

Part III

TEACHERS: THEIR PREPARATION AND PEDAGOGIES

CHAPTER 8

HAIL THE CONQUERING DOLPHIN: REFLECTIONS ON THE PRE-SERVICE PREPARATION OF SPECIAL CLASS TEACHERS

*Burton Blatt*¹

Boston University

Introduction

The problem of the pre-service preparation of special class teachers is not suffering from a scarcity of people writing and talking about it. However, in spite of the diligence being brought to bear on this area of concern, one finds it difficult to substantiate the notion that teachers are being prepared today in ways that are clearly distinctive in contrast with preparation practices twenty or more years ago. In this same regard, one must contrive in order to explicate differences in pedagogical practices with children between that period and the present one. To be sure, there are exciting—if equivocal—suggestions that cause us to hope that American Education is now on the periphery of a great unprecedented era of excellence.

It has been predicted that programmed instruction will reshape the schools, will reinvigorate education for all of our children, and will restandardize the model of the American Teacher. Such recent innovations as the ungraded school, team teaching, and specialized programs for children with special needs lend compelling support to the prediction of a Golden Era. For those who have been concerned with teacher preparation for five or more years, it is somewhat startling to realize that, within our schools of education, we now have a variety of psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists. Although it is not possible to speak with certainty on this matter, one has the notion that professional educators had some responsibility for the alliance with this new breed of "education professor" as well as for the introduction of more liberal and broadening curricula offerings in schools of education. Notwithstanding our considerable accomplishments and the promise of far more important ones, it does not appear inconsistent to mention that we have implied far more than we have proven, or even tested. There is, I believe, a rather serious discrepancy in quality between the carefully reported work of a few and the application of these research findings in both our public schools and our college preparing centers. Specifically, although we have introduced some

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interesting ideas into our public school curriculum and our schools of education are somewhat different from the model we were familiar with as students, things appear more the same today than they are different; interestingly, in matters of greatest importance, both things and times have changed very little. We continue to graduate and certify teachers who have spent four or five years presenting themselves to their professors as more or less ignorant people asking to be told the facts and theories associated with their lives and their teaching. They have not been presented—with sufficient regularity—with an environment that forces them to ask the question, "What do I know?" They have not been given frequent opportunity to develop skills in observing phenomena around them and in making distinctions between what one sees and what one infers. They have not been able to discover how much they can do for themselves, what they can teach themselves, and what they do know. Similarly, when these students enter the teaching profession, they often assume one of two positions: (1) I admire the type of education I received and will, therefore, educate the children in my class in the same manner; or (2) I must guarantee that children in my class will never experience the horrible education foisted upon me. In either case, the teacher must rely, unfortunately, almost solely upon his own educational experiences in order to develop whatever pedagogical principles he wishes to stand for. It is this superficially comprehended phenomenon that has delayed development of modern resources in education.

This paper represents some *personal convictions* relating to ways we may help university students appreciate the power of their gifts as human beings and the awesomeness of their responsibilities as teachers.

The Character of the Humanist

Within recent months, I have had opportunity to learn of several animal studies that are presently being conducted. One scientist is developing designs to observe the higher-order problem solving potentialities of monkeys. He has some interesting thoughts relative to the heretofore determined uneducability of monkeys in regard to: toilet training (monkeys have great difficulty in being toilet trained; this, on the other hand, is a simple task for dogs, cats and other domesticated animals); gentility (monkeys have been noted to have vicious tempers when in custody); and language (monkeys have not learned to communicate in meaningful ways with humans). This scientist suggests that the uneducability of monkeys may be due to: (1) the ways they are handled in experimental environments (locked in cages and isolated from intellectually stimulating experiences); and (2) the unsophisticated and weak interventional programs designed to educate these animals. He proposes experiments of the kind that: (1) provide monkeys, as soon after birth as possible, with a natural human-like home life; i.e., being a part of a loving and responsive family; and (2) provide them with a learning environment powerful enough to develop communication skills. He explains previous disappointing results obtained in teaching monkeys higher-order problem solving in much the same manner that earlier marasmus studies with humans described those conditions that gave rise to decrements in physical and intellectual behavior. Monkeys, it appears, need the love and companionship that humans crave. Without these, they wither. There have been reports purporting to assess the intellectual abilities of dolphins. Some scientists are convinced that the dolphin is a very intelligent creature and is capable of learning a system complex enough to communicate with humans.

