

# Teacher Education: A Response to Watts' Response to Combs

David N. Aspy and Flora N. Roebuck

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*Research evidence supports Arthur Combs' view that teacher education must focus on "the person in the process."*

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It was surprising to us that Doyle Watts assailed Art Combs' suggestions for teacher training in the November 1978 issue of *Educational Leadership*. We decided to summarize Watts' recommendations for teacher training, compare each one with Combs' position as we understand it, and present research evidence on that point.

1. *Watts*: Establish more stringent and selective requirements for entrance into teacher education programs.

*Combs*: Teacher education should attract the finest people available. The emphasis for selection has been focused on the candidate's knowledge of subject matter, but the data from several studies indicate we should also consider the kind of person the teacher is. This would involve looking at the candidate's openness to new data, interpersonal qualities, and positive view of students. Certainly, the substantive areas are important, but the personal and interpersonal characteristics are important too.

*Research*: Ratings of more than 15,000 hours of teacher/student interaction from ten states indicate that the average classroom teacher (who is currently selected and trained from an academic or subject-matter viewpoint) functions at about the 2.5 level on a scale of 1.0 to 5.0 (Aspy and Roebuck, 1976, 1977). On this scale, the 3.0 level is considered to be "minimally" facilitative; that is the point at which the teacher stops "hurting" and starts "helping" kids to grow, both personally and academically. As an example of how learning is affected by the teacher's nonacademic skills, a recent study (Roebuck and Aspy, 1979) indicates that approximately a third of

the variance in students' disruptive behavior in the classroom can be predicted if you know the teacher's level of interpersonal skills. Learning stops, of course, when class is disrupted.

2. *Watts*: Identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for effective teaching and structure the program specifically to develop them.

*Combs*: The teachers' perceptions of self, other, and the phenomenal field determine behavior. Knowledge, skills, and abilities enable the carrying out of appropriate behavior.

*Research*: Studies have supported both (a) that the teachers' knowledge does *not* determine classroom behavior (Aspy, 1972; Aspy and Roebuck, 1975b); and (b) that the teachers' perceptions of self as adequate were translated into behaviors that resulted in higher student achievement (Aspy and Buhler, 1975). This would seem to indicate that one strong component of a good teacher training program should be aimed at helping teacher trainees develop appropriate perceptions of self and of their tasks.

In regard to the selection of the specific instrumental knowledge, skills, and abilities that are to be taught to these trainees, a great deal of research has indicated that student learning is facilitated by a teacher who responds to the students' feelings (Aspy, 1969; Aspy and Roebuck, 1973, 1975a, 1976). These studies measured cognitive outcomes as well as self-respect and interpersonal learning. The data support the conclusion that skills for teachers, which currently concentrate upon the cognitive domain, should be extended to the interpersonal dimension. Incidentally, these same studies reveal that teachers ac-

quire interpersonal skills most effectively when their professors have those skills and use them while teaching teachers.

3. *Watts*: Extend the length of the professional education component of teacher education to a minimum of one year.

*Combs*: Teacher education is pointed toward helping a teacher become a facilitator of learning. Becoming that kind of person requires different amounts of time. Some people coming to the teacher education program are already that kind of person, while others take considerably longer. Still others will, unfortunately, never become facilitators of learning. This means that the teacher educator has to be patient with the learning process lest our impatience teaches teachers to be impatient with their students.

*Research*: Kean and others (1978) established that neither teachers' scores on the National Teacher Examination nor the numbers of graduate courses they had taken in reading and/or language arts made a difference in the reading scores of fourth graders.

4. *Watts*: Require initial and renewed teacher certification to be contingent upon competency-based evaluation.

*Combs*: Teachers should be competent in the skill of human facilitation and they should continue to improve their competence. This is why it is so important to help student teachers attain a lifestyle that involves growth. For some teachers this requires a long and sustained effort, but it doesn't help to be compulsive about it. If we as teacher trainers can view life as a learning experience that progresses idiosyncratically, then we can learn to keep our shirts on and not spend so much time remediating everybody.

