

# First a Person—Then a Teacher

**"The teacher's true social function lies in adequately fulfilling his task, in teaching well; and he can do this only when he himself is engaged in the process of developing to the fullest possible extent his own capacities, when he himself possesses that creativity which he seeks to develop in children."**

THE NEED for fostering and developing creativity in the preservice education of teachers is immense; it is, in truth, a desperate need. The degree of desperation is marked by the fact that fulfilling this need is a makeshift solution to another, more fundamental problem; it appears, however, to be the only feasible action we have open to us.

It is my conviction that creativity is essential to the successful teacher; without that personal development which leads to wisdom, without those original insights which are the product of creativity, without that initiative of intellect and idea which characterizes the genuinely creative person, the teacher fails significantly. It is also my conviction that many aspects of the teacher's life—from large portions of his professional training to some significant factors in his working situation—tend to discourage creativity. There are, indeed, important factors in both training and practice which make creativity in the teacher downright dangerous. And if creativity is to be fostered—as it must if we are to produce teachers who are really good—then it must be fostered outside those realistically defined

and strict limitations of professional training and actual teaching which discourage it. The logical place for fostering creativity in the teacher, as the world now spins, is in his preservice education.

There seems to be little need to defend the idea that teachers should be creative. Our attempts to label favorably with the word "creative" show that we like the idea; we relate creativity to that mysterious quality which distinguishes the really good teacher from the drone, the rut-follower, the yes-man and the other nonentities who hold positions on teaching staffs. We have, in fact, become somewhat ridiculous in our use of the term "creative," such is our admiration of creativity. We apply the term with equal impartiality to almost any evidence of ingenuity, efficiency or willingness to lose sleep which a teacher can display. Without searching too arduously, we can find references to the "creative" use of charts, the "creative" use of seating arrangements, of window shades, of sociograms, of motivation techniques, of almost anything, in fact, with which the teacher finds himself in contact

during his busy and varied day. Our considered reaction to this adulation of creativity must become, sooner or later, some version of "Methinks the lady doth protest too much."

For good teaching is not fundamentally composed of such easily exposed mysteries, such easily reported matters. And our problem, I take it, is fundamentally the achievement of good teaching. The creativity which we seek to foster is that sufficiency of self and intellect which sees matters clearly and wholly, which functions to produce original insights, to find relations and see problems. Too much of the "creativity" we admire so publicly is that skill of the laborer who knows what motions to make when the problem is pointed out, and makes them efficiently. Much of the professional training of teachers, for instance, is avowedly devoted to the matter of setting up lines of communication—some of them admittedly ingenious—between teacher and pupil. We might well remember John Ruskin's comment when he was informed that the miraculous telegraph line between England and India had been completed: "Good," he said, "and what shall we cable to the people of India?"

Certainly lines of communication are necessary for teaching, but they are not enough for good teaching. Gimmicks designed to look "creative" will not necessarily make teaching significant. Significant teaching emanates from the teacher who is a real person, not merely a skilled performer on both

tight and slack lines of communication. The good teacher will automatically be "creative" in the classroom, because his teaching stems from his own development as a person and has a significance closely related to his own nature. The good teacher teaches himself to his pupils and himself; the poor teacher is a failure as a self. It is tragic that the failure is not always his fault.

For the quarrel which we may press against the school systems in which teaching is practiced and the professional training which prepares teachers for that practice is that one, in the name of practicality and expedience, and the other, in the name of theory and principle, tend to discourage, deny and even obfuscate that development of self—that self-sufficiency in purpose and practice—which characterizes the good teacher.

### Development of Self

The stifling of creativity in the teacher by those two agencies which might most be expected to foster it is most emphatically *not* the result of any deliberate attempt to frustrate teaching. It is a shadow cast by the shape of the world we live in; but this explanation does not relieve its blackness, nor does it hide the fact that social agencies help to shape the world. The superintendent with limited budget—and this description will fit most superintendents—will hire personable teachers, or cooperative teachers, or, most likely, cheap teachers; he wants but cannot afford good teachers. He will put the teachers he can afford in overcrowded and inefficient rooms through necessity, not malice. He is under pressure from board members, parents, prob-

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lem pupils, problem teachers, elections, budgets, and other matters less important but equally time- and energy-consuming. In too many instances, he must sacrifice soundness for smoothness, simply to have a workable school system at all. In the name of practicality, the teacher must become part of the system. The poor teacher adopts protective coloration and disappears; the teacher who might develop that capacity for original insights and comprehension of ultimate realities which would make him a good teacher will soon become cynical or morose, or both. Neither quality aids good teaching; both pervert creativity.

