

The Teachers' Day is Dawning

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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.

The art of teaching effectively has received less spectacular rewards. Why? Is it because teaching is less important? Is it because teaching is so much more difficult to evaluate? The answer to both questions is No.

Education, guided and promoted by effective teaching, is the very foundation of all those activities in which our society excels – whether it be research, communications, industry, or business. What could be more important?

Granted, art is difficult to evaluate. But what makes the art of research easier to evaluate than the art of teaching? The accepted reply is that publications are easier to evaluate, as a measure of effective research, than any product of the teaching effort. But is this **really** so? The number of publication is not a criterion of research competency. Ask the editor of any research journal about the ease of evaluating journal articles. He may burden you with the problem of being a tight-rope walker between the reviewers on one hand and the authors on the other. Naturally, the authors think highly of their product. Some of the reviewers may say the manuscript is good. Others will be critical – often very critical. And when the battle is over and the manuscript – in a greatly altered form – finally receives the blessing of approval, the authors may question either the judgement of their reviewers or whether publications are, after all, worth all the struggle. The research authors have thus been tested and evaluated. Then comes the testing and evaluation by the journal readers who may publish their criticisms in subsequent journal articles.

Everything a researcher does is subject to scrutiny and challenge. His laboratory must always bear a welcome sign for any colleague to enter, examine the procedures, and stop to argue the logic of the approach toward the solution of any problem. In other words, a researcher is constantly being challenged and evaluated by his peers and his administrators.

By contrast, teachers prior to World War II enjoyed a sheltered existence – like monks of the Middle Ages. In the classroom the teacher reigned supreme, his teaching a rather well guarded secret from his colleagues and administrators. Students were a captive audience – not likely to make much complaint.

But today things are changing. Students are clamoring for a voice in the kind of subject matter to be presented and a voice in evaluating the art of teaching. Instructors, frustrated by the better rewards of their research colleagues, are asking similar

rewards for equal merit. Administrators and legislators, pressed by the urgent need for good teachers, are eager to oblige with appropriate rewards if merit differentials can be established. National agencies are undertaking projects to improve and upgrade course subject matter, and to familiarize teachers with the complex electronic and other technological aids that are available. Seminars and workshops on a regional and national scale are being organized to quicken the interest of teachers in further developing their capabilities and competencies in the art of teaching.

While college teachers in agriculture are still being employed without any training in how to teach, or any understanding of how students learn and how to involve and motivate them, there is a growing consciousness of inadequacy on the part of teachers who lack this background of training and experience. And graduate students aspiring to become college teachers are encouraged to obtain this special training along with their subject matter training.

Teachers are becoming objective about their competencies in the art of teaching just as their research colleagues did with their research competencies several decades ago. Progressive teachers, bent on the evaluation of excellence in teaching, are willing to submit to mandatory student evaluations as one measure of excellence. They recognize that only through student evaluations of their teaching can they improve. Such teachers welcome visits to their classes by colleagues, department chairmen, and deans of instruction. They are concerned about their excellence and about the art of teaching – how to advance teaching into the modern day on a par with the advances in research. Just as researchers seek team efforts toward solutions of their problems, college teachers are beginning to bring their problems out into the light of day for group consideration and action. Likewise, the team approach to teaching certain courses is now proving effective where well coordinated into a team effort.

Researchers have long since admitted their weaknesses and limitations. They have been amply rewarded for their objectivity. Now the college teachers' day is dawning. It's high time to abandon false modesties, admit there are no perfect teachers – as there are no perfect researchers – and get on with the most exciting and challenging endeavor of our times – striving for excellence in the art of teaching that will involve and motivate students.