. Work, work, work.
2. The antidote for discouragement is to do something good for its own sake. More of our effort should be spent at trying to satisfy ourselves rather than at pleasing or impressing others. A person doesn't "burn out" if all along he's mainly "doing it" for himself--because it's right, because it's what's necessary, because he can do it. Then it matters less if the world appreciates him, pays him sufficiently, honors him appropriately. Of course, it matters, but less.
3. No one should claim to be in the public's service--as teacher, psychologist, physician, professor, no one--unless that person is always prepared to bend over backwards to appreciate the client's point of view. All public servants--be they politicians or policemen, the highest office holders to social workers in the teeming city--must try with all their might to be magnanimous. The people have a right to expect that from those in whom they entrust their very lives.
4. All of our professional philosophies must include the belief that--

as human beings-- all people are equally valuable, all human life is equally sacred, and all individuals deserve an equal opportunity to learn, to grow and to succeed.

Lots of our "best people" are around. Lots more are on the way. Lots are undiscovered. Possibly even you can be one of our "best people." After all, wasn't it Alfred Binet himself who claimed that capability is educable, is a function of practice (work), training (education), and motivation (belief)?

‡ We're left!