I have had a compelling need to consider where the above mentioned experiments will lead to. Obviously, some scientists believe that certain of our animals can be taught to either speak—as we do—or, at least, learn a system for meaningful animal-human communication. Let us suppose this task is eventually accomplished by a species of animal. Let us further suppose that the dolphin learns a language that we understand or we learn a language that he understands. If this occurs, we may learn that the dolphin has a soul as well as a mind. If he has a soul, he has—or can find—a God. In that instant when animal demonstrates both mind and values, all animals are changed and all humanity is different.

My dilemma had been—what now do we call the dolphin? Certainly, we could no longer provide (or find) this creature with a "humanizing" theology and then, with one caprice or another, send him to test the existence of his maker. Certainly, our legal codes would require drastic revision. Until my absurd lack of logic was corrected by a student, I gave eloquent plea to a notion that when the dolphin demonstrates mind and values we must consider him "human-like." The student could not agree. He was unable to define what human is and, with refreshing honesty, he admitted he was not sure who is and is not human. However, he was sure that the dolphin is not and could never be human. With one burst of logic, he said, "The dolphin is dolphin." This is right. Even if the dolphin is found to be brighter than humans and even if the dolphin is found to be possessed with greater compassion, it would be the height of human presumption to say, "Now, you are human." If the dolphin is found to have greater intellectual and moral qualities than man, he would have less a presumption if he then said to man, "Now you are dolphin."

It may be that, within the human race, we have too long held to a criterion model of humanness. Those outside the model (e.g., the mentally retarded, the mentally ill, and the severely physically handicapped) have at varying times, both explicitly and implicitly been considered subhuman. Maybe it will be the dolphin to show us our error. Perhaps someday an animal, or a being from another world, will show us that all humanity is humanity. If we are not superior as a species, we may become prideful of the uniqueness rather than the contradistinctiveness of humanity. Maybe this is the philosophy of the humanist.

Most teachers enter training programs with strong humanist convictions, i.e., *man, his interests, and his development are dominant preoccupations* of university students preparing as teachers. I am not sure how we can best reinforce the exemplary convictions with which students confront us. However, I am distressed by the notion that the day of the humanist is over. I am distressed by the cynicism, within our literature and our universities, that begrudges the humanism our students come to us with. The teacher is first a humanist; for whatever reasons—wholly altruistic or not—his central concern is with people.

Hail to the conquering dolphin. But, it has also been said that only man has man's word and the word is man.

The Paradox of the Teacher as an Artist

Our literature abounds with terminology referring to the "art of teaching" and the "teacher as an artist." Subsumed here is the concept that the process of teaching requires pedagogical artistry—equally requiring scientific inquiry

—and the teacher is an artist as well as a scientist, applied psychologist and technician. Obviously, all teachers—to one degree or another—apply principles of psychology to the ways they cope with an understanding of children; as a generality, teachers are prepared to use certain approved techniques in presenting reading, music, social skills, and other curricula materials. Certain teachers, with unusual preparation and more than unusual insights and motivation, both appreciate and implement the “scientific method” in appraising children’s capabilities and in searching for answers to puzzling questions. Certainly, a strong and eloquent case can be presented for illuminating and, thus, specifying the image of the teacher as a scientist, as an applied psychologist, and as a technician (or as imparter of facts and a developer of skills).

