

The Obligation of Teaching

Thomas J. Stanly

Nicholls State College

Graduate faculties too often fail to orient their Ph.D. candidates to the realization that teaching is a major function of the scholar. Research may or may not have been overemphasized at the expense of the teaching responsibility. Perhaps our times have served to relegate teaching to a secondary position as an avenue of scholarly accomplishment. It is conceivable that a lethargic example of teaching by those responsible for directing graduate study has unintentionally created this diminishing image of college teaching.

Evidence supporting the need for concern with the significance given college teaching has recently been exhibited on a number of fronts. Overall, The Ford Foundation's three-year masters program identifying potential college teachers during the sophomore year may be cited. The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation for prospective faculty in sciences, humanities, and social sciences is an example. These may be combined with many other similar efforts by foundations and institutions concerned with improvement of instruction. The fact that college administrators must often combine research opportunity with teaching responsibility in order to attract a new Ph.D. of any consequence to the teaching faculty is commonplace as an example of this neglect. For further consideration is the frequent occurrence of finding experienced Ph.D.s more willing to take on full-time teaching assignments than those freshly graduated. This may indicate that they have discovered on their own that "all that glitters is not gold".

Agriculture shares this neglect of teaching with the remainder of the academic community. Its problem could possibly be of greater magnitude due to the abundance of research money and the many consultant or full-time professional opportunities in the industry. Renewed concern by agriculturists regarding the teaching responsibility is also evidenced in many instances. One may point out the increased activity of the instructional sections of the regional and national subject matter associations. The formation and sustained activity of the National Association of Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture during the last decade is largely the result of this need. The National Academy of Sciences has recognized the importance of this function. The Committee on Educational Policy in Agriculture appointed by this group supported by the National Science Foundation is presently embarking on a series of conferences which have as their primary purposes discussing major issues and problem areas in regard to the philosophy and practice of education in the agricultural sciences, and examining of undergraduate teaching in these sciences.

Research is most often cited as that which is

taking away the human factor in college teaching. This may be a fact but the argument is certainly a two-sided one. Oliver C. Carmichael has expressed concern in several publications that an unbalanced emphasis on research at the expense of the teaching function in the graduate program will in the long run limit our potential in research.¹ On the other hand, recent glamorization of research opportunity in the academic world has mushroomed enrollment in graduate schools. This increased number of candidates for graduate degrees will certainly provide a larger pool of potential teachers. Even though the percent that teach is smaller, the total should be greater. Consequently, we may be a little hasty in concluding that research in the long run is reducing those available as college teachers.

The distinction between teaching and research is in itself somewhat arbitrary. There are not many successful teachers who in one fashion or another do not concern themselves with research in the very act of teaching—involving both themselves and their students. This type of research may be insignificant in terms of publications and new processes but, regardless is serving the scholar's obligation of research. By the same token, few full-time researchers desire to exclude themselves entirely from the teaching ranks. More often their removal from teaching is the result of the physical environment of their professional affiliation. The average research man as well as the more successful will readily regard the publication of his findings as subject matter to be used in teaching, will teach on a part-time basis, will accept lecturing opportunities for expenses or less, and in many other ways will contribute to the overall effort of education in and out of the classroom.

Eugene Arden has said that the idea that prevailed through most of history is that people who knew a great deal about a subject were considered competent to teach that subject. For every instance of a great scholar who cannot teach, there are scores of others who work effectively both in scholarship and in the classroom. It is the failure of the mediocre mind which assumes a state of incompatibility between scholarship and teaching. And if higher education is to remain "higher", it is precisely the mediocre mind which it must repudiate.²

Consequently, if this distinction is somewhat arbitrary, is it necessary for the scholar to classi-

¹Carmichael, Dr. Oliver C., Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 522 Fifth Avenue, New York 8, New York.

²Eugene Arden. "Great Scholar, Great Teacher, One and the Same", *The Journal of Higher Education*, XXXV (March, 1964), p. 153.

fy himself a research man or a teacher? Or, is it necessary for the graduate school to orient him in particularly one direction or the other?

