

REFLECTIONS ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING

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By Alex Gitterman

Alex Gitterman, Ed.D. is Professor, School of Social Work, Columbia University, NY

When we begin our careers in teaching, we often start with the comforting but mistaken assumption that substantive expertise of the subject is self-actualizing. This belief is widely held, perhaps because teaching is frequently equated with sharing one's knowledge. As most of us quickly and painfully discover, while knowledge is an essential requisite, it is not in itself sufficient. To make this point, Granrose (1987) shares his experience with going to a master banjo player for lessons. During each lesson, the master would play several instrumentals at full speed, share experiences as a young banjo player, and urge a lot of practice. What the master did not, and, apparently could not do, "...was to slow down his playing enough for me to learn how he made the wonderful sounds he did with the instrument. Nor could he talk clearly about what he was doing. His knowledge of the banjo was in his fingers. Now, that is probably the best place for a banjo player's knowledge to be; with a banjo teacher, however, things are different. A banjo teacher — any teacher — needs to be consciously aware of what he or she is doing" (p. 1).

The purpose in this narrative is to slow down, become, consciously aware, and reflect on my present understanding of the teaching and learning process.

In social work education (as in all education) important issues emerge regarding the nature of learning and teaching. The complex relation between subject matter, i.e., what is to be taught and teaching methodology, i.e., how it is to be taught, is a pervasive and persisting issue. In reviewing educational literature, I found three distinct educational approaches: the "subject-centered," the "student-centered," and the "integrative" (Gitterman, 1972). The subject and student-centered approaches represent polar ends and to choose one over the other is to create pedagogical mischief. In this narrative I discuss these polarized approaches and reflect on and illustrate my own teaching mistakes of emphasizing the subject at the expense of the student or emphasizing the student's learning process at the expense of the subject. I believe an integration of the intrinsic connections between the subject to be taught with students' learning styles and interests should be our primary edu-

cational objective. Finally, I attempt to operationalize this objective by specifying and illustrating teaching tasks and methods.



The Subject-Centered Approach

Locke said that the mind is empty at birth, "tabula rasa," and ideas are carried through the senses — "let us then suppose the mind to be ... white paper, void of character, without any ideas" (Locke, 1959, p.70). Herbart supported Lockean philosophy by conceiving the mind to be a passively receiving, storing entity (1945). Based on these conceptions, teaching was equated with disciplining and training the mind. To this end, the selection and arrangement of prescriptive "lesson plans," containing the content, appropriate questions, and "right" answers was the primary teaching function. The primary method was Socratic, that is the skillful asking of leading questions until students recognize the correct answer. Behaviorist psychologists' stimulus-response associationist formulations enhanced the Socratic method (Thorndike, 1913; Watson 1924; Skinner 1954, 1959). Essentially, they added to skillful questioning a framework for teachers to reinforce learning through a system of scheduled rewards

(e.g., praise, gold stars) and punishment (e.g., disapproval, detention).

Pedagogically, the subject-centered approach emphasizes the curriculum.

Primary teaching methods include lectures, Socratic questioning, and external reinforcers. Bruner refers to the teaching style as the "expository mode" in which the "pace and style of exposition are principally determined by the teacher as expositor; the student is the listener" (Bruner, 1968). The learner is a relatively passive recipient of generalized abstractions.

Social work faculty and students have been primarily educated in this tradition. The teacher exposit; the students listen and take notes. The approach is familiar and comfortable to all parties. It also goes well with our intellectual preoccupations. As scholars, we devote our careers to the pursuit of substantive expertise. Understandably, we want to share our knowledge and insights. In our confident enthusiasm we often present formulations as if they were self-evident "truths." Neatly honed and sequentially organized presentations of abstract ideas and classifications do not adequately take into account the less neat and less sequential processes by which we acquired our knowledge or for that matter of practice itself. Since the students' world in the field is rarely neat and sequential, our presentations, however brilliant, may well lose contact with them and they, in turn,

with the subject we are teaching. In the end, we both lose. If students do not find our presentations and teaching styles responsive to their educational needs, their learning suffers. And if we care about being effective, then the students' negative direct and indirect feedback affects our self-view and teaching motivation.

