

1990

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Edgerton, Russell, "The Teaching Initiative: With a \$50,000 gift from Allen Jossey-Bass, AAHE launches a new Special Project on teaching" (1990). *To Improve the Academy*. 195.

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Excerpted from "The Making of a Professor"\*

# The Teaching Initiative

With a \$50,000 gift from Allen Jossey-Bass, AAHE launches a new Special Project on teaching.

**Russell Edgerton**

...During this decade, many of the faculty who came into higher education during the spectacular boom years of the 1960's will begin passing the baton to a new generation of faculty. New issues have already surfaced: The prospect of shortages in critical fields. The desperate need for faculty of color. The strains, within and among our institutions, created by campus leaders who, in their scramble for talent, are behaving more and more like corporate raiders....

But there is another agenda at this meeting that is even more prominent than the first. It's not how can we increase the flow of talent through the pipeline, but how can we repair the pipes. It's the need for reform: reform of the structures and processes through which graduate students turn into professors; and reform of the way academic work is defined, and how this work is rewarded....

## Preparing Faculty as Teachers

The issue that intrigues me, looking at the upcoming changing of the guard, is the opportunity for a second try at making a professor. In the 1960's, we were so caught up in building buildings and organizing new institutions to keep up with enrollments, we had little time to stop and

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\*Russ Edgerton, President of AAHE, presented the opening session of the Fourteenth Annual Conference of the POD Network on Friday, October 8, 1989, entitled "Forward to Aristotle: Teaching as the Highest Form of Understanding." He capsulated the essence of his comments in this article which appeared in the June, 1990 issue of *AAHE Bulletin*, 42(10), 15-18 and is reprinted with permission.

think about the teaching tasks that faculty were to perform, or how they should be prepared for these tasks.

The question is, were we to muster our forces for a second try at preparing faculty to teach, what would we do?

The question typically leads to a discussion of who is responsible and where in the process more attention should be paid to teaching. Graduate schools are taken to task for their single-minded focus on research. The graduate schools retort that only half of their students are preparing for careers in teaching – and, besides, research is the backbone of teaching. The first years on the job, given the pressures for tenure, all energy must be focused on research. And on it goes.

Yet underneath all this buck passing lies a deeper issue, one we don't often discuss: What is the "it" that we think prospective professors should learn? Faculty become specialists – economists, chemists, biologists – by virtue of their mastery of a field of knowledge. They become "professors" when they are employed by our institutions and assigned classes to teach. What should a professor of biology know, and be able to do, that a biologist may not?

## **The Revival of Pedagogy**

It is here, I believe – in our assumptions, biases, stereotypes about the nature of the expertise required to be a good teacher – that we come to a key source of the problem. Most faculty have little respect for pedagogy itself.

I'm not talking here about the doing of teaching – which most faculty care about and many do quite well. I'm talking about respect for the science and art of teaching as an intellectual field. Few of the faculty who care about teaching and are good teachers would ever consider taking home an article to read about teaching, or consider teaching an intellectually engaging topic to discuss with a colleague....

Why should we care, especially since there seem to be faculty in our midst who are naturally good teachers without any help or formal training? Because they could be better, and because the other 75 to 90 percent of the faculty who are not "naturals" need help to acquire this expertise. To privatize teaching is to demean it. So it behooves us to understand why pedagogy is so undervalued.

Two characteristics of pedagogy in particular have limited its appeal to the larger faculty. First, most scholarship in pedagogy has focused on the study of teaching and learning in general. Inevitably, generalizations about how to lecture, how to lead discussion groups, and other issues

concerning how to teach across all subjects skip over what most faculty consider the most important aspect of their teaching — the knowledge they bring to class about the substance of the topic at hand.

Second, when most faculty think of learning how to teach, they think of the teacher training that goes on within departments and schools of education. And this brings to mind the stereotypes of a community striving to overcome its low status by constructing an edifice of deductive theory about what most faculty see as rather simple matters. The more elaborate the taxonomy, the stranger the words, the more “scientific” it all appears — and the less sense it makes to faculty who might otherwise be receptive.

