

Teacher Education: The Person in the Process*

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Good teaching, this author holds, is a product of teacher beliefs or perceptions in five major areas.

Years of research on teaching methods have been unable to isolate a substantial number of teacher acts, behaviors, or methods that can be definitively associated with either good or bad teaching. Good teaching is not, it seems, a question of right methods or behaviors, but a problem-solving matter, having to do with the teacher's unique use of self as he/she finds appropriate solutions to carry out the teacher's own and society's purposes.

A series of researches at the Universities of Florida, Northern Colorado, and Massachusetts corroborates this "self as instrument" concept of teaching.¹ Effective and ineffective teachers could be clearly discriminated on the basis of their perceptual organizations or belief systems. From these studies, it is apparent that good teaching is a product of teacher beliefs or perceptions in five major areas:

1. *Empathic qualities.* Good teachers are phenomenologically oriented. They are keenly aware of the perceptions of other people and use this understanding as the primary frame of reference for guiding their own behavior.
2. *Positive self-concept.* Good teachers see themselves in essentially positive ways.
3. *Beliefs about other people.* Good teachers characteristically see other people in positive ways as able, trustworthy, friendly, and so on.
4. *Open, facilitating purposes.* The purposes of good teachers are primarily broad, facilitating, and process oriented.
5. *Authenticity.* Good teachers are essentially self-revealing and genuine.

The findings of such studies have important implications for teacher preparation. The remainder of this paper suggests four major areas in which a personal view of teaching calls for significant change in teacher education.

Teacher Education as a Problem in Becoming

A "self as instrument" concept of teaching makes teacher education a problem in personal becoming, of helping a student discover how best to use himself/herself as a professional educator. Teaching students "what they need to know"

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about philosophy, psychology, sociology, and methods, then sending them out to "practice" teach is not enough. A program for becoming must be oriented toward student perceptions like those in the researches above, beliefs about self, about others, about goals and purposes, and the student's personal discovery of appropriate ways of implementing beliefs in action.

In a program for becoming, learning must be personal and experiential. Mere acquisition of

knowledge will not do. What is required is the development of a personal system of perceptions or beliefs to provide the young teacher with long-term goals and short-term guidelines for the moment-to-moment decisions of classroom interactions.

There is a vast difference between developing a personal philosophy and studying philosophies. There is also a difference between understanding a given child and understanding the

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H. G. Vonk. "The Relationship of Teacher Effectiveness to Perception of Self and Teaching Purposes." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Florida, Gainesville, 1970.

psychology of childhood or adolescence. From sociology, one can understand how society came to be in its current mess, but that is a far cry from being able to take an active part in changing it.

The time honored function of teaching has been to impart information or pass along the accumulated wisdom of the past. But, much learning of an aspiring teacher has nothing to do with new information. Change in perception and belief can often occur quite without input or new information as students discover the deeper and deeper meaning of that which they already know.

One does not need new information, for example, to learn to respect the dignity and integrity of others; what is required is continuous exploration of the concept and clearer differentiation of what it means in one's personal economy of values. Experiential learning is subjective, phenomenological, and personal. Applied in teacher education it calls for continuous student exploration of self, others, ideas, purposes, and the student's own confrontation of problems in the classroom.

The Importance of Need

One of the few principles of learning about which there is general agreement is that learning proceeds best when the learner has a need to know. Applied to the "self as instrument" approach to teacher education, it follows that learning must begin from the student's own needs expanding outward to encompass more and more difficult professional questions. The requirement that information and experience be related to student need and readiness, however, strikes at the very heart of traditional course organization. A course is a package, usually arranged in logical sequence and delivered with the assumption that, of course, every student needs this vital information or experience. If he or she doesn't need it now, he or she will later on. Unfortunately, student needs are usually erratic and rarely sequential. A program truly related to need must make information and faculty talent continuously available to students in sensitive response to where they are and what they need to explore next.

This is not to say that the function of a college is solely to satisfy need. Learning must begin with personal need, to be sure, but good teachers do more than satisfy immediate need;

they also help students discover needs they never knew they had. To accomplish this, the traditional course must give way to learning experiences designed to help students confront professional problems and discover appropriate personal solutions. Provision must be made for continuous student exploration of ideas, self, others, professional concepts, and confrontation of problems in the classroom.