However, on the one hand, we are dealing with tools—psychological insights and materials, methods for teaching, principles for investigation—and on the other hand we are dealing with what one is engaged in, the artistry of teaching. The paradox here is plain. We may not talk about the teacher as an artist for the teacher is an artist; teaching is art. We run the risk of pedantry when we define commonly used words for literate audiences. However, although commonly used, the word “artist” is much abused in our society. Amateur cooks have been called artists; and so, too, are our local athletes. The problem of communicating an understanding of this term becomes infinitely complex when we realize that there are literally no synonyms for art, the product of the artist. Therefore, we apply analogical methods to describe what we judge art to be and the commitment we make to it. Art involves aesthetics, beauty, skills. It requires the systematic use of means to attain some end. These are definitions one can find in a dictionary; however, all art has one great, vaguely discussed objective. All art requires both communication and knowing. Put another way, to discuss the proposition that the teacher is an artist, we might better discuss the notion that the artist is a teacher. I fail to see the fine distinction between Sinclair Lewis, the artist, and Sinclair Lewis, the teacher, in much the same way as I fail to see the fine distinction between John Dewey, the teacher, and John Dewey, the artist. Both men were creative rather than mechanical; both communicated wisdom; both caused men to be inspired, to learn, to seek intellectual adventures, and to develop as human beings. None could place a monetary value on their contributions; yet, these were priceless. There was no yardstick to measure their achievements and no rule to give them just recompense. There was—and is—controversy relative to their contributions.

Great artists have several things in common: an early and strong identification with a master; a breaking away to find one’s own medium and destiny; development of self-discipline, control, original style; a lifetime struggle to understand oneself as the creator of the product and as a person being influenced by his own creation. The great teacher, especially concerned with the process of learning and change, must struggle with an understanding of himself as learner. He must develop his own—not an imitative—style; he must work out his own means to comprehend and control his skills and to express his art.

It is painfully difficult to comprehend teaching in the above terms because this is a transitory art. Artistry transpires during the teaching-learning moment, never to reappear in quite the same way, impossible to examine naturally in retrospect, resulting in greatness for the moment not the ages. However, this unique art, teaching, claims its strongest affinity with all other art forms in the origin of the creativity—within the mind of a man. Other

gerat creative triumphs—in biology, chemistry, mathematics, and physics—are predicated upon the discovery of phenomena or relationships. The creative scientist discovers an interaction. Regardless of the brilliance or importance of his discovery, if he did not make it it would be waiting for others to comprehend, if not in this millenium then the next one. Art, however mediocre, has its genesis in the mind, is not awaiting discovery as was “gravity” and “round world,” and is virtually impossible to accidentally replicate.

There are much too many things that are common, to both the great teacher and any other great artist, things that rule out the inference of coincidental relationship. The great burdens that have beset us in this age of merit ratings and “promotional opportunities” may have antecedents strikingly similar—in form if not content—to those that give rise to debates concerning the worthiness of a particular sculptor or musician. Who knows how to prepare an artist? At this point, maybe we have made some progress in being able to say that the teacher is one.

The Teacher as a Scientist

It has been said that those qualities that make the human being a great creative force, an artist, make him a very poor measuring instrument. Artistry characterizes teaching; science measures our effectiveness and gives us principles and tools to improve our skills. Facts, laws, the phenomena of change in an environment are all the concern of science. Teachers must be trained to observe, to discover that what they observe and what they infer must be held separate or an already complex task becomes completely unmanageable. The processes of observation and inference are strongly affected by the prejudices a teacher brings to the observational task. Simply, the task of preparing the teacher as a scientist concerns itself with helping the teacher understand his prejudices so he may deal with them more effectively. There are many examples that can describe the universality of teacher prejudice. In Special Education, there are strong currents that demand the integration of mentally retarded children into regular classes. In discussing this question with a group of my students, all felt that, under all circumstances, mentally retarded children should be integrated into the regular grades; i.e., for them, this was an invariable principle—or should we say prejudice. Some students described model integration programs in their schools. One, who is a principal of a typical school, informed us that the children in his school, who are mentally retarded, are placed in special classes. These children are integrated into as many regular classes as possible. When I questioned him about the reason for the integration, he informed us that integration is desirable. In order to strengthen his argument, he further told us that children not in a special class—i.e., children from the regular grades—are sometimes placed in the special class for special periods of help. There are several puzzling aspects to this situation. Doesn’t it seem strange that we identify and diagnose certain children to be in need of special help, place them in special classes, and then, after they are placed in the special program and labelled as mentally retarded, we replace them into the regular grades. On the other hand, there are children from the regular grades who seem to be in need of, from the standpoint of time, as much special class work as do the special class children. The question to be asked is, “Why is one group considered mentally retarded and not the other?” Another question we may ask is, “What is the special significance in placing children in regular class environments?” A more sinister question

