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ABSTRACT

Teacher educators need to standardize levels of achievement both for admission to and for graduation from communications programs. Competency-based education may help to establish standards of behavior which are objectively measurable, but the fact that this approach is often implemented for political rather than educational reasons demands that caution be exercised in accepting this method. Similarly, educational innovations in materials, methods, and concepts are often made on the basis of persuasive arguments rather than on empirical evidence of their worth. Evaluation of the academic preparation of teachers should gauge not only knowledge of methods of instruction but also attainment of skills in the specific content area. Prospective teachers should learn also that theories are speculations, not facts; the encouragement of varied viewpoints is essential. Finally, the areas of decision making and control in teacher education must be clarified. (KS)

SOME CONCERNS OF A TEACHER EDUCATOR FOR THE PREPARATION OF FUTURE COMMUNICATION TEACHERS

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When I was invited to participate in this meeting of distinguished scholars in communication, I was flattered. Also, I was slightly worried that a mistake had been made. My day-to-day responsibilities and interests deal with pedagogical and pragmatic considerations. We have scholars in speech communication education. These individuals devote a great amount of time to reading and research on specific aspects of teaching and learning. I respect them. Sometimes I envy scholars for their luxury of having time to do these things. Often, as I am driving cautiously through heavy traffic to get to a school before one of my student teachers begins teaching, I think about the world of scholars and scholarship. "It would be nice," I think, "to be in my office, or in the library, reading widely and deeply in a particular area of my discipline."

The limitations of my profession bring me back to reality quickly. One does not read while driving, or while observing a student teacher in a classroom. If I must be at another school, in another part of the county, in two hours, my thoughts are not the ponderous, philosophical ones that scholars face. They are pragmatic ones. How do I get to the next school by the shortest route? How can I confer with my student teacher after this class without jeopardizing my planned travel time to the next school? If I miss the class at the next school, when will be the earliest time I can see that student teacher teach another class? If my students are

having problems, what can I suggest immediately that may give them some practical direction? Can I get back to the campus in time to teach my own class if I remain at a school to talk with a supervising teacher?

I do not apologize for having to make these decisions. In their own frustrating way, they are important in my field. However, I want to be sure you understand from the beginning that my paper is not, in the true sense of the word, a scholarly one. This will allow anyone who came to hear profound comments on teacher education to leave now for a cup of tea and return in approximately twenty minutes. I will not view this departure as a personal affront and you will not be disappointed in having to sit through a paper that deals with less than scholarly comments.

Now that I have established a framework for my paper, I want to express my genuine pleasure at being able to speak to an international conference of communication specialists about concerns that face the area of teacher education. Sometimes it is possible to confront my professional colleagues with matters that I face in my unique corner of the communication discipline only by making them captives in a situation like this one.

Although my academic background in three degree programs was in speech communication, during the past eleven years I have devoted my professional efforts to the preparation of secondary school speech and theatre teachers. In my role of teacher educator I have become aware of many problems that face teacher educators. The concerns that I am talking about today are not the only ones I have. They are the most

pressing ones. Since time will not permit me to elaborate upon the implications of each concern for our discipline, I hope you will be able to draw inferences and make conclusions that relate directly to your own areas of specialization.

First, I am concerned about the standards for admission to, and graduation from, teacher education programs. Teachers frequently argue that they should be recognized as the professional equals of doctors and lawyers. However, most of these teachers never met the high academic standards required by Law or Medical Schools. In the United States, students with average academic records are admitted to most teacher education programs. Frequently, these academic records are the only criterion used to determine a prospective teacher's acceptability.[1] Furthermore, if prospective teachers maintain average academic records, they probably will graduate from the program and will be certified to teach. Few of these students are required to undergo any form of standardized testing.

Law and Medical School applicants must submit the results of standardized admission tests before they are considered for admission. After graduation the prospective doctors and lawyers are expected to take state examinations. Few students with average college records can get into Law or Medical School.

As long as we foster standards that allow average students to enter and graduate from teacher education programs, we will not be in a defensible position when we claim that doctors, lawyers, and teachers are professional equals.

