

The College Classroom

Conflict, Change, and Learning

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PREFACE

If you were to interrupt a college teacher and ask him what is going on in his class, his answer would probably focus on the material being covered at that moment. The content of the lecture or discussion would be central to his awareness of what was happening. But if you pressed him a bit and asked if that were really all that was going on, he would probably be able to identify other events: two students whispering, one looking especially pleased at the political implications of the teacher's last comments, some misgivings on the teacher's part about whether he had represented the facts correctly, and so on. What are these events? What happens in college classrooms beyond the appointed tasks of "covering" and "mastering" the material of the course?

This book presents a study of some of these events, especially the interpersonal and emotional events that occur in the classroom. It is by no means an assault on the importance of the content of education. It merely expands the focus to include aspects of the teacher-student interchange that are often ignored. The fact that as teachers we so often ignore the noncontent issues of the classroom can be traced partly to our ignorance and partly to our pessimism. Our ignorance is revealed when we find out how little we understand about what caused a particularly sluggish class or a confusing, violent interchange over a minor issue. Our ignorance is revealed when we find that for unknown reasons things which "worked" one term flop terribly the next. And our pessimism is revealed when upon wondering what to do about our failures, we are forced

to conclude that we had better not even bother to find out why things happened as they did. The "other" part of teaching and learning, the world of emotional and interpersonal realities, is usually seen as a hopeless quagmire. Better to push ahead, we say, than to veer off the beaten (content) path into the murky world of emotion. Our pessimism is revealed by our fear that it might take all term to figure out why one session was so fruitless. Obviously, it is better to avoid the whole business.

We are as subject as anyone else to the confusion and pessimism just described, but we have tried to call on our other identities as researchers and psychologists to prevent such situations from becoming chronic. We have tried to band together to study the process of teaching and learning with the hope that we can comprehend the interpersonal reality of the classroom more accurately than before and then do what needs to be done. This is a tall order for any research undertaking, especially given the nonrepetitive nature of the teacher's world.

Our exploration took us in several directions: toward understanding the teacher's role from a new and broader perspective, toward understanding the diversity of students more sensitively, and especially toward understanding how things develop in the classroom. The intellectual and the interpersonal life of the college classroom is in a constant state of flux. Crises, partial adaptations, new challenges, some failures, and some genuinely creative solutions: the interpersonal world is a kaleidoscope of shifting realities. But can we understand these changes and can we use this understanding to formulate a new sense of the goal of college teaching?

The search for a new conception of both the process and the goal of education is central to this effort. The notion we find most useful is essentially a generalization of Bion's concept of work. By the time we are done with our presentation we hope to have put substance into the abstract notion which can now only be stated baldly: the proper goal of the college classroom is "work," and only by understanding the obstacles to work that flow from the complexity of the teacher's task, the students' diversity, and the nature of group development can the teacher make his optimal contribution to this goal.

The challenge of coming to understand this process better will not be met by one study. This effort is more in the form of a proposed model than a definitive statement. It chooses the path of the intensive case study rather than the survey of many classrooms. Its research style is a mixture of quantitative, observational techniques and qualitative analysis of transcript and interview material. We arrive, in the end, with some generalizations across our limited data and with the beginnings of a theory about how the college classroom develops.

These products should be seen as a challenge to all college teachers to begin collaborating with one another, to begin sharing their observations,

quantitative or otherwise, so that the regularities and variety of our classroom may be better understood. The challenge is implicit in the choice of this exploratory, case approach. It says, "Well, this is what happened, as best we can understand it, in these few cases. Now, is it like that in your field, in your college, in this decade? If not, what is it like? What other types of students, what other developmental phases, and what other dynamic processes have you observed and do you feel should be added to this new body of knowledge?"

Implicit in this study and in the challenge that we hope it will present to others is a notion that it is still important to understand the internal workings of the college classroom. Simply by avoiding other issues so explosively manifest in today's colleges, we might seem to be implying that the only (or even the most important) changes in college education are those having to do with the classroom. We really do not think that at all. As two of us have tried to show in another volume (Cytrynbaum and Mann, 1969), many of the ideas presented here suggest and clarify the kinds of off-campus or field courses in which all of us have been involved. The old patterns of education are breaking down, and new and legitimate criticisms of the university's role in society suggest that further changes are likely. It seems to us, however, that the need for clarity about what happens in the process of college teaching is going to become greater rather than less. As open enrollment programs and their approximations come into effect, as the politics of the academy are more and more forced into public debate, and even as the classroom's locus and content changes, the teacher's task becomes all the more complex. The importance of knowing what the teacher is feeling about his subject matter and about the students will increase. The importance of developing new and sharper images of the students and their diverse reactions to their education will increase. The need to develop a humane enough and a complex enough sense of the educational relationship is acute, and to this end we offer this exploratory venture.