I have made the mistake of being preoccupied more with what I was teaching than with what students were learning:

I was teaching the concept of contracting to first semester practice students. The explaining process I taught was simple, logical, and sequential: 1. state the agency's offer of service in clear and operational terms, identifying applicants' or clients' potential perception of their interests, needs, or problems; 2. state your professional role; 3. reach for feedback and so on. In response to the well-organized, sequential presentation and to my total surprise and chagrin, I confronted 25 students in a glazed trance (bordering on the catatonic) and others in absent reverie.

I had forgotten, to my embarrassment, the distinction between guidelines and prescriptions and I failed to draw from my own practice experiences in which orderly, sequential, and predictable actions were rare, very rare. In my eagerness to "teach" I had forgotten the distinction between students 'knowing that,' i.e., having facts and information and 'knowing how,' i.e., using facts and information. Teaching about contracting is not the same as helping students to struggle with how to contract and how to apply the generalizations to their unique situations and individual styles (Gitterman, 1988).

From such teaching experiences, I have learned and relearned

the importance of maintaining a balanced tension between where I am and where the students are in the teaching and learning enterprise. Yet, I occasionally lapse to a preoccupation with the subject and lose contact with my students. I try to reverse this pattern and to invite student feedback and experience. I heed Bertha Reynolds' trenchant observation "When education is oriented to the person who is to learn plus the situation to be mastered, there is something more to teaching than proving to the learner that one knows the subject." (1942, p. 83)

The Student-Centered Orientation

Rousseau perceived children to be inherently good and active while society promoted conformity and constricted their creativity (Rousseau, 1911). Since children possessed innate beauty and goodness, they had to be protected from the evils of society: "From the outset, raise a wall around your child's soul..." (p. 6). He advocated that we allow children to unfold naturally, over time, rather than to impose societal ideas and conventions:

"Nature provides for the child's growth in her own way and this should never be thwarted. Do not make him [sic] sit still when he wants to run about, nor run when he wants to be quiet. If we did not spoil our children's will by our blunders their desires would be free from caprice." (p. 49-50.)

Froebel (1887), father of the kindergarten movement further developed the Rousselian perspective of the child and

society relationship. Children's needs for self expression were fulfilled in play through which they learned to control and master their environment.

The "student-centered" pedagogical approach emphasizes students' interests and needs and an unstructured curriculum. The learner requires freedom for self-expression and self-realization. Teachers allow students to select their study and to "unfold" at their natural pace and rhythm. Dewey (1966, p. 9) captures the spirit of the student-centered approach:

"The child is the starting point, the center, and the end.... To the growth of the child, all studies are subservient; they are instruments, valued as they serve the needs of growth...Not knowledge or information but self-realization is the goal."

Except for kindergarten and possibly a group dynamics class or sensitivity/encounter experience, most social work faculty and students have limited acquaintance with this educational tradition. Yet, we may stumble into focusing primarily on students' immediate concerns and needs. Field work and class dynamics are the two most frequent reasons for our detours. Agency settings and field work assignments can generate anxiety. Such compelling concerns may become the focus of class discussions. Similarly, some of us may become preoccupied with the students' interactional processes. Then class dynamics move to the foreground; the subject matter recedes to the background and the process of

learning is isolated from the substance of education.

As a beginning teacher and eager to respond to students' concerns and interests, this type of mistake is familiar to me.

In teaching a group work course for the first time, the class lacked structure, focus, and direction. The immediacy of students' practice concerns and the classroom process received primary attention. Classes were frequently electric with confrontation, conflict, and introspection. Students were extremely involved and satisfied with the experiential, expressive emphasis. But by the semester's end I questioned what students were actually learning. Indeed, they were "interacting" at the expense of pursuing intellectual goals.