This matter of standards also applies to existing requirements for admission to, and graduation from, college

speech, theatre, or communication programs. Communication majors with average academic records are as certifiable as majors with superior academic records. However, I am even more concerned about the lack of standards for communication behaviors in our majors. As a profession, we do not have general agreement on what these standards ought to be. If speech communication is based upon language and speech behaviors, we should specify the minimal competencies that every major will demonstrate consistently in his or her behavior before graduation. It is as foolish for us to ignore these professional considerations as it is for English teachers to ignore spelling, punctuation, and grammar standards for prospective English teachers. We should be embarrassed to discover that communication majors are less fluent, less articulate, or have less facility in the use of language than majors in other disciplines who have had no formal coursework in oral communication. We need standards for verbal and vocal behavior for prospective communication teachers. If these standards cannot be specified by the profession at a national level, they should be formulated and enforced at the college departmental level.

This brings me to my second concern. In the United States, we are hearing much about competencies for teachers. Related to this matter are terms such as competency based teacher education (CBTE), performance based teacher education (PBTE), accountability, and behavioral or performance objectives. Underlying competency based education (CBE) is the expectation that someone will establish objectively measurable standards of behavior for students and tasks will

be assigned that require students to demonstrate competency in those behaviors. School systems, state boards of education, individual schools, and professional associations are trying to determine necessary teacher competencies in my country.[2]

One would assume the development of teacher competencies also would lead to a development of standards which I mentioned as my first concern. It can. However, will it? The rationale for developing competency based education often is financial and/or political, rather than educational.[3] State legislatures have adopted this concept, believing that: it will lead to efficiency and economy in education expenditures; the competencies will be comparable from institution to institution; and educators will be qualified, willing, and able to formulate and evaluate competencies within a time frame specified by politicians in addition to their regular teaching obligations!

Proponents of competency based teacher education have not dealt with the essential details for making this system work. Determining minimal competencies in a professional area is a time-consuming, frustrating task. In most cases, individuals who will attempt to evaluate the competencies in future students have not met the competencies themselves. Unless standardized or uniform competencies are agreed upon, as well as the means for measuring them, there will be differences in measurement, interpretation, and enforcement from teacher educator to teacher educator. To meet time deadlines, some groups have stated only the most obvious competencies in their fields because they can be measured easily.

Competency based teacher education can make significant contributions to the preparation of future teachers. However, I have serious reservations about the way in which it is being introduced throughout the United States, and about the rationale used for its introduction.

My third concern involves what commonly are called "innovations" in education. Too often, educators adopt and implement new methods, concepts, and materials before they have been tested adequately, either by empirical or experimental methods. Previous practices and materials disappear, shifts in personnel occur, educational structures change, huge amounts of money are spent, and then the practice or concept falters, fails, and dies.

American education has had too many innovations that were called "trends of future education" and then became impractical.[4] For example, modular scheduling divided school days into ten to fifteen minute modules that could be arranged, from day to day, in such a complex maze of flexible class periods that even the most organized teachers found their schedules difficult to remember. In the late 1940s, the college "communication skills" course tried to group the study of literature, composition, speaking, and listening into a freshman course. The teaching task was formidable and few professors were qualified or interested in teaching the course. Currently, open classrooms are an educational innovation in my country. Several teachers conduct their classes in a common open area. Speech and theatre teachers at the secondary school level have found that their noisy

activities become distractions to students and teachers in adjacent areas where quiet activities are occurring. A current trend in schools that were built especially for open classroom teaching appears to be the addition of portable room dividers or permanent walls to partition some of the open spaces.

It is little wonder that teachers become apathetic, if not opposed, to change in education. They devote numerous hours of their personal time to planning and implementing educational innovations, only to find that the innovations are not as useful as previous practices or materials. If the innovations were mandated by legislators or administrators, teachers become very agitated. They realize funds that could have been used to improve the previous system have been wasted.

In my own school district I know of two schools that have stored relatively new English textbooks because they did not serve as effective teaching devices. Those textbooks, which took a linguistic approach to the teaching of English, are being replaced by traditional grammar books that were called "old fashioned" and "useless" a few years ago.

If education wishes to be regarded highly by persons inside and outside the field, it must refrain from endorsing educational innovations until sufficient objective evidence is available to indicate the innovations will be successful, and worth the effort and money required.[5] These judgments must be made by educational researchers who work in close cooperation with classroom practitioners: teachers and teacher educators. If innovations are impractical for

certain schools, students, teachers, or regions, this information should be publicized. The criterion for adopting new educational concepts, methods, and materials must not be that a few influential, highly verbal individuals, whether they are skillful writers, persuasive administrators and politicians, or charming teacher educators, can convince parents and educators to become excited about their ideas.

