

The Professor

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Is One Year Enough?

As an education professor in charge of a professional development program for secondary teachers, I am often asked whether one year after a liberal arts degree is enough or whether an additional year for a B.Ed. degree is necessary. First, I'm not so sure that time is the crucial issue. I can't say I believe preservice education is the answer to good teaching. Further, I agree with Shulman that certification should culminate only after five years of teaching (in Brandt 1988, p. 43).

But if good teachers are good decision makers, then it takes a lifetime to make them that. If good teachers are autonomous—and by that I mean, as Bettelheim (1960) does, that they "have a deepening sense of identity, self-respect, and inner freedom" (p. 75)—then it takes a system that allows such development. One year is not enough. Five are not. The entire attitude and actions of education must be geared to the goal of creating autonomous individuals who are clear on their values; who know what they need and want; who know what they will give up or do, or will not give up or do not, to satisfy their needs; and who can act humanely in a situation and not be led or driven.

Sadly, I cannot say our governments, in the past 10 years, have made the political moves to ensure independent, risk-taking educators. Indeed, I have seen so many disabling, dispiriting moves that I stand in awe of the many strong and daring teachers surviving in schools across North America. One remarkable offshoot of the continued attack on teachers and the teaching profession is renewed camaraderie among educators.

Another, interestingly, is one Bettelheim (1960) mentions in analyzing his own spontaneous defense against being in a concentration camp: he tried to analyze and understand what was going on around him. Teachers are doing precisely that. More and more

of them are conducting research to explain the nature of teaching and the effects of political restraints on their work. I am not suggesting what is happening to teachers is anything akin to the Nazi horror. I am simply recognizing the nature of human survival: we survive by examining and understanding. Doing so is a triumph of the intellect and the spirit, possible only in autonomous people.

Our societies and our present education systems are not designed to create autonomous, responsible, wise citizens. However, it is precisely that kind of individual that we want in our system. There *are* some, and these few will be the ones able to educate others to have self-respect and the ability to act wisely and humanely in a very fragmented society, where our knowledge base is far greater than our ability to deal with the knowledge we have.

Perhaps, then, we should be concentrating more on ways to recognize and attract those individuals, ways to allow them to function with freedom and respect for themselves and others in our classrooms. All our clamor about the perfect preservice program may be just another mistake in our overzealous and fragmented "too much knowledge and not enough ability to use it" syndrome. The Holmes Group has acknowledged this need for a new ecology of education, indi-

cating that the underlying belief behind their efforts is the importance of a lifetime of active learning for students and teachers. They are forming a coherent and long-term strategy for changing education in general (Lanier and Featherstone 1988, p. 20).

If the issue of how much time we should devote to a preservice professional development program were based on our desire to provide "an intimate and *prolonged* association between a mature, autonomous person and a growing one" (Bettelheim 1960, p. 98), I might be more passionate about the debate. However, as I hear it, the debate focuses too much on: Which courses must the student-teacher take to be "effective"? Which piece of knowledge or methodology is essential? Which of my precious courses (which ensure my importance and even my livelihood) must be part of this essential knowledge? That debate does not enliven the spirit, calling forth imagination and creativity; it wears the mind, saddens the heart, brings out the worst in the frightened and the insecure.

No, I must admit it: time is *not* the important issue here. There is a great danger in worrying too much about the wrong thing. It is the burden of fragmentation of knowledge we all carry. It sometimes blinds us to the larger issues. □

References

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