For the student, this will require far greater student involvement in decision making and taking responsibility for personal learning. For the college, processes will need to be highly individualized. New styles of organization, assignment of responsibilities, and experiential approaches to learning are called for. Fortunately, modern developments in counseling, group experience, sensitivity training, awareness, encounter, and a wide variety of individual and group techniques have come upon the scene in recent years. These new processes designed to facilitate personal discovery of ideas and relationships have much to offer the teachers' college and can often be readily adapted to the needs of teacher education.

Field Experience in a Person Centered Program

Need-related, problem-solving approaches to teacher education require close and continuous interaction between field experience and substantive study. Historically, field experience was regarded as the place where students practiced what they had been taught at the university and was usually reserved for the last term in the program. Field experience has far greater value, however, for experiential learning programs. It is a priceless source for problem confrontation and student discovery of needs to know and should be available to students continuously throughout the training experience. In the sheltered atmosphere of supervised field experience, students are able to try their wings in the encounter with professional problems at a pace appropriate to current stages of growth. Here they can discover their personal strengths and weaknesses, evaluate where they stand, and find out what they need to know next.

Such a view of field experience calls for basic changes in traditional practice. For one thing, faculties will need to establish sensitive ways for discovering student needs acquired in field experience and create new processes for

helping in the necessary explorations and solutions.

Even more drastic, continuous field experience will probably require that teachers colleges relinquish responsibility for field supervision to classroom teachers in the public schools. The provision of college faculty supervisors for a single term at the end of a student's program already takes a sizeable chunk of a college budget; continuous supervision throughout a student's program is far too costly for most colleges to contemplate. Colleges and public schools must share the training of teachers, with colleges maintaining responsibility for substantive and personal aspects of student growth and public schools assuming responsibility for field experience and supervision.

New Kinds of Faculty for Personalized Teacher Education

The personal "self as instrument" approach to teacher education also calls for new kinds of faculty. Historically, teachers' colleges have characteristically been staffed with experts in content areas like psychology, sociology, philosophy, curriculum, and methods. Students were exposed to such specialists in orderly sequence and expected to learn the concepts needed to make them effective teachers. As Carl Rogers once suggested, teaching, in this sense, is a vastly overrated activity. Experiential learning calls for persons who are not so much "teachers" as process facilitators skilled in helping others explore problems, events, themselves, and others. They are not so much teachers with answers as persons who know how to help students find appropriate personal solutions.

Experiential faculty will need to be generalists in education, capable of helping students explore a wide spectrum of educational concerns, but their special contributions will be as facilitators in human relationships and individual and group growth processes rather than content and method. They resemble much more the guidance counselor or group leader than traditional academic professors.

The Need for Humanistic Psychology as Guide

If the making of a teacher is a matter of becoming, a phenomenological problem in developing personal beliefs and perceptions, then a new

psychology is required to provide effective guidelines for action. Research results make clear that effective teaching is not a matter of knowledge or method. What goes on in the classroom can only be understood in terms of what teachers are trying to do and what students perceive is happening. A purely behavioral psychology is not enough to help deal with such matters. If good teaching is a function of perceptions and beliefs, then a phenomenological-existential psychology, capable of dealing with the inner life and experience of persons, is called for.

For a long time we have lived under the influence of behaviorist psychologies. We still commonly define psychology as "the study of behavior," forgetting that its original definition was "the study of mental states and processes." Humanistic psychology, as I see it, represents a resurgence of concern for the inner life of persons. If the determinants of good teaching lie in the perceptual-belief systems of teachers, as a considerable body of research now suggests, then teacher education must adapt to this new understanding by moving toward personal-humanistic approaches.²

The person of the teacher must be central in the process, and a perceptual-humanistic psychology will be required to provide the guidelines for program and practice. We have barely begun to apply such thinking to teacher preparation. Whenever we do, it pays off handsomely. A major need now is for greatly increased exploration of personal approaches to good teaching and broader application of perceptual-humanistic thinking to all aspects of teacher education. [E]

² See: *Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming: A New Focus for American Education*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1962; A. W. Combs, A. C. Richards, and F. Richards. *Perceptual Psychology: A Humanistic Approach to the Study of Persons*. Boston, Massachusetts: Harper and Row, 1976.



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