From this teaching experience, I discovered an important lesson. Teaching means being engaged in a structured activity, not being caught up in a classroom process.

I find that certain class processes continue to pose teaching dilemmas. For example, in one class entrenched cliques created a negative climate and interfered with collaborative learning. Some students had personal antipathy for one another and expressed their hostility quite openly. I vacillated between creating safe conditions for discussion, trying to deal with the class obstacle, and pushing ahead with the content. In retrospect, I devoted too much time to dealing with the obstacle to collaborative learning and should have more quickly accepted that some collectives do not work well together. In evaluating the course, some students felt they learned from observing my efforts to deal with the internal obstacle; others felt just as strongly, that too much time was devoted to it. That's the wonder of teaching — just when you are

confident you have it figured out, along comes an experience that throws you off center and motivates you to keep working on improving. For as Will Rogers warned, "Even if you are on the right track, you will be run over, if you just sit there."

The Integrating Approach

Educational scholars frequently assume polarized positions as to whether learning evolves from "within" or from "without." Dewey perceived the polarization as an epistemological phenomenon in which ideas are formed in opposition to other ideas, i.e., as mutually exclusive "either/or." Dewey (1966, p. 4-5) suggested, "It is easier to see the conditions in their separateness, to insist upon one at the expense of the other, to make antagonist of them, than to discover a reality to which each belongs... We get the case of the child vs. the curriculum."

Dewey argued for an organic relationship between students and curricula. Students' needs and subject demands must be integrated rather than made "antagonist". Teachers have to create the opportunities for students to interact with the subject and to personally experience its abstractions. For example, children could more effectively learn about the discovery of a geographic area by actually reenacting the explorer's journey than by simply memorizing relevant facts. Dewey also called for the teacher to assume a middle ground between the extremes of authoritarian control and of total permissiveness (Dewey 1922, 1938, 1947).

Dewey's ideas had a powerful impact on my own teaching. Identifying and developing the conditions which enable students to actively search for and personally experience the connections between the "real world" of practice and the "abstract world" of theory has become for me an ongoing, exciting androgogical challenge. Each class represents an educational journey in which bridges are built across students' diverse system of personal beliefs and experiences with the facts, concepts, and theories of the course.

Integrating Teaching Tasks

I have found seven teaching tasks essential to integrating course content with students' personal experiences and beliefs:

1. Engaging students' minds and hearts with the subject matter:

When we present theories or classification schema to students, they often experience them as fixed doctrine, as formulations separated from the unorderly process and actual struggle of their creation. Presenting students with a "closed system" of knowledge, unfamiliar to their own experiences, distances them from the subject matter. Students can more capably comprehend and utilize a theory, concept or fact when they discover its personal meaning. They need assistance in restoring abstractions to their original states and meanings, and to discover and rediscover these for themselves. Thus, I have learned an important teaching task is to structure situations in which students use the literature, classroom assignments

and discussions, and field work to facilitate their personal involvement with the subject at hand. Through creative structuring, we can provide students with the opportunity to "catch the point," to experience an "aha," to capture the pattern of relationships. The task is to help students to discover, partialize, and use ideas.

2. Embracing uncertainty and ambiguity:

Uncertainty and ambiguity generate anxiety. In response, students become dependent on our expertise and preoccupied with fulfilling our expectations. A search for order and structure is a natural initial survival response. Yet, if this search becomes entrenched, natural curiosity and intrinsic learning motivation suffer. Thus, helping students gain comfort with uncertainty and ambiguity is an important teaching task. They need our help to accept that complex social realities do not lend themselves to simplistic formulations. In place of students' wishes for experts' prescriptions, linear causation's, good/right versus bad/wrong dualism, we must help them embrace and negotiate the gaps between theory and practice, the interdependence of time, people and situations, and the areas of gray, competing principles, and ethical dilemmas.

