*Reuben E. Slesinger*

# Pointers for Professionals Turned Teachers

**Although the successful professional should be in the best position to tell others how to succeed in his field, his success in the profession does not guarantee that he can effectively teach others how to do it. Dr. Slesinger here gives many wise suggestions for successful teaching.**

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The word education comes from the Latin and suggests *to lead out or to draw out.* At once we begin to realize that teaching too frequently is the opposite. It has come to mean, for many, a filling-in process. The teacher pours in facts, details, and principles as if the human mind were a sponge and the final examination a sort of wringing-out process. Certainly on the college level we should, in the words of Tryon Edwards, attempt "to discipline rather than furnish the mind; to train it to the use of its own powers, rather than fill it with the accumulations of others."

Teaching calls for the use of facts, of course, but it also calls for the stimulation of enthusiasm of the students. Teaching should challenge students to develop their capacities to the fullest. We sometimes think that we learn a great deal in four short years in college. Yet the greatest learning takes place in the years of infancy when a child, without a single word in his vocabulary, begins to use his five senses to learn, to recognize, to say single words, to phrase whole setences, to separate himself as an entity from the world around him. He accomplishes all of this, not in school and not with trained teachers, but at home, and frequently under unfavorable circumstances. Why? Because he has enthusiasm for learning and he has an almost uncontrollable sense of curiosity.

The tragedy of formal education lies in the killing off of the enthusiasm for learning and the toning down of curiosity asking questions, we cease to be receptive as something undesirable. When we stop asking questions, we cease to be receptive to the education process. If adults would only ask as many questions as children, we would be a much wiser people.

A good teacher is one who arouses enthusiasm for his subject and encourages the student to be curious about it and to ask questions — and then later to try to answer them through further study.

This is the basic responsibility of a teacher — a responsibility well described as follows:

"Surely it is not necessary to elaborate upon the importance of *quality* in college teaching. What college young people make of their lives depends in no small degree upon it. Indeed what the lower school children make of their lives de-

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pends to a degree upon it, too, because their teachers are the products of the colleges. It is not too much to claim that, in the long run, the speed with which a society progresses and the effectiveness with which a country solves its social, economic, and political problems are influenced greatly by the quality of its college teaching."[1]

## Born Teachers?

So much for education and teaching. Let us now raise the question as to how college teachers are trained to meet their responsibilities. A report of the President's Commission on Higher Education puts the matter very bluntly: "College teaching is the only major learned profession for which there does not exist a well defined program of preparation directed toward developing the skills which it is essential for the practitioner to possess." [2]

For the most part, college teaching assumes that the programs leading to Master's and Doctor's degrees are in the main satisfactory as preparation for college teaching. But the critics argue that attending classes, writing papers, doing research for advanced degrees does not in itself constitute adequate preparation for teaching.

Since a substantial number of graduate students become college teachers, the key to developing effective future teachers rests in their training. This being the case, the question has been raised: Should a graduate school include teacher training or should these schools assume that course work and research for a thesis or dissertation are adequate training for the life of a professional teacher?

Graduate course training as a preparation for teaching has run into a special problem in recent years with the increased emphasis on research ability as the key for advancement in teaching. Thousands of graduate students, however, will not become teachers, and many teachers are not research motivated. Thus, there are two basic objectives in teacher training—namely, competence in subject matter and ability to teach.

Dr. Howard Bowen in his study, *Graduate Education in Economics*, expresses his view on the *minimal* standards regarding teaching ability as follows: [3]

1. At the time of receiving his Master's degree, a student should be able to teach, under supervision and with time for preparation, the first undergraduate course in principles of economics;

2. At the completion of the Ph.D., the candidate should be prepared to teach, at a level of proficiency acceptable in a leading university or college, principles of economics, the first undergraduate course in his special field, and (given time for preparation) intermediate economic theory.

The same expectation may be set forth for other courses in the other disciplines — elementary courses to be taught by Master's and second level courses to be taught by those who have newly won their Doctor's degrees.

The point has been made that a graduate student should be able to teach even though he does not plan to—on the assumption that other jobs he may take require some ability to impart his knowledge to others. It may or may not be true that "almost all economists (and those trained in graduate business subjects) are in some sense teachers." The charge will not be silenced that preoccupation with research, especially the writing of a dissertation on a restricted topic is narrowing; whereas a competent teacher needs breadth of knowledge and ability to organize, synthesize, and criticize a wide range of ideas. On the other side of the coin, the critical quality learned in writing a dissertation helps in analyzing related problems.

Most university graduate professors operate on the assumption that they do not feel any responsibility in training their doctoral students in the art of teaching, or that this duty has been met by providing teaching assistantship and informal aid to these assistants. Very few favor a formal instruction in pedagogy as part of the graduate program. Department heads, however, in colleges not giving graduate work often feel differently. A common belief among these departmental heads is that more teacher training should be given.