On the other hand, the professional training which a teacher receives comes from what is, in the context of this discussion, a craft school utilizing a special set of concepts and procedures to solve what is conceived to be a special set of problems. Education curricula tend to demand that teacher trainees exhibit mastery of certain concepts and practices, and the trainee's certificate marks him as a craftsman committed to definite principles and skilled in the techniques of applying them. The mass of material he has mastered is large and complex, and he has of necessity devoted his time to meeting requirements imposed by agencies external to his own personal mental life. The result is effective minimization of any individual progress into the business of being a person which the trainee may wish to attempt. That such progress needs to be attempted, that it will inevitably be attempted with the material at hand, is often illustrated by those trainees who attempt to live by the special concepts of their pro-

fessional training; they differ from the carpenter eating with a hammer or the doctor applying a stethoscope to the radio by being pathetic, not ridiculous.

So we are faced with a real world in which the nature of the situation demands the production each year of a large number of teachers—not necessarily good teachers, just teachers. If the role of a social institution is to reflect society, then these institutions which train and use teachers are remarkably sensitive to their responsibilities, for the teachers are produced and often they are not good. And this sensitivity is gained, I suggest, at the price of an inhumane disregard for the being and development—for the inherent creative needs—of those individuals who undertake to teach. The notoriously high attrition rate in the profession marks the price paid for expedience; one can hardly toss a pebble into an average American group without hitting an ex-teacher—not an ex-good-teacher, just an ex-teacher. Young women teachers "marry out of teaching" with an alacrity reflecting their potential excellence as teachers, and young men seek personal development and fruition of self in better paying jobs or, if completely devoted to education, in school administration. In either case they are lost to teaching. Adequate introduction to self for the teacher trainee will provide him with those inner resources required to transcend the inevitable limitations which he meets; the good teacher is not so easily driven out as is the poor teacher. He runs later, and with less panic.

And he stays for good cause. For

teaching in our world is deeply and profoundly a social function, and the teacher with that depth and profundity of being which can transcend the irritating impedimenta surrounding the teacher-pupil unit is performing a function for society far more valuable than any surface gratifications of social whims and immediate necessities supplied by realistic institutions. The poor teacher can only indoctrinate with the dead dicta he has mastered; it is not enough that this little is satisfactory to the world. The teacher has taught well when he has developed to the fullest possible extent the acceptable capacities of the child; and the child is equipped by his very nature to master more than dicta. The teacher's true social function lies in adequately fulfilling his task, in teaching well, and he can do this only when he himself is engaged in the process of developing to the fullest possible extent his own capacities, when he himself possesses that creativity which he seeks to develop in children.

And in our present situation we can look only to the preservice education of the teacher to foster that creativity. Some significant exposure to the realms of endeavor which man has discovered through the centuries will tend to help the teacher trainee to discover himself. It will not guarantee such discovery, but we must not be so foolish or impatient as to attempt perfection at one fell swoop. About all we can expect, really, is that some thorough grounding in the wisdoms and follies of man will function more actively to stimulate the individual to some de-

velopment of self than does what we now do. We must be satisfied to invoke the sacred principle of individual differences to explain why some students, even when given this chance, will not develop sufficiently to become good teachers. And our understanding of the preservice education of teachers must be expanded to include the vital function of development of self which precedes the development of the successful teacher. Such an understanding will not work miracles, but it will be the beginning of a solution to a fundamental problem.

It is actually a substitute solution to the problem. It is hemmed in by limitations, not the least of which are the weaknesses of the teachers. But there is available no direct and immediate solution to the matter. The problem seems to hinge directly upon the achievement of selfhood before teacherhood, and we must attack it with the means at hand. If creativity is necessary for good teaching, and if we want good teaching, we must foster and develop creativity in the teacher when and where we can. In the present nature of things, the pre-service education of the teacher is the most reasonable place to begin. And when professional teacher training begins to recognize that it must start with people—that professional training cannot be the be-all and end-all for willing guinea-pigs with no personal reality except a desire to be told what to do—then creativity in the teacher will have a chance to come into its own. And so will the profession of teaching.

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