3. Encouraging critical thinking:

Adult learners evolve implicit knowledge frameworks and personal value systems which profoundly influence their judgments, perceptions, and actions. In time, they become internalized, comfortable, and cherished. Critical thinking, however, requires a suspension of pre-conceived judgments, intellectual curiosity, and a healthy edge of skepticism. Assessment and clinical decisions must be rooted in critical thinking,

i.e., logical reasoning and inferences based on available evidence rather than on unwarranted and unexamined assumptions. Thus, challenging (gently of course) imposition of implicit beliefs and values, and lapses in logic and reasoning is an important teaching task. Teaching critical thinking "involves intentionally creating an atmosphere of disequilibrium so that students can change, rework, or reconstruct their thinking processes." (Meyers 1986, p.14). To learn, students should be taught to critically use both inductive and deductive methods of reasoning: to develop generalizations from practice experiences; and to deduce from knowledge and research findings application to the clients' life situations.

4. Applying knowledge:

In teaching social work practice, I have been struck by the fact that learning about a subject is not the same as learning how to use the subject. I have observed that students who had substantial knowledge about professional assessment and interventions did not necessarily "own" these professional processes. Knowledge has to be transformed into thoughtful and spontaneous action. Knowing-in-action is a learned capacity, a competence, and a significant source of professional influence.

5. Generalizing from experience and literature:

I have learned that just as students can have knowledge about skills without knowing how to use them, students can have skills without having knowledge about them. "Knowing how" is not quite enough; professional competence and mastery requires having generalizable knowledge about one's action. Thus, an equally important task is to help students organize and conceptualize their

thinking so that it lends itself to transferability. Bruner refers to this as "the active pragmatic ideal of leaping the barrier from learning to thinking." (Bruner 1968, p. 77).

6. Creating a climate for peer learning:

Teaching tasks are more recognizable in a classroom environment in which instructor and peers encourage, even demand of each others, exploration of ideas and welcome divergent perspectives. When students are involved in an active, cooperative educational process, they are more likely to learn, think, and risk. Students learn to communicate their ideas while they are still being formed and shaped. From their conversations, they influence one another's knowledge framework and personal values, while they simultaneously question, refine or change their own. They also learn a critical professional skill — how to work collaboratively.

7. Modeling scholarly and professional behavior:

In reflecting on teaching, I have learned that much important learning is "caught" not "taught" (particularly so with values). We have to represent in action what we are trying to teach. If we are dogmatic, sloppy in our own preparation and thinking, authoritarian in our methods, unengaged, etc., these will be the very behaviors we will in effect teach. Thus, an essential teaching task is to strive for congruence between what we teach and how we teach it.

Teaching Methods and Illustrations

Each of us has a distinctive learning style; some learn primarily through symbols and conceptualizations; others visually, summarizing images and organizing perceptions; and still

others by active involvement, i.e., doing. To accommodate distinctive learning styles, I attempt to use various teaching methods.

Discussion method:

Most teachers use the discussion method to actively engage students in the subject. Through structured discussions students have the opportunity to share and test their ideas. For those of us educated and/or trained in group work practice, leading class discussion is relatively comfortable. Many faculty, however, have limited experience, and are not comfortable in the use of discussion. And when they have difficulty in engaging students in meaningful dialogue or in dealing with "class management" issues, they lose faith in the discussion method and retreat to the lecture.

I have learned that class discussions are stimulated by skillfully asked questions. Some types of questions inhibit intellectual exchange. For example, when I ask a question for which I have a specific "right" answer in mind, students quickly learn the object lesson — "compete to show how smart you are". Some gladly join the competition; others withdraw feeling resentful and insecure. A few suggestions:

1. In the first few classes, I have found it helpful to establish the norm of participation by asking questions which invite opinions and have no right or wrong answers, e.g., "What ideas about contracting do you find most difficult to apply to your practice?"

2. Encourage students to talk to each other and build on their respective contributions rather than direct their "answers" to us. Bouncing responses back to students lets them know that we have confidence in their intellectual

abilities and enhances participation.