The good news is that a new generation of scholars is now reshaping our understanding of what pedagogy is all about. They are shifting the paradigms and, in doing so, are laying the foundations for a new pedagogy that can earn the respect of the faculty at large.

We heard about one of the new directions at last year’s Conference — in Lee Shulman’s address, “Toward a Pedagogy of Substance” [see the June 1989 Bulletin]... Lee’s message is this: To appreciate the rich complexities of teaching, teaching that really produces understanding, we must go beyond general methods, get inside the subjects being taught, and look closely at the particular pedagogies that might be used to transform these subjects into terms the students can understand.

Paralleling this shift is another. A number of scholars are turning away from deductive theory toward what Donald Schon, author of *The Reflective Practitioner*, has called “the epistemology of practice.” Teachers, they believe, must learn to be exemplary teachers like chess players must learn to become master chess players — through experience, and systematic reflection on that experience. Theories, prior ideas about what to look for, are important. But just as good lawyers know which legal precedents to apply to a particular case, so exemplary teachers know which ideas they should apply to the particular cases they face. To develop this expertise of critical analysis, teachers must learn to teach in the context of real or simulated teaching situations.

What these new directions add up to is a view that pedagogy should be more rooted than it has been — rooted in the substance of what is being taught, and rooted in the complexities of practice. The message is this: We can best help a prospective professor “think like a teacher” if we do so in the specific context of what is being taught to whom.

What excites me about this message is that it appeals to faculty where they live. Here is a view of pedagogy that includes what is nearest and

dearest to the hearts of most faculty: their own disciplines. It says that teaching expertise is more than subject-matter knowledge, and more than knowledge about general methods of teaching. Transforming what biologists know into knowledge that helps students learn biology is what deep teaching is all about. And here is a view of teaching that acknowledges that there are exemplary, “master” teachers among us all. We can all learn from them.

## **A Second Try at Turning Specialists into Professors**

Suppose we were to base our second try at making professors around this more rooted conception of pedagogy. What would we do? How would our second try differ from the first?

Much more than at present, we would try to center the action within each academic department on campus. Department chairs would not assume that their role is only to send their faculty off to workshops about how to teach, sponsored by experts outside the department. Some of the expertise lies outside; but faculty within the department are also a source of expertise. We would ask each department, in effect, to view teaching as it approaches research—as a scholarly act, subject to continuous, ongoing peer review.

To support this aspect of departmental life, we would develop a new infrastructure—an infrastructure designed to nurture and reinforce professional discourse about teaching that is rooted in the fabric of departmental life. Academic divisions would perhaps develop materials and programs useful for prompting discussions by faculty who share the assumptions and interests common to natural scientists, social scientists, and humanists. The annual conventions and journals of each academic discipline would promote similar materials.

The materials and instructional methods themselves would rely more on stories, drama, cases—prompts for discussions that are based in particular incidents of teaching and learning. (Katherine Merseeth, at the University of California at Riverside, is now working on a monograph for AAHE on how professions like law and business turned to cases and case-based instruction as a key component of their curriculum. She makes a persuasive case that there is a bright future for case studies in helping faculty develop expertise about teaching.)

Nothing about this strategy, I hasten to add, would diminish the importance of learning about generic methods of teaching. Nor would it

remove the role of central staff units, such as centers of instructional or faculty development. But their role would change, in that they would become agent provocateurs for a new mode of conversation about teaching.

Enough of how to get from here to there. Let's look at what being "there" might mean and turn the clock forward to, say, 2001.

Sparked in part by AAHE's 1990 National Conference, the decade of the 1990's turned out to be a decade of vigorous reform. You get to do what you've always dreamed—to do it all over again. After some anguish, you finally decide not to go to law school and you enroll as a graduate student in the University of the Twenty-first Century—a university that regards teaching as a truly professional activity. I'm going to put you in the political science department since there you can study almost anything. Here are a few scenes from your future life.

