

Making Teaching Effective

E. Grant Moody

It has been said that the glory of God is intelligence. It is with this glorious commodity that the teacher works in inspiring and informing students — the two "I's" of teaching. Teaching, like love, is "a many splendored thing" involving not only the mastery of subject matter but also complex interpersonal relationships. The teacher finds himself interrelating not only with students currently in the classroom but with those who have gone on into the working field. He also relates to his peers, to the public, and, finally, he must relate happily with himself, saying with Shakespear, "To thine own self be true." Realizing the worthwhile contribution to the good of society that teaching can accomplish, I chose my profession.

A Primary Concern

My primary concern is the student-teacher relationship. The teacher must relate with a positive, encouraging attitude to his students, recognizing and reinforcing the uniqueness and potential each possesses. To do this, he must have a genuine concern for his students and be available for help in their learning, self-evaluation, and growth process. It is generally accepted that the teacher has not taught until the student has learned. Hence, at the outset of any course of study, the student should understand the contents of the course and what is expected of him in the performance and level of mastery, and be directed to relevant data to accomplish the specified goals. The teacher must endeavor to place within the grasp of each student pertinent information on the course materials, making it understandable, providing techniques for learning, such as special problems, visuals, and hands-on experiences. The student learns best when he is involved. When a student needs a better grasp of a concept that is basic to understanding the coursework, the qualified teacher will provide outside help through a personal review of the material with the student, supplementing discussion with auto-tutorial or other materials the teacher has developed. The student must then be motivated and inspired to master the lessons by a teacher who is enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and proficient in his work. Students recognize quickly any lack of interest and/or expertise.

The college student must often be helped to see the real need for learning to solve problems, for learning subject matter and its application to the farm, business, and life, rather than for just getting information to "pass a

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test." We must help the student realize that the world is changing rapidly and that concepts and procedures accepted today are often superseded by advanced knowledge and technology tomorrow. Hence, the value of learning how to think and find solutions.

The progress of the student must be evaluated by appropriate testing procedures that not only supply data for just and equitable grading but emphasize the important aspects of the subject matter, while challenging the student to reach levels of intellectual achievement not previously considered possible. This procedure is enhanced by advising students of grading procedures at the outset of the course and involving them in their own evaluation.

The effectiveness of a teacher as a "learning facilitator" can often be measured by the effect he has on his students after they have left his classroom. The relevance of his teaching becomes more apparent after a few years of testing in the "real" world. At the same time, the teacher can greatly benefit from the feedback resulting from continued contact with students after graduation.

The dedicated teacher will identify and then continually strive for improvement in the areas wherein he might be lacking, keeping himself current both in his subject matter and teaching techniques. Innovative ways of presenting material and stimulating its mastery by students are constantly being developed. He has no reluctance to having his teaching evaluated by students, peers, and administrators. He would expect, however, that this evaluation be based on criteria to which he would agree and that it be administered and interpreted in a competent and fair manner. Evaluation of a teacher by his peers is valuable because the caliber of a man's mind and work can best be judged by others trained in his profession.

In addition to other considerations, introspection and self-study of one's identity will help pinpoint and accentuate those qualities in himself that make for effective teaching. One must feel at ease with himself, recognizing that while he may not have perfect understanding and unlimited capacities, he does possess knowledge and skills that qualify him for his work, and that these capacities can be enlarged.

The Search

The effective teacher is dedicated to the search for truth and to the expanding knowledge of his particular field and encourages the similar dedication of his colleagues. Research in a scholarly discipline with its study and publications can contribute significantly to teaching effectiveness; however the teacher must remem-

ber to give top priority to his association with students. Too often this is reversed; the person in the classroom considers himself having been hired first as a professional within his discipline and only secondarily, if at all, as a teacher.

The teacher who possesses a high degree of professional aspiration is also actively participating in his professional organizations. Presenting papers, being involved in committee work, and learning from these experiences with his peers improves both the organization and the teacher's own professional growth.

The college teacher is a member of a faculty, and thus has a vital concern with matters of institutional governance that might affect the educational process. Since the faculty is responsible for implementing the institution's educational programs and goals, the individual teacher must be involved in their development.

We know that the teacher can contribute to the shaping of minds and building integrity and character in society's future citizens. Hence, I view the teacher's role as including the need to help the public understand that the educational process and the institution can and should contribute to the wholesome ongoing and improvement of civilized society — that they can be positive factors in preserving worthy social values.

The college teacher is increasingly being challenged to account for his stewardship in the classroom. Needed is a definition of competency that is widely understood and accepted by both the teaching profession and the general public. It is the responsibility of the teaching profession to devise, articulate, and disseminate such a definition. It then behooves the profession to set reasonable standards of both pedagogical and ethical performance for its members and to expect that those standards be met. In its quest for excellence and credibility, any profession must guard against the unqualified, non-performer, and malfasant.

The teacher must defend by his responsible professionalism those essential conditions of excellent teaching — academic freedom and tenure. He needs to perform in an atmosphere of trust and respect, being free to pursue truth in his area of expertise. To do this most effectively, the teacher must have stability of employment and the assurance that he will not be deprived of his means of livelihood because of his discovery and/or espousal of a concept that his training and understanding dictate is true, but which might not be highly popular with segments of the general public at any point in time.

My philosophy of teaching involves not only the teaching of students in the classroom, but includes extending the teacher's influence to his peers, his discipline, the institution, and the public good, as well.

For me, the exhilarating and challenging contact with students provides the greatest personal fulfillment and reward. I take my teaching seriously, viewing it as an activity to be pursued and enjoyed.

LEAD

Leadership Education/ Action Development

James T. Horner

Deans and directors of Agricultural Colleges, along with their faculties have engaged in much discussion about a major concern of people who employ our graduates. The concern often expressed is, "The graduates we hire are unable to relate and to communicate effectively. They do not understand decision making in the 'real world' of business. Graduates from colleges and schools of agriculture should certainly be able to communicate to the public the profound and overriding impact that agriculture has on each phase of our existence in the United States and around the world."

America is a leader in agriculture for a variety of reasons — one is its millions of capable, well-educated farmers and ranchers. Their abilities in agricultural production and management have been honed to a sharp edge. Many display outstanding qualities of leadership, which have not been nurtured or even recognized. Few have been challenged to consider the world beyond the farm and ranch gate and its need for effective decision-makers, spokesmen, and leaders.

Leadership development was a major topic at the 1981 RICOP meeting. Also, a number of institutions have recently announced one or more "leadership" courses. One thing more is needed — a FOLLOW-UP program for the development of new leadership. It is perhaps the most urgent need of agriculture for the 1980's and beyond. One half of the U.S. producers were lost in a generation. In 1940 there were 30 million farmers. Now there are fewer than 8 million.

A year ago a group of outstanding Nebraska farmers, ranchers, and educators formed a non-profit corporation called the Nebraska Agricultural Leadership Council. The Council, in turn, developed LEAD (Leadership Education/Action Development). Its primary mission is to enhance the quality of rural and agricultural life in Nebraska through the development of latent leadership potential of young agriculturalists, while allowing them to continue to manage their farming or agribusiness operations.

This development is being accomplished through a series of intensive leadership seminars. Specifically, 30 young Nebraska agriculturalists, ages 25 to 40, are selected each year to participate in a two-year intensive continuing education program. Three-fourths of the participants are men and women engaged in production agriculture.

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