When one considers the prevailing values of our time, it is difficult to conclude that this should cause a graduate faculty to underplay, intentionally or unintentionally, the significance of teaching as a major part of the scholarly role. There is to be found ample material adding to the image of especially the college teacher. The intellectual status of the professor has certainly not suffered in the eyes of the general public. The community regard of him, if anything, has been enhanced in recent years due to a wider segment of those attending college and his relatively improved financial position which serve to place him in association with his fellow citizens to a greater degree.

The most recently released figures show that the economic rewards of college teaching are sharply improving overall and appear, in view of short supply, to promise an even more favorable financial climate. Other physical attributes of the teaching profession on the college level developing as the result or along with the times are more *comfortable* work surroundings as the result of the federal government's participation in active or contemplated building programs. Amenities difficult to evaluate such as general academic liberty, community surroundings, associations, etc., are certainly equal to those of past decades. With these advantages accruing for the prospective college professor, how could one afford not to introduce the promising scholar to this opportunity of fulfilling his objective of expanding and projecting knowledge? Yet, we continually see and hear sound assertions by scholars such as Russell M. Cooper who says graduate schools have failed to assume any substantial responsibility for the pedagogical development of their students.³ Could it be that the majority of the established graduate school professors of today and yesterday, having been reared professionally under less favorable conditions, do not take all these prospects as promises, or perhaps fail to appreciate these prospects for the brighter of their pupils?

The true test of the times in relation to the profession of college teaching would be the frequency that college professors would advise the brighter of their own children to pursue college teaching as a career. A short questioning period with one's colleagues on a large or small campus will soon indicate that this is now more often being done than ever before, especially with regard to the young people with greatest ability.

It is unfair to generalize asserting that the graduate student views teaching as a lesser path of scholarly achievement because of the example of teaching to which he is exposed. During graduate study, he is no doubt associated with some of the finest individual teachers in his educational experience. Almost without exception every aca-

³Cooper, Russell M. "The College-Teaching Crisis", *The Journal of Higher Education*, XXXV (January, 1964), p. 9.

demician will point to at least one individual teacher who he holds as an example of what he is striving for. This negates the reasonability of declaring that example does not have some influence on the scholar's attitude.

There is, however, the still pointing finger of accusation toward the individual graduate professor who presents such a poor image of teaching that his total prospect of doing good in the academic world is offset by those students who shun teaching to avoid a common professional identification. Where this exists it is usually recognized, but it is most difficult to remedy since these are the people who often are entrenched and least likely to be enticed by another school.

Some of our finer teachers are plagued by a common psychological ailment of all mankind—the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. A large number of graduate faculty, especially in this day when graduate schools are growing in number, have limited their published research to their dissertation and a few ordinary articles such as this. Consequently, each has the feeling that if he were freed from the mundane chores of teaching, he then could deliver himself of many stored up ideas, proofs, treatises and other precious contributions to the welfare of mankind and perhaps to himself. No doubt this fine teacher who sets a good example and who is an inspiration in the classroom inadvertently steers good teacher prospects away to other interests in an effort to satisfy his own frustration in what he may occasionally think of as his misspent professional youth.

Another professional detractor who distorts the image of college teaching is the individual who does not truly appreciate the values and opportunities in his profession outside of teaching. He is likely, in his state of limited wisdom, to succumb to the normal reaction of adding a silver lining to other routes of professional accomplishment, presenting them as unexplored ventures beyond the known or, at least that which he does not know. This is enticement out of teaching in the first degree.

It may be observed from the discussion that when a poor example of teaching does detract aspirants from the ranks of teaching, it is most commonly occurring without the awareness of the professor. This, however, does not remove it as a factor affecting the future supply of quality faculty.