could concern itself with the types of regular class assignments afforded these children. My somewhat informal survey discloses that these children are placed, not in classes that they necessarily need, but in situations that will give guarantee of a passing grade because either the teacher is sympathetic and will modify things for these special class children or the class does not require academic competencies of the kind that cause difficulties for the mentally retarded. To exemplify my concern with a rather absurd analogy, it would be fair to say that we can choose a young adult who is a former special class student and place him in any number of university programs. Especially on the graduate level, we could, with proper information, find ten courses that are offered where the instructor does not require either student assignments or a final examination (we in no way imply that courses of this type are to be discouraged for mature and superior students). We could predict that our non-academic young adult stands a fair chance of earning a Master's Degree in any number of fields. What has been accomplished? To return to our discussion on teacher prejudice, the above hypothetical situation is a clear example of what often occurs when one has strong prejudice—either for “good” or “evil”—without understanding the nature of his prejudice and how to deal with it.

Another example of teacher prejudice revolves around dealing with a child who has a problem with a teacher. It is rare when we test the hypothesis that there is, at least, some possibility that the teacher is partly to blame. In the physical sciences, when A matter combines with B matter in a way to produce a specific reaction, unless both A and B are tested, it is not possible to determine whether A or B or the combination of both are needed to produce the reaction. The label “teacher” denotes being correct at all times. “Children” are sometimes correct and sometimes incorrect. In dealings between teachers and children, the latter are correct only insofar as they are in agreement with teachers. The problem of labelling certain children and then behaving toward them in a way that is guaranteed to make the label come true has long been a concern of special educators and may be designated as the “self-fulfilling prophecy phenomenon.” Heisenberg said this another way, “The better one defines the position, the more indefinite the momentum becomes, and vice versa. . . .” It almost seems as if, when we label a child as being mentally retarded, we grant ourselves the privilege of explaining every aspect of his behavior as being directly related to and caused by the mental retardation. To put this another way, the prejudices we have about certain individuals—as reflected in our labels of them—are calculated to change both our behavior toward them (in contrast to our behavior toward individuals not so labelled) and the individuals themselves. Quite obviously, the student of education who is not a trained and astute observer cannot function as a scientist; basic to all science is the understanding and control of one's prejudices.

Recommendation

There are several crucial problems, related to the preparation of the teacher in the ways we have discussed, that deserve our most serious attention. However, time does not permit us to do more than mention them here. Many teachers have undeveloped skills in educating around defects and in remedying that which is remediable. Many teachers have no clear notion of the goals they are seeking; and the most important thing about any matter is the idea—without the idea we do nothing; with it, man is in control and can progress.

I am concerned about our inability to distinguish between the purposes and procedures of research and the responsibilities and tasks implicit in serving children. I am sensitive to the inefficiency and wastefulness of conventional student teaching models. These are problems that are amenable to solution or, at least, better understanding.

