

Humanistic Teacher Education: Another View

Donald C. Medeiros, I. David Welch,
and George A. Tate

Doyle Watts' article¹ was essentially a criticism of an earlier article by Arthur W. Combs entitled "Teacher Education: The Person in the Process."² While it is an honored scholarly tradition to criticize the thinking and theories of others, Watts' article does not appear to lend itself to this tradition. It is unprofessional because it resorts to a tone and use of language that are ill-considered at best and insulting at worst. Words such as "ridiculous," "absurd," or "amusing," in the context in which Watts used them, are not serious scholarly criticism of another theoretical point of view. Watts challenges the work of Combs not from a research base but from a base of mere opinion. In his attempt to criticize, Watts apparently has not taken the scholarly effort to investigate other works that might enlighten him on the concepts and ideas of perceptual-humanistic psychology.

In the sections that follow we will attempt to point out some of the misunderstandings contained in Watts' article. We will follow his points of criticism, and in the last section address his recommendations for teacher education.

Teacher Education as a Problem in Becoming

Watts criticizes what he views as a vagueness in definition of the concept of becoming, views Combs' approach as trial and error learning, and offers a comparison of teacher education with medical, engineering, and pilot training. Given the limitations of a short article, Combs is not at all vague about the concept of becoming.³ Readers might look into the works referenced in Combs' article and to the works of such writers as Gordon Allport⁴ and Abraham Maslow.⁵ Certainly, as professionals, we must recognize that it is not necessary to repeat definitions every time we use a phrase, concept, or word. It may be assumed that the audience of the journal is informed about such phrases, concepts, or words.

Watts somehow concludes that the Combs' article implies trial-and-error learning. Frankly, we fail to follow Watts' logic here. It is our feeling that Watts has created a caricature, and then criticized his own creation. Combs' recommendation is clearly that students involved in a teacher education program need time to explore personal values, convictions, and beliefs. The thrust of Combs' recommendations in this section is not that subject matter be thrown out, but that the mere acquisition of knowledge and skills alone is insufficient for a total teacher education program. This is not trial-and-error learning, which implies stumbling around in the dark with no idea of

¹ Doyle Watts. "The Humanistic Approach to Teacher Education: A Giant Step Backwards?" *Educational Leadership* 36(2): 87-90; November 1978.

² Arthur W. Combs. "Teacher Education: The Person in the Process." *Educational Leadership* 35(7):558-61; April 1978.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 559.

⁴ Gordon Allport. *Becoming: Basic Considerations for a Psychology of Personality*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955.

⁵ Abraham H. Maslow. *Toward a Psychology of Being*, Second edition. New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1968.

whether the approach will work or not. This is a process that requires understanding and the ability to create a classroom atmosphere that facilitates personal exploration.

Watts also says of physicians, engineers, and pilots trained through the methods of personal exploration: "I certainly would not wish to be operated on, flown in an aircraft, or driven across a bridge designed by persons so trained." That is a great punch line but, again, it is not what Combs said or implied. Combs does not imply that knowledge or skills are unimportant, but rather that these alone are insufficient. It is interesting that Watts chooses to compare teacher education with medical, engineering, and pilot training. Perhaps in such fields, because of their mechanist aspects, there are identifiable skills that definitely lead to success. Educational research does not suggest any such skills or behaviors for teachers, and that is the thrust of Combs' research on identifying effective teachers.

Combs compares teaching with fields such as counseling, social work, and the ministry, because these are fields in which the identifying characteristics listed at the beginning of his article have in fact indicated similarities. Watts, on the other hand, brings up the medical, engineering, and pilot training models on his own and does not offer research that indicates similarities with teaching.

Field Experience is a Person-Centered Program

Watts criticizes Combs' recommendation that field experience be under the direct supervision of classroom teachers rather than college professors. He says that such programs would be too costly and that classroom teachers do not possess the skills, knowledge, and competencies to do an adequate job of supervision. Again, Watts has missed the thrust and major importance of what Combs is saying.