3. As students become more comfortable about discussion, more discriminating questions requiring facts, inferences, explanations, and evaluative judgments deepen the quality of the conversation. Discerning questions such as, "How would you distinguish and apply contracting and engagement skills with people of different levels of cognitive functioning?" promotes critical thinking and generalizations.

4. Productive class discussions are focused, so in assigning readings I suggest a few questions to be kept in mind. This will provide a preparatory focus for the readings and the ensuing class discussion. Occasionally, student concerns may veer away from course content. In such circumstances there should be explicit recognition that the original line of inquiry is being temporarily laid aside and will be resumed presently.

5. When we ask questions, we must wait for answers. A period of silence can be very helpful. Student responses must be valued and respected. When their reasoning is illogical or inaccurate, it should be courteously challenged to deepen their thinking. Suggesting an alternative interpretation, asking for further evidence, inviting alternative explanations are some ways of to achieve this.

6. Finally, we periodically need to pull together the threads of the discussion by summarizing salient themes. We might also ask students to summarize, e.g., "What one or two ideas are you pulling out from our discussion or what differences are being expressed?"

In a practice class, students were learning the scientific dimension of professional skills. Their academic journals, papers, and class discussions reflected an ability to

inventory professional skills. However, and perhaps as a result of my own emphases upon professional discipline in the use of skills, students reduced skills to mechanistic formulations. In response, I structured a class session to focus on the "art" in social work practice.

After several student presentations, I asked the class what skills meant to them. Shirley responded that it was what you did, the offering of concrete assistance. Rose labeled numerous skills (e.g., awareness and the conscious application of skills). I inquired about the relationship between self-reflection and skills. Rose and Mark thought that self-awareness had to be turned into actions. Debby elaborated the theme further, identifying the worker's capacity to control self; to separate self from the client and the helping process. Gabe described the ability to transfer a skill to new situations. I suggested it might be helpful to examine examples of their efforts to help. Mark identified his empathy for an ADC client. When the client shared how her baby had died, Mark responded, "I know you must feel terrible." Even though his affect was totally bland, Diana credited Mark for his "verbalizing the client's feeling." Rose also supported his empathy, suggesting he demonstrated "interest and concern." Since students continued to offer conceptual labels, I asked them to role play the situation. Mark repeated his interaction with a student volunteer. I asked the class members to experience being the client in the situation as Mark responded, "I know you must feel terrible."

This time they "heard" his blandness and a painful silence followed. I asked Mark to go back into the experience, "what did he feel at that moment?" "I felt outraged, horrified — as if the

whole roof caved in on her." In reaching for other students' reactions, they identified the difference between Mark's affectual inner response and his detached professional response.

The class lit up with excitement. Jennifer was struck by how the professional effort was experienced as "empty words," while his inner reaction, "a sensitive human response." This led into a discussion of their desire to "say the right thing," the professionally "correct" response, stifling their creativity and humanness. Numerous examples were offered, differentiating the "book" and the "person" skills. Diane identified the difficulties in learning to be a professional: "To be in, but outside of the process; to be involved, but to be detached; to be spontaneous, but disciplined." Bill suggested that it felt "schizy," trying to feel a client's pain, but remaining distant. I asked if others experienced this "schizy" feeling. Numerous examples were offered. They were very nicely helping each other to identify the "art: science" dimension. I reached for Phil who seemed to be working on something. He responded, "You have been helping us to learn conceptual skills — to know what to do — when to do it — and why to do it. But this is only a step — now we have to learn to connect these skills with our own personalities." I responded, "Yes, with your own unique professional style — with the artist in each of you." Carl exclaimed, "This is the crux of the challenge, integrating me with the skills — it sounds impossible." Paul added, "I'm beginning to realize that I have to own these skills — not just learn them — they have to become part of me." Carl likened their learning experience to "An uncut diamond... it possesses natural precious qualities, but it needs to be shaped,

smoothed, and polished." The class was excited by this analogy and ran with it. Time ended our discussion and I suggested several readings on the art: science professional dimension.