The authors of this volume were fortunate enough in being part of a larger and wonderfully vital group of teachers. Our main assignment was introductory psychology, but we branched out in various directions. As we recall with appreciation those whose contributions made these research efforts doubly exciting, we would mention first our colleagues in this teaching culture, especially Jim Ledvinka, Jeff Paige, Stan Same-now, Phil Newman, Dan Perlman, Rory O'Day, Kalen Hammann, and Graham Gibbard. Dana Silverberg Bennett and Myrna Wolfson Wolosin spanned this teaching world and our research project, and we owe them a special debt of gratitude. Dana's work on the follow-up study was a crucial part of the data collection, and both of them played important roles in the evolving definition of what we wanted to study. Three other

members of the research team were our colleagues in teaching as well. John Hartman not only scored one group but he carried out with great skill the heavy responsibility of training the other three scorers. Doug McClennen was another of the four scorers and stayed with the project during its early days. Martha Cohen Arnold also combined the role of teacher-colleague with an important place in the chaotic days of finding our sense of direction amidst all the quantitative data we had created.

We would surely have drowned in our own data had it not been for Dick Cabot and Honor McClellan. Dick wrote a whole family of programs which restored order, and Honor inherited the often thankless job of keeping the research efforts from flying off in a million directions. Subject to cross-currents of requests, pleas, and their own good sense, Honor and Dick somehow managed; and we are terribly aware of how many times they helped us move through the jumble to the simple truths we have tried to present in this study. Liz Silverberg's part in our long journey was also an important one: she helped us develop and apply the teacher-as-scoring system developed during the latter phases of our research.

Marg Koski has earned our special respect and appreciation. She has typed more versions and drafts of this report than any of us can recall, and both by her work and her encouragement she kept alive our often flagging sense that we would ever manage and complete our task. We owe much of the success of this complex and often precarious venture to Marg and to the steady, competent work of Audrey Warren in our early days.

We wish to express our appreciation to our colleagues who have advised us along the way and as the manuscript neared completion. Jim Donovan and Roddy Wares were particularly helpful critics of our writing. Ted Mills deserves our special appreciation for his criticisms and suggestions which helped us to make some much needed revisions of the first draft. Bill McKeachie was generous with both his consultation and his support throughout the project. It was he, together with Drs. Isaacson and Milholland, who made it possible for this study to be supported by their long-term grant from the Office of Education. In addition to Bill McKeachie's role in the project, we were particularly fortunate to have his support in the department where, as chairman, he had for years helped to create the kind of environment in which research and innovation in teaching were likely to occur and to receive the necessary support.

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CONTENTS

1	<i>The Meaning of Work</i>	1
2	<i>Varieties of Affective Experience</i>	20
3	<i>A Day in the Life</i>	87
4	<i>The Styles and Adaptations of Students</i>	144
5	<i>A Case Study of Teacher Strategies and Student Responses</i>	224
6	<i>The Natural History of the Classroom</i>	243
7	<i>The Process of Learning to Work</i>	293
8	<i>The Effective Teaching Culture</i>	333
	APPENDIX A <i>Methodological Footnotes</i>	351
	APPENDIX B <i>Instruments</i>	367
	REFERENCES	383
	INDEX	387

THE MEANING OF WORK



If college teachers were to discuss their teaching with one another, which at present they hardly ever do, it would soon be apparent that controversy and confusion abound beneath the polite and self-assured facade so characteristic of an educational institution. There is controversy over the proper goals of a college education, over the best techniques for reaching even the goals that can be agreed on, and over how to determine the relative success of the different techniques. Beyond this, there is widespread confusion within the minds of educators about the legitimacy and effectiveness of various procedures. The teacher is under pressure from students, colleagues, and administrators, and from his own ideals and convictions. These forces often imply or demand that he move as quickly as possible in apparently incompatible directions, and his world becomes a pressure cooker of seemingly irresolvable alternatives.

