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ABSTRACT

Since the controversial concept of Competency Based Teacher Education (CBTE) has been or will shortly be mandated by many state legislatures, it is now important to stress the teacher education component of the concept as opposed to teacher training. While training teaches students to perform previously stated, uniform, or similar tasks, education encourages individual cognitive differences. Four recommendations for insuring the realization of education in CBTE are the encouragement of the individual differences of student teachers, the retention of open-ended competency requirements, the creation of the connection between theory and practice, and the development of evaluation tasks which require transfer of learning and which assess teacher and student originated objectives. (JM)

Let's Put the "E" in CBTE

Harold Ladas and Sally-Anne Milgrim

Let's stop arguing for or against Competency-Based Teacher Education and start working constructively with this controversial concept. Among the critics who point to the ambiguity of CBTE, Sam Yarger speaks of it as a concept in search of a philosophy.[1] Harry Broudy asks, "Do they mean what they say?"[2] James MacDonald says: "I find the whole idea of CBTE to be proposed as an answer, and it is not clear what the question is."[3] One of the fears of knowledgeable educators is that CBTE will degenerate into CBTT, or Competency-Based Teacher Training. Rather than rant and rail against CBTE which is or will shortly be a fait accompli[5] mandated by many state legislatures,[6] those of us who may be most affected might better spend our energies on making the "E" in CBTE a reality.

In order to do this, we must distinguish between education ("E") and training ("T") and consider their appropriate contributions to the learning process. Glaser describes the usual distinctions between education and training.[7] Training teaches students to perform similar or uniform tasks which are specified beforehand, and it tends to minimize individual differences. Education, on the other hand, attempts to guide students' behavior in accordance with individual talents. Education, therefore, encourages individual differences. It further helps individuals to generalize learned behavior or to transfer it to similar or novel instances, while training involves little or no transfer of learned behavior.

What then is the value of education? The concept of encouraging individual differences is not as widely accepted as we may think.

According to Carroll,[8] some students learn four times faster than others. If the instructor ignores individual differences and teaches the fastest pupils, the slower ones who are capable of one fourth of the progress inevitably fall behind and fail. If the instructor teaches at the pace of the slowest, the fastest ones learn at only one fourth efficiency. Furthermore, since the mental age (M.A.) spread in the classroom is about six years,[9] some pupils in a third grade class, for instance, are capable of sixth grade work while others can do only first grade work. Giving third grade assignments condemns the pupils of sixth grade M.A. to boredom and the pupils with first grade M.A. to failure. No wonder discipline is such a problem in classrooms where a single age level curriculum is followed.

In 1973 Bloom estimated that 50 percent of the variance of improvement which could be made in teaching would result from matching each individual with material that he could master.[10] By ignoring individual differences, for example, three million students are today condemned to reading literature that they cannot understand.[11] These individual differences, and we have been talking only of cognitive differences, increase with length of time spent in school. They can increase to such a point that there is almost a total mismatch between the individual and the available curricular materials. Students may consider the contents to be irrelevant to their needs or interests. Perhaps, that is why we also get a decline in creativity,[12] motivation,[13] and listening[14] as children progress up through the grades. If our new teacher education programs do not consider the importance of developing individual differences, they too will fail to fulfill their mandate.

Hence, our first recommendation for putting the "E" into CBTE would be to encourage the development of individual differences of our student teachers who hopefully would then encourage the individual differences of their pupils. As the president of Queens College, Joseph Murphy said, "Whatever you teach someone about how to teach is less important than how he was taught."[15] We might add that if we preach in ways other than we teach, it is usually not only ineffective but immoral as well.

Encouraging the development of individual differences in preparing teachers will be difficult if current CBTE programs try to spell out in advance exactly what makes a competent teacher. Only a limited list of competencies should come beforehand, especially since our current research in teaching effectiveness is so scant. Any preconceived list should be subject to further construction and revision during the student teaching experience. What enables one teacher to do well may have little or no bearing on another's effectiveness.

Thus, our second recommendation would be to keep competency requirements open-ended. Only those competencies which are most clearly supported by research should be specified beforehand.

In a training program all objectives may be specified in advance and measurements based on the degree to which those objectives are reached. Where all objectives are proposed by the teacher first, students cannot possibly play a part in determining what is to be learned. Because education goes beyond specified objectives, often to "novel instances," it should be open-ended. Students, therefore, should be encouraged to propose their own objectives. Kropotkin, the Russian liberal, told students to think of what they needed to know

to build a better world, then ask their teachers to teach them that. DeCecco reaffirmed this theme in a recent American Educational Research symposium: "The content of educational psychology," he argued, "is negotiation between what students want to learn and what the instructor wants to teach."[16] We might add, "... or what the instructor wants to learn." Was it Socrates who said, "A school is properly the place where the student teaches and the teacher learns"?

