

University of California: In Memoriam, 1994

Guy Thomas Buswell, Education: Berkeley

1891-1994

Professor Emeritus

Guy T. Buswell was one of the eminent pioneers in experimental educational psychology. He is especially known for his path-breaking studies of the psychophysiology of reading and for his research on the teaching and learning of arithmetic. He died of unknown causes, on May 27, 1994, at the remarkable age of 103, in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Guy Buswell was born in Lincoln, Nebraska on January 21, 1891. His father was a minister, who, during Guy's boyhood, made frequent moves from one parish to another, with consequent interruptions of his son's formal schooling. The time lost from school, however, was made up for by Guy's skipping grades, and by age 17, he had graduated from high school and entered York College in Nebraska, where he became class president and editor of the college magazine. To earn his way through college, he worked 30 hours a week in a pharmacy and, through a correspondence course, became a registered pharmacist. While a student at York, Buswell happened to read a famous book by Hugo Munsterberg on applied psychology, *Psychology and Industrial Efficiency*, which led to further reading in psychology. So after graduating from York College, and having decided to pursue a career in applied psychology, Buswell, in 1914, entered the University of Chicago for a year's graduate study in psychology. To earn enough money to continue his studies, he returned to York College for three years as a teacher there. Then came World War I. Buswell was drafted into the Army and served in the Signal Corps. In 1917, he returned to the University of Chicago, where he earned the M.A. and Ph.D. degrees, graduating summa cum laude in 1920.

Buswell's experience at the University of Chicago is the key to understanding his entire subsequent career in educational psychology. At

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that time, the psychology faculty of the University of Chicago had some of the most eminent figures in the history of American psychology, most notably James R. Angell, Harvey Carr, and Charles H. Judd. Buswell also studied neurology under Judson Herrick. It was Charles Judd (1873-1946), however, who had the greatest influence on Buswell, and one has to know something about Judd to understand Buswell, whose own career seems an extension and elaboration of Judd's philosophy and practice of educational psychology. Judd was the

second American to receive a Ph.D. under Wilhelm Wundt (the first was James McKeen Cattell, who headed the psychology department at Columbia University). Wundt had founded the first psychological laboratory, in Leipzig, and is known as the father of experimental psychology. The lineage of nearly all Ph.D.s in psychology can be traced back to Wundt, who founded the first department of psychology that could award the doctorate. So Buswell, via Judd, was a second-generation Wundtian. Judd had expressly wanted to emulate Wundt and carry on his mentor's rigorous experimental laboratory approach to psychology. He brought Wundt's philosophy and methodology to bear on the psychological aspects of education. Judd developed the eye movement camera, which took motion pictures that could be studied in minute detail frame-by-frame, and did the first studies of eye movements in reading, relating various features of eye movements to reading efficiency and comprehension.

Buswell followed on the same path. His doctoral dissertation was entitled *An Experimental Study of the Eye-Voice Span in Reading*. In subsequent studies, using Judd's prototype eye-movement camera, Buswell analyzed eye movements in reading as a function of age and school grade level. He found that each of the various components of eye movements that occur while reading (e.g., number of fixations per line, average duration of fixations, number of regressive movements per line) has its own characteristic learning or growth curve of

"efficiency"

when it is graphed year by year from first grade of elementary school to the last year of high school. Buswell related these variables at every age to the characteristics of the reading material, the overall speed of reading, reading comprehension, and to analyzing the

"symptoms"

of children's reading disabilities in terms of the fine grain of reading behavior. It should be mentioned that the study of eye movements in reading and other cognitive tasks that was initiated by Judd and developed much further by Buswell has undergone a revival in present day experimental

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cognitive psychology, now based on more advanced and refined electronic and computerized techniques.

Judd was so impressed by Buswell's capability as a researcher in educational applications of experimental psychology that he had Buswell appointed to the faculty in the School of Education at the University of Chicago. Buswell spent the first thirty years of his career at Chicago. There he continued his laboratory studies of reading and of arithmetic, work that

greatly influenced the methods of teaching these subjects in the teacher training institutions and in school textbooks of that period, many of which he himself authored or edited.

In 1949, Buswell, by then already famous in his field, left the University of Chicago to join the educational psychology faculty as a full professor in the School of Education at Berkeley. He was a popular professor. One of his colleagues, Professor James Stone, remarked,

"As a teacher, Buswell sparkled. He had taught and conducted extensive fieldwork in the schools, and his courses were always very relevant. The students loved them, and they loved his wit."

Buswell became professor emeritus in 1958, but remained in the school for another year as a special assistant to the dean.

Buswell was elected president of the American Educational Research Association and later served for three years as the association's chief executive officer. In 1974, he was initiated into the Reading Hall of Fame, which honors senior scholars who have made major contributions to the reading and literacy field. Buswell and his wife, Eva, stayed in Berkeley for several years after his retirement, then moved back to Nebraska to be near their children and grandchildren.

Personally, Buswell was a memorable figure, and it is interesting to know what kind of man lives to the age of 103. We both knew him when he was in his early seventies. Although he had white hair, he appeared remarkably young and vigorous for his age. Always immensely dapper, he was a fast walker, with a lively spring in his step; he never seemed to be hurried but was simply brimming with energy and good spirits. His friendliness, cheerfulness, kindness, and quick-wittedness were his most conspicuous traits.

During the thirty-five years following his retirement, he enjoyed exceptionally good health, traveled extensively, and enjoyed his family and friends. At the age of 99, four years before he died, he wrote an unpublished autobiography. It is a nicely written document, remarkable for its utter lack of egocentrism and for its fullness of warmth,

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good feelings, and love of family and friends. At age 99, he remarked,

"My health is surprisingly good. . . . My vision and hearing are not up to normal, but I still manage."

He concluded his autobiography,

"As I look back over the years, life has been far better than I deserve. Life is still good

at age 99, and I have so much for which to be thankful."

Arthur R. Jensen Robert B. Ruddell

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