

# All Knowledge Is Personal Knowledge

GRETCHEN SCHWARZ

**A**rmed with 13 years public school experience, a doctoral student's extensive reading, fresh knowledge of research, and high ideals for improving teacher education, I discovered by accident where to begin. There was so much I wanted my English methods students to know before they began student teaching. I finally learned where to start, and it was not with my lectures, bibliography, or classroom tips—it was with how it feels to be a teacher.

The students spent a week peer teaching. They prepared a unit plan in groups and then presented one daily lesson from that unit for the class. The class and I would critique each presentation briefly. One young man did a

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lesson on Swift's *A Modest Proposal*. "John" proceeded to conduct a class discussion—only no one was discussing. He was his usual engaging self, asking probing questions and willing to accept a variety of interpretations. Most of the class had done their homework and read *A Modest Proposal*. The problem was that after a couple of people commented, no one was discussing. We could see John starting

to sweat as he moved about and kept trying to involve people. Silence. Finally, John went on to another activity.

The next day, John told me how unhappy he was with both my critique and his classmates' behavior. I decided his experience, the horror that comes from having a lesson go "belly up," was one we should explore more. I set aside the only time left, the last day of class. Magic! John expressed how angry he was at the class and how frustrated he felt alone at the front of the room. We reflected on why people didn't participate and what John could have done differently.

More students seemed engaged in this discussion than any other during the course, and more good teaching ideas emerged. Issues of student access to literature, curriculum relevance, and group discussion techniques finally took on real meaning. Anyone in the class could have been in John's shoes and might be some day. Theory was no longer inert information.

In the pursuit of professionalism and higher standards in teacher education, the human element must come first. If as Michael Polanyi claims, all knowledge is ultimately "personal knowledge," then even though the teacher education curriculum is carefully tied to the knowledge base in our fields, we may still have no effect on how teachers teach. Research, reading, and critical thinking are essential for future teachers. They must grasp the essential connection between the what's and how's of teaching and the feelings of being a teacher. □

<sup>1</sup>M. Polanyi, (1962), *Personal Knowledge: Towards Post-Critical Philosophy*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press).

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## IN THE DECEMBER/JANUARY ISSUE...

### "Whose Culture?"

The voices of traditionalists and multiculturalists can be heard on the pages of *Educational Leadership*, debating what to teach and how to reach all our nation's children.

- Sara Bullard sorts through the confusing rhetoric that makes teachers feel they must "do everything now."
- Diane Ravitch pleads that the ideals of a unique and nonexclusive American culture not be displaced in favor of singular ethnic loyalties.
- Molefi Kete Asante awakens educators to the need for cultural centeredness for children who too often have had to forsake their heritage to succeed in school.
- James A. Banks advocates an enlarged curriculum that embraces—in a truthful and complex way—both the Western canon and the contributions of people of color.

A host of other writers — among them, Eliot Wigginton, Nel Noddings, Asa Hilliard—speak of the overwhelming educational benefits of an up-close scrutiny of culture in the classroom.

From addressing women's perspectives, to facing up to the Holocaust, from writing the Baseline Essays to exploring students' home cultures—read about how educators are responding to the challenge of teaching culturally diverse students.

COMING IN FEBRUARY: "Transforming Leadership"—articles about shared leadership, leadership styles, visions and procedures for building more participation—and achieving educational goals.

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