Our hope in this volume is not to provide definitive answers to the "Should I do A or B?" questions which flood the teacher's mind during periods of stress. Neither is it our intention to argue that one goal or one technique should be chosen over another. Our hope is to broaden the conception of what is happening between teachers and students and to suggest larger goals within which at least some of the alternatives can be transformed into challenging and even soluble problems for the teacher and the students to work on together.

Toward this end we first address ourselves to the definition of the teacher's task as an educator. Surely the familiar pedagogic argument ("The teacher's job is to get across information." No, it's to motivate students." "No, it's to certify a certain level of proficiency." And so on.) needs to be replaced by a broader conception of the several distinct aspects of teaching, each of which is legitimate and even crucial under certain to-be-specified conditions.

There are many ways to analyze the components of the educational task, but we have chosen to focus on the teacher and his role relationships to the students. We have tried to unravel the strands of the teacher's total role by answering in six different ways the questions: Who is the teacher? In what capacity does he stand before his class?

As we observed teachers in action, talked with them after class, and reflected on our own experiences, a set of six different identities emerged. Each element of what we have called *the "teacher-as" typology* represents a distinguishable aspect of the teacher's total relationship with the class. The teacher-as typology is but one possible way of carving up the diverse intentions, behaviors, and perceptions that constitute the teacher-student relationship, but it will provide a basis for going further into the analysis of the educational process.

The Teacher as Expert

The most obvious answer to the question "In what capacity does the teacher stand before the class?" is captured by the teacher as expert. This aspect of the teacher role conjures up the disparity between teacher and student with respect to the knowledge, experience, and wisdom they can apply to the subject matter of the course. The teacher is the expert, at least within a certain defined area of knowledge. His presumed expertise underlies both his right to be there and the students' interest in taking the course. They imagine they will learn something from him: from his lectures, his comments in class, or in the margins of the graded papers—somehow the initial imbalance of expertise will be altered if the educational contract has been fulfilled.

Whether the channel of communication is the assigned reading or the nonstop lectures or the give-and-take of classroom discussion, the essential issue here is the role relationship between the teacher

as expert and the students. The student may be the passive note-taker, but this is not the only possibility. The student who best fulfills the hopes of the teacher as expert might be better described as diffusely curious, motivated to satisfy intellectual drives of his own, and genuinely interested in the material presented or assigned by the teacher.

We need not belabor this aspect of the teacher's role. With only slight variations the teacher as expert plays a major role in nearly every college classroom in the country. If anything, our difficulty is less one of describing the teacher as expert than of broadening the conception of teacher beyond the confines of this traditional view.

The Teacher as Formal Authority

In what other capacity does the teacher stand before the class? Who else is he? Consider the teacher as he presents his proposals regarding when the final paper will be due and how much it will count. Clearly, at that moment, he is not the teacher as expert. The students are not raising their hands to challenge his command of his field but to challenge, or at least to engage, the teacher as formal authority. The whole process of education in an institutional setting raises so many issues of authority (for example, grades, credits, and requirements) that the teacher as expert may sometimes wonder whether knowledge or a smoothly functioning bureaucracy is more important to the college. The students may wonder, too.

The pressures on the teacher to function as a formal authority arise from several sources. Viewed from the perspective of the larger social structure within which the college classroom is located, the teacher is an agent not only of instruction but also of control and evaluation. He is responsible to a group of administrators and external agents who expect him to insure uniformity of standards and a justifiable evaluation system based on merit when he presents his set of grades at the end of the course. Future employers, draft boards, graduate schools, scholarship committees, and Deans' offices may all indicate their need for a meaningful and averageable estimate of a student's performance. The chaos which is anticipated if a pass-fail or nongraded system were instituted reflects the amount of commitment the formal system has to a merit-oriented grading system. In addition, teachers are expected to cooperate with university officials

in seeking student compliance with the university's rules, regulations, and standards of decorum, so that neither the administration nor the university is publicly embarrassed. Teachers enter the classroom with their power clearly established and institutionalized, whether they like it or not.

