

Obituary, Arthur T. Jersild (1902-1994). *American Psychologist*, November 1996, 51, p. 1181.

In the 1960s, Arthur Jersild taught a course at Teachers College called Developmental Psychology of the Lifespan; it was the first course I ever took in human development, and it changed my life. Until then, I had been taught to think of development in terms of the different behaviors one could observe at different ages. But in his teaching and in his text *Psychology of Adolescence*, Jersild described development in terms of changes in the hidden phenomena of thoughts, feelings, and, yes, even the "self." He evidently never surrendered to the psychology fashions of his time but remained true to his own self in his teaching, research, and writing. He wrote:

"My graduate work in the Department of Psychology at Columbia dealt mainly with academic, experimental, and theoretical aspects of psychology. When I became a Research Associate in the Child Development Institute at Teachers College in 1930, with an opportunity to specialize in developmental psychology, a major shift occurred in my activities. Among other things, I did a considerable amount of research on the 'inner life' of childhood (fears, desires, fantasies, etc.). . . . I became convinced that research and teaching should give more attention than usually has been devoted to the subjective dimensions of human existence."

His work in emotion was prescient, and the definition of emotion he offered in his 1954 chapter of *Carmichael's Manual of Child Psychology* is echoed in the scholarship of today: Emotion takes many different forms and involves a complex coordination of feeling, perception and awareness, impulse to action, and visceral and muscular activities; in short, "emotion is involved in the whole business of living."

Born in Elk Horn, Iowa, in 1902, Arthur Jersild received his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Nebraska in 1925, and the Doctor of Philosophy from Columbia University three years later. Before coming to Teachers College in 1930, he served briefly on the faculties of Barnard College and the University of Wisconsin. At Teachers College, his research in adolescent and child development was an integral part of the activities of the Child Development Institute and its successor, the Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute. He became Professor of Education in 1938 and remained at Teachers College until his retirement in 1967.

A major motivation in Jersild's work was his conviction that children in schools really want to learn about themselves and other people, and he was dedicated to making research available and meaningful for teachers. To that end, he did research on developmental aspects of self-awareness and what schools might do to promote children's knowledge of self and their insight into the feelings and motivations of self and others. He pointed out that the child's concept of self grows out of the interpersonal relationships between self and other, and he was particularly concerned that teachers understand the role of the school in promoting self-understanding.

Arthur Jersild was the author or co-author of numerous books; in addition to his *Psychology of Adolescence*, his text *Child Psychology*, originally published in 1933 by Prentice-Hall, had sold over 300,000 copies by the time the 6th edition appeared in 1968. He was the author of 12 research monographs, including "Children's Fears" (1935), "In Search of Self" (1952), and "When Teachers Face Themselves" (1955); over 22 research articles in the leading professional journals; and other theoretical,

historical, and educational publications too numerous to mention. He served as Editor of the *Child Development Monographs* and was a Fellow and then President of the Division of Childhood and Adolescence (now the Division of Developmental Psychology) of the American Psychological Association.

His colleagues at Teachers College over the years remembered "Tommy" Jersild as a wise, kind, and gentle man, and they missed him. He died in Beaufort, South Carolina on January 17, 1994; he was 91 years old.

Lois Bloom
Teachers College, Columbia University
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