A fourth concern relates to what I believe must be every teacher's primary responsibility: perpetuating knowledge and skills in students. Learning stagnates when this does not happen. If it stagnates too often, particularly in successive grades, students will fall behind their peers in other institutions and may never attain proficiency levels attained by other students.

Teachers in secondary schools and colleges are responsible, primarily, for knowledge and skills in a specific content area. Therefore, their academic preparation should emphasize that area. Secondary school speech and theatre teachers who are more concerned with creativity, socialization, and spontaneous interaction,than with the substance of their discipline, have been misinformed about the reason they are paid to teach speech and theatre. Communication teachers who stress that their students be open, friendly, and loving, but teach little or nothing about use of evidence, organizational processes, parliamentary processes, or proper diction, commit an educational blunder, if not outright fraud.

Too many young teachers believe that education must be exciting, fun, or entertaining if it is to be successful.

I am not opposed to humor, fun, and excitement in the classroom if they assist in the perpetuation of knowledge and skills that the teacher is being paid to teach. However, every teacher who remains in the profession for a number of years learns there are some things that must be taught and learned that are not particularly interesting or fun, regardless of how they are taught. I do not believe teacher educators are honest unless they admit to their students that teaching involves interesting and uninteresting materials; tedious repetition and exciting strategies.

The perpetuation of knowledge and skills in the classroom cannot be viewed as a popularity contest among teachers, or as a laugh-a-minute "show" for students. Rather, it involves a continuing process of demonstrated dedication by a select group of individuals who have found partial answers to a series of questions in a particular subject area.

Beyond our task of perpetuating knowledge and skills in particular areas is the need for us to find what continues to be true, right, logical, and important in our day. Therefore, a fifth concern that I have relates to the tentative nature of truth. Perhaps you have experienced the same feeling that I have experienced: just when I understand what is true, something occurs that makes that thing untrue. New dimensions of truth become evident as individuals decode the secrets of the universe. In our own discipline we have experienced different truths and a

redefinition of our understanding of knowledge because of the discovery of television, videotapes, taperecorders, and communication satellites.

Every teacher makes decisions about the knowledge and skills that will be perpetuated in his or her classroom. These decisions may be based upon the individual's openness to new ideas, intellectual capacity, geographical location, accessibility to communication media, religious or philosophical orientation, and so on. By virtue of the things we teach and the ways in which we teach them, we editorialize knowledge and skills. If we select materials, teaching strategies, and ideas that deal with only one viewpoint, rather than several viewpoints that are available, we limit the accessibility of our students to knowledge. Ultimately, this limits their search for Truth.

In the communication area, teacher educators need to be sure their students understand the difference between facts and theories as they search for Truth. Recently, I have heard professional colleagues talk about communication theories as if they were facts, implying that certain theories are more defensible or desirable than others because a few experiments indicate positive results in a specific direction. My professional colleagues do not indicate also that their professional reputations rest upon the perpetuation of those same theories. Prospective teachers need to learn that theories are speculations, not facts. Generalizing from a few controlled experiments to broad, uncontrolled populations, in an effort to support a

theory is indefensible and dishonest.

Teacher educators must encourage their students to search for Truth. In doing so, they need to be sure their prospective teachers realize that a theory is an educated guess; that truth changes as new discoveries are made; and that many aspects of a problem must be investigated thoroughly before one aspect is espoused as the best solution.

My final concern is one that I predict will become a worldwide concern in the next century. That concern is: who should plan and control teacher education? In whose hands should the preparation, certification, and renewal of certification be placed?

First, I think it is important for us to recognize that teachers have been called "public servants" for centuries. The term is becoming less popular as teachers identify themselves with the professions, or with unionized labor.[6] Younger teachers do not view themselves as servants. Teacher organizations are beginning to demand rights that no servant would dare to demand: better working conditions, personal rights that other workers enjoy, and decision-making responsibilities for determining certification requirements. Rights and responsibilities that have been held by Colleges of Education, local schoolboards, and administrators are being shared, or given outright to teachers in collective bargaining sessions. Political groups, parents, students, teachers, teacher educators, minority groups, local schoolboards, and professional associations are involved in determining who will control teacher education.