At present, the responsibility for training the college teacher rests with the individual himself, i.e., he picks up public speaking, psychology, and method, and observes his own teachers. Informal training is provided by the graduate school in the sense that a graduate student is allowed to teach an elementary course while studying for his degree. The employing college which conducts a sort of on-the-job-training, internships, ap-

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[1] Fred J. Kelly, *Toward College Teaching* (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1950), p.1.
[2] Quoted in Kelly, *ibid.*

[3] *American Economic Review Supplement*, (42:4, Ch. 10, *passim.*) September, 1953.

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prentice-teaching as new teachers are employed, also plays a role in developing teaching capabilities.

There has been limited sentiment in favor of a noncredit seminar in college teaching—in the graduate department concerned, in the School of Education of the university which the student is attending, or as a joint venture by a series of related disciplines . . . .

## Teaching — An Art?

Let us take a closer look at the teacher. No matter how young the teacher, the student is prepared to respect him until he forfeits that respect. This can happen within the first hour of the class meeting. A teacher can kill the assignment sheet or the textbook by the tone of his voice in referring to them.

Young or old, a good teacher must possess a sense of the right kind of showmanship. Students respect success; and they measure it by competence in the presentation of the subject, by alertness, by poise, by dress and grooming. It is a serious mistake (yet one that is often made) to complain to the class about the poor salary received and how heavily in debt the teacher is—or some similar personal fact. For good or ill, the student (as well as the American public) judges success by position in the market. (You are paid what you are worth, according to basic economics.)

In the same spirit, a good teacher refrains from classroom criticism of his institution, dean, and the student body. Aside from not belonging in classroom discussion, this places a label on the teacher—therefore on his teaching. The students assess that the teacher is prejudiced, bitter, and inaccurate about some things, and hence the teaching probably is biased and lacking in accuracy.

The young teacher must learn to be honest with his class and avoid "bluffing." It is no reflection on a teacher to say "I don't know" or "Let me look this up before giving a definite answer." If the question is pertinent, an answer subject to qualification later can be offered. Remember, the whole legal profession and medical profession reserves the right to look things up and to council with others. By the same token, if an answer or a statement has been given and later found to be wrong, do not hesitate to correct it at the next class meeting.

Let us take a closer look at what the student reveals. Emerson once said that the secret of education lies in respecting the pupil. How often this is overlooked. The wonderful thing about American democracy is the wide variation in the students who make up a classroom. Seated side by side are the wealthy and the poor, the first generation and the descendant of pioneer settlers, the son or daughter of a prominent family and one not so well-known... variation in age, in experience, in abilities... with physical handicaps and some perfectly normal, some brilliant, some average or even below ...each with a different interest in the course...some from good high schools, some from schools of lesser rank. What the students have in common is that they occupy the same classroom at a particular hour and each has a desire to pass the course.

The teacher faces the challenge of welding them into a unit for the purpose of his course. He must inspire them to leave their prejudices outside the classroom.

Students study for two reasons: (a) because they have to, and (b) because they want to. A good teacher tries to swell the second group at the expense of the first. The teacher should seek to build a class spirit as early in the course as possible. Class unity and class response help move the class forward. They urge the lazy members to work harder, bringing out the best in each one.

## Planning Plus Method Equals Better Communication

There is a certain sense of logic in most students. The teacher should always explain to the student the reasons for what he is doing. This sense of logic calls for planning both the course as a whole as well as each lecture. The more a teacher knows about a particular subject the greater is the need for a plan—lest he fail to cover the subject. Planning checks a tendency to ramble or to "ride a particular hobby." At the end of a session, it is logical to suggest the usefulness of the next assignment .It is logical to have periodic reviews and resumes. It is logical to conserve class time by omitting that which is extraneous, by refraining from dictating long sets of figures or placing complicated diagrams on the board and expecting the class to copy them. Mimeographed material can save class time, but the mimeographed material should be neat and legible. The assignment sheet fits in with the student's idea of logic. Likewise the outline of a lecture is logical. Anything that does not fit in an outline does not belong to the logic of the subject.

In commenting on teaching methods, it must be recognized that no one method can be best for every teacher. There are many variable factors—the nature of the individual, the size of the class, the hour of the day, the make-up of the class (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, graduate), whether

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the course is a required one or not, whether the class is coeducational, the content of the subject —whether elementary economics, applied economics, or economic theory [for example].

But there are some general methods that will increase the effectiveness of any teacher because of the nature of the learning process.

All learning results from sense reactions which register impressions on the mind. Since few students can think in the abstract, we must rely upon sight and sound. In laboratory courses, senses of smell, touch, and taste can be drawn into the learning process as well. Where we rely upon sight, we must draw upon visual aids—the simplest one of which is neat blackboard work. Teachers whose work on the blackboard is sloppy and is done so hurriedly that words are not spelled out (or written in unrecognizable abbreviations) are missing much of the value of visual aids. The human eye likes symmetry and neatness. Good use can be made of charts and similar devices that are prepared in advance.

Much can be learned from the advertising profession which emphasizes repetition, reduction to essentials, summation, clearness of purpose, comparison, contrast, visual aids, and other psychological aids.

