

Affective Domain, Too, Has Professional Competencies

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COMPETENCIES—yet another in a long line of professional jargon terms (behavioral objectives, PBTE, accountability) created by those at the top of the educational hierarchy to be imposed upon those who perform the final act of teaching.

There are a number of assumptions upon which most performance-based programs are organized, but the unspoken, most important assumption is that the fault, the blame, for what is wrong with our schools lies with the teachers. Therefore, it is naively assumed, if we can more thoroughly control and hold accountable what the teacher does, list what *we* think are important abilities, talents, procedures, that is, *competencies*, we can then improve education in our schools.

It is by now an old story, a formula for “improvement”—make the schools, as much as possible, teacher-proof, through the use of programmed materials, detailed lesson plans, and texts which, in red print, instruct the teacher exactly what questions to ask, what responses to expect, and how to divert unwanted or off-the-topic questions. We now

add to this control the whole spectrum of performance-based/accountability/competencies/lesson plan ritual (and it is no more than ritual), and then wonder why we have such mediocre, uncreative, sterile teaching in our schools, coupled with the well-documented and finally accepted criticism of child destruction enunciated by the “Romantic Critics” of the 1960’s.

As one who works closely with large numbers of teachers both in graduate classes at the university and in-service programs in schools, I see them performing very well—*everything we taught them to do in the schools of education. The same is true of administrators*; that is, the fault, the responsibility for whatever is wrong with our schools is mainly the result of the mis-training given our teachers at the university. And we are not moving away from this situation but rather, on the contrary, are compounding it by the same mediocre, simplistic assumptions and attitudes now magnified under the rubric PBTE, which in translation means: “We do not trust you to know how to teach and deal effectively with children and so we will impose upon you the most rigid controls we can create, make you spell out, on paper,

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Photo by John L. P. Maynard

The most effective way to train a teacher is with children, in and out of classrooms.

everything you do, plan to do, and hold you accountable for our failure." This is, of course, a very real insult to every teacher, and we get not quality education but a new charade. Teachers will fabricate behavioral objectives just as they fabricate lesson plans.

Our teachers are trained to teach subjects, not people, and they do this well, ignoring—with some exceptions, in the primary years—all that their experience, commonsense, and daily observations tell them about how children learn. They are well aware that "lessons," taught to the whole class at the same time, are probably the most ineffective method of teaching. Yet, thoroughly trained in our schools of education, they plod through the curriculum, the lesson, the behavioral objective, ignoring the thousands of cues which could foster real learning, and in the process creating for themselves continuous and unnecessary discipline and control problems.

Their courses in educational psychology dealt mostly with how to construct tests and

grading curves, not how to observe each child and try to understand the unique way in which each child learns. The methods courses dealt with broad theory—and who knows what else—but not how to devise 35-40 different instructional programs which change and take new directions throughout the day. And where in the teacher's education are the fresh innovative ideas spewing forth every day that are so essential to the open classroom? Where is the teacher taught how to talk—not lecture—with students, not talking down, at eye level, touching, understanding, *not* criticizing, commanding, shouting, or threatening, but instead subtly yet unmistakably transmitting that the teacher is committed to the student and his development, not simply to a subject but to a total person?

Teachers who have these competencies, and they do exist, have had to learn them on the job or guard and nurture them carefully throughout their teacher education. With few exceptions in this country and certainly in England, they did not usually get these competencies at the university.

British Teachers Excel

In England there is no imposed curriculum (religion required and usually satisfied by a short hymn or prayer), no behavioral objectives, no "PBTE," no lesson plans, no grading, no tests. Tenure after one year is based on the only criterion that really matters—effectiveness with children—and teacher education is a supportive program rather than a control program such as ours. It seems a bit incongruous that we are sending thousands of our teachers to study the British system while attempting to make our system more unlike it than before.

The teachers in British primary schools are indeed better than ours. They do not start out with any more talent or advantages, probably less, but their training is indeed different. And *they are free* of all the encumbrances we have heaped and are presently heaping upon our teachers. They are trained to deal with individual children, to create their own curriculum and classroom

organization, to observe and listen to children, and to deal with whole people. *They are trusted to be the best judge of what and how to teach, and set their own objectives.*

Given near-total responsibility, they meet the challenge and are superior teachers. The British have known for some time, and a few schools of education in this country now recognize, that the most effective way to train a teacher is with children in and out of classrooms, in playgrounds, in tutoring sessions, and excursions, and not exclusively in the final term of student teaching, but for several extended periods with professors from the university out in the schools with their students.

How a student teacher interacts with children is what really matters. There we can begin to develop real competencies. "Did you notice that you ignored Michael in favor of Mary? Why didn't you listen more to what Peter was trying to tell you? Is competition the best way to teach math? Did you think the math group was bored with your explanation? Is that book you recommended to Sharon really interesting for her, knowing what you know about her interests; that is, does it carry her forward and build upon her interests? Did you note how much time each child read today? Is it possible that Eddie really isn't very social and perhaps should not be forced to work with groups but given more individual projects? . . ."

This is one small example of affective teacher education, and it requires a sensitive and knowledgeable observer in the classroom who can communicate this sort of sensitivity to a teacher without its being criticism, control, or manipulation, and can thus turn the teacher around from teaching "lessons" to teaching children.

I observe scores of teachers meeting the new expectations of behavioral objectives and "accountability standards" while doing some of the most ineffective and often destructive teaching. We are allowing ourselves to fall into the "new math," "new science," cycle/formula, that is, a flurry of activity followed by dismal failure and finally functioning essentially as before. The evidence from England (where reading and

math scores have continually risen) and from our own successful open situations indicates rather consistently that the teacher is to be given freedom and support rather than control and "accountability," especially when such accountability is no more than a jargon-ridden paper charade. It is both amusing and an indication of the ludicrous stage we have reached when a PBTE committee at the University of Pittsburgh reports that it has managed to reduce an initial list of 18,000 competencies to 4,000.

Those of us who are attempting to educate and reeducate teachers for effectiveness with children are not concerned with lesson plans (although our organization and preparation are much more extensive than in most classrooms), behavioral objectives, writing anything down on paper, or listing criteria the teacher must meet. But we *are* concerned with the essential relationship between student and teacher. That it is noncritical, nonjudgmental, supportive, committed. That the teacher is a diagnostician, able to discover a child's needs in a continual change pattern and to make immediate changes of direction in learning experiences. That the teacher can generate new ideas and activities daily, under a general objective of expansive learning experiences, picking up subtle cues, creating materials and activities out of children's interests.

We create situations in which the would-be teacher is surrounded by those already engaged, functioning, in this manner and then give the teacher a great deal of freedom and support, especially the freedom to fail—several times (an often necessary freedom for real development)—and finally self-sufficiency and genuine professionalism. In this setting, in order to survive and be successful, a teacher must be organized, highly sensitive to students, but most important is continually challenged—forced—to be self-reliant, creative, committed, and has to work very hard. Very quickly the teacher does indeed become "accountable," to herself or himself, not to a professor from the university or an administrator. It is this accountability that is real and matters and makes for quality education. □

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