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Teachers for all seasons 239

Lawrence Stenhouse

*Director, Centre for Applied Research in Education, University of East Anglia***Skill in forms**

I believe that teaching is a craft exercised in a context of meaning. By a *craft* I mean a set of learnable skills individuated by style. By a *context of meaning* I intend a setting which provides criteria for the judgement of the exercise of the craft. The context of teaching is *education*, and like most important contexts it is problematic and publicly controversial.

However, it is clear that the idea of education is sufficiently ambitious to preclude the possibility of perfect performances. No teaching is good enough: therefore good teaching is teaching towards the improvement of teaching. The implication is that all teaching ought to be seen as experimental.

In the sense that it has a high investment in personal skill in proportion to its investment in knowledge teaching is an art. A teacher can train himself by practice as a ballet dancer or a poet can. But teaching is a human art, not a medium art: its artefact is not manifest in palpable or visible form.

We can make too much of the distinction between science and art, and I don't want to attempt an analysis of the distinction here. I shall claim that art is experimental like teaching, that one element in the science/art continuum is the extent to which experiment is structured by theory or disciplined by critique, and that teaching lies at a middle point in that continuum. It is, at its best, an improvisation on a form, the form structured by theory and constituting a test of theory, the improvisation disciplined by the actors critique and in dialectic with public critique.

I am trying in these introductory paragraphs to hint that my view is that of a researcher aspiring to work systematically on the development of forms in collaboration with teachers as artists. This leads me to theory at the intersection of phenomenology, Marxism and symbolic interactionism. On this basis I am attempting to construct an educational 'science' based on history – rather than on sociology or ethnomethodology – and possibly then to ask what such a professional 'science' founded upon collaborative experiment of researchers and teachers has to offer to social science where the researcher is confronted, not by professionals, but by laymen.

I say this, knowing that I am writing for teacher educators, because I have found that when, in the past, I have adopted common language presentations they have been mistakenly seen as atheoretical. But also to indicate, as I move into common language with an assertion of the necessity for formal teaching, that I have not fallen under the shadow of the Colossus of Rhodes! I believe that in order for teaching to be held to be problematic, it must be formal; and that improvisation by teachers can only meet criteria of quality if it is improvisation on a form as opposed to an intuitive or child-centred formlessness.

I do not see *formal* and *informal* as distinguishing along the same lines as *traditional* and *progressive*; and I do believe that the formal/informal distinction is the more relevant to the quality of education – so long as the form is held to be problematic.

Let me characterize informal teaching. Informal teaching is based on the assumption that the personal qualities of the teacher, the sorts of things that the teacher believes, the knowledge at the teacher's disposal and the passion with which that knowledge is lived are the most important determinants of the quality of teaching. Teachers are born, not made; and intuition, sensitivity, inspiration are of the essence. All this is true in a sense, but it doesn't help much because it defines the great teacher, and in terms rather like those which might be used to define the great poet. Teacher education has to be seen on an analogy with the creative writing course, not of Coleridge, Wordsworth and their circle.

Again, informal teaching is based on the assumption that the relationship between teacher and taught is primarily a personal one, even a discipleship, rather than a contractual one. Responsiveness to and affection for children is the child-centred expression of this. The *right* of the teacher to get angry is the middle-of-the-road one. The defender of corporal punishment who claims to come out of love and care – and the claim is often made – is taking basically the same stance.

The authority of the older generation over the younger is being questioned and with it the authority of teacher over pupil. The informal teacher, dedicated to charisma rather than contract, is prepared to concede ground in claiming to be '*in* authority' so long as he can maintain his claim to be '*an* authority', the man of knowledge, the master of content. For he can use knowledge as control, finessing the residual potentials for confrontation by informalizing them – conning the kids.

My characterization is a mere thumbnail sketch and does less than justice to the pragmatic power of such a position. In teacher education acceptance of informality in this sense leads to the failure to relate the development of the student and the development of his skills; for the assumption is that techniques can be independently integrated by each student by virtue of the organizing power of his personality. Teaching becomes expression of self rather than enabling of others. And in the last analysis the quality of the person is taken to determine the quality of the teacher.

Formal teaching is based upon the assumption that teaching can be developed experimentally as an art in which the logic of content and the logic of form are in dialectic tension. It is the form – as in sonata or blues – which supports the development.