As teachers, two essential ingredients are freshness and novelty as stimulants to interest. Repeating the text continuously is hardly good teaching.

The good teacher watches the faces of the students. Learning should be a pleasant activity. Signs of boredom, perplexity, doubt, and dissatisfaction, as well as interest should guide the teacher. Students should not be placed under undue strain.

The teacher should realize that real concentration lasts but a few minutes at a time; that any attempt to hold the class as a unit for a longer period of concentration is to weaken the presentation. For that reason, points should be made within a short period and then a flight of fancy—a transition to the next point, a bit of humor, a change in tone of voice, will prove helpful. The class will be less tired at the end of such an hour.

Intelligent questioning as a teaching device takes advantage of human curiosity. Carefully selected questions can arouse and sustain interest, can stimulate creative thinking, can give students a chance to express themselves, and can help the teacher to find out if the class is following him. The Socratic questioning technique is best used in small classes or on the graduate level. A danger the beginner should beware of in the questioning technique is the use of sarcasm if the forthcoming answer is weak, evasive, or wrong. A teacher who finds himself becoming sarcastic should evaluate himself. Sarcasm is the antithesis of good teaching. Another danger is the tendency to dismiss points raised by students on the grounds that the answer is obvious. A good teacher assumes that nothing is obvious in view of the varying backgrounds of the students.

Care must be exerted in working out fair examination questions which can be answered reasonably within the time available. The return of the graded papers as quickly as possible is a must for good teaching—the very next class meeting if possible, when interest still is high.

The lecture method of teaching may be necessary where classes are large. But the lecture notes should not be so voluminous as to call for reading them to the class. Feverish note taking by the class is a mechanical process and they tend to miss the "ideas" which are basic to understanding . . . . In fact, these "ideas" are what move us to recognize the discrepancy between the real world and what it ought to be. The student note taker is placed under strain and does not take part in the educational process. When the lecture is over, the freshness of the idea is gone. The student staggers out with dead notes in horrible handwriting.

The lecture method can lead to the reading of long selections from books. This is deadly teaching unless the teacher interrupts his reading to explain what it is all about.

Supplementary to the classroom lecture, use may be made of outside readings, reports, term papers, and workbook assignments. Each has a place depending upon the size of the class, the location of the college, and the nature of the subject. Properly employed, they can become effective teaching aids. They have inherent dangers when they become mechanical devices used mechanically by students and teachers to achieve a grade.

The recitation or discussion method is a combination of some lecturing and some discussion of the text by the class during the regular class hour. The students should be drawn into the discussion—first those who volunteer and then gradually those who are less outspoken. The student who raises an especially good point should be recognized by having his name attached to that point during the ensuing discussion. This gives him a sense of accomplishment and urges others to join in the discussion.

Much of the value of the recitation method is retained in the

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case method. The case method originated in law but is not the same when used in . . . [other] courses. There are a number of dangers in the use of cases. The tendency is to use a case book—cases developed by someone else. A case might fit the teacher about as badly as if he were to wear somebody else's coat. Cases in economics [for example] are usually regional and may not fit a particular school, and as a result will student. Cases go out of date quickly. Unless the teacher skillfully uses a case, he may kill the case by revealing his answer, by not giving enough time to discussion, or by dragging the discussion out beyond the interest of the class. For the less skillful teacher, a rich collection of illustrations and examples might serve just as well in driving home important ideas. Cases lend reality—which is basically the real strength of the case method in the classroom situation.

Field inspection trips are good teaching aids, provided they fit the classwork and the class is fully informed why they are taking the trip and what to look for. A summation of the trip should be presented in the next class session after the trip. Sometimes the preparation of questions in advance of the trip proves helpful. Models and demonstrations frequently are available in larger communities and can be helpful. Film strips, lantern slides, opaque projections can also be used where facilities exist. Unfortunately, the college class which meets 50 minutes hardly lends itself from a time point of view to many of these special aids.

Most courses can be enriched by selected outside speakers. An hour's talk by an expert in some phase of business—a banker, a lawyer, a referee in bankruptcy, a merchandise man, a manager of a chain store, a credit manager—can be stimulating. Care should be exerted by the teacher to inform the speaker of the nature of the class and of his assignment. Otherwise the talk can degenerate into fond memories of the speaker's boyhood.

## Conclusions

This brings us finally to the question as to how we can measure effective teaching and effective teachers. As one writer has observed: "The old dictum that whatever exists, exists in some amount and therefore can be measured, seems only remotely applicable in the realm of the changes expected to be wrought by college instruction."

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**The following list of student reactions can provide a few immediate indications that you as a teacher have stimulated their interest . . .**

**(1) When students voluntarily and among themselves discuss, outside of class, points raised in the class.**

**(2) When students in elementary courses begin to ask about majoring in . . . [your field].**

**(3) When students ask what other courses are offered in the department.**

**(4) When students ask aid beyond the classroom as to study programs, or as to topics for public speaking classes, debates, essays and themes.**

**(5) When students come up to the desk at the close of the period for an extra word or comment.**

**(6) When students ask for additional readings in the field.**