

"The Teacher and Teaching"

K. E. Gardner
University of Illinois

Mr. Gardner is Director of Resident Instruction, College of Agriculture, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Never in the history of higher education have the barbs and criticisms concerning teaching flown about the head of administrators and teachers as they have recently. Here and there, too, some targets have been hit. It behooves all of us to take note and to take action.

Obviously, the real objective of a University is to induce "learning" and "teaching" is one of the means to this end. Since this article is addressed primarily to teachers it will apply itself principally to teaching although in the context of "guided learning."

If I were to enumerate the attributes of a good teacher, I would list at least the following:

1. Knowledge and understanding of his subject. Only the true student, the sincere scholar of a subject, can be a great or even an acceptable teacher. This calls for thorough dedication to the everlasting search for more and more information about the subject taught and in addition, more understanding of it. It is absolutely essential that the teacher be "current" on his subject since he just cannot lecture from notes that are even a year old. The great Indian philosopher, Rabindranath Tagore, has put it quite aptly, "A teacher can never truly teach unless he is still learning himself. A lamp can never light another lamp unless it continues to burn its own flame. The teacher who has come to the end of his subject, who has no living traffic with his knowledge but merely repeats his lessons to his students, can only load their minds; he cannot quicken them. Truth not only must inform but must inspire. If the inspiration dies out and the information only accumulates, then truth loses its infinity." Only one who has worked in certain Indian colleges, can appreciate the appropriateness of this urgent instruction of Tagore.

2. Enthusiasm about his subject. A good teacher likes the subject he teaches and he is enthusiastic about explaining it to anyone who wishes to learn about it. Usually, his enthusiasm is contagious. Of course, the good teacher likes to teach and he feels that his is the most important job in the world.

3. Interest in students. The good teacher likes students and he likes to see them learn. He takes time in class and out of class to explain the aspects of his subject which are difficult for certain individual students to comprehend. He has patience with students and does not berate them when they have difficulty learning. He knows that learning proceeds at varying rates among students and at varying rates within the individual student, depending upon the topic.

4. A knowledge of teaching skills. There are a number of techniques and arts and skills which contribute to good teaching. For example, the good teacher has clarity of expression and students are not left in doubt as to the meaning of what has been said. Such a teacher speaks clearly and forcefully enough to be heard and understood and he speaks to the class and not to the blackboard and maps. His grammar must be exemplary and he should use language which encourages learning. The teacher should be alert enough to observe whether he is teaching the subject at a level too far advanced for the understanding of the students. He must "pitch it" at their height. The instructor must be alert and perceptive so as to observe dishonesty, *undue absences* from class, time-wasting in the laboratory, or inattention. He must be fair and play no favoritism. His examinations will be composed of questions and problems which are clearly stated and representative of the material he has stressed in the lectures, in the laboratories, and in reading assignments. He also studies the use of a number of techniques for teaching such as the less formal

seminar approach, the auto-tutorial laboratory, the use of visuals of all types and the reinforcement and enrichment of learning, possible through the use of study carrels equipped with sound tapes, films, and slides.

He will admit that there is something to educational psychology and that we do need to know what motivates students to want to learn. He will appreciate the need for studying measurement of student learning.

5. Broad interests and an engaging personality. The most effective teacher is often a broad-gauged individual who is not provincial or narrow in his experiences and in his interests. He is well read and knows the relationship of his specific discipline to the needs of society. Usually, he is personable and likeable, with a fine sense of humor, and is pleasing and congenial.

6. Demanding. A thorough teacher demands that each student put forth his best effort and such a teacher is not satisfied with poor performance on the part of the student or on his own part. He drives himself without mercy to improve his own teaching. No lecture, discussion, or examination ever satisfies him and he continually evaluates his own teaching and seeks to learn what his students and his superiors think of his work.

7. Encourages and motivates. Every learner needs encouragement. A compliment on a term paper or examination paper, when sufficiently earned, stimulates a student. Sarcastic, or cutting comments tend to discourage as do unfair and unnecessarily severe cuts in grading. The teacher needs to comprehend that students and teachers are not adversaries but cooperators in an educational experience.

I think a college encourages good teaching when it provides the best possible facilities within the financial limitations of the institution and when it makes certain that the teacher has time to prepare properly for his teaching function. Good teaching requires time and it requires advance preparation.

Good teaching is most likely to result when good teaching is properly rewarded. This reward can come about in a number of ways. The most practical acknowledgement of good teaching is via promotion and pay increase. Another more subtle reward is the development of the esteem of students and faculty alike. The high regard of former students and the excellence of the ratings given by present students — these are also rewards.

The longer we are in the teaching game, the more we may begin to suspect that teaching effectiveness does not necessarily tend to improve materially with experience. It seems likely that any increase in skills and professional competence resulting from maturity and experience tends to be offset by a loss of enthusiasm. There is often an increased preoccupation by the teacher with other tasks or interests that accumulate like barnacles as the faculty member continues his service to his institution. A formerly outstanding instructor may not fully realize how much he has been neglecting his teaching task until he is shocked by something such as a published teacher rating report. It takes time, lots of it, to prepare for a 50-minute lecture and our blessing falls on those professors who put their prime duty first.

Ultimately, the job of the teacher and the ultimate goal of the entire educational system is, as John Gardner put it, "... to shift to the individual the burden of pursuing his own education." We, as teachers can assist this process by the kind of teaching we provide — not all spoon-feeding.

The Teachers' Day is Dawning

B. Rodney Bertramson
Washington State University

Mr. Bertramson is Director of Resident Instruction, College of Agriculture, Washington State University, Pullman, Washington. This article is based upon experience with mandatory student evaluation, class visitations, and other teaching activities at WSU College of Agriculture.

The art of conducting effective research has long been recognized; and those highly skilled have been richly rewarded by prestige, huge grants, widespread publicity of their accomplishments, travel to national and international conferences on research, meritorious awards, and substantial salaries.