

Essays on Teaching Excellence

Toward the Best in the Academy

Volume 8, Number 5, 1996-97

A publication of The Professional & Organizational Development Network in Higher Education (www.podnetwork.org).

Teaching and Values: What Values Will We Take into the 21st Century?

Kathleen McGrory, *Society for Values in Higher Education*

The Unique Role of Values in Teaching When thinking people attempt to describe the often mysterious engines that drive human moral choices, i.e., values, the term is usually a synonym for ideals, standards, ethics, and principles. The term "values" was washed of meaning during the political "family values" campaigns of the '80s and '90s. However, it has now acquired a new respectability as we seek to reclaim our spirituality, religious or secular. Teaching is a classic example of action based on values although professionally teachers are often expected to live in a neutral world. Recent scholarship seems more willing to consider the areas of teaching and values. One topic now finding voice concerns evidence that students find academic subjects more interesting when their professors reveal something of their own convictions, if relevant to the subject under discussion (Minnich, 1994). How to do this without abusing the teacher's power to influence students and how to avoid indoctrination and proselytizing will continue to concern the profession well into the next century.

The art and craft of teaching will increasingly demand calculated risks from a well-trained professoriate. Elsewhere, I have suggested that college teaching might be improved by an occasional "ethical time out" (Fisch, 1996), voluntary self-reflection, a personal "values audit," (Kendall, in press), and/or a review of the values driving both

institutional and faculty decision-making. The busy life of a teacher leaves little time for "retreat," but it is in the best interest of institutions to encourage such re-creational activity.

Arts and humanities have traditionally been used to transmit the values cherished by generations of core-curriculum builders. Scientific study, like the arts and humanities, is a value-laden activity rather than a neutral exercise in human reason; and today we confront serious scientific ethical dilemmas. In deconstructing some of the West's most sacred texts and art forms to create a new canon or curriculum, contemporary scholar-teachers have shown how we often distort and manipulate human experience for political and artistic ends. Efforts to deconstruct and decentralize content and pedagogy will no doubt continue into the next century, forcing change and exchange of professional views. Teachers in disagreement with colleagues about the content and methodology of their own disciplines will need to learn the language of the opposition. Many have commented on the growing rancor of departmental debates about curriculum and teaching. If collegiality and civility do not show up as priorities of the professoriate, college teaching will be much less fun in the future, to state only one lost value that has induced many to "follow their bliss" by becoming college teachers. The adverse consequences for students will be incalculable.

Recent research has forced many to reconsider values such as inclusiveness and diversity. Crossing disciplinary boundaries is often the best way to consider issues of value. No longer is teaching a private activity, limited to the confines of one discipline. Teachers must also look beyond journals in their fields to find articles of relevance to values in teaching. Until graduate preparation of teachers recognizes the usefulness of values inquiry and interdisciplinary study of how human values "work," values in teaching--whether as solitary art and craft, as communal effort, or a mixture of both--will continue to be short-changed.

"Global values" At the October 1996 State of the World Forum convened by Mikhail Gorbachev in San Francisco, participants were surveyed on their perception of "global values." Among 267 participants who were asked to identify the five operative values in

their daily lives, truth, compassion, responsibility, freedom, and reverence for life were clear winners. Fairness, self-respect, preservation of nature, tolerance, and generosity were next in rank (Kidder & Loges, 1996). As a college teacher-administrator for 34 years and in my work with the Society for Values in Higher Education, I have gained some insight into how faculty might respond to such a survey. The values above would no doubt loom large. But in addition, there would be love of the discipline and responsibility to master the subject taught, concern for students and student learning, insistence on standards, quality of life, and consciousness of the impact of their own learning on others. Self-confidence would be there, too, and healthy concern for faculty roles and rewards.

One can see where trouble lies for faculty in future, as public opinion and financial exigency bring public scrutiny of institutions like tenure, formerly perceived as a value both outside and inside the profession. Technology will require greater openness to concepts like distance learning and computer-assisted instruction as well as financial resources that might otherwise be expended on things more traditionally valued by faculty. The dramatic shift in public perception about teaching has been well documented over the years by *Change* magazine (AAHE) and the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

What values will inform teaching of the future? As we experience a transition in our values, it is appropriate to ask what factors may require some modification of values in an "adapt or die" scenario?

