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We Suggest

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WE SUGGEST

Eleanor Buelke

May, Rollo, *The Courage To Create*
New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1975. Pp. 143

America is in headlong retreat from its commitment to education. . . . This retreat ought to be the most pertinent issue in any examination of the country's condition in its Bicentennial year. At stake is nothing less than the survival of American democracy.¹

Great personal and professional courage is required of educators and their leaders in order to prevent what Fred Hechinger calls "Murder in Academe."² It must be the kind of courage that is described in *The Courage To Create*, a book written out of Rollo May's long experience as a therapist in observing and helping people to discover their creative possibilities. Facing major issues of concern demands sensitivity and awareness, without yielding to anxiety and panic. To influence the evolution of education, to preserve a sense of responsibility in the face of radical societal changes, to live into the future with conscious participation in the process of making it more equitable and human — all these require "a degree of courage for which there is no immediate precedent and which few people realize."

What is creative courage? According to this author, it is the capacity to move ahead, even when faced with despair. To be authentic, it must be centered within one's own being; it is not rashness, masquerading as courage to compensate for unconscious fear. It is the foundation for other psychological virtues, keeping love from becoming mere dependency, and fidelity from paling into colorless, even casual, conformism. Having creative courage implies making choices and decisions, acting upon them daily. *Commitment* is the ingredient essential to development of fully human beings who can help turn meaningless conflicts of the surrounding world into constructive confrontations furnishing creative vision for progress.

Traditionally, in our culture, courage has been thought of in such terms as *physical courage*, like that which takes its form largely from the myths of the frontier; *moral courage*, like that of political heroes who, abhorring violence, dare to stand alone against cruel, inhuman acts by bureaucracies; and *social courage*, like that required of any who invest and risk themselves

¹ Fred M. Hechinger, "Murder in Academe: The Demise of Education," *Saturday Review* (March 20, 1976), 11.

² *Ibid.*, 11-18.

in intimate relationships with others. May adds another kind of courage to the list. This he considers the most important kind of all; he calls it *creative courage*: “the discovery of new forms, new symbols, new patterns on which a new society can be built.” To possess such courage, the writer suggests, the physical self must be valued as a means of empathy with others, to be used for the cultivation of sensitivity. He believes that moral courage has its source in perception of the suffering of one’s fellow human beings; here the crucial factor is *involvement*. He warns that the challenges and fears that face anyone who cares for another are dangerous and demanding, but intimacy on many levels of the personality is necessary for self-realization and production of work significant to the present age and for future generations. Genuine, creatively courageous persons are so bound up with their contemporary condition that their works and communications cannot be separated from it.

How does one acquire courage to create? Some other modern writers have approached this question with thinking similar to that of Dr. May. Succumbing to comfortable, uncontroversial certainty, as opposed to enduring rejection and gambling with security, has been called a “dilemma as old as man himself.” It has been suggested that persons turn their minds back into the past at the same time they look ahead to the future, neither bound by the one, nor baffled by the other; join a group of others who share their ideas and who affirm each other; avoid looking at others as “fixed or static, as all this or all that,” recognizing that change and complexity are the nature of life; and persist day-by-day with the hard work of meticulous observations, with honesty, acknowledging always that there are more questions than answers.³ Another respected writer of today recognizes the hidden aspect of man’s nature that leads him to perform memorable deeds, “*entheos*, a god within,” enthusiasm in our language, as the true source of creativity. This can be revealed and sustained only by repeated, volitional verification of one’s own personality.⁴

During the past two centuries, since Thomas Jefferson first called for the elite society of inherited power to be replaced by a new aristocracy of talent, the forward thrust toward universal education in this nation has never long deflected. Visions of each succeeding generation’s capacity to do better have been linked to education as the key to progress. But, now, political confusion and economic insecurity shake declining confidence down further as days go by. How can education’s leaders, as change-agents, use the courage to create to keep available educational options for all, to restore the challenge of open horizons, to project a forward-looking agenda for the nation’s schools?

First, there must be recognition of, not railing about, limits of education’s capacities as a progressive social force; it is from the struggle

³ Robert Coles, *The Mind’s Fate*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1975. Pp. xv + 281.

⁴ Rene Dubos, *A God Within*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1972. Pp. ix + 325.

against limits that expansion of intelligence and creative solutions are born. Having accepted limits, educators as persons, and as a profession, need to keep “inventing themselves” repeatedly, consistently, by choosing responses toward which they wish to throw their weight. “Apathy is the fruit of interlocking aimlessness.”⁵ Further, to dare to disturb the status quo or to jolt the self-centered out of their preoccupation with their own troubles, or to threaten the prestige of political opinion-makers and policy-purveyors means to act with individual courage “to do something new, to confront a no man’s land, to push into a forest where there are no well-worn paths, and from which no one has returned to guide us.” At the same time, it means to act with awareness and responsibility to others, for creativity requires this kind of fine-honed sensitivity of those who are willing to let themselves be vehicles of a new, emerging vision.

Every profession can and does require some creative courage. . . .
Whatever the sphere . . . there is profound joy in the realization that
we are forming the structure of a new world.

⁵ Fred M. Hechinger, *op. cit.*, 18.