

## MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

### ROBERT DANIEL HESS (1920 – 1993)

Robert Daniel Hess, the Lee L. Jacks Professor of Child Education and (by courtesy) Professor of Psychology, Emeritus, died at the age of 73 on June 30, 1993, of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis ("Lou Gehrig's disease"). He had been coping with increasing disability since receiving the diagnosis in April 1991. Unable to speak for about the last eighteen months of his illness, he used a computerized voice machine to make himself audible for telephone conversations, in which he typed his message and then activated the electronically produced voice that pronounced his words. Using this and other high technology, he kept in touch with friends and co-workers nearby and around the world. Also, in this last period of his life, he participated actively in a writing class in Palo Alto, for which he produced about twenty essays on matters ranging from his illness to his visit in the 1950s to the atom bomb memorial in Nagasaki; all of these writings manifested a subtle blend of humor and piercing insights into the human condition, including his personal calamity. Many readers of these essays were moved by his grace and awed by his courage in confronting his situation.

After serving as a Marine Corps flight instructor during World War II, Hess did his undergraduate work at the University of California, Berkeley. He received a Ph.D. in Human Development in 1950 from the University of Chicago, where he rose from an instructorship in the Committee on Child Development in 1949 to the chairmanship of that committee, a professorship in Human Development and Education, and the directorship of the Urban Child Center. He came to Stanford in 1967, after a year at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. In Stanford's School of Education, he served as chairman of the Committee on Psychological Studies in Education from 1977 to 1981 and as co-director of a graduate training program in interactive educational technology for several years beginning in 1981. One of his studies in that area focused on the gender gap in interest in, and use of, computers.

Hess's research was reported in numerous books, chapters in edited volumes, and journal articles. It dealt with family and school influences on children's cognitive, social, and emotional development, and also, in its later years, with the design and use of educational software in computers. In one well-known study, widely reprinted, he and Virginia Shipman compared the ways in which more and less well-educated minority-group mothers interacted verbally with their child in teaching the child how to perform a variety of tasks. This study, which became a Citation Classic because it was referred to in hundreds of others' scholarly writings, exemplified Hess's ability to apply rigorous approaches to the study of what had hitherto been relatively "soft" phenomena in human social activity. The study was one of many in which Hess threw light on the mechanisms through which home environments give children advantages or disadvantages in school learning and achievement. The work had implications for the improvement of early school experiences and curricula, and Hess served accordingly in the planning and evaluation of such federal programs as Head Start and Follow Through.

In another widely-noted research program, Hess studied the development of political attitudes in children. The resulting monograph, written with Judith Torney, showed graphically the ways in which children's political attitudes changed from those of fourth-graders to those of tenth-graders. He also wrote, with Doreen J. Croft, a textbook for teachers of young children and, with Irene T. Miura, a monograph on issues in training teachers to use microcomputers in the classroom.

Hess's search for the factors that affect children's development also led him into a twelve-year cross-cultural study, in which he collaborated with, among others, Hiroshi Azuma, then at the University of Tokyo. In these studies, he investigated the ways in which parental behavior and classroom teaching in Japan and the U.S. resembled and differed from one another. The findings, when viewed in the light of cross-national differences in student achievement, are widely considered significant for the improvement of teaching and teacher education in the U.S.

As a teacher, Hess won great respect and affection from the many graduate students whom he shepherded through their doctoral studies and who now hold important positions in universities and research institutes. When these students became aware of Hess's illness, they organized a tribute, which appeared as an issue of the newsletter of the Early Education-Child Development Special Interest Group within the American Educational Research Association. Received by Hess in the last days of his life, this tribute was treasured by him in a way that revealed his reciprocal respect and affection for his students. One of his Chicago colleagues, Irving Sigel, presented a moving statement on Hess during the awards ceremonies at the convention of the American Educational Research Association in April 1993. The large audience joined in honoring Hess as a scholar, a researcher, a social activist, and a warm, sensitive human being.

As a colleague, Hess was notable in faculty councils for his ability to get to the root of issues being debated. He carried more than his share of the burdens of faculty members as citizens of the Stanford community. His reputation in social science research circles was repeatedly rewarded with grants and contracts that supported graduate students working in his research programs. After his retirement, Hess continued his research while also pursuing his various nonacademic interests: tennis, both as a ruthless player and as a spectator with a reserved chair in the Stanford tennis stadium; birding, in which he applied his skills in working with special equipment; folk dancing; and travel, including visits to the Galapagos Islands and the Wimbledon tennis matches.

Hess was born on March 10, 1920, into a family with a long line of fathers who were Mennonite ministers. He spent his childhood on a farm in Arizona and lived in a town in California during his high school years. He is survived by his former wife, Betsy Hess-Behrens of Berkeley, and their four children: Jared Hess of Menlo Park, Alyssa Reit of New York City, Devin Hess of Oakland, Bradley Hess of Richmond, and by seven grandchildren.

Hess will be fondly remembered and long respected by his Stanford colleagues and friends, and by members of the world's child-development research community for his modeling of what hard-headed and insightful thinking can yield in the study of humanity's most important future assets.

Nathaniel Gage, Chair  
Robert Calfee  
Alberta Siegel  
Richard Snow