Functioning as a formal authority may involve the teacher in setting clearly defined standards of excellence, goals, and deadlines for assignments, as well as those instances of moment-to-moment control over classroom procedure and decorum. The teacher's influence in this area is derived ultimately from his power to banish the student from the classroom in the interest of maintaining an environment in which other students can learn and, more commonly, from the teacher's capacity to be punitive in his examining and grading practices. Although this ultimate power might never be invoked, the fact remains that in most classrooms it is typically within the teacher's domain to define what is relevant for class discussion, when an issue should be raised privately after class, who will speak in class, and what kinds of behavior are unacceptable or disruptive.

It follows, then, that we would include within the set of activities initiated by students not only the familiar requests for clarity regarding assignments and grades but also those which address the issue of the teacher's control over the classroom interaction. Thus the basic aims of the formal authority strategy are the integration of the student into the norms of the larger formal system, the enforcement of these norms, and the provision of a classroom structure and clearly defined expectations designed to insure a minimum of disruptive activities (see Jackson, 1963; and Trow, 1960a, 1960b). Some teachers mistrust students, are convinced of their irresponsibility, and are fearful that they will get out of control and turn the classroom into a "blackboard jungle." They are convinced that their authority is all that prevents a state of anarchy in the classroom. Other teachers seem more concerned about student passivity and complacency. For them the usefulness of assignments and grades lies partly in their capacity to curb student laziness, but grades are also seen as curbing the students' tendencies to be mistaken about their ability and their accomplishments. The grade can say "You don't know this material as well as you think you do," but it also can say "You may not know it all, but relative to your classmates you have a right to feel some pride in your performance." The entire process of examining and grading involves the teacher as expert as well as the teacher as formal authority. Clearly, one aspect of the teacher's power is his capacity to define success and failure in terms of the kind of

exam, the content of the exam, and the standards applied to the students' work.

In addition to serving as a representative of the formal structure, the teacher is also a member of a particular field or discipline in which he has a great deal invested and into which he is interested in recruiting new members. This brings us to the teacher as socializing agent.

The Teacher as Socializing Agent

An understanding of the teacher as socializing agent requires a consideration of the context in which higher education exists. First, the teacher is in possession of certain information and is responsible for providing a structure within which he can share his knowledge; he is also a member of various overlapping groups of which the students are either marginal members or outsiders. Furthermore, the students' goals typically reach far beyond a particular classroom or course. The teacher is usually a member of the community of scholars, accredited by a professional and academic discipline, and he is also a member of an institution that may be highly relevant to a student's occupational aspirations. The teacher resembles in some sense a gatekeeper to a vocational world. He serves as a representative of his field, and especially of the values, assumptions, and style of intellectual life that characterize his discipline. Frequently, it is he who does or does not pass a student to the next plateau or screening process, or he may do so with varying degrees of support and pleasure. It is soon apparent to students that acceptability within the standards of the intellectual community involves more than the ability to master the intellectual material. In a very real sense the college teacher can serve as a recruitment officer for his field, and his functions tend to include the identification of a bright and exciting prospect, the selection of the most likely candidates via a continuous process of selective encouragement and discouragement, and the provision of a form of training and experience that equips the student apprentice so that he can tackle the next set of hurdles or initiation rites (Adelson, 1962).

When undergraduate programs are adapted to this aspect of higher education, they tend to become highly "preprofessional." The student is encouraged to take courses that would be useful to him in graduate school. He is engaged in discussions of the underlying

commitment to science or humanism or financial success which seems to the teacher to be a necessary condition for acceptance into training programs at a higher level. But we should not overlook the socializing activities of the teacher whose relevant reference group is the more broadly defined community of scholars. Although teacher may shun the more explicit forms of creating "little graduate students," he may feel very strongly about the extent to which the university is an appropriate place only for those who share his political or social values or his notions about what the process of education is all about.

Students also make their contribution to the establishment of this aspect of the total task. For many, there are features of the intellectual community or of the activities of a particular specialty per se which are attractive. For some students, to begin to imagine their future in terms of a particular occupational goal is to crystallize their still developing interests and passions; for others, it makes concrete and reachable a future that assures them of the necessities and pleasures of life as they see them. There are students who are motivated primarily by their alienation from or rejection of the life style associated with their parents, their community, or their peers; many of these students are inclined to approach other socializing agents in order to test out the possibilities for a meaningful future commitment (see Keniston, 1967; and Peterson, 1968).