If all objectives are specified in advance, and only these objectives are considered important, the law of serendipity is suspended. In all probability the inventor of the wheel and fire, our understanding of gravity, and the discovery of penicillin were the result of serendipity. Winston Churchill observed that many men stumble over the truth, but most pick themselves up and hurry on as if nothing happened. Teachers can stumble upon many marvelous truths in the classroom, but in their rush toward specified objectives never have the good fortune to see them. This is not to say that specified objectives are not important, but with overcommitment to them, we may overlook valuable opportunities. Perhaps, the best course to follow would be the setting of tentative objectives; and so, to reiterate our second recommendation, keep the competency requirements open-ended. This implies that the determination of objectives (competencies if you please) should not be divorced from the contributions of individual teachers and their students and be carved in stone at the state level or at any other level in the educational hierarchy.

Of course there should be suggestions from principals, community groups, unions, and others who are involved. The phrase negotiable might best describe any set of objectives. If we specify all objectives

ahead of time and try to establish specific measurements to press for the fulfillment of these objectives, we will have eliminated one of the few research supported dimensions of effective teaching. In a review of the literature, Gage stated that there are more than a dozen studies which point to the effectiveness of indirect teaching in promoting student learning.[17] Indirect teaching means that students' questions and student originated contributions are made a part of the teaching-learning process. "The suggestion that the teacher has determined in advance all of the important ideas which a book, a film, or an activity has to offer is an authoritarian design for closed minds which are dependent upon others to decide for them what is important to be known."[18] Kimball Wiles stated in an article on values and our destiny in America that in a non-totalitarian society, we must assure all individuals the right of participating in making decisions that will affect them.[19]

* * *

Our concern is not a matter of education as opposed to training, and certainly education cannot be subsumed under training. We believe that training and education are <u>both</u> a legitimate part of the learning process. Korzybski once said that sanity is being able to go from the abstract to the specific and vice versa. Without this ability, an individual cannot make appropriate responses in new situations. Observed skills (which involve training) can be equated with the "specifics" of learning; theory (which is a part of education) can be equated with the abstract. By practicing skills, we provide evidence of many of the abstract principles of education. The skill performed is not the abstraction, but an example of it.

A principle of learning theory is that children learn better when rewarded rather than punished. Suppose a child spelled the word phlegm, "flem." A punishing reaction might be "You're wrong." The rewarding reaction might be, "You spelled it the way it sounds. The 'l,' the 'e,' and the 'm' are correct; what else sounds like 'f'?" And proceed from there. While many student teachers know the principle of learning theory behind this procedure, few are able to apply it consistently. What is missing is the connection between the theory and the practice. In the past our teacher education programs have often taught theory and practice separately. For example, in some programs the foundations courses were almost exclusively theory, while the curriculum courses and student teaching were almost exclusively practice. Such separation is not in the best interests of education.

Our third recommendation to put the "E" in CBTE is to make the connection between theory and practice. When a student has demonstrated a skill, he should be asked, "Why did you do what you did?" "Why" is to be interpreted as a request for the relevant psychological, sociological, educational or curricular theory to support the action. It is when we fail to understand <u>why</u> a skill is used that education is reduced to mere training.

One of the major differences between training and education is that transfer is involved in the latter. Transfer refers to any process by which a student learns under one condition and then performs under another condition.[20] Understanding the principle behind one's actions enables that transfer. Learning without this understanding is reduced to trial and error or even rote. Ritual or rote, of course, could result in unthinking idiocy, one instance of which was uncovered

by a Prussian officer. For twenty years sentries had marched each day around the perimeter of a military post. Unlike his predecessors, this officer undertook to discover why this was done. He uncovered the fact that twenty years earlier the walls had been painted and the order given to keep the public from touching the wet paint.

Let's take the principle that the likelihood of desired behavior is increased by a favorable result of that action. In the hypothetical case of Mary, who has a deep need for esteem from her teacher, the student teacher is taught to praise her work by saying, "Well done, Mary." In the real case of Sue, who is struggling with the task of self-actualization, the same student teacher now in the school setting avoids providing external praise but asks instead, "Sue, how do you think you did on that assignment?" Sue examines her assignment and thoughtfully replies, "It looks good to me, if I do say so myself." The original principle has still been applied, even though the favorable consequence had to be elicited from the student. Thus, transfer of learning has been demonstrated.

