



Preparing Competent



ON THE surface it may seem ridiculous to write about teaching teachers. There may be truth in the statement that, in fact, no one can teach anyone anything, unless that person wants to learn something and is willing to accept the help of an outsider as a facilitator. No general agreement exists as to what effective teaching may be, although there seems to be some agreement about how learning occurs. If these statements are in any part true, then it may be appropriate to discuss teaching in terms of creating a situation where learning may occur.

Teaching teachers today in our universities and colleges has generally followed the pattern, outside colleges of education, of believing that if one has mastered a considerable amount of content matter in a particular discipline, he can teach it to others. And, as the amount of content matter has increased, we have continued to add to curricula, insisting that students master not only the traditional matter but some of the new as well.

In other words, while the need of our fast-changing society is for teachers who can change, be creative and flexible, we tend to produce more conforming and yielding teachers who have a very narrow and shallow picture of the educational process. The purpose of this presentation is to suggest an

approach that universities might take if we want to produce teachers who have a breadth of experience, who are growing, maturing, changing, knowledgeable, and who can help students find unique answers for unique problems.

Although there seems to be no real consensus on what attributes the ideal teacher should possess, the following four characteristics or competencies for teachers of teachers emerge as most important and are supported by both students and faculty as vital parts of a program of preparation. The teacher should be:

1. Superior in organizational ability
2. Enthusiastic about teaching
3. A skilled analyst
4. Adept at interpersonal relations.

If, for the moment, we accept these as desirable and necessary competencies, then the question of how they may be acquired arises.

Needed Competencies

One of the salient points made in an informal survey of undergraduates about the teacher preparation program at the University of Wyoming was an appeal for some sense of "organization" on the part of these teachers. They were not seeking more lec-



Teachers of Teachers



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tures or more testing or more telling on the part of the teacher, but rather a clarification about how the objectives of the course might be met, what sort of feedback the teacher would provide, and how the whole business related to living.

Many prospective teachers may have grown up under a teaching system wherein the teacher was the absolute authority; hence, they are used to being told. Somehow, those responsible for preparing teachers must help, through careful organization and planning, prospective teachers unlearn these long-held attitudes. This can be accomplished in an atmosphere in which an increased responsibility for learning is placed upon the student and in which there are more planned student discussions, less reliance upon the teacher for detailed supervision, and more effort made to credit growth to the students' own initiative rather than to the teacher. To create this kind of atmosphere takes much better organization and more planning than does one in which only telling occurs.

If there were a recipe for creating enthusiasm for teaching and if it could be applied to all who were entering the profession it would be truly great, but such is not the case. However, there is much more that college teachers could do to encourage those preparing for the field. The first is to get enthusiastic themselves. Hopefully the

prospective teacher will, while learning how to learn, also learn to like learning. Unless enthusiasm prevails on the part of the teacher, the student may never learn to want to keep on learning. Some maintain that the typical college teacher can never become enthusiastic in that he is a prophet without authority, a preacher without unction, an orator without sex appeal, and a martyr without a crown. He responds to many names, including professor, scholar, researcher, academician, and intellectual. In recent years, a few have been called subversives, dilettantes, and absent-minded impracticals. Seldom has the word "enthusiast" been used to describe the teacher.

It is suggested that those who teach teachers should make a deliberate effort to become skilled analysts and encourage their students in a similar direction. This competency embodies the skills of promoting conceptual understandings, contrasting implications of various theories, presenting the origins of ideas, and stimulating further search for the related concepts. One of the significant approaches that colleges and universities might take in developing this competency would be the promotion and

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encouragement on the part of the faculty, particularly in the social sciences, of the use of the laboratory practice approach in teaching. Team teaching is another approach that could capitalize upon the special competencies of individual faculty members. If effectively used, the in-service preparation of young teachers could become a concern, both in subject matter and in teaching skills, of their more experienced colleagues.

In the area of interpersonal relations, it appears that members of several departments and colleges, including education, psychology, and sociology, might pool their talents in helping teachers of teachers to gain a deeper understanding and insight into the problems faced by students in the teaching-learning transaction. Teachers should

be provided the opportunity to develop greater sensitivity to student actions. The ability to detect class apathy, mediocre decision making, lack of motivation, and going off on tangents is a skill that can be developed through study, observation, and practice.

Once the sensitivity exists on the part of the teacher, attention must then be focused on diagnostic ability. What causes a class or group of students to digress, what slows down problem solving, what encourages students to get excited about learning, are all questions which prospective teachers must attempt to answer through the careful development of selected diagnostic abilities. With a keen understanding of the problems faced by learners, with a sensitivity about group action and the ability to diagnose and suggest solutions to the teaching-learning transaction, the prospective teacher should be in a position to step in and help the learner move toward his goal by effectively supplying the necessary function.

In looking at the big picture, there seems to be much more interest in teaching being expressed today by students, faculty, administrators, and the public at large. One indication of this is the action recently taken by a state legislature resulting in a formal definition of the number of hours college faculty members must teach. This is a false approach to the problem, but it does indicate interest. On the other hand, many universities are experimenting with techniques and devices designed to improve college teaching, and this may be the first step in creating a teaching-learning transaction that is emotionally, intellectually, and scientifically sound.

However, if the competencies suggested herein are to become part and parcel of any teacher preparation program, then universities and colleges must do much more than has been done to date. They must recognize and reward good teaching, there must be provisions for student evaluations and participation in program development, and there should be a determined and successful effort on the part of the faculty to organize and conduct ongoing and sophisticated professional development programs for themselves. □

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