Thus a teacher and his students may be bound together in many ways within the socializing relationship. In trying out the discipline or profession that the teacher represents, the student may acquire sacred artifacts or the awkward mimicry of an accepted intellectual pose or pretentious vocabulary. Fortunately for him, most teachers overlook these ungainly beginnings. A faculty member may remark to a colleague that such and such a bright undergraduate seems to be "coming into the field," although he may feel constrained to conceal his sense of pleasure at the implication that his field has proved capable of attracting yet another valuable recruit.

How does the teacher as socializing agent or gatekeeper typically function in the classroom? Keeping in mind that we have been describing a process of acculturation in which new norms, values, and ideas are synthesized with the old, let us focus on the classroom process. Here we would include brief lectures or anecdotes which convey to the student the positions members of his field take on different issues, why they line up the way they do, some sense of his own position, and the process by which he arrived there, as well as some statements which convey his research interests and intellectual style.

A teacher is often drawn into or initiates discussions of how one goes about entering the "inner circle"; that is, how one applies, which advanced degree programs are good, what admission requirements are like, what future courses would be relevant, and so forth. In these instances, the teacher may be providing his students with a fair amount of factual information, leading one to believe that he is functioning as an expert. However, the main thrust of the teacher's effort is still in the direction of socialization.

The goals of information transmission, evaluation, control, and socialization or recruitment are a legitimate and rather traditional part of the dominant academic culture which heavily influences classroom functioning and the values of higher education. In introducing the teacher as a facilitator, an ego ideal, and a person, the goals and prototypic behaviors we shall describe tend not to have the same aura of legitimacy in academic circles. We shall argue that they should. Let us begin by considering the teacher as facilitator.

The Teacher as Facilitator

There are times in the teacher-student relationship when the teacher seems much less absorbed with his own expertise, his power, and his field than with the aspirations of the students. The teacher as facilitator seems to conceive of his role differently mainly because he conceives of the students differently. By not assuming that he can specify what skills or goals they bring with them, he creates for himself the complex task of determining what individual students have come to do, what they seem able to do already, and what they might need help in doing better. Thus the student-centered teacher is usually opposed to what he might call "imposing" his goals or agenda on a group of strangers. In this view the major task facing the teacher is to construct goals for the class that express the students' sense of what should come next in their intellectual development.

From this it follows that the typical activities of the teacher as facilitator may entail far more listening and questioning than lecturing and assigning. To involve the students in formulating the goals, questions, and content of a course may prove to be a difficult process if the students are reticent or disbelieving. Furthermore, the teacher as facilitator may find that much of his energy goes to working on student discouragement, frustration, and paralysis if the goals and especially the means to those goals prove to be more difficult than they were initially thought to be.

In practice, the teacher as facilitator may address himself to two general sources of student learning impediments. On the one hand, he may sense that students are capable of productive intellectual effort only to the extent that impediments such as fear of failure, self-abasement in the face of authority, or depression resulting from excessively high standards are removed, reduced, or at least confronted (Adelson, 1962). This may lead him to invest a considerable amount of concern and energy in reducing emotional and interpersonal blocks to learning in a variety of fairly direct ways. On the other hand, the teacher as facilitator may operate more like an administrator than a counsellor, as he addresses himself to a variety of situationally determined impediments. Students may not be familiar with how the library system works or where to find relevant reference material. The teacher as facilitator may guide the students through the library or prepare a handout on reference materials and where to find them. Many students would find it difficult, without assistance, to gain access to the field experiences which would make their intellectual work more relevant; a facilitator might enter here. The teacher as facilitator might aid students in their own battle for ungraded or more socially relevant courses. He could structure his class in such a way that it was entirely student centered so that it was based on individual student programs of study, or he could leave the decision about class structure up to his students. He might not hand out a list of assigned readings but instead might prepare an extensive, annotated bibliography from which students made their own decisions about what they were to read.

In whatever form he chooses, it is clear that the teacher as facilitator tries to respond primarily to the student's own definition of his goals and his unique sense of himself as a learner. The student's goals may be quite divergent from those of the teacher but, then, facilitating someone's learning and development often involves a recognition of the substantial differences between individuals in terms of what they value and what they are seeking.

The Teacher as Ego Ideal

The function of the teacher is broader than that of providing information, control, and entry into the elite. It also extends beyond that of helping the student realize his own goals and potentialities. It