Combs indicates that the present plan of "learn now/apply later" is not the most effective way of educating teachers. He suggests that field experience be continuous rather than at the end of a teacher education program. Professors and students would then be able to discuss real problems and concerns students bring back with them from their daily classroom experiences.

In such programs, college and public school

personnel become real colleagues in the process of teacher education. Watts' notion that public school teachers are not capable of supervision seems to us to be misguided and uninformed. Surely, we know that the professions of medicine, psychology, and other fields including education, employ a model in which young professionals are supervised by practitioners, with perhaps an occasional visit by someone from their program.

A final word is needed here regarding the criticism of costs. It seems that effectiveness, not costs, should be the main consideration in program development. No doubt there are more economical ways of training pilots, surgeons, and engineers (to use Watts' analogy), but the results of less than the best training could be tragic. Is teacher education no less important than these fields?

New Kinds of Faculty for Personalized Teacher Education

In this section Watts disagrees with Combs over the role of faculty in a teacher education program. Instead of sending students through a number of specialists, Combs' suggests that the faculty should consist of generalists skilled in human relations and other group process methods. This certainly could be an area of honest disagreement, but, rather than state it as such, Watts has resorted to an innuendo that the students of such programs would require therapy. Combs says that if we are to create a new approach to teacher education, then we must create a new role for professors as well. It is a logical suggestion, but Watts chose not to discuss it seriously and raise the real issue of disagreement.

A final word concerning therapy. One of the contributions of humanistic psychology is the notion that one doesn't have to be sick to get better. Is therapy bad? Does it mean that a person is incapable, weak, or unfit? Perhaps, with the pressures of everyday living, we might all profit from having a person or some persons to talk things over with, to sort out our feelings, and move toward a life that is more fulfilling. It will be difficult to do that as long as we consider self-examination a sign of some psychopathology rather than movement toward becoming a mature, healthy person.

The Need for Humanistic Psychology as a Guide

Combs recommends a perceptual-humanistic psychology as a guide for a more comprehensive understanding of teacher education. Watts disagrees and states, as a matter of belief, that the influence of humanistic psychology must be reduced. This appears as a legitimate belief. However, he is not content to leave it at that. He accuses that many of the difficulties of present-day public education must be assumed by the influence of humanistic psychology. He charges that students graduating with "limited knowledge, skills, and abilities" are the direct result of humanistic psychology. We challenge Watts to produce any evidence to support such a charge. Most professionals recognize that humanistic psychology and humanistic education are minority views in psychology and education today. If students are graduating with inadequate skills, the blame cannot be placed on humanistic psychology.

Watts' disagreements have led him to propose several recommendations concerning teacher education. They are ones which, in the main, do not seem to be well-considered for a number of reasons. We have listed the recommendations with a short comment on each one.

1. *Establish more stringent and selective requirements for entrance into teacher education programs.* The problem here is what criteria would Watts use to select candidates for teacher education programs. Grade point average or scores on certain tests? Certainly, we know that grade point average is not a predictor of successful teaching. It might be worthwhile for Watts to consider some of the research referenced by Combs since it does provide suggestions for selection.⁶

2. *Identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for effective teaching, then structure the program to specifically develop those objectives.* Watts apparently is paying little attention to years of educational research that indicates that no single skill or group of skills, no single competence or group of competencies, no single trait or group of traits, no single method or possession of mere knowledge alone can be said to lead unerringly to effective teaching.^{7, 8} Surely it is time to recognize that the investigation of teachers' methods does not provide a useful understanding of effective teaching. Combs suggests a more promising approach in which

methods and beliefs need to be congruent for effective teaching.⁹

3. *Extend the length of the professional education component of teacher education to a minimum of one year.* Perhaps Watts does not include student teaching in his recommendation, which would lead him to conclude that professional teacher education programs are shorter than one year. However, the programs with which we are familiar all approach a year's duration, at least, as far as credit hours are concerned. If a person is in elementary education that time is longer. A program founded on Combs' research at the University of Florida is approximately two years in length.¹⁰

4. *Require that the original and renewal teacher certification be contingent upon competency-based evaluation.* It would be simpler and easier if we could develop competency-based criteria for teacher effectiveness. But, alas, Watts is again ignoring the results of much teacher effectiveness research referenced in recommendation two.

