

HOULE TRIBUTE

Preface: I was fortunate to know and work with both Cy Houle and Malcolm Knowles. They both were truly dedicated to the field of Adult Education and did not hesitate to share their wealth of information and expertise with those of us in university adult education graduate programs--their generosity was vast.

Cyril Orvin Houle--or Cy as he was known to friends and colleagues--was a Southern gentleman. Thurman White, one of his students, called him the "gentle giant" of adult education in America for the last half of the 20th Century.

I was privileged to interact and work with Cy during the last 10 years--thanks merely to the accident of proximity. The Adult Education Program at the University of South Florida in Tampa benefited from Cy's retirement in Sarasota, Florida. He let my students interview him. He spoke to my classes. He even used one of my students as a case study in his book *The Design of Education*. And his last public speech was at the Adult Education Research Conference in Tampa in 1996.

For those of you who may not know a lot about Cy--let me briefly sketch his life and accomplishments.

Cy was born in Sarasota, Florida in 1913. In 1934 he received both his Bachelors and Masters degrees at the University of Florida (I think he received one at the beginning of the year and the other at the end of the year.) He later attended and taught at the University of Chicago until 1978 when, unfortunately, the mandatory age 65 retirement policy forced him to seek other avenues to promote lifelong learning.

After a long, distinguished university career, he did not rest on his laurels; he went to work for the Kellogg Foundation as a Senior Program Consultant until 1995.

One of my favorite stories about Cy as a compulsive learner was that, after he retired from the University of Chicago, he took piano lessons. He truly believed in lifelong learning.

Cy's legacy can be measured in myriad ways:

- The annual Cyril O. Houle World Award for Outstanding Literature in Adult Education was created in honor of him.

- Most recently the Kellogg Foundation established a program to support nine annual Cyril O. Houle scholars at the University of Georgia in Adult and Continuing education.

Other accomplishments or honors included:

- created and ran the first degree granting adult extension program by a major four-year university.
- chaired 78 doctoral committees, including those of
 - Malcolm Knowles
 - Thurman White
 - Alex Charters
 - Roger Axford
 - and he liked to claim Phyllis Cunningham and Ron Cervero.
- supervised 250+ masters degree graduates.
- published 14 books, 21 monographs, and over 145 papers.
- received 11 Honorary Degrees.
- and a 1978 study identified Cy as the number one Prominent Contributor to Adult Education.

His final accomplishment was the creation of the library at Plymouth Harbor, the retirement facility where Cy and his wife Betty lived during the past years. His last labor of love was to organize and develop the library for residents of the complex. He claimed that it was nothing special to develop, but he took immense delight in showing off the library to one of my students. His family chose this library to be the beneficiary of any memorial contributions.

His love of learning is obviously contagious. Not only did he set up the library at Plymouth Harbor, he also passed on his values to those around him. At Cy's Memorial Service, his son David admitted that his father had imparted to him the value of an Inquiring Mind--the title of his most enduring book. This was especially touching since Cy's life work was to promote thousands of inquiring minds around the world.

He always brought insight, wisdom, and diligent scholarship to his work and

delighted in adding touches of subtle, dry humor throughout everything he did. When he was autographing copies of *The Inquiring Mind* for my entire class of students, he quipped to me “The books without a signature will be worth more than those with it, because there will be fewer of them!”

Although Cy was not known for political involvement in professional associations, he was an intellectual force in adult and continuing education and became a magnet for scholarly devotion and excellence.

This push for excellence often made Cy a stern disciplinarian. Thurman White still delights in telling how Cy reviewed an article Thurman was preparing for print, Cy chided him: “This is wrong and if you had listened to my lecture about it, you’d know it’s wrong!!”

We will miss this kindly distinguished Southern gentleman, his precise scholarly manner, and his legacies to the field. In many ways, he has had an impact on all of us and we are richer for standing on the shoulders of one of the true giants in adult education.

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