Many questions emerge in any discussion of who will control teacher education.[7] Who should determine admission standards to teacher education programs? Who should specify the content area courses needed for a teaching major? Who should supervise student teachers? Who should determine and enforce accreditation standards used in evaluating teacher education programs generally, and communication education programs in particular? Who should set and enforce standards for recertifying teachers in their content areas? Who should determine the retirement age for teachers?

These questions merely scratch the surface of my concern for the future control of teacher education. It would be easy for a subject-related association such as this one to dismiss these questions as unimportant or unrelated to the central concern of its membership. This action would be shortsighted. I believe professional speech, theatre, and communication associations must maintain continuing divisions or committees that will become familiar with teacher education standards, movements, and materials. Otherwise, decisions that affect our future teachers in elementary and secondary schools will be made by persons outside our discipline. Those decisions could be detrimental to existing curricula, the preparation of future teachers in our discipline, and even to college communication departments.

The concerns that I have expressed are not from an outsider. They are a commentary on myself as well as a reflection on my profession. None of us has a solution for all of these concerns. However, among us, I hope we will find acceptable solutions for most of them.

FOOTNOTES

[1] A 1971 survey of 386 American colleges and universities found the most frequently enumerated criterion for selecting students for teacher education programs in those institutions was college grades. Next in importance were English proficiency (238), speech proficiency (237), and academic references (205). See Martin Haberman, Guidelines for the Selection of Students into Programs of Teacher Education (Washington, D.C.: Association of Teacher Educators, 1972), 14.

[2] A joint task force of the Speech Communication Association and the American Theatre Association published suggestions for evaluating teacher education programs in speech and theatre. See "Guidelines for Speech Communication and Theatre Programs in Teacher Education," The Speech Teacher, 24 (November 1975), 341-364. Although teacher competencies are not specified in the guidelines, the specific evaluative criteria may be used to develop lists of competencies. Also, see the recommendations regarding teacher preparation in P. Judson Newcombe and R. R. Allen (eds.), New Horizons for Teacher Education in Speech Communication (Skokie, Illinois: National Textbook Company, 1974).

[3] An interesting discussion of this matter occurs in Harvey B. Scribner and Leonard B. Stevens, "The Politics of Teacher Competence," Phi Delta Kappan, LVI (September 1974), 51-53.

[4] A number of American innovations in education and their ultimate disposition are examined by Donald Orlosky and

B. Othanel Smith, "Educational Change: Its Origins and Characteristics," Phi Delta Kappan, LIII (March 1972), 412-414.

[5] Educational innovations in one country may not be particularly innovative in another country. For example, see Frank H. Klassen and John L. Collier (eds.) Innovation Now! International Perspectives on Innovation in Teacher Education. (Washington, D.C.: International Council on Education for Teaching, 1972).

[6] The influence of teacher unions on education in the United States is investigated in three articles that should be interesting to teacher educators. They are: Tom James, "The States Struggle to Define Scope of Teacher Bargaining," Phi Delta Kappan, 57 (October 1975), 94-97; Robert H. Chanin, "The Case for a Collective Bargaining Statute for Public Employees," ibid., 97-101, and Myron Lieberman, "Neglected Issues in Federal Public Employee Bargaining Legislation," ibid., 101-105. Also, see Ronald J. Perry and Ellen Hogan Steele, "Reflections on a Strike," Phi Delta Kappan, 57 (May 1976), 587-592.

[7] Many articles regarding teacher education control are available. For example, see Robert R. Spillane and Dorothy Levenson, "Teacher Training: A Question of Control, Not Content," Phi Delta Kappan, 57 (March 1976), 435-439; Edward C. Pomeroy, "What's Going on in Teacher Education - The View from Washington," Journal of Teacher Education, XXVI (Fall 1975), 196-201; Donald S. Kachur and Duaine C. Lang, "Negotiating Clinical Experiences: Do the Colleges and Universities Want In?," Journal of Teacher Education, XXVI

(Fall 1975), 202-205; National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards, Who's In Charge Here? Fixing Responsibilities for Student Teaching (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1966); and Stanley Hewett, "Determination of Policy in Teacher Education" in National and Community Needs: The Challenge for Education, edited by Frank H. Klassen and David G. Imig (Washington, D.C.: International Council on Education for Teaching, 1973), 70-77.