

Studies of the Teaching Act: What Progress?

*Current studies provide a base
for launching new inquiry.*

TEACHERS concerned with furthering their own professional growth have available some promising new resources in the concepts emerging from recent studies of the teaching act. Curriculum development programs can utilize these resources in building a more adequate research base. In short, marked progress is being made.

This progress might seem slight indeed to the individual who surveys the distance we have yet to go to arrive at a fuller understanding of the complex teaching process. Yet, in contrast to where we were a few years ago, we are moving ahead.

Greater insight into the nature of teaching—significant as it is at any time—is especially crucial now when we face an increasing number of curriculum proposals which tend to cast the teacher in a mechanical, almost paraprofessional role. More than ever, we need to come to grips with what actually is involved in the teaching process in our own situations if we are to assess adequately these proposals. Furthermore, in-service education worthy of the name

should begin to have a sound, more rigorously professional base. Such a base must necessarily be built from what we know about teaching.

Utilization of these new resources—namely, studies of the teaching act—presents some problems despite their promise for direct help to us in curriculum development and in-service education. However, the great potential of the new resources offsets these difficulties if we can but learn how to use them effectively.

Beyond sketching the nature of these studies, this brief overview will indicate what appears to be a major requirement for their effective use in school situations. Some additional closely related areas that might well be kept in view in the process are also suggested.

Interaction Analysis

Ned Flanders' work with interaction analysis in the classroom is a significant approach to the study of the teaching act. It offers much we can use in building a sound research base for curriculum development.

Flanders has arrived at a system of categories for analyzing verbal behavior.

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His interaction analysis identifies those acts that increase the students' freedom of action and those that decrease it.

Ten categories comprise the system for which he has developed an observer's manual. Seven are used to analyze teacher talk; two, student talk. The tenth category is used to classify noise or confusion and pauses or silence. The teacher talk categories are divided further into those with indirect influence and those with direct influence. In the student talk category, Flanders includes two kinds of events: response and initiation.

Flanders reports that an analysis of verbal behavior using this observer's manual as a guide provides a teacher with more systematically arranged information about his spontaneous behavior than has ever before been possible.¹

This approach to an analysis of the teaching act is clearly concerned with verbal behavior. It rests on the assumptions that what an individual says is an adequate sample of his total behavior and that this verbal sample is consistent also with all aspects of his nonverbal behavior.

Operational Definitions

Marie Hughes and associates have developed yet another way of looking at teacher behavior in the classroom which results in some useful operational definitions of classroom interaction.

Her work involved an analysis of verbatim records of what teachers said and did and how children responded. She assumed that the teacher in speaking or acting was performing a function for some individual in the classroom.

¹ Ned A. Flanders. "Analyzing Teacher Behavior." *Educational Leadership* 19: 173-80; December 1961.

An analysis of these records resulted in 31 functions which were then categorized under seven headings: controlling, imposition, facilitating, development of content, personal response, positive affectivity, negative affectivity.

In effect, this study holds that teaching may be described in terms of the functions the teacher behavior performs in these seven categories.² Again, as with Flanders' interaction analysis, the emphasis is on verbal behavior in the classroom.

Logical Structure

A third approach to the study of the teaching act which merits attention as we seek new data for our curriculum development efforts is the work of B. Othanel Smith. This approach involved an investigation of the logical structure of the teacher's verbal behavior.

Smith separates the teaching act from learning in order to analyze teaching without getting caught in the total teaching-learning quagmire. He uses a model based on Tolman's paradigm of human action. This permits him to describe teaching in terms of independent variables and to distinguish it from acts of "taking instruction" which are conceived as dependent variables.

Although Smith identified two categories of teacher behavior which he calls performative and expressive behavior in addition to linguistic behavior, or teacher talk, it is the latter category that he investigates.

Clearly, Smith³ is concerned with how the teacher handles words in his teacher

² Marie M. Hughes. "What Is Teaching? One Viewpoint." *Educational Leadership* 19: 251-59; January 1962.

³ B. Othanel Smith. "A Concept of Teaching." *Language and Concepts in Education*. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1961. p. 94.

talk. His research based on an analysis of many hours of classroom recordings has defined a number of logically relevant categories.

Verbal vs. Nonverbal

Central in any consideration of these and other recent studies of teaching is the question of whether teacher talk is the essential core of the teaching act. In fact, this question and the issues surrounding it usually loom so large that they overshadow efforts to place the mode of inquiry suggested by these studies, themselves, into some kind of framework for our further use.