Lecture method:

The increased demand for integrated, generalist, and specialized knowledge overloads course curricula. Most faculty feel pressured about covering increasing amounts of material. We learn from experience to become selective about the content to be studied and the way to present it. An obvious advantage of lectures is that condensing information saves time. Well prepared informal and brief lectures also supplement students' understanding from readings and class discussions. Placing the many bits and pieces of what students have been reading, discussing, and experiencing into an organized framework helps them tie together diverse materials. Lectures also provide us with a forum to share our current contributions to knowledge building and express our views on complex professional issues and dilemmas.

Although "monologue is less risky than dialogue," a primary reliance on lecture increases the distance between us and our students and them from the subject matter. Anxious note taking should not be considered a substitute for "processing information by thinking out loud, restating concepts in one's own words, discussing issues with fellow students, or challenging a teacher's assumptions and conclusions." (Meyer 1986, p. 57). A few suggestions:

1. At the outset, I have found it helpful to inform students what I plan to cover and my basic thesis or argument. You can list on the blackboard the major points to be covered. The introduction helps students follow your presentation.

2. The main points you wish to make can be emphasized by repetition and voice modulation. It is also helpful to build explicit bridges between concepts and to occasionally summarize major points.

3. Provide illustrations and examples relevant to students' practice experiences. They activate and personalize concepts, and so to speak, bring them home.

4. Making eye contact, inviting questions, and reaching for non-verbal signals of confusion or even boredom engages students in the presentation.

5. Humor is a social lubricant. It provides a common class reaction, a relaxing moment, and mobilizes interest and attention. Whether showing cartoons, making witty remarks, using puns and ironies, telling a joke, or making self-disparaging quips, humor must be congruent with the instructor's personality.

6. Visual methods such as overhead transparencies, videotapes and hand-outs support verbal presentations.

While my students are receptive to psychological group theory, sociological inquiry generates anxiety. They experience the sociological perspective as opaque and abstract. Yet, if they are to obtain an understanding of the group entity, they must develop familiarity and comfort with such concepts as social structure and culture. A brief lecture involves students with these more abstract constructs and clarifies their practice relevance.

Initially, I suggest that two types of social conditions influence the behavior of people: social structure and culture. I identify social structure as our first learning task and begin by asking students to react to the statement: "Is the whole greater than the sum of its parts?" After cursory discussion,

sometimes debate, I ask the class to apply the statement to different types of groups, e.g., people waiting in line to get into a movie theater and people in a movie theater, a class group, and a field work group. From this exercise, they begin to distinguish an aggregate from a group. In comparing these groups, they begin to identify the elaboration of group properties, e.g., patterns of interaction, division of labor, patterns of sentiments, i.e., essentially the concept of social structure. While becoming somewhat more comfortable with these notions, they do not yet fully grasp the ideas. To further their understanding, I ask the class to develop an inventory of single words, describing a group. Usually, they immediately identify numerous descriptive adjectives, e.g., hostile, affectionate, and other "individual" attributes. At this point, I pointedly place a chair in the middle of the classroom, asking them to use single words to describe it. They quickly identify the chair's properties, e.g., texture, materials. By this time, most students begin to catch the point, the sociological group, like the chair, is an abstraction, comprised and defined by certain attributes or properties. Within this perspective of a small group, I ask again, "Is the whole greater than its parts?" By this time, they have captured the above and beyond dimension as the elaboration of a social structure. I then ask them to respecify the components of social structure. I identify illustrative research to deepen their grasp. For example, in the discussion of division of labor, they become acquainted with studies of status and role expectations, evaluations, diversity, ranking, etc.

