

Roll Call of Individual Teacher Characteristics

Profile of An Outstanding Teacher

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One of the primary objectives of NACTA is the improvement of instruction at the college level. In the pursuit of this goal, much thought is being directed to the problems of devising effective methods of evaluating teachers and teaching and extending recognition to those individuals who have demonstrated proficiency and skill in this field.

Teacher evaluation, admittedly, is a complex problem, fraught with many inherent dangers; but it must be faced squarely by educators and administrators if we are to merit public confidence and support. Our failure to recognize and reward good teaching has resulted in a serious shortage of the product. In many instances, where teacher evaluation has been attempted, much emphasis has been placed on superficial or irrelevant criteria such as number of publications, membership in professional societies and amount of research conducted. While these activities may enhance the reputation of the institution and may make valuable contributions to education in general, they bear little relationship to actual accomplishment in terms of teacher-student relationship.

By traditional methods of evaluation, the quality of the product is one of the most reliable standards of comparison. In the area of education, the accomplishments and opinions of former students would appear to be one of the most relevant and accurate sources of information for teacher evaluation. The valid objection that this information is often difficult to obtain, is not sufficient reason to discard completely this valuable tool.

This article was prompted by the desire of a former student to give broader recognition to a teacher of agriculture who is already well known in his own area as an outstanding teacher. An attempt will be made to enumerate some characteristics which appear to be associated with or responsible for his excellence as a teacher.

Mr. O. A. Childs has been Head of the Department of Agriculture at Southern State College, Magnolia, Arkansas, for twenty-five years. By criteria sometimes used, he might rate poorly as a teacher since he conducts no research, belongs to no national professional societies and does not write for publication. However, he is well known in the field of agriculture throughout his state and in neighboring states. Several universities actively compete for students from his department when they complete the two-year curriculum in agriculture offered at Southern State. Although no accurate figures are available, it is commonly conceded that a higher percentage of

students from the Agriculture Department eventually earn graduate degrees than from any other department in the college.

The recognition accorded Childs as an outstanding teacher is due primarily to the high regard that his former students have for him. His advice is still sought many years after graduation by his ex-students who subsequently may have attended several other colleges. During the past twenty years, most of the faculty members in the Agriculture Department have been former students who passed up higher salaries to come back to the department. In an area of declining agricultural activity, and during a period when agricultural enrollment has been declining in many colleges, enrollment in agriculture at Southern State has shown a steady and substantial growth. No financial encouragement is offered students other than working scholarships; yet many boys decline scholarship grants from other colleges and enroll at Southern State.

While it is not being suggested that the same characteristics are common to all effective teachers, it may be useful to examine some of the factors which seem to be associated with this particular outstanding teacher.

Perhaps in the forefront of Childs' qualities as a teacher is his genuine interest in the total welfare of his students. No doubt most teachers would claim an interest in the student's welfare; but the essential factor is that the student must recognize and feel assured of that interest. In many instances, the loyalty and respect which students and former students have for Childs develop from a feeling that it was he who gave them an important push in the right direction; motivation to continue their education, some sound advice or a small measure of selfconfidence, at a critical time during their freshman or sophomore years.

His classroom presentation is simple and direct, designed for maximum retention rather than maximum saturation. Frequent examples drawn from areas familiar to the student help relate theory to practice. Laboratory classes are conducted under a philosophy that laboratory exercises may be the most effective method of teaching or a total waste of time depending on the care with which they are selected and the manner in which they are conducted.

The six hundred acre, commercial type farm

operation at Southern State is effectively used as a teaching facility. Most of the labor is supplied by students with the assistance of only two regular employees. The efficient manner in which the farm is operated gives the student confidence that the technical information he receives in the classroom is practical and up-to-date. Confidence in the knowledge and ability of the teacher is a strong motivating force.

With characteristic modesty, Childs suggests

that the favorable reaction to his program is due mainly to the benefits of the small college situation where closer supervision and better counseling are possible. However, the same situation in other places has not always resulted in the same desirable teacher-student relationships. The obvious conclusion is that the attitude, knowledge of subject matter, ability, and personal characteristics of the individual teacher are primarily responsible for the success or failure of the teaching process.

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Tribute to A Dedicated Teacher

Numerous teachers taught me during my thirty-odd years of formalized schooling. In my opinion, many of these teachers were excellent ones; others were mediocre, and some much below the average. It was my good fortune throughout my educational training to have individuals as teachers who were, in my opinion, adequately versed in subject matter content; yet, many of them failed to communicate that knowledge to me and to other members of the class.

It doubtless is true that teaching cannot be measured quantitatively; and furthermore, all teachers cannot be shaped in the same mold. The differences in personalities of individual teachers, different methods of approaches to teaching, and different subject matter areas all telescope to make teacher evaluation most difficult. However, each teacher, in his own manner, should be able to stimulate intellectual curiosity and love of learning in his students.

