

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION RICHARD E. GROSS

(1920-2004)

Richard E. Gross, Professor of Education (Emeritus) died of natural causes at his home in Los Altos Hills on April 2, 2004, at the age of 83. A graduate of the University of Wisconsin (Madison), from which he held both a BS and an MS, he taught social studies and history in a local high school before moving to Stanford where he completed his Ed.D. in 1951 and also obtained further teaching experience at nearby Menlo College. After four years as an Instructor at Florida State, he joined the Stanford faculty in 1956; he became emeritus in 1994.

Dick Gross was known to local residents as a dedicated apiarist; and many thousands of School of Education students and their families will remember him as the genial Marshall of the School of Education commencement ceremonies – each year proceedings would conclude with his brief discourse about the origin of academic regalia, and his invoking of the habit of medieval scholars and their students to move to a “nearby hostelry” to have “a celebratory libation.” Staff members in the School of Education will remember him for the lively analyses of foreign countries – accompanied by slides – which he would deliver to them in the brown-bag sessions that he regularly hosted on his return from one of his frequent trips. Colleagues on the faculty will remember him for, among other things, his lengthy service as chair of one of the School’s major program area committees. To countless teachers and teacher-educators around the USA, and indeed around the world, he will be remembered as a leading spokesman for history and social studies education, and for his efforts over many years to strengthen the curricula therein by way of his high-school and teacher-education textbooks. In all he authored or edited more than twenty volumes in these fields, including *Civics in Action*, *Teaching Social Studies Skills*, and the prizewinning *Educating Citizens for Democracy* (1958); in addition he edited several influential book-series, including the Addison-Wesley Social Studies Program. He made further major contributions by producing 109 doctoral students and an estimated 700 MA students who in the main were being prepared for high school teaching careers, by his consulting work with the California State Department of Education, and by his work establishing professional organizations for social studies educators. The National Science Foundation supported him in running several institutes for leaders in social studies education; and he had many opportunities to lecture overseas including the award of a Fulbright lectureship in Wales, and guest professorships and keynote presentations in Germany, Australia, New Zealand, The Netherlands, Denmark, Korea, and Morocco, among others. His work overseas included a period at two of Stanford’s overseas study centers.

The field of social studies had been in intense ferment during Dick Gross’ entire career. As a student at Wisconsin he witnessed debates about whether to blend history and social sciences in the high school curriculum. Conflicting interpretations within disciplines found their way from graduate seminars into high school textbooks. In response to the Great Depression of the 1930s radical educators called on social studies teachers to reconstruct the whole society and economy. In the process they did not bring about socialism but they helped to reshape discourse about the purposes of the social studies. In some quarters the child-centered school was in vogue, in others the community-centered school; in some periods laissez-faire and electives ruled. Dick Gross tended to take a middle ground in these attempts to define the field, and he used the opportunities provided by his many invited addresses and

the speeches following his various awards to champion the vision he held for social studies education. Despite the fact that he had published so prolifically, he expressed concern about the tendency for publishers to determine the content of textbooks – a prescient concern four decades ago; and he attacked the approach to teaching social studies that emphasized rote learning, what he called “the fatal right-answer syndrome” – as he put it in one national address, “youth need to learn to live in a world of tentative answers”, and to this end (and true to his progressive educational principles) he advocated instead that teachers should focus upon teaching inquiry skills and the processes of learning, and that the social studies curriculum should be problem based. But above all, he reminded his audiences of the relationship between social studies education and the strengthening of democratic institutions; as he put it in his presidential address to the National Council for the Social Studies in 1967:

Above all, youth need to be reminded why we have government. They need to be convinced of their responsibility to stay involved and to use their governments effectively. A desire for good government should be instilled right along with the knowledge and skills essential in helping citizens keep government under control and responsive to their needs. Boys and girls should have recurring opportunities to learn that they are not free citizens just because they live in a free country, but that they and their country will maintain liberty only so long as they live and act as free men and women.

Dick Gross was survived by his wife Jane, by his sons Edmund and John, by his daughters Elaine Stoddard and Kay Essary, and by six grandchildren.

Committee:

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