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No Standing Ovations

In 1980 and 81, I had one of the most satisfying assignments an educator could want. I spent a few days observing an American Studies summer institute at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, where outstanding teachers from some 25 states spent five weeks developing units combining American history with literature, the arts, and other cultural studies. Then during the school year I visited a few of the teachers to see how they were using what they had learned.

On one such trip I went to the Radnor Middle School in Wayne, Pennsylvania (the school that inspired the ASCD booklet, *Applied Strategies for Curriculum Evaluation*). As I watched humanities teacher Mark Springer question students about the subtleties of Robert Frost's "Death of the Hired Man," I thought of actors, dancers, and musicians I had seen. Few adults would witness the skilled performance I was enjoying. The students, who may have been appreciative but could hardly be expected to give a standing ovation, were participants, not audience. Springer and thousands of other fine teachers perform day after exhausting day with little recognition and few rewards, except the knowledge that they have taught well.

This theme issue, organized by guest editor Elliot Eisner, celebrates the teacher as artist. In his persuasive lead article, Eisner warns against considering education a science, especially if that science is expected to yield prescriptions for excellent teaching. Eisner contends that the gap between our professional knowledge and the concrete realities of particular classrooms can be filled only by the intuitive judgments of an imaginative teacher.

Other authors elaborate on that theme. Carolyn Mamchur relates four examples of classroom success to illustrate Sylvia Ashton-Warner's "organic method": teaching which "touches things very deep and real within the child."

Tom Barone and Robert Donmoyer also portray classroom episodes. Barone pinpoints similarities between educational and aesthetic experiences and

Donmoyer shows that good teachers often rely on improvisation.

In an essay that is itself a work of art, Madeline Grumet notes that teachers, like artists, live on both sides of a line between aesthetics and the daily mundane. Deliberately playing with words ("drawing," "lines," "spaces,") she urges teachers to create spaces where they can express and share their artistry.

Louis Rubin reports on a staff development project intended to acquaint teachers with theatrical techniques. He concludes that supervisors can foster artistry by encouraging teachers to express their individuality.

These sentiments are pertinent because of the stress being placed on studies showing certain methods effective for teaching basic skills. In general the research shows that teachers who work with whole classes rather than individuals, maintain a high success rate, have a high level of participation, and keep students focused on the material to be learned tend to have students with higher average test scores. Teachers who want similar results should presumably follow their example.

Before dismissing these findings as contrary to the art and craft approach, we should remember that most process-product research is not experimental. In most cases, the teachers studied were not following an external model but were teaching "their way." The researchers who analyzed their work might have preferred some ways to others, but were obligated to report correlations, not preferences. The results can easily be misinterpreted or overgeneralized. If they are, however, that is not the fault of a rudimentary science of education, but of educators who are unscientific.

We can best succeed in improving our profession by recognizing that education needs both science and art. By carefully observing and analyzing the performance of great teachers, we may learn something about what makes them great. The danger, as Eisner says, is in overly rigid prescriptions based on the observations. Inflexible commandments may stunt the natural inclinations of a budding classroom artist. □

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