

# **Ethel Bushnell Waring**

*January 9, 1887 — December 18, 1972*

Ethel Bushnell Waring, professor of child development and family relationships, emeritus, was a member of the staff of the New York State College of Home Economics (now the College of Human Ecology) from 1927 until her retirement in 1955. Her appointment as professor of home economics in what was then the department of Family Life marked the beginning of the formal study of child development, behavior, and guidance in the young College. The small department grew vigorously. In 1945 it became Child Development and Family Relationships. (Currently it is Human Development and Family Studies.) During her twenty-eight years in the College, Dr. Waring made outstanding contributions in teaching and research. For many years she directed the departmental research program; during 1940-41 and 1943-44, she served as acting head.

The A.B. degree was awarded to her at the University of Illinois in 1908, where she was the class valedictorian. Pursuing an interest in work with young children, she studied for the next year at the Chicago Kindergarten Institute. The year provided valuable experiences and brought her in touch with the laboratory school Dr. John Dewey had established at the University of Chicago some years earlier. She was stimulated by his educational theories and was to know him well later in her years of study at Columbia University.

She received her teacher's diploma in 1909 and studied with Dr. Lewis Terman at Stanford University for the Master's degree, receiving it in 1917. She was awarded the Ph.D. by Columbia University in 1927.

Dr. Waring was a member of many honor societies, including Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Xi, and Pi Lambda Theta, and in 1957 she was elected an honorary member of Omicron Nu.

Prior to her appointment at Cornell Dr. Waring worked with young children of various ages, backgrounds, and ability, developing methods of teaching and guidance that were creative, progressive, highly successful, and far-reaching.

She married Clarence Waring in 1914. While living in Oakland she assisted Dr. Terman, at Stanford, who was developing psychological tests for children between birth and preschool age. When her husband died in the flu epidemic of 1918, their son was a year old.

The next few years presented opportunities to teach young children of primary-school age in San Francisco, and to work with exceptional children (many with learning problems) in the public schools of Los Angeles. As a creative

young teacher she had already begun to develop the methods for self-directive learning experiences and the self-corrective materials for which she became well known. Her teaching of young children continued at Columbia University, where she held assistantships with Dr. Patty Smith Hill and Dr. Helen Wooley from 1923 to 1926.

The child study movement in America was then in its infancy. Nursery schools were just beginning. The young Ph.D. candidate studied under the chairmanship of Dr. William H. Kilpatrick, Dr. Dewey's close friend. As her work progressed it attracted the attention of leaders in the field of child study and childhood education.

In 1926 Dr. Waring accepted a position at the University of Iowa with Dr. Bird Baldwin in the Institute for Child Welfare Research. Here she became acquainted with Dr. Amy Daniels, the child nutritionist, who sought her help with emotionally disturbed children in the university hospital and was impressed with the positive results of her advice and methods. So Dr. Daniels recommended Mrs. Waring when Miss Flora Rose asked her to suggest "a human psychologist" — a teacher whose wisdom was "practical as well as theoretical — for the new program in child development at Cornell.

Laura Spelman Rockefeller grants were then making possible initiation of child study and childhood education programs in a number of state universities. The College of Home Economics at Cornell had received a generous five-year grant in 1924. It was unique among the institutions receiving grants, for it centered the new program in a department of Family Life. This was an important consideration for Dr. Waring, who wished to work both with preschool children and with their parents.

Professor Marie Fowler, also appointed in 1927, was to be head of the department of Family Life. A laboratory nursery school was already being organized. Further additions to staff resulted from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller funds, and extension programs in child development and family life were soon launched. Dr. Waring, in addition to her college teaching, directed the research program, while Professor Fowler carried the department's administration until her retirement in 1943.

Dr. Waring's creative educational methods in teaching young children had early attracted attention in California. "Self-directive learning experiences" permitted the child to choose among several learning tasks. "Self-corrective materials" were designed to lead him to find the right combination to achieve success. Her classroom organization resembled that of the open class- rooms of today. The promotion of self-teaching, the development of individual strengths, and an emphasis on positive direction (do this rather than don't do that) were fundamental concepts in Dr. Waring's teaching and writing. In 1929 she was invited to present her methods and materials at a conference

on progressive education in Denmark. In this same summer both Dr. Ovide Decroly and Dr. Jean Piaget invited her to prepare articles for publication in French. She also consulted with Dr. Jessie MacKinder in England.

Mrs. Waring spent several weeks of that summer in Berlin, reviewing movie-filmed studies of child behavior being conducted by Dr. Kurt Lewin. A few years later Dr. Lewin left Nazi Germany and came to Cornell, where he worked with Dr. Waring from 1933 to 1935, making movie films of child guidance and child behavior in the nursery school. These were accompanied by stenographic notes of observation. The films are preserved in the Department of Manuscripts and University Archives at Cornell, where they are available to scholars today.

Dr. Waring's research, and her teaching of both undergraduate and graduate courses, always utilized observation of child guidance, behavior, and learning. Students observed for five-minute periods, rested five minutes while editing notes, and then returned to observation.

Help for parents was a continuing concern to her. Dr. Waring was a consulting editor for *Parents' Magazine* from the time of its first issue in 1925.

Several books, a number of Cornell extension bulletins, and numerous articles for professional and other magazines were written by her: *The Behavior of Young Children*, coauthored with Dr. Marguerite Wilker, is a text published in three volumes. *Helps to Learning, a Progressive Series of Worthwhile Games together with Workbook*, was a set of self-directive, self- corrective materials published by the Children's Institute and distributed to purchasers of *The Book of Knowledge* for use by parents. Her bulletin, *Principles for Child Guidance*, first published in 1939, was reissued in 1970 with a foreword stating: "This bulletin, substantially unchanged in its content since the 1930's, now stands as a classic. Its usefulness to its readers is the test of its endurance." Using four basic principles — that adult affection gives the child security, respect encourages self-respect, help stimulates his abilities, and approval fosters values — it is brief, clearly written, and timeless as a help to parents, teachers, and counselors working with people of any age.

Dr. Waring considered the Ethel B. Waring Fellowship one of her greatest honors. At her retirement dinner in 1955 one of her graduate students started the fund, expressing the hope that her contribution would lead to "a chain of giving," reflecting Mrs. Waring's philosophy that a kindness received should be passed on to others. Generous and substantial gifts followed. The Fellowship, now active, is designated for graduate study in fields that contribute to "the improvement of family living in other countries and societies." Since Mrs. Waring's death, many memorial

gifts have come in, with accompanying letters of appreciation for the guidance in times of trouble and the sharing in times of joy given by this greatly beloved teacher.

Mrs. Waring was a small dynamic person. She said that her size was helpful in dealing with nursery school children. She knew what she believed in and was a leader and pioneer in the field of early childhood education. Although she taught large classes, she seemed always to know and to be interested in each student.

People were important to Dr. Waring. Many of her former students found their way to her door in her retirement years, and many others wrote to her. Annually she sent out her "newsletter" of notes about fellow alumni to a list that ran into the hundreds. Her former students hold positions of leadership today not only in the United States but also in many other countries. Her last sabbatic leave was spent in Lebanon and Egypt, where she visited several former students and worked with them in their programs of research and teaching.

Dr. Waring's retirement years were spent with her son Dana and his family in Connecticut. Her apartment in a wing of their house was home base for her comings and goings. She enjoyed being part of the family and watching her four grandchildren as they grew, graduated from school and college, married, and established homes of their own. These years were active and busy. Until her final illness she was preparing and refining manuscripts for publication and serving as a consultant in universities and school systems where her former students were establishing new programs in child development.

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