This is unfortunate, for an effective utilization of these studies as we attempt to provide continuing growth for teachers does not need to wait for the final answer to this question and to the resolution of the related issues. We are at a point now where we can profitably engage in a more comprehensive field testing of the concepts about teaching that have been derived from such studies as those of Flanders, Hughes, and Smith.

The fact that these efforts focus directly on the *teaching operations under way in the classroom setting* is their great strength. For so long, we have generalized about teaching through inferences drawn from learning theory. Usually this theory has been derived from a view of performance on a series of contrived laboratory tasks. Or, we have assumed certain generalized teaching procedures to be effective in fulfilling goals based on an organization of social values judged to be appropriate for the school.

Our proposal is, then, that we use these studies and others like them as ways of looking at our own teaching operations in actual classroom settings—that we be-

gin to field test them as a part of our ongoing programs of curriculum development and in-service education. As we use them, we shall come to see *what more we need to know* in order to understand the teaching-learning operations we engage in to implement various curricular designs.

In this sense, the teaching act studies which now focus on verbal behavior can provide us with instruments for moving into an examination of other problems. We may come to find that we need other quite different instruments. Probably, we shall see refinements we will want to make in these. What these other instruments are and the nature of the refinements, however, can best come from our use of the most promising of the resources we now have. Our energies are better used in this way than in efforts to resolve at the outset the verbal-nonverbal issue.

Adequate Conceptual Framework

To utilize the teaching act studies in the way suggested here—making them an integral part of a curriculum development program—requires, in each situation, an adequate conceptual framework. Every thoughtful review of the current curriculum scene has called for the development of such a framework.

Without an explicit conceptual framework we are not in a position to raise other important questions as we use the teaching act studies as *one way* of getting an essential feedback of data into our curricular planning.

Goodlad⁴ suggests the functions a conceptual framework performs. He notes that it serves to help us identify

⁴ John Goodlad. "The School Scene in Review." *The School Review* 66: 391-401; December 1958.

major questions to be answered and also that it helps us to see and classify subordinate questions. Moreover, it shows the relationships among these questions and identifies the sources available in seeking relevant data.

An example of a framework that could perform these functions is that proposed by Getzels and Thelen.⁵ With it they describe nomothetic, idiographic, and transactional styles of teaching based on a sociopsychological approach to learning.

Centering more directly on curriculum, itself, is the model for curriculum theory developed by George A. Beauchamp,⁶ in which he identifies assumptions and postulates, definitions, curriculum planning elements and curriculum design elements.

These are but two examples of the setting required for a further field testing of the teaching act research. A conceptual framework of this kind will permit one to use the studies in ways to get systematic information as curriculum innovation is undertaken. In short, we will be building on a research base.

Participants in the approach suggested here will undoubtedly concern themselves with dimensions of the teaching act that go beyond the central emphasis on verbal behavior.

What, for example, does Bruner's "hypothetical mode" of teaching mean for the teacher's use of language? Is it, in fact, directly related to verbal performance? He asserts⁷ that it is the mode

⁵ Jacob W. Getzels and Herbert A. Thelen. Chapter 4. *The Dynamics of Instructional Groups*. 59th Yearbook. Part II. National Society for the Study of Education. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960. p. 53-82.

⁶ George A. Beauchamp. *Curriculum Theory*. Wilmette, Illinois: The Kagg Press, 1961. p. 99.

⁷ Jerome S. Bruner. *On Knowing: Essays for the Left Hand*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1962.

which characterizes the teaching that encourages discovery.

To what degree do the various operations involved in guiding creative talent, as identified by E. Paul Torrance,⁸ depend on the teacher's use of language in performing the teaching act? Are the nonverbal aspects of teaching and guidance equally significant factors in fostering creativity? Students of communications theory have long emphasized the role of nonverbal communication.

How are we to account for the teacher's self-concept and the learner's view of himself in our analysis of teacher talk? These perceptions of self clearly play significant roles in teaching and learning as described so effectively in the 1962 ASCD Yearbook, *Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming*.

And finally, what do we do with the provocative outline Jules Henry⁹ gives us for viewing classroom operations from a cross-cultural perspective? Certainly, its implications for an analysis of both teaching and curriculum are significant.

These examples could be extended in many directions. However, this listing will serve to suggest some of the other typical questions about dimensions of teaching and curriculum that will come into purview as we engage in curriculum development with a conceptual framework adequate for the task. With such a framework, some of the best of the current studies of the teaching act, although they focus on verbal behavior, have real promise for helping us. They can provide a sound research base in field situations for the launching of new inquiry. This represents progress.

⁸ E. Paul Torrance. *Guiding Creative Talent*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962.

⁹ Jules Henry. "A Cross-Cultural Outline of Education." *Current Anthropology* 1: 267-305; July 1960.

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