



The Value of Variety in Teaching Styles

Richard L. Turner

The virtue of schools is that students experience a variety of teaching styles.

An easy inference in these money-minded times is that schools, or clusters of teachers, exist because that is the most economical arrangement for educating the young. According to this view, schools survive because they are inexpensive compared to other alternatives. There are, however, some other reasons why schools are such durable social organizations.

It is a fact of professional life that both teachers and students vary. The high school math teacher may be dominating, rigorous, and demanding; the English instructor student-centered and humanistic; the social studies teacher directive; the sixth-grade teacher disposed to small group work; the fifth-grade teacher committed to behavioral objectives and a systems approach; and so on.

Teaching styles, then, are likely

to be quite different among teachers in a given school. Students also vary, of course, by age, aptitude, degree of socialization, cognitive styles, preferred methods of learning, and in numerous other ways.

Variety—A Strength

A key feature of virtually all school organizations is that little effort is made to control the variability of teaching styles and learning styles. Schools rarely attempt to match the styles of learners to styles of teachers. Therein lies much of the strength and durability of the school as a social entity.

Among any group of students, some will adapt more readily to the style of a particular teacher than others will. The strength of the school as a collective lies in the fact that over long periods of time stu-

dents are exposed to many different teaching styles. By virtue of this variation, all but a few students are exposed to several teaching styles to which they readily adapt, and to some with which they must struggle.

It is important, then, that all teachers be skilled, and it is critical that they vary in style. A widespread problem in school districts, in schools of education, and in educational research is the idea that there is a single best style of teaching and that teachers should be highly skilled in that style. A more fruitful conception is that there are many effective styles of instruction and that every teacher should be skilled in at least one, preferably in several.

Successful Teachers are Flexible

One of the most interesting aspects of Brophy and Evertson's recent research report on teaching¹ is

that the most successful teachers of disadvantaged students *expect* to vary their instructional styles and strategies. If one strategy does not succeed, another one is tried. While not the only characteristic of these successful



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teachers, their psychological posture or "set" to vary style and strategy may be viewed as highly significant to their success.

¹ Jere E. Brophy and Carolyn M. Evertson. *Learning from Teaching, A Developmental Perspective*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1976.

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