

# The Changing of the Grad

**Fred T. Wilhelms**

HE silly season is almost over now. The academicians (and others) have had their little day, ridiculing the time teachers wasted on "methods," when all they needed was to know their subject matter; they're worrying now—and blaming the schools of education—because too few teachers know how to reach the children of the slums, or the Blacks, or the children of the suburbs. For almost a decade they took their pleasure, at society's expense, poking fun at the absurd "anti-intellectual" notion of teaching the whole child; they wanted none of it; to them "excellence" consisted of a narrow kind of cognitive push, and they deliberately took "the disciplines" out of the context of human nature's daily food; they're worrying now because even the ablest students, for whom they were willing to sacrifice everything, damn their deliberately isolated learning and search for what matters in relation to life; they're worried because precisely the forces they tried to deny—the fundamental drives for human values and the whole affective side of life—have broken down their pretty fences and are trampling the cool precincts of their little shrines.

## **Intellect and Affect**

We educationists haven't always been gifted with total insight either, not by a long shot. But at least we've always known that all the children are valuable and you don't start saying "precious" at the 85th percentile. We've known that intellect and affect walk hand in hand through life, and had better get cordially acquainted at school. And we've known that subject matter was made for man, not man for subject matter.

Since at least the thirties we have held to the vision of a curriculum that would help each young person in his personal becoming and at the same time serve the emergence of the great democratic society. We have fought for that vision against the drag of a public that thinks education is knowing facts and making high scores on the College Boards; against

shallow sophisticates who think that being educated consists of being a ready-made candidate for the Ph.D. We have been derided and opposed so vociferously that we came to doubt ourselves. And now, in these days of the rebellion of so many of our finest youth and the doubt and disenchantment of a whole people, it is a sudden surprise to realize how right we have been all along.

If wisdom means anything at all, in the councils where decisions are made, then a group with our track record had better claim our rightful place. For when it comes to the education of teachers we have every right to insist that our judgment has been best and deserves priority. The legislators who have cut back money and time for professional education, pretending that teachers need little more than the subject matter they are to teach—and the academicians who have so often egged them on—have simply been proved wrong. Both before and after they graduate, teachers need what professional education has to offer; year by year it has more to offer; and as this country finally settles down to try for a decent education for the underdeveloped parts of our society, it is professional education that holds the key.

### **The Professional as Person**

Only—and this we have to be blunt about, too—if we are going to step up and assert ourselves, we have some housecleaning of our own to do. Teacher education has a deadly structural flaw. It took its form at a time when the whole process was grossly misperceived. And, for a bunch of educational sophisticates, we have been strangely reluctant or lackadaisical or lazy or something about starting surgery. Teacher education got started with a sequence of courses running generally from some form of “foundations” (history, philosophy, sociology) to “methods” (now under nicer names like “curriculum and instruction”) to a final application in practice teaching (now called “student teaching” or even “internship”). Whatever the names and the details, the basic sequence has been simple: theory first, application last.

Anybody with any common sense knows that that sequence is wrong; our students and our experienced former students have been telling us so for generations; our own theories cause us to deride a similar sequence in any other area of education. But, in spite of all that, the basic pattern is still dominant in most institutions. We are not going to get much improvement until we fix that structural flaw. And fixing it is going to call for a new partnership between the schools and colleges.

Another very serious problem is that teacher education is based on a bad assumption. It got started on the idea that good teaching consists of some body of right practices, and that these “methods” are the essential thing to teach. As Plato might have said, “In heaven there is laid up for us a perfect pattern,” and if a teacher follows that pattern it is a guarantee of effectiveness. Despite a half-century of failure to identify anything remotely approaching that perfect correlation between *any* set of methods and effective teaching, and despite the inspired work of men like Combs to reveal that it is the person inside the teacher that counts and that merits development, most teacher education is still basically on the old competency kick. At least, there is still awfully little attention to the young professional

person *qua* person—to his growth in sensitivity, in autonomy, in commitment, and in all those inner traits which alone will make his skill worth attaining. The cold probability is that the period of professional education is not even a very healthy one for the student, who is overdirected just when he should be exploring and gripped in acquiescence just when he should be inquiring. This old assumption that it is the competencies that count controls the very nature of teacher education, and we shall not achieve much improvement until we enrich it with a more personal orientation.