In introducing the concept of culture, the shared beliefs and orientations which unite members of groups, I suggest that while individuals have their own

standards of human conduct, a collective develops its own notion of how people "should" behave. I identify different kinds of norms: prescribed, proscribed, permitted, preferred, moral, cognitive, and aesthetic. I ask for examples of the various types of norms in the class and then in their groups. They become involved and surprised by the existence, force and impact of group norms. They learn, for example, that most norms are unspoken unless broken. This leads to a presentation of positive and negative sanctions. I close by explaining why groups cannot survive without the elaboration of a social structure and culture; and, by giving them a reading assignment on the subject and asking them to try to apply it to their practice in the field.

With this foundation, students are readied to tackle the more complex relation between a group and its social and physical environments.

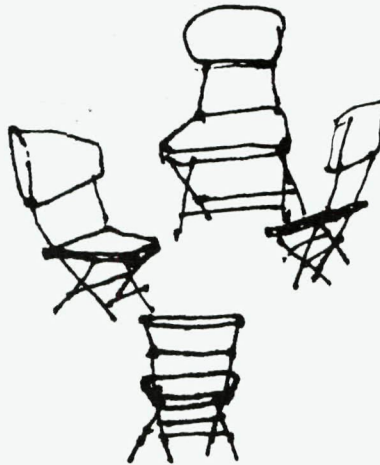
Action methods:

The usefulness of brief lectures is revealed in how they affect the quality of students' thinking and communication in class discussion, as well as their capacity for analysis and synthesis in written assignments. Discussion and lecture together form the principle methods of the teaching: learning experience. They can also be supported by action methods.

Role play is probably the most potent action method. If set-up properly, it helps students experience the perspective of others, explore their own reactions, their own behaviors and rehearse new behaviors. Being actively involved, facilitates integration of the cognitive and affective aspects of their learning. If role play is unstructured and unplanned, it yields minimal learning, and participants self-conscious and

anxious. A few suggestions:

1. To stimulate thinking and learning, the situation being role played should be well structured and challenging. The design, however, should be fairly simple with enough description to make the situation specific and clear.



2. To introduce role play, begin with two-party role plays and build gradually to small group and eventually to class role plays. Dyad and small group role plays mitigate self-consciousness primarily because the audience is limited.

3. As students become accustomed to role playing, invite them to participate more spontaneously. For example, when a student raises a question or refers to a practice experience, the teacher might suggest role playing and have that questioner "brief" the role players to see what might have gone awry and what might be done.

4. Having the players reverse roles helps to deepen the feelings and perceptions of the players.

5. In role plays conducted before an entire class, structure specific student assignments, e.g., identify with client or worker, observe nonverbal behaviors, etc. The assignments assure active involvement of the entire class.

6. In role playing practice

interviews, invite students assuming worker roles to comment on their own practice. This step provides the opportunity to be self-evaluative and frees others to be honest and direct in their feedback. The discussion can then be directed to what was observed, what helped and what didn't, what was the impact of what was said, why particular actors reacted as they did, etc.

7. Contrast a role play with an actual case excerpt. For example, a role play is structured in which a prospective client responds to a student's home visit with, "What the hell do you want?" After discussion, the teacher reads (or distributes) the actual case excerpt, inviting comparative analysis and practice generalizations.

Many new field instructors have difficulty with the transition from practitioner or administrator to teacher. A brief class vignette from a "Seminar in Field Instruction" illustrates my use of role play to help field instructors examine a student's learning pattern and improve their own teaching skills.

Jane presented her second year student. She described the student's tendency to make everything bleak, tragic, terrible, overwhelming; and in turn, her own tendency to reassure prematurely. In moving to the supervisory record, several field instructors commented on the student's lack of preparation for the conference. Similarly, the student's reluctance to become involved in the supervisory process was shown in her sudden, abrupt changes of focus, and haste to end the conference, etc.