*Research*: According to a physician who specializes in adolescent medicine, 1.3 million teenage girls will become pregnant this year. One-third of them will undergo abortions, while the rest of them will give birth to their child. Over 30,000 of them will be under 14 years of age. A report on school violence produced by the National Institute of Education tells us that 20 percent of our teachers are afraid of student violence against them. This same report speaks of 48 percent of our students being afraid of violence while they are attending school. Another physician reports that smoking, an acknowledged health hazard, is increasing among teenagers.

It is hard to argue that our teenagers smoke because they don't know about the hazards of smoking. It is equally difficult to present a cogent defense

of the stance that they get pregnant because they don't know what makes them pregnant. In fact, one of the world's leading authorities on adolescent medicine says that many teenage girls get pregnant because they want to do so. He relates that they tell him they want the baby because they want something to love.

A lot of evidence from studies of school anxiety and stress suggest that our compulsivity contributes a great deal to the suicide rate, as well as to the learning problems of the young. Kean and others (1979) established that neither the length of the reading instruction period nor extra help ("remediation") for students having reading problems were related to increased reading ability. And Flanders (1951) found that, in students' priorities, personal-social anxiety takes precedence over learning problems. Furthermore, results of the New Elementary Program (Wass and others, 1974) at the University of Florida offers support for both the idiosyncratic growth of teachers and the positive results in improving teacher quality through a facilitative training program.

5. *Watts*: Provide structured inservice programs for practicing teachers.

*Combs*: Inservice training is very important. The content of inservice training should be determined by the needs of the people served by it. If it is not, then the effect of the training is to teach teachers to ignore their students' perceptual worlds. This just doesn't work very well in terms of facilitating learning, because as even the most ardent behavioral engineer knows, you must begin learning from the learner's frame of reference. For example, behavior modifiers must identify which reinforcers will work with an individual learner.

*Research*: Evidence from a three year longitudinal study indicated that when teachers were involved in planning their inservice program, based on their perceptions of the needs for their population, the results indicated both greater teacher satisfaction with the inservice training and improved student performance. (Aspy and Roebuck, 1977). In this study, the teacher trainers (university professors) served as consultants to the teachers. That is, the teachers designated specific skills they needed, and the trainers then devised ways of helping them develop those skills. The ineffectiveness of the usual type of structured inservice program is attested by Kean's (1979) failure to find a relationship between students' reading attainment and teacher attendance at staff development sessions.

6. *Watts*: Design adequate follow-up procedures to monitor program effectiveness.

*Combs:* There can be no question that follow-up procedures are important. However, if the follow-up studies use the same cognitive indexes that dominate school practice, then little is gained; the most important factor about being human is the quality of life enjoyed by a person. Instruments for this type of study are still at a low stage of development, but they should be emphasized in the future, not to replace cognitive indexes but to complement them.

*Research:* Holistic measures of affective aspects of the person have already demonstrated research utility (Roebuck, 1975a; Roebuck and Aspy, 1975; Roebuck and others, 1975). Other measures of the quality of school life such as Carkhuff's (1976) "Detractor-Leader" Scale, are currently being tested. The question is will they be utilized on the firing line to broaden the base of school program monitoring?

7. *Watts:* Base redesign of teacher education programs on empirical program evaluation.

*Combs:* Certainly program change should be

based on empirical evidence. The difficulty is that data related to student happiness is rarely collected and even less frequently presented formally to decision-making bodies. The imbalance between cognitive data and affective data results in decisions that vitiate some people. The affective is important because it makes a human being unique in the universe. When we lose the human perspective, we do inhuman things to people.