### The Need for "More"

These two basic problems are artifacts of our own making, and we can get rid of them when we decide to. They are "in-house" matters. But, out in the institutions our teachers serve, there are other problems of a far different order: the deadening bureaucratic mindlessness that Silberman decries; the pervasive ineptitude with lower class children, especially if those children are also from a racial/ethnic minority group; the enormous gap between the curriculum and the real life of a person in our society in our time. Teachers who are to help solve problems of this magnitude need self-development, commitment, wisdom, and statesmanship that go far beyond any ordinary conception of classroom competencies. It staggers the mind to try to conceptualize a program that will provide for the personal and professional growth that will save education.

One thing one can say about it with certainty is that there has to be *more of it*. It has to have more time right from the start out on the actual scene, dealing with real kids and schools and communities. But it also has to have more time to go deeply into theory and philosophy and the whole realm of visionary ideas. Even though teacher education should not all come before first full-time service, we need *much* more time with our candidates so that they can mature into real professionals.

And after people are out on the job they need still more time for growth; it should be on regular time and paid for by the system. Our society is not so poor that it has to have its in-service education financed by tuition for extension courses!

### The Delicate Green

I want to emphasize this simple need for "more." I think we educationists took such a beating in the fifties that we lost confidence in our own offerings. I don't think we have fought as hard as we could have against pinch-penny and pinch-minute programs of professional education. I don't even think that we ourselves have appreciated the great intellectual gains we have made in psychology, the social foundations, and the whole area of curriculum development and school organization. Consequently, we underappreciate what teacher education now has to say. And, as a consequence of that, great potential advances are being wasted, while the research reports languish in ERIC's catalogues.

Education in this country is dangerously close to breakdown. I do not wish to be smug or chauvinistic, but much of the reason is that the kinds of ideas we ASCD-types had been generating were kept from

functioning for almost two decades. Not that we were always right or that we even now have anything like the whole truth, but we had been groping our way toward conceptions of humanity, of learning, and of society that would have led to a great greening. Then the ice moved in, that chill time when only intellect could be excellent and it was malfeasance to commingle the great funds of education and life. And even though vitality persisted beneath the ice, it was a period for which we pay dearly.

Fortunately, there is a thaw and a new tide is flooding in. New models of teacher education are being devised across the land. The whole field is in a state of excitement and ferment. The intelligent sector of the public is once more looking for fundamental improvements in education, and therefore is ready to support our daring to go for full human potentiation. After a long cold winter, for the professional teacher educator, the delicate green of spring is beginning to show through.

—FRED T. WILHELMS, *Executive Secretary, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.*

In Press

## Interpreting Language Arts Research for the Teacher

*Written under the direction of*

**Harold G. Shane, James Walden, and Ronald Green**

Evidence of growing professional concern for language development is reflected in the large number of conferences on the subject that have been conducted during the past ten years, and in the appearance of a number of research summaries compiled during that period. This booklet is third in a series of ASCD language research digests compiled by Dr. Shane. The latest monograph focuses on developments since 1963 in the field of the language arts.

### **Chapter titles:**

"The Increasing Importance of Language Arts Research" • "Language Development Research" • "The Spoken Word" • "Having Ears They Hear Not" • "The Growing Impact of Mass Media" • "Classroom Applications of Reading Research" • "Handwriting" • "Webster's Baby" • "Creative Writing" • "Research in the Realm of Literature" • "Linguistics, Grammar, and Usage" • "Foreign Language Instruction" • "Research in Retrospect"

**Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development**

1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036

Copyright © 1971 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.