In response, Jane increasingly taught didactically, though she realized that the student wasn't "listening." Seminar members identified Jane's reactions to the

student's provocative behavior. We recreated an incident where in the midst of a teaching point, the student excused herself to make a telephone call, returned 10 minutes later and gave Jane "permission" to continue. I asked Jane to reexperience in the form of a role soliloquy what she experienced at that moment. In sharing her reactions, she dramatically reenacted her growing anger and efforts to suppress "taboo" feelings by lecturing. Other field instructors supported Jane. They shared their own efforts to be "super-teachers," (one analogized it to being super mom, wife, professional). They also understood her disappointment and self-blame. After examining various student learning patterns and blocks, we returned to Jane and role played constructive use of anger and the importance of holding out expectations for the student.

Conclusion

The relation between teaching and learning remains our central issue and enduring preoccupation. It has been described in various ways and sometimes with much hyperbole. To Hill (1980) the teacher is a mountain climber who is a "confident, exuberant guide on expeditions of shared responsibility into the most exciting and least — understood terrain on earth — the mind itself" (p.48). Based upon the birth of his first child, Ayers (1986) analogizes the teacher to a birth wife in the student's birth as a learner. For those musically inclined, Eisner (1983) compares the complexity and creativity of teaching to orchestrating, and a teacher to an orchestra leader. These analogies can be helpful imageries.

However, they confuse expertise with an ability to teach. One might be an excellent mountain climber, birth wife, or conductor yet experience difficulty in teaching others the necessary theory, methods, and skills.

I have reflected on my own teaching in order to specify the complex connections between teaching and learning. One has to maintain a balance between curriculum objectives and student concerns. Choosing between them is often a false choice. Content and process must be woven into a design which permits the mutual support of curriculum objectives and students' active participation in their own learning.

The student's prior educational socialization can create obstacles to their active participation. For example, I have consistently found students' initial stance to be intellectually passive and disengaged. It is as if they expect to be lectured at without their opinions and experiences taken into account. In order to engage their intellects and their emotions, the passivity has to be sensitively and unequivocally challenged. Our excitement and respect for the subject and for teaching is conveyed to the students.

How instructors use their authority is very important and sometimes crucial. At some point a student or a few students is sure to directly or indirectly challenge our authority by such behaviors as coming late, looking bored, asking provocative question, disagreeing with something we said, making a

direct complaint, etc. How we deal with testing behaviors will determine the quality of our conversation. If we invite and chase the negative, students are more likely to engage the subject and each other. If we squelch their concerns, they will withdraw.

It is plain and clear that if we are open to different opinions, suggestions, and criticism, students will have to deal with how differences will be dealt with among them. Differences in students' personal backgrounds and life experiences creates tension between them in how to engage the subject (Gitterman 1992). The instructor communicates faith in collaborative learning by providing support and inviting students to deal with the interpersonal obstacles that obstruct their learning from each other as well as the instructor.

A CODA

After an initial review of this manuscript, Sonia Leib Abels, my friend and editor of REFLECTIONS, "suggested" that I further "explain in a personal sense what lead to your changing to a more balanced, or integrated approach to teaching." A straight forward, simple question — so it seemed, but as I stared at the computer monitor I pondered how to sort out a 30 year preoccupation? Sonia wanted me to reflect some more.

So on further reflection — one factor that I discovered early in my career is that students are the best teachers on teaching. Their direct and

indirect feedback has been invaluable in teaching me about the connections between the subject and the learner. Second, some of my own teachers primarily in the masters and doctoral programs modeled for me the integration. Particularly, Professor William Schwartz' teaching of a seminar for new field instructors had a profound impact on my ideas about teaching (and practice as well). His demand for active participation in learning, for intellectual and emotional involvement with the subject, and for clarity about professional, function, methods, and skills continues to resonate. Then of course there have been numerous colleagues, countless conversations about teaching, and generous sharing of materials. I learned from all of them that the instructor's job is to teach (and to learn) and the student's job is to learn (and to teach). When teaching and learning overlap, coincide, and come together it is indeed a shining moment which sustains us until the next shining moment.

Finally, I also attribute my learning to a love for and curiosity about teaching and a chronic striving to avoid mediocrity. Will Rogers words certainly motivate me: "The only good thing about being mediocre is that you are always at your best." □

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