Pedagogy is the playing out of the improvisation within a form in the classroom. The critique of pedagogy is complex, and under discussion. My own view is that the central problem is the teaching of error as problems of control drag the teacher inexpert in his form off course.

This view implies that teaching is a professional skill in performance; and – within limits of course – teachers less than satisfactory as people, uncertain in their beliefs and fragmentary in their knowledge can practise their art to the great and lasting advantage of their pupils, while the rare exemplars of perfection who may be attracted into teaching will also profit, as teachers, from the discipline of form. Note too that the implication of experimental teaching within forms is that the adoption of styles of teaching should be experimental. I want to emphasize this. Were it not so common, I should find it incredible that teachers make up their minds how to teach on some *a priori* basis and then refuse to experiment with a range of forms.

In formal teaching, the relationship between teacher and taught is primarily a contractual one. It *can* be personal, but only if the personal tone of the relationship is not used to smoothe the way to slackness of contract. Anything which might lead a pupil to forgive you for failing to teach him more effectively is to be avoided. When rights and duties are being satisfied, a sure foundation has been laid. The teacher exercises his skill to the full advantage of the child he dislikes as of the child he likes.

In a reassessment of authority the formal teacher will prefer to stand by his position '*in* authority', giving him a legitimate responsibility for good order and disciplined learning in his classroom as the basis of his contract. He will be prepared to make realistic concessions with respect to his claims as '*an* authority' recognizing himself as one who does not represent public knowledge, but rather manages people's encounters with it. In that sense, he will stress his role as a man of learning rather than a man of knowledge, rather an informed seeker than an authority for the validation of knowledge.

What I should most like to see colleges achieving for students graduating in 1977 is that they should be equipped to develop progressive competence in several forms of teaching by laying the foundations of artistry and critique in each. In particular they should be able to meet specifications, and to analyse recordings of their own teaching in the light of sociology of knowledge and epistemology.

To meet such a demand teachers should have the confidence to work in contractual situations without requiring the psychological support of their pupils or looking to pupils for personal satisfactions more appropriately obtained in the adult world outside the school. Underlying such confidence is the security of competence in several forms of teaching. This it is which constitutes mastery of the craft.

Above all, every teacher should be able to teach in forms which embody contradictory premises. Nor can any teacher afford to discard or dismiss a form unless he can

demonstrate his competence in it. At the moment I believe most teachers are hemmed in by a narrow range of competence.

It would be wrong for me to try to lay down a prescription of forms. I'll restrict myself to examples.

A worth-while form for class instruction is readily available in Herbart and in such manuals as Pinesent's *Principles of Teaching-Method*.

A form of discovery-based learning can be drawn from Dewey and Bruner and Joseph Schwab and Elliott's Ford T Project.

A form of inquiry-based learning can be drawn from Charlotte Mason, and the Humanities Curriculum Project.

Other forms, with which I am not familiar, could be derived for the demonstration of skills, as in craft work or gymnastics; for teaching group performances, as in choirs; for organizing and supervizing fieldwork; for training in library work; for teaching reading; and so forth.

To some, I suppose, there will seem to be little new in what I am asking. But I don't myself possess the craft with which I'd like to equip teachers nor was I ever trained to it. I don't think I have encountered any teachers trained to the standards asked of professional actors or cricketers. And colleges and departments of education do not as a rule link logics and skills.

If you disagree, here is a trial exercise for you:

- (1) With a group of fifteen children teach and audio-record an instructional lesson and a discussion lesson with at least 60% teacher talk in the instructional lesson, and at most 20% teacher talk in the discussion lesson.
- (2) Justify your choice of material for each lesson on the grounds of fit between content and form.
- (3) Set out in each case the observation-linked criteria which you think should be adopted to criticize your performance.
- (4) Locate on tape or on transcript every point at which you did not meet your criteria, and analyse in each case the source of the lapse.

Teacher probationers who are able to perform this exercise are likely to be able to contribute more to the improvement of schooling because their choice of practice will not be constrained by the narrow boundaries of their confidence in their competence. Teacher power – to improve education – rests on teacher virtuosity.

If this seems to swim against the tide of reconsideration of the monotechnic function of teacher education courses, I'd argue that professional education can be general education. The quality of the teacher shapes the quality of the person.