Since my earliest remembrance, it has been my desire to be a good student. I have always put forth a conscientious effort to learn, but fully recognizing that I possessed some built-in limitations for which the teacher could not be held responsible.

Many qualities bear directly upon distinguished teaching regardless of whether it be university teaching or teaching at the elementary or secondary levels. Much has been written about the qualities which characterize good teaching. Many of them are intangible qualities that tend

to defy measurement and yet they do much to separate the good from the mediocre teacher.

The teacher that I best recall who truly exemplified the art of teaching was my high school teacher of English and American literature. At that time she was known for her excellence as a teacher of secondary classes and since then has carried that reputation on with her into college teaching.

This teacher knew her subject matter, enjoyed it, and was able to communicate this enthusiasm to each of her students. She read many of the literary classics to us during the scheduled class hours. Whether she was reading from Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton or Tennyson, her students felt that the author himself had been recalled and the period in history which he represented had moved back into the present. She required that we memorized many lines of poetry and many passages from various Shakespearian plays. These memory assignments were made after her thorough and enthusiastic presentations. It made the memory task easy then, and furthermore, I have been able to retain and quote from memory most of the poetry and prose passages which she required us to learn.

The spiritual values which I have already received from this bit of learning are immeasurable, and with the passing of more years, I'm sure these values will continue to increase in meaningfulness. This teacher was one of the few who attempted to explain to me that all knowledge was inter-related and that one's reading should cover all the corners of the library.

Through her encouragement I developed a greater appreciation for my rural background. Many of the outstanding works of prose and poetry in early American literature possessed an agricultural or rural theme. She frequently acknowledged this and encouraged the rural students to take pride in their heritage.

My appreciation and understanding of cer-

Editor's Note: This article is written about Miss Christine Vaughn, who is Professor of English, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, and formerly was in the Manchester, Tennessee Public School System where she taught the author Dean Hal B. Barker.

tain books, poems, songs and art productions were greatly enhanced through her efforts in relating rural life of the author's day and mine. Many students that I have counseled in recent years have registered extreme protest concerning the literature requirement in their curricula. I only wish that they could be motivated and encouraged to study and appreciate literature in the pleasing and acceptable manner in which it was presented to me.

In addition to the enthusiasm for her subject she always expressed a personal interest in every member of the class. It was her desire to know as much about the personal background of the individual as possible. The interest in the student's personal life was always expressed without any indication of prying. It could be said that she taught the individual rather than masses.

Students were assigned novels to read. In private conferences these were discussed. The informal discussion presented an opportunity for self-expression. Even though, in most cases, she had read every book and thoroughly understood its contents, she would allow the student to think that he knew more about the book than did she. She certainly avoided any ridicule concerning major ideas which we had failed to grasp, or which we might have misinterpreted. The idea of self-confidence was thus inspired.

In my opinion, all teachers should, in some manner, express to students their confidence in the individual's ability even though limitations are apparent. Imparting the idea of at least partially succeeding can be most encouraging. In this manner, students can be challenged and inspired to express academic potential that might otherwise remain in a dormant state forever.

Several years ago an essay appeared in print written by the teacher whose distinguishing characteristics have been innumeraled in this manuscript. It was entitled "Why I am Dedicated to Teaching". In the essay she was attempting to answer a question which had been presented to her. The question was, "How can you be so enthusiastic about teaching after being engaged in a profession for thirty-five years in which you have been paid a very low salary and received very little praise or gratitude for the services rendered". Portions of this essay are presented as follows:

"Thirty-five years? How can you still be so enthusiastic about it? You do sound as if you like to teach."

This gave me the opportunity to explain just why I loved teaching and why I had dedicated my life to it. "No, it isn't the money, although I couldn't have stayed in the profession this long if I had not been paid for my services."

"May I tell you some of the bigger and more important compensations a teacher receives? Then you will understand why I am, as you said, still thrilled about teaching."

I knew that my answer to her question must go much deeper than just "How can I be otherwise?" Also I knew that I had to make her see and realize that I wasn't saying this with my lips only

but also with my heart. I didn't want to be tedious, but I did want to give her a true picture of teaching, which I felt sure she had never seen before and which I honestly believed she wanted to see.

I began cautiously but enthusiastically. We all know, of course, that a sales lady who is not enthusiastic about her product never makes a sale. I had a wonderful product, and I was then, as always, enthusiastic about it.

The teacher actually holds a student's destiny in her hands. She teaches him to live, to work, to play, and to share. All of these you must agree are the worthwhile things in life. We cannot want more for him than that he shall become a happy, useful, Christian citizen. The real teacher inspires him and fills his heart with ambition to become just that kind of citizen.