**Department orientation:** The chair is explaining that, while many students are headed for careers in government and other nonacademic settings, you all will be teachers with a capital "T"—that is, you will all have to communicate your specialized knowledge to others outside the field. The department regards teaching as Aristotle regarded it—as the highest form of understanding. Your qualifying exams, therefore, will assess not only your capacity for independent research but your larger understanding of your field and your capacity to communicate it to others.

**Your TA experience:** The department views its TA positions, not as subsidies, but as apprenticeships in teaching, and carefully sequences the assignments TAs take on. After observing several master discussion leaders, you are preparing to take over a class and be the discussion leader. You and your professor meet for an hour in advance, to go over what you both know about the students, what the call pattern might be, where you hope the class will be at the end of the period. You are grateful that this planning session is being videotaped so you can review the entire experience later on.

**A turning point:** You decide, after passing your qualifying exams, to take one of the "teaching residency" positions that are now widely available at liberal arts colleges. While working on your dissertation half-time, you will be teaching a class under the supervision of a gifted teacher/scholar.

"Grand rounds," when all the teaching residents at the college gather to discuss a particular case from their classroom experience, has just ended. Your professor tells you that he thinks your case study should be submitted to the prestige journal in the profession. You had thought that

it should go to the journal specifically devoted to teaching, but your mentor notes that the profession is now much more open in the inter-relationship between teaching and research than it used to be; the journal publishes a teaching case in nearly every issue.

Now an assistant professor: You are sitting in your office, working on your course syllabus. The department chair has said everyone in the department should exchange new syllabi as freely as they share proposals for research, and you are wondering who among your colleagues you'd like to get comments from. You finally select a colleague who had visited your class last semester—the one who pointed out that few students understood what you meant by “middle class.”

Preparing for tenure: You are grateful that the ordeal was put off until the eighth year, so you could prove yourself as both teacher and scholar. You've taken your mentor's advice, and published several first-rate articles rather than cranked out quantities of stuff like they used to do in the 1990's. All that remains is to put together your teaching portfolio. You decide to include the video of your explanation of party identification to the international students; your essay, looking back over how your examinations had changed, and why; and your review of the textbooks being used in introductory American Government that had stirred such debate at the last annual meeting. You know you are a good political scientist. You think you are a pretty good professor as well.

## **A Role for AAHE: The Teaching Initiative**

Do we want to bring about a future where scenes like these could be more common? I hope we do—and I think there is a role for AAHE in doing so.

For years we have used the National Conference, and the AAHE Bulletin, to give priority attention to issues of teaching. But as we have found with several other major issues—assessment being one, collaborations among schools and colleges being another—a leadership role requires sustained attention throughout the year. It requires a talented professional staff person in our national office to help shape a distinctive program of R&D, conference, and publications activities. With such a capability, we can mobilize talent around the country into a new force for change.

What always constrains an association like AAHE from providing such leadership is the lack of venture capital—funds to underwrite the time of a talented staff person to move forward on the kind of agendas

I've outlined above. Funds to refine ideas, design well-conceived projects, and get these projects off the ground.

I'm delighted to announce that Allen Jossey-Bass, the founder of Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, has pledged to provide AAHE with a gift of \$50,000, to be used to launch what we are calling "The Teaching Initiative." Patricia Hutchings, who served for three years as director of AAHE's Assessment Forum, will direct it....

We are already at work on some initial ideas:

We are hoping to develop prototypes of case materials and case-based instructional methods that might be used in programs preparing faculty for teaching roles.

In cooperation with the Council of Graduate Schools, we are planning to cosponsor another national conference on TA training, hosted by the University of Texas, in November 1991.

We are working with Gene Rice and Ernest Boyer to follow up the publication of *The New American Scholar* with a project that will develop new criteria and standards for faculty performance in areas such as creative scholarly work, teaching, and profession-based service.

Best of all, Allen's generous gift will enable us to work more closely and continuously with the growing numbers of faculty who are joining AAHE – and especially the faculty who are participating, this year and last, in our special Forum on Exemplary Teaching. More than 400 faculty are at this meeting, and some 180 are here to participate in our special forum. If we can but give voice to the insights and ideas of those wonderful teachers, Pat and I know that the Teaching Initiative will be in good hands.