My recommendation is not one that will “save” American Education. However, our experiences lead us to believe that it is a fruitful beginning in coming to grips with the real issues involved in preparing teachers. Several years ago, we developed a seminar for teachers preparing to work with children having special needs (1962). In brief, we provided students with the opportunity to observe children—and each other—over a long period of time for the purpose of developing their skills in observing human behavior and in formulating relevant inferences. It seems appropriate, at this time, to describe something about the University group we have this year. Our clinic is located on the ground floor of a building in a state school for the mentally retarded. All of our students are preparing for professional work with retarded children. We have several classrooms, two with observation rooms containing one-way vision and monitoring sound. At the first meeting of the group in the fall of 1962, we were confronted with approximately 20 students who let it be known that they were there to learn how to understand and teach the mentally retarded. Our first remarks to them were:

As you know, each time we meet, you may have the opportunity to observe a class of young children. It isn't possible to observe a class or any social gathering for even a few minutes without questions popping into your mind or without coming to some sort of a conclusion or opinion. The one obligation which you have is to bring into the open reactions to any observation. To the extent that you can feel free to articulate your reactions, you and the rest of us will learn from each other. One of the things you must guard against is keeping your ideas, questions, and opinions to yourself because you do not know whether they are right or wrong. If you do remain silent you, of course, increase the chances that you will be unable to evaluate your reactions other than in a subjective, private manner. This is an opportunity to learn, by which we mean an opportunity to change your ways of thinking and acting. If you do not actively participate in this market-place of ideas, you will be short-changing yourself. At this moment, you probably look upon your instructors (we have four instructors for this clinic) as “experts” with whom it would be foolhardy for you to disagree. We do not view ourselves in this way, and we hope it will not be too long before you see that we do not observe everything, and that we will be disagreeing with each other. Because we have had more experience than you should not intimidate you into automatically mistrusting or devaluating your reactions.

There may be times when we do not wish to observe children. You will soon realize that you share in both the substance (content) and the physical management of this seminar. It is your responsibility as well as ours to provide a direction for this seminar.

From the first day, and for several weeks thereafter, the students were very anxious to know more about these “mentally retarded” children. They wanted to review the case records on each child and they wanted us to tell them the cause of the retardation. We asked that they observe the children and

discuss questions relative to the behavior of these children and their inferences leading to a designation of "mental retardation." In time, these students convinced themselves (quite accurately) that these were, in fact, not mentally retarded children (these youngsters are participating in a research project designed to study the effects of special education interventions to the prevention of learning difficulties of so-called culturally deprived otherwise typical children). Our students began to realize that the processes of observation and inference are a way of investigation that increases greatly the scope and insight of the teacher prepared with these skills. During the course of the school year, our University students observed and dealt with almost every major problem confronting all who work in the behavioral sciences. As often as not, they did not observe children during a particular session. There was so much time needed to deal with one's own prejudices, with one's need for dependence on the instructors, with one's habit—nurtured during many years of formal schooling—of passively waiting to be taught. At mid-year, an interesting situation presented itself. A student, through charm and persistence, convinced us that she should enter the seminar at mid-year. During her first session with us, she asked a question about "the mentally retarded children in the classroom" (in fairness, one would expect to find mentally retarded children in a classroom in a state school for the mentally retarded). Immediately, a number of students said to her, "Why do you say these children are mentally retarded?" At that point, both students and instructors realized that something very significant had taken place during the preceding months.

This section is located under the heading, *Recommendation*. I hesitated in using so strong a term to describe our experiences in this seminar. At this time, we have not sought evidence of the kind that can be labelled "research" to validate the efficacy of our approach. However, this experience, as described in our book and but briefly touched upon here, has been a great learning adventure for our students and, in many ways especially, for us. We have rediscovered—but so much more clearly now—that teaching requires sustained intellectual discipline, continuous self-evaluation, control of one's prejudices, sheer undefinable artistry, and the humanism that we all must have. As one seminar student so sensitively put it, "We are wrestling here with our own retardation to cope, ultimately, with the retardation of others."

Reference

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