Not only does she hold the destiny of the future citizens in her hands, but the teacher also holds the destiny of this great country of ours in her hands. It is she who trains the future doctors, lawyers, preachers, scientists, and statesmen. My doctor, my druggist, my dentist, my lawyer, and my merchant in this little town are all "my boys". They went to school to me. Ten of the teachers in this town, including the principals of both schools, have been my pupils.

I certainly don't want you to think for one minute that I take all the credit for their success. They had other teachers, of course, but I do want to believe that I at least helped them to interpret the signs on life's highway which lead them to become loyal, useful citizens in their chosen professions. I hope, too, that I helped them to understand the true meaning of democracy so that they could better meet and solve the problems which constantly arise. They are the ones who must solve those problems; and I had the supreme opportunity of helping them to know, not only what they should do, but also what they ought to do.

Some people have the wrong impression about teachers. They seem to think that teachers must know the answers to all questions. You know as I do, of course, that *this idea is wrong*. She doesn't have to be a mental giant. She should, however, be a well-qualified person and be thoroughly saturated in the subject matter she is endeavoring to teach. Only such a person as this can be a truly good teacher! There are other qualities, too, which she should possess: such as, patience, faith, loyalty, self-confidence, poise, and last but by no means least, she must have a love for and understanding of people. These do not come over-night but through the years she will acquire them.

My father was a physician; and, like him, I have an experimental nature. He was ever on the alert for newer and better ways of treating disease and relieving pain. He did not however, cast aside a true and sure remedy for something just because it was new. But, if he were convinced that the newer remedy was better, he certainly used it. I, too, am always on the watch for better methods of accomplishing my aims. I do not stubbornly hold to the traditional methods of the past

nor do I glibly accept fads. I try to find and follow a happy middle course and meet the needs of my pupils with the methods which I believe will help them most.

The greatest drawback to teaching is the fact that one cannot immediately fully measure or evaluate the results. But, measurement does come and often in the most unexpected way. Once I received a postal card showing Shakespeare's home with this message scrawled above the signature, "I thought of you today when I went here and remembered my class in Shakespeare." Just that little card with its sincere message made up for the many times in class when the writer seemingly paid no attention. Then last week I saw a young fellow who had been in my class several years ago. He told me that he was teaching. When I expressed my happiness, he said, "You were my inspiration, because of you I am a teacher". That was enough, my cup was full. I was humbly grateful, and tried, through my tears, to tell him so.

The rewards of teaching far outweigh the drawbacks. There is no pleasure, joy, nor, yes, thrill which can excel that which comes from seeing a student grow and develop, unless it is from winning his trust, love, and gratitude. Just to know and realize that you are a part of that greatest of all professions, which has the mental, physical, social and moral growth and development

of people as its aim is a satisfaction and a joy. What a difference teaching makes in the lives of others.

I love people. I love to laugh. I enjoy living. I am happy. I love to teach. There is no finer life. So you see, all of these and more, many more, are the reasons why I am dedicated to teaching."

Those of us who are engaged in college and university teaching must recognize that most of us have limitations but many of our weaknesses will be greatly strengthened when we concern ourselves, in a personal way, with the student and when we approach our lectures, laboratory exercises and conferences with sincere zeal and enthusiasm for our wonderful product.

The teacher whose attributes are recognized in this presentation by one of her former students and whose personal testimony lends further emphasis to these qualities is evidence that a dedication to teaching is an absolute prerequisite for anyone who expects any real measure of success in the profession. Most of the qualities which characterize a good teacher can be acquired, especially when a concentrated effort is put forth to develop them. The qualities of enthusiasm for one's work and concern for others are basic qualities that are equally as important as knowledge of subject matter and appropriate teaching procedures in order to be an effective teacher.

My Teacher Hall of Fame

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It is not always possible to appreciate fully a situation or a person at the moment of contact—appreciation often comes later and in retrospect. (In fact, it is possibly true that our keenest enjoyments and pleasures are in anticipating and looking back.)

In thinking over my college career, four teachers stand out in my mind: and for my own personal reverie, I have placed them in my "Teacher Hall of Fame".

They are a diverse lot, and I have searched deeply to catalog the qualities that caused me (somewhat sub-consciously) to separate these from the many others I encountered. The answer is not that a single common trait sets them apart! Rather, I can cite several individual traits which each possessed that contributed to his impressing me as a superior teacher.

To show the range and to honor the persons being discussed, I shall list the teachers and their positions when I knew them and their present position if different:

(1) Mr. W. Claude Hall, Professor of English at Freed-Hardeman (Junior) College, Henderson, Tennessee; now retired.

(2) Mr. W. J. Huddleston, then Professor of Agronomy, Tennessee Polytechnic Institute, Cookeville, Tennessee, presently Dean of the School of Agriculture at the same institution which is now known as Tennessee Technological University.