By requiring transfer between the learning task given the student teacher and the evaluation task, we are asking him to go from the specific of the learning task to the theory underlying it and then on to the specific of the evaluation task. This requirement should promote greater sanity, of which Korzybski speaks, since the student is more likely to give an appropriate, rather than an inappropriate, response to each new task, or at least recognize when he has not given an appropriate response.

One of the difficulties of insuring that transfer will occur is that all too often teachers teach to the evaluation task. Thus, a

task originally designed to require transfer of learning by the student often deteriorates into one calling for mere memorization. To minimize this, some of the evaluation tasks should be developed before, some during, and some following the learning experience. If we are serious about open-ended objectives and enhancing individual differences, we should include suggestions from the student regarding tasks which could be used to determine the achievement of student originated objectives. The student should provide the evaluator with some of the criteria needed for judging, and in this way show his ability to relate the tasks to the underlying ideas and concepts which he has developed.

Our fourth recommendation, therefore, deals with evaluation in competency-based teacher education. Teachers in collaboration with their students should be required to create evaluation tasks which demonstrate that transfer of learning has taken place and that teacher and student originated objectives have been reached.

In order to realize the "E" in CBTE, we have made the following recommendations:

1. Encourage individual differences of student teachers.
2. Keep competency requirements open-ended.
3. Make the connection between theory and practice.
4. Develop evaluation tasks that require transfer of learning and that assess teacher and student originated objectives.

It is our hope that if the foregoing recommendations are given genuine consideration, then CBTE might become a means of moving toward a more human, more effective approach in education.

Footnotes

1. Sam Yarger, "Competency-Based Teacher Preparation: Is There A State Of The Art?" Kappa Delta Pi Record, Dec. 1973, p. 38.

2. Harry S. Broudy, "CBTE/PBTE--Do They Mean What They Say?" Upheaval in Teacher Education: The Regents Master Plan, proceedings of the 22nd Annual Teacher Education Conference, City University of New York, edited by Gloria Gottsegen & Sally-Anne Milgrim, March 23, 1973.

3. James MacDonald, in Competencies and Beyond: Toward A Human Approach to Education, edited by Sally-Anne Milgrim & Gloria Gottsegen, proceedings of the 21st Annual Teacher Education Conference, City University of New York, March 24, 1972, p. 32.

4. Since we wrote this article Sandra and John Gadell have also pointed out the distinction between CBTE and CBTT in the "Backtalk" column of the March 1974 Phi Delta Kappan, p. 506.

5. Sally-Anne Milgrim and Robert Lacampagne, "Competency-Based Teacher Education: Concerns for the Profession," Impact on Instructional Improvement, New York State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1973, Vol. 8, No. 4, p. 9.

6. In Texas, however, on January 4, 1974, the attorney general ruled that the Texas Board of Education does not have the authority to mandate competency-based teacher education. Alternatives must be provided for.

7. Robert Glaser, Training Research and Education, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1962, p. 4.

8. J.D. Carroll, "School Learning Over the Long Haul," Learning and The Educational Process, Skokie, Illinois: Rand McNally & Co., 1965.

9. W. Trow, The Learning Process, Washington, D.C.: The National Educational Association, 1954, p. 9.

10. Benjamin Bloom, "Individual Differences in School Achievement: A Vanishing Point?" Facts and Feelings in the Classroom, edited by Louis Rubin, New York: Walker & Co., 1973.

11. Allan Muskopf and Alan Robinson, "High School Reading 1965," Journal of Reading, November 1966.

12. P.E. Torrance, "Creativity," What Research Says to the Teacher, Department of Classroom Teaching, American Educational Research Association of N.E.A., 1963.

13. John Flanagan, "Education How and For What," American Psychologist, June 1973, pp. 552-553.

14. R. Nicols and L. Stevens, Are You Listening? New York: McGraw-Hill.Inc., 1957.

15. Sally-Anne Milgrim, "Open Admissions and Its Effects on The Preparation of Teachers," Urban, Social and Educational Issues, edited by Leonard Golubchick and Barry Persky, Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall Hunt Publishing Co., 1974.

16. John DeCecco, Symposium on Teaching Psychology to Teachers, Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Americana Hotel, New York City, Feb. 4, 1971.

17. Nathaniel Gage, "Can Science Contribute to the Art of Teaching?" Phi Delta Kappan, March 1968, p. 402.

18. Wayne Dumas, "Can We Be Behaviorists and Humanists Too?" Educational Forum, March 1973, pp. 305-306.

19. Kimball Wiles, "Values and Our Destiny," Curricular Concerns in a Revolutionary Era, edited by Robert Leeper and Neil Atkins, Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1971, pp. 6-10.

20. J. Stephens and E. Evan, Development and Classroom Learning: An Introduction to Educational Psychology, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1973, p 312.