

In Memoriam



Nathaniel Lees Gage, Former AERA President

The American Educational Research Association is saddened to report the passing of former AERA President Nathaniel Lees Gage on August 17, 2008, in Palo Alto, California, about two weeks after his 91st birthday. Gage was the Margaret Jacks Professor of Education, Emeritus, at Stanford University. He was with family and friends when he passed away from complications following a fall. Gage is survived by daughters Elizabeth, Sarah, and Annie, son Tom, their partners and spouses, and three grandchildren. His beloved wife of 64 years, Maggie, passed away in 2006.

Gage was born in Union City, New Jersey, in 1917, the second child of Polish immigrants who met and married in the United States. He graduated from high school in 1934 in the midst of the Great Depression. He attended City College of New York and transferred to the University of Minnesota as a junior, finishing there with election to Phi Beta Kappa. While at Minnesota he was a work-study student, making food pellets for the lab rats of a young professor of psychology soon to become better known: B. F. Skinner. Gage was also influenced by two graduate students he met there—Louis Guttman and J. B. Carroll. He graduated Magna Cum Laude in 1938, with a bachelor's degree in psychology.

Despite his stellar academic record, Gage, whose original surname was Gewirtz, was rejected by every one of the 10 graduate schools to which he applied. People weren't accepting Jews into graduate schools because they didn't want to "waste resources" on someone who, even with a Ph.D., would have trouble finding a job, given the depths of the Depression and the prevalence of anti-Semitism. The name change was a response to those societal pressures. Luck intervened, however, in the form of H. H. Remmers, the creator of a new program in psychology at Purdue University. Remmers was searching for doctoral students and was free of prejudice.

Military service during World War II soon interfered with Gage's budding career in measurement and social psychology. But he continued his studies in those areas after the war, and also began to examine issues in education while finishing his doctorate at Purdue. He did still more work in education in his first genuine faculty job at the University of Illinois—Urbana-Champaign. At Illinois, Gage and another new faculty member, L. J. Cronbach (also a future AERA president), chose to divide up their spheres of influence. Gage took teaching while Cronbach took measurement. Gage was at Illinois for 14 years before moving to Stanford in 1962, where Cronbach followed a year later.

Gage was, in many ways, the father of research on teaching, a field that owes much to his masterly editing of AERA's first *Handbook of Research on Teaching* (1963). "The Gage Handbook," as it was often called, was not merely a compendium of what was known at that time but also an intellectual event marking the establishment of a field of study for psychology and other social sciences. The handbook had its start at a 1950 meeting of AERA, where an informal group met to discuss criteria for teacher effectiveness—a topic of interest then as it is now. A formal committee to address the topic was named soon after by the president of AERA; committee reports, often written by Gage (among the youngest of the committee members), were issued in 1952 and 1953. But little action was taken. In 1955 a new AERA committee was formed; it conceptualized a handbook on teacher effectiveness as its product and named Gage as editor. The advisors to the committee, the members of a special editorial board, and the contributors to the handbook represented the elite of the still small education research community. The handbook, when finally published in 1963, became a bestseller. Chapters from the book quickly became influential in all the social sciences. This remarkable volume was the first to organize the field of scholarship that ultimately gave rise to AERA's Division K (Teaching and Teacher Education), now the Association's largest division. It was also in 1963 that Gage became president of AERA.

Throughout his long career, Gage's faith in social science was unshakable. He insisted that there can be, and should be, a scientific underpinning for the art of teaching, and he never wavered despite changes in research fashions over the years. Both his empirical work and his faith in his work provided a basis for our contemporary commitment to a role for traditional science in education research, and in the social sciences in general. His achievements as an empirical scientist and as a defender of the scientific study of education brought him the respect of education researchers of all methodological camps. In recognition of his stature in the field, AERA selected him as the 1988 recipient of its Distinguished Contributions to Research in Education Award.

A few years after Gage moved to Stanford, he cofounded and became codirector of the Stanford Center for Research and Development in Teaching. The center allowed a whole generation of young (and now eminent) scholars to hone their research skills on problems of classroom life. For them, Gage—or more commonly, Nate—was a much beloved advisor.

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Throughout Gage's lengthy career, major journals published his articles, including some classics of social psychology as well as articles in measurement, teacher education, methodology, IQ and race, and philosophy. Among his most notable books after the 1963 handbook were *Teacher Effectiveness and Teacher Education: The Search for a Scientific Basis* (1972), *The Scientific Basis of the Art of Teaching* (1978), *Hard Gains in the Soft Sciences* (1985), and *Educational Psychology* (in six editions, 1975–1998, coauthored with David C. Berliner). Gage was also the founding editor of the highly respected journal *Teaching and Teacher Education*. At age 91 he had just finished his latest book, *A Conception of Teaching*, scheduled for release this October by Springer Publishers. In it Gage begins to develop a theory of teaching to help answer questions that he had raised in his article in the 1963 handbook. This new work is just one more contribution by a scholar who devoted his life to making teaching as important as learning in the field of educational psychology, and to making teachers better at their jobs.

Nate was once asked why he chose to study teaching. He said teachers ought to be liked and respected, and they weren't always thought of that way. So he wanted to improve both their practice and the ways that students thought about them. He spent 60 years trying to do just that. Gage happily toiled in Pasteur's quadrant, trying to do, and to influence others to do, the kinds of research that are at once practical and generalizable, helpful to teachers while also making a contribution to the social sciences.

As we remember Nate, it is appropriate to note that he is honored for more than his scholarship. We remember him for his decency, humor, affection, unflinching optimism, and for his

mentoring of, and friendship with, many other scholars in the field. A true story about the affection Nate elicited from so many is told by Professor Emeritus Barak Rosenshine, a Gage student from the 1960s. One day at an AERA Annual Meeting when Nate was well into his eighties, he gave a talk to a group of classroom and instructional researchers. He said in a hesitant voice, "I'd like to comment on something I heard last year, I think it was by one of my students. . . ." And Professor Ron Marx, now Dean at the University of Arizona, interjected, "We're *all* your students, Nate." Yes, Nate, we are, indeed, all your students.

David C. Berliner

Phoenix, September 21, 2008

NOTE

The photo of Nate Gage was taken in 1963 (courtesy Stanford News Service).

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