(3) Dr. A. W. Dicus, Professor of Physics at Tennessee Polytechnic Institute; now retired.

(4) Dr. M. T. Henderson, Professor of Agronomy, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Professor Hall was my freshman English teacher: Mr. Huddleston taught me several undergraduate agriculture courses: Dr. Dicus taught me freshman physics and Dr. Henderson was my professor in statistics and plant breeding when I did supporting work in agronomy on my doctorate at L.S.U.

Although there were several qualities that these men possessed in common, not all, however, were of the same degree. They were all devoted to teaching and to their subject matter. They were

particular about details and special points of emphasis and interest. They were well organized; their presentation never lagged, and there was no hesitation while they decided what to present next. They possessed enthusiasm. Light shone in their eyes as they explained their subject and one very often said, "Now don't you see, fellows?"

Bro. Hall feigned cock-sureness and blew himself up like a big bull frog. He dramatized. He even praised. But oh, he also scathed. He was especially insistent that new words in the text be learned. (I just recently retired my collegiate dictionary which I used as a freshman). He offered a mighty incentive for excellence: if a student presented an outstanding paper, he would be asked for a copy to be placed in a permanent file. I twice knew the thrill of this experience and can attest to its value as a teaching tool. Freed-Hardeman College offered a one-hour course in speech correction (which I took several times) known as "Spoken English". Bro. Hall doubtless invented this course judging from the enjoyment he evidenced in teaching it. In his critical analysis, he would say, "Mr. Jones said ' . . . He should have said' . . .".

Perhaps I could not appreciate this man when I was his student. I suspect I rather feared him; but now I think I must have been able, even as a most immature freshman, to see beneath his protective armor and spot the "heart of gold" that dwelt there. Truly, I have appreciated his teaching ability for a long time now.

Mr. Huddleston taught a range of agricultural subjects when I first entered Tennessee Tech; therefore, I had several classes under him. I remember well his enthusiasm and the sheer joy that surged through him as he cunningly presented his subject. He made it sound as if this great truth had just been discovered and he was letting one in personally on classified information. He built up tension and then sprang the punchline so that the student had an aid by which to remember. He made details important. His explanations were the essence of simplicity and clarity. Another less interested in the development of the student might have become worried with the detail and have appeared bored with his own presentation. Mr. Huddleston gesticulated expressively, and he frequently brought the class to more rapt attention by asking a question of some individual or by simply saying, "Now fellows. . ."

His topics usually began with a question: he then proceeded to present answers.

Mr. Huddleston was a ready and willing counselor and he gave full attention to his advisee. I think I can remember his saying, "Now that is what I would suggest that you do, Johnnie".

His training was in Vocational Agriculture, but Mr. Huddleston developed himself into an able agronomist as he was allowed to specialize at his institution. He has done outstanding work in the American Society of Agronomy. Perhaps I am not entirely sure why, but I consider Willis

Huddleston a master teacher.

My personal contact with Dr. Dicus was limited to the classroom, although I knew much of him as a public figure. Physics was a new subject to me when I started his course. His ability to make the subject interesting and the content easily grasped was striking, and I remember his direct manner vividly. My retention of specific facts learned in the class is almost nil, but I well remember his ability to make matters clear so that I had no difficulty understanding. As I remember now, his lectures moved at a goodly pace; and when he finished, he stopped.

Dr. Henderson professed me after I was a mature man and working on a doctorate. This, having been fairly recent and myself at a mature age, perhaps makes my evaluation of him more valid. I felt that I was able, in his classes, to take notes that contained in essence everything that he said in his lecture and this was not because of his slow speed. His ability to organize material, cut through the subterfuge, and present a clear picture was almost uncanny.

He enjoyed teaching as evidenced by his participation, his smiles, and his attention to detail. He presented his material with confidence and I suspect never had a doubt but that any student who was trying would find his presentation crystal clear. Students came from departments all over the campus, to take his course to "understand" statistical methods. He is a past master at organization and clarity of presentation.

Many others of my college professors had outstanding abilities as teachers but somehow these four fall into a special category.

I am sure that it is not significant that two are agronomy teachers and that three names start with the letter "H". It is interesting, however.

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to convey it. He should be a model of a man thinking, not merely a man reciting.

Isn't it strange that there are so many slow learners in our schools and so few slow teachers? We think that we will improve our colleges by better selection of students, but rarely assume that there is a positive correlation between poor teaching and poor students.

So finally, what does it mean to teach? To teach is to transform by informing, to develop a zest for life-long learning; to help pupils become students—mature independent learners, *architects* of an exciting, challenging future. Teaching at its best is a kind of communion, a meeting and merging of minds.