- *Technological changes in teacher/student communication.*
Distance, access, and growing diversity of college populations will result in use of sophisticated technologies to a greater extent than now. (For a more comprehensive treatment, see Roger Sell's essay in this volume of the essay series.)
- *Shrinking financial resources for education.* Monies previously available for smaller classes, low-enrollment majors, released time for all except funded research, etc., will have to be re-routed to fund expensive technology and staffing for emerging

knowledge areas. Remedial instruction will persist despite political attempts to limit college access to English-proficient, adequately prepared high school graduates, but school improvements will be felt by colleges as school-college partnerships burgeon.

- *Loss of government subsidies for education, cuts in federal endowments and entitlements.* Philanthropic dollars are already inadequate to fill the gap between rising costs and declining federal dollars. Corporate voices will receive greater attention in setting higher education priorities because corporate funds will be a continuing source of support. Corporate entities will be forced to take into account their social responsibility to fund projects for the common good, not merely the profit motive.
- *New disciplines, more interdisciplinary and interactive than at present.* This development will require new knowledge, new skills, and educability. The human learner, though more knowledgeable, brain-aware, and digitally apt, will need human teachers.

Such a scenario is not all doom and gloom. In periods of depressed economies, as predicted for the future, and in periods of downsizing, such as now, higher education has often gained. Community colleges and undergraduate institutions have always benefited when any significant portion of the workforce has realized, by will or by force, that new skills and knowledge are required. As demands for a skilled workforce increase and as developing global needs require higher level learning, colleges and universities will be the focus of intensive development efforts by public and private interests.

In all the challenge and promise of the future, faculty awareness and active self-reflection now, with students and in the privacy of time spent alone with the discipline, should be focused on taking steps to ensure the continuance of those values they consider timeless or essential to improve quality of life in the profession. Values that motivate because of a shared humanity should not founder through indifference or failure to understand their force to make a future

world more civil and livable.

Some helps to self-reflection exist in books that have proven useful for faculty retreats and collegial discussions within departments. Two of the most quoted books in any discussion of values and teaching have been John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971) and Alan Tom's *Teaching as a Moral Craft* (1984). Among more recent publications, Stephen Carter's *Integrity* (1996) has much to say about congruence of outer actions and inner values in human experience now and in the future, much of it applicable to teaching. Those interested in institutional- wide values concerns, mission statement reviews, self-studies, might find ethicist Edward Long's *Higher Education as a Moral Enterprise* (1993) helpful. Not likely to change is the value of the teacher as agent of change. It might help to remember that the values of the future are not necessarily those being written about and debated in cyberspace. Faculty cannot afford to say "pass" when opportunities arise to model for the civic community the virtues of the professoriate. Community interaction with university concerns may be the only way to persuade a recalcitrant citizenry that food for thought cannot be purchased with food stamps and that an investment in the future of their academic disciplines, and future meldings of disciplines in higher education of the 21st century, is perhaps the best investment of all.

References

Carter, S.L. (1996). *Integrity*. New York: Basic Books.

Fisch, L.(Ed.), (1996). *Ethical Dimensions of College and University Teaching: Understanding and Honoring the Special Relationship Between Teachers and Students*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kendall, P. (Ed.). (1997). *Values and Decision-Making: the Values Audit*. (Forthcoming publication, Society for Values in Higher Education.)

Kidder, R. M., & Loges, W.E. (1996). Values survey identifies common values of humanity. *Insights on Global Ethics*, 6 (4) 4,11.

Long, E.L., Jr. (1993). *Higher Education as a Moral Enterprise*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Minnich, E.K. (1994). *What is at Stake? Risking the Pleasures of Politics*. Annual SVHE Fellows Lecture, Emory University (video).

Rawls, J. A. (1971). *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Tom, A. (1984). *Teaching as a Moral Craft*. New York: Longman.