

William C. Morse 1915- 2008

William C. Morse, Professor Emeritus of Educational Psychology and Psychology at the University of Michigan, died January 28, 2008, at his home in Michigan. Dr. Morse taught at Michigan for 31 years, and following his retirement, was a visiting professor at the University of California-Northridge and the University of South Florida-Tampa. While at Michigan he co-established and chaired the Combined Program in Education and Psychology, one of the early programs training psychologists to work in schools. During his long and distinguished career, he strongly influenced the development of services for students with special needs, particularly those with emotionally and behaviorally disorders. He was a mentor to many students and professional colleagues and recipient of the “Distinguished Service award from the University of Michigan. Dr. Morse was active in many professional organizations including ICEC which in 1977 honored him with the J. E. Wallace Wallin Award for lifetime achievement in Special Education.



Even before the field settled on the name, Dr. Morse championed an ecological perspective on emotional and behavioral disorders. Today, we take for granted the multidisciplinary team approach in addressing mental health problems. But in the 1950’s, when Morse was developing his Combined Program at Michigan many psychotherapists viewed teachers and schools as among the threats to the mental health of students, Morse joined with others to demonstrate that educational settings can become more therapeutic. During the fifteen years (1945-1961) he was Director of the University of Michigan Fresh-Air Camp for Emotionally Disturbed Boys he and others developed the Life Space Interview as a therapeutic intervention and trained teachers as well as social workers and psychologists in its application. He served as a consultant to public schools and to residential treatment settings such as the Hawthorne Center for Children and Youth in Northville, Michigan and as chair or member of many committees charged with developing policy at the federal and state levels.

In 1988 Dr. Morse participated with others in a symposium looking back at and celebrating 40 years of serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders as a basis for planning for the future (Braaten, Wood, and Wrobel, 1989). For those who did not have the opportunity to interact with him directly, his contribution to the published proceedings of that conference provides a sample of the wisdom he drew from his clear vision of things as they are and the incisive, witty language in which he shared it. He said in summary, “We know there will be an ever increasing need for our expertise. We know there will not be the money we should have. We know that we need a reworking of the whole child support system in this country, including our part of it. And yet we know that we can’t give up trying to do the most we can possibly find ways to do” (p.32). In 1965, together with Nicholas Long and Ruth Newman, he published the first edition of *Conflict*

in the Classroom, a collection of theoretical and practical papers to be used in preparation programs for teachers and others working in educational settings. The sixth edition of this important book was published just this past year and serves as a larger sample of what he thought was important in our field (Long, Morse, Newman, and Fecser, 2007).

The members of CCBD offer sympathy to his wife of 71 years, Bernice (Sunny) Morse, and their family and thank them for sharing Bill Morse with us. We are challenged to prove that his time with us was well spent.

Prepared by Sheldon Braaten and Frank Wood who drew upon the memories and friends of Dr. Morse and material published by James Lloyd and James Kauffman in the EBDblog.

Quotes from close friends

“sometimes, when I became somewhat depressed about the directions in which special education was tilting, I could go sit with Bill for a little while and feel relieved. He was a kind, gentle, intelligent, optimistic, and rational man--always the voice of sanity in our occasionally insane world. Just being in his presence made me a better person--a valid test of a good human being.” Eleanor Guetzloe

“Bill Morse was one of the most giving persons I have ever known... one of my most faithful and helpful friends... my mentor. I was overwhelmed with his generosity. The world will miss him and his magnificent accomplishments.” William Rhodes

References:

Lloyd, J. & Kauffman, J. (January 28, 2008) tribute to William C. Morse
Link to EBD blog <http://ebdblog.com/2008/01/28/william-c-morse/>

Long, N. J., Morse, W. C., Fecser, F. & Newman, R. G. (2007). *Conflict in the classroom: Positive staff support for trouble students, 6th ed.* Austin, TX: pro-ed.

Morse, W. C. (1989). Education and the emotionally/behaviorally disordered student: A personal perspective. In S. Braaten, F. H. Wood, & G. Wrobel (Eds). *Celebrating the past preparing for the future: 40 years of serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders* (pp. 23-34). Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders and Minnesota Educators of Emotional/Behaviorally Disordered.