*Research:* In a study of "slow" learners, Roebuck, Buhler, and Aspy (1976) found that students of teachers who operated at low levels of facilitative functioning actually had poorer self-concepts at the end of the year than at the beginning. On the other hand, a comparison group of slow learners whose teachers were functioning at high levels of facilitation improved their self-concepts. Teaching people to like themselves *less* is an inhumane thing to do (Roebuck, 1975b), yet this kind of data rarely forms part of the input to decision-making bodies. What seems to be called for is a way of empirically evaluating programs that systematically taps many broad areas of human

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#### Doyle Watts replies:

Over 90 percent of all applicants are currently accepted into teacher preparation programs, and once admitted, almost all are eventually awarded teaching certificates. Entering college students who select education as their major score lower on entrance tests than any other group. The decline in SAT scores is well known, but even more distressing is the fact that the SAT decline among future teachers is over twice as great as the national average. Teacher education is attracting far too many students with inferior academic ability.

Moreover, we in teacher education do not appear to be having much success converting these academically inadequate students into competent teachers. Last summer 535 first-year Dallas teachers were out-scored on the Wesman Personnel Classification Test by a group of high school students. Half of Houston's teacher applicants scored lower in mathematical achievement than the average high school junior. There is no reason to believe these examples are exceptional rather than typical.

Why are so many with meager abilities certified as teachers? Unfortunately, original and renewal teacher certification consists of specified courses and credit hours. I believe that knowledge and ability should be demonstrated, not assumed, when application is made for certification. Aspy and Roebuck disagree. They warn against any such drastic action

because it might cause anxiety, stress, and perhaps suicide. They seem more concerned about hurting the feelings of incompetent teachers than in placing quality educators in the classroom.

The influence of humanistic philosophy has been a major contributor to the decline of academic standards in our schools. In the late 1960s it was claimed that traditional grading methods were not only dehumanizing and irrelevant, but they actually interfered with learning and thus prevented students from achieving their full potential. Consequently, more humane grading practices such as pass/fail options, ungraded courses, and eliminating F's were introduced or expanded. New "relevant" courses with little academic value were added to the curriculum. At the same time more emphasis was placed on the affective domain at the expense of academic accomplishment. Many argued that the "mere" acquisition of knowledge was not sufficient; that schools should direct their efforts toward development of the student's values and perceptions. Learning, it was declared, should be subjective and personal with the student being the best judge of his/her own academic accomplishments. The results have been inflated grades, decreased knowledge, and, oh yes, increased student unhappiness—proof that ignorance is certainly not bliss.

I stand by my seven recommendations for improving teacher education. The comments of Aspy and Roebuck have not changed my mind.

existence, not just the limited areas of cognitive or skill growth.

## Discussion

The major differences between Watts and Combs are both small in number and large in significance. Basically, their differences are first, that Watts wants to return to our old method of refining teacher training, while Combs advocates a new and integrative approach; and second, that Watts rejects a psychotherapeutic approach to learning situations, while Combs views all of life's activities, including teaching, as a facilitative process in the broad sense of the term.

The significance of the differences between the two is vast. If, as Watts implies, we limit our concern to the student's cognitive characteristics, we leave his or her feelings outside the classroom. This is not only impossible but undesirable. Feelings are as important as cognition and are always concurrent with them.

It would be a retreat from reality to design a teacher training program that is easy to control by arbitrarily reducing the complexity of people to fit our current level of learning. Why not accept our present limitations and continue to search for the fullness of humankind. As Shakespeare said:

What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason!  
how infinite in faculty! in form and moving  
how express and admirable! in action  
how like an angel! in apprehension  
how like a god!

*Hamlet, Act II, Scene 2*

If we fully understand this statement, it fills us with appropriate humility for the task of teaching our fellow human beings. *ET*

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David N. Aspy (left) is Director of the National Consortium for Humanizing Education, Catholic University, Washington, D.C.; Flora N. Roebuck (right) is Professor of Education Applied in Medicine, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Baltimore, Maryland.

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