5. *Provide for a structured inservice program for practicing teachers.* We agree that such a recommendation is valid, but also would point out that such programs, in theory at least, already exist. In fact, they are often haphazard and could profit from a more organized and real need approach.

6. *Design adequate follow-up procedures to monitor program effectiveness.* We agree, provided that we can come up with acceptable criteria. Such a follow-up program would need to consider a number of educational values and avoid the narrowly conceived approaches of the early accountability movement.

7. *Develop formal program reconceptualiza-*

⁶ Arthur W. Combs, R. A. Blume, A. J. Newman, and H. L. Wass. *The Professional Education of Teachers*, Second edition. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1974.

⁷ N. L. Gage. "Paradigms for Research on Teaching." In: N. L. Gage, editor. *Handbook on Research on Teaching*. Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1963.

⁸ Arthur W. Combs. *Myths in Education: Beliefs that Hinder Progress and their Alternatives*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1978.

⁹ Arthur W. Combs. *Florida Studies in the Helping Professions*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1969.

¹⁰ Robert A. Blume. "The University of Florida's Childhood Education Program." *Colorado Journal of Educational Research*. Fall 1976. pp. 36-42.

How many GIFTED students are there?
Who are the GIFTED?
What can I do for my GIFTED?

REACHING FOR THE STARS: A Minicourse for Education of Gifted Students answers these and other questions asked repeatedly by educators.

Your P.O., check or money order for \$130 + \$2.50 handling/shipping will bring you 10 texts for workshops or independent study.

Individual texts available as shown: *Characteristics*(\$20), *Needs*(\$8.50), *Gifted Underachievers*(\$7.50), *Gifted Handicapped*(\$10), *Gifted Minorities*(\$10), *Using Knowledge about Intelligence*(\$15), *Using Knowledge about Creativity*(\$15), *Enrichment*(\$25), *Programs*(\$25), *Counseling*(\$25) + \$1/per book handling/shipping. Texans add 4% sales tax.
Doris L. Evans, *Multi Media Arts*,
P.O. Box 14486, Austin, TX 78761



edited by
Thomas J. Sergiovanni

Stock No.: 611-75046 87 pp. \$4.50
Orders under \$10.00 must be prepaid.
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Suite 1100, 1701 K St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006

tion and change based on empirical program evaluation. This recommendation strikes us as the most ironic of Watts' concerns since Combs' work represents one of the few programs in the nation that was based on theory, tested, and then implemented.¹¹ Combs' work at the University of Florida provides a basis for organizing and implementing a teacher education program based on empirical data rather than mere opinion alone.

Conclusions

Articles like the one written by Watts do not, in our opinion, advance the field of teacher education. We think he has misinterpreted and misunderstood much of what Combs wrote. His article was unprofessional because of the language he used in his criticism and was unbecoming of scholarly work. He has caricatured Combs' work, and then criticized the beliefs and practices of his own caricature. That is wrong professionally and deserves our severest response.

Surely, we must recognize that a person of Combs' stature is making a serious and well-meaning attempt to improve a field that is important to him. His attempt is an effort to promote a comprehensive teacher education program that will produce educators that are more than self-confident fools or well-informed neurotics. We think it deserves more than flippant and ill-disguised sarcasm.

¹¹ H. L. Wass, R. A. Blume, A. W. Combs, and W. D. Hedges. *Humanistic Teacher Education: An Experiment in Systematic Curriculum Innovation*. San Francisco: Shields Publishing Company, 1974.



Donald C. Medeiros (left) is Assistant Professor, I. David Welch (center) is Professor, and George A. Tate is Associate Professor; all at The University of Northern Colorado, Greeley.

Copyright © 1979 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.