It may be observed from the discussion above that no single condition prevails that alone would discourage the graduate student from seeking professional fulfillment in the confines of higher education. If there is a deterrent, then it is a composite of several influences. Obviously, we can assume that a detraction exists or there would not be the great clamor over improvement of college teaching. All of this recent motion has served to convince those outside higher education that more attention should be paid to the quality of instruction in colleges. Administrators are becoming acutely concerned with this issue. There is little defense against these assumptions since

simple statement usually makes criticism valid to the majority of people.

We can assume that we are in a position at least to look at what is being done with the idea of taking remedial action where it is needed. If the profession fails to do so and this neglect of the teaching function is as serious as some evidence seems to indicate, then, as has occurred historically, some other group will justifiably move in to fill the void unwittingly created. This as a normal sequence of events may be illustrated by observing what has happened in a number of the sciences which failed to recognize applied aspects. In the area of agriculture, we may trace as an example the origin of horticulture from within the ranks of the botanists.

The logical development in college teaching, assuming a shortage of those who meet desired current standards, will be for the teaching faculty to be composed of professional teachers whose basic education is in teaching and not in the subject matter being taught. Cooper has said, "Col-

lege faculties devoid of questioning, wide ranging intellects would not only be barren of intellectual excitement, but sterile in research as well".⁴ This may be the direction that the teacher function in higher education is being pushed—primarily by those who would object most.

All professors are concerned with the autonomy of their particular academic subdivision. Time has seen the passing of some academic specialties and the birth of new ones. Undoubtedly, there were certain signs common to all these areas of intellectual concern as they began to fade. No doubt one of the most striking signs was when the subject matter could be taught more effectively by another discipline.

There is hope that full realization of our neglect of imparting the teaching function to the scholar by graduate school faculties may halt this trend within the various disciplines. This would preclude the need of outside help.

⁴Ibid., p. 10.

What Does It Mean To Teach?

Ralph A. Benton

Southern Illinois University

Let us begin by asking, "What is a teacher?" The dictionary states that "a teacher is one who teaches, or instructs: especially one whose occupation is to instruct." Teaching is "to make aware by information, experience, or the like; or to give instruction."

This tells us what a teacher does or should do, but nothing is said relative to the method of doing it. Therein lies the difference between an effective teacher and an ineffective one, and good teaching versus poor teaching. There are of course other important factors.

In altogether too many instances it is apparent that the instructor is not primarily interested in helping the students. The larger the college or university the more likely this situation is apt to exist. In smaller colleges the sole responsibility of a teacher is to teach, and excellence in teaching is the prime factor behind professional advancement. In larger universities people are also hired to teach but too often the administration looks primarily at the "creativity" of writing and publishing when considering a person for promotion. Ability as a teacher is given little more than lip service.

This often results in causing the young ambitious teacher wanting to advance rapidly, or just to advance, to use his teaching assignment merely to earn his "bread and butter". His main interests and energies are given to research and publication. As a consequence his teaching and students become secondary. A recent experience

brought this forcibly to my attention. One of my advisees came to me greatly disturbed by what was transpiring in one of his classes. This student is an above average student but had just received a second "D" on a written assignment. After the first paper he had gone to the instructor to find out his trouble and get some help. He was brushed off with the statement that you "either know the material or you don't." Further questioning of the student revealed that during the first meeting of the class the instructor made a remark to the effect that "you people might just as well not be in this class because you won't know any more at the end than you now know."

This class is already demoralized. A conference with the departmental chairman revealed that the instructor has been in previous difficulties with his chairman and also with his colleagues. The chairman, however, made this pertinent remark:—"this instructor is a very capable man and accomplishes a really vast amount of work. He is publishing regularly and will doubtless make a name for himself. On the other hand he is tactless and gauche beyond belief."

Unfortunately, there are probably many of this kind of teacher; but we would be safe in assuming that the majority of teachers are conscientious and dedicated to teaching and helping young people. In recent years a number of universities have taken to recognizing and honoring outstanding teachers for excellence in teaching,—research is secondary. Here at Southern Illinois