

“A Little Learning. . .”

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Born in Long Beach, California in 1934, I received the A.B. degree from Pomona College and Ph.D. from Princeton University. I undertook additional study during postdoctoral and visiting professorships at the University of Virginia, the Pennsylvania State University, the Delta Primate Center of Tulane University, the University of Stirling (Scotland, UK), the Medical Research Council, Cambridge (England, UK), the University of Mysore (India), and the University of California at Berkeley.

I am the author of *Psychology: The Experimental Approach* (McGraw Hill, 1968, 1978), *Emotion* (Brooks/Cole, 1973, 2003), *Feral Children and Clever Animals* (Oxford, 1993, 1995), and the *Psychology of Mental Fossils: Toward an Archeo-Psychology* <www.douglascandland.com>. I was honored to be the recipient of a Christian Lindback Award for Distinguished Teaching (1971), the American Psychological Foundation Award for Distinguished Teaching (1977) and a similar award from the Animal Behavior Society of America (1999). I am Professor of Psychology and Animal Behavior (Homer P. Rainey Professor, emeritus), at Bucknell University, where I taught from 1960-2002. I am the current editor of the *Review of General Psychology*.

Early Development as a Teacher

It occurred to me during my year of intellectual awakening, my sophomore year at college, that I could not decide among philosophy, biology, or psychology as a major. The first two areas were exciting, but I saw no distinct future for myself in either field. My introductory course in psychology was taught by a person who seemed to lack enthusiasm for the field, although he was to become a distinguished researcher in educational psychology. I searched for a teacher who communicated some passion for the big ideas that occupied psychology in those days: the theories of Hull, Skinner, Tolman, Guthrie; the place in working theory of logical positivism, hypothetical constructs, and intervening variables. The arrival of just such a person at Pomona College, the late Joel Greenspoon, led to the capturing of my enthusiasm, a summer of research on Estes' mathematical theory through the Social Science Research Council, and the decision that if I were to continue with the luxury of learning, graduate school would be the obvious path.

Training for Teaching

I had no formal training in how to teach, although during a postdoctoral year at the University of Virginia, I attended a seminar offered by the late Frank Finger in which we designed hypothetical psychology courses and assignments and discussed their merits and failings. This was an excellent way of becoming prepared to teach and, not unimportantly, of having something useful to say during job interviews.

Motivation for a Career in Teaching

I cannot say what led me to college-level teaching. No one in my family had attended high school. The only people I knew who had gone beyond high school were, I supposed, teachers. Their patient support led me to apply to several colleges they selected, none of which I knew. None offered me the full scholarship I needed to attend.

With no further education in sight, I went to work for the Civilian Conservation Corps clearing the Angeles Crest Forest of poison oak in the company of day-release prisoners. I learned much from them, and it seemed for a time that this was the only higher education I would receive. One evening, the dormitory phone rang. I received a call from Pomona College. The Director of Admissions, William Wheaton, was calling for me to say that the college had received unanticipated funds that would allow me to enroll, even though the semester was six weeks underway. I took the bus to Pomona, California, only to learn that Pomona College wasn't there. I found it in Claremont, California.

What I Learned

The first lecture I attended was on Plato, a name previously unknown to me. I did not understand the point of the *Phaedo*. The second was on the Minotaur of Crete, another unfamiliar topic. I did not understand that the opening of "The Wasteland" was a reference to Chaucer's opening line in *Canterbury Tales*, having heard of neither. (On the social level, it was noted with hilarity during my first breakfast that I did not know how to use an egg-cup.) The fourth new topic, the corpus callosum, was explained in a psychology course. To my shock, a daring student pointed out to the teacher inaccuracies in the description of the brain. From this episode I suspected, a suspicion later confirmed many times, that teachers do not always know what they are talking about—and that students are expected to contribute their knowledge to any discussion if learning, as opposed to indoctrination, is the goal of education.

I was frightened and in love: frightened that I could never know what other people knew and in love with the ideas I was finding. I was drunk on nothing but the pure water of the muses said by Alexander Pope to haunt the Pierian Spring. My heart still beats faster when I recall the first time I asked a question in public, a slyly aggressive question (I thought) addressed to the aesthetician, Philip Wheelwright. He thanked me for my thoughtful point, and, later, sent me a postcard expanding on a point made during his answer. My career was

launched by his taking my comment seriously and by his courtesy. The lesson I learned was that all good teachers respect both their subject matter and those who would learn it no matter what their level of experience and understanding.

Graduate school was a different matter. Minnesota, my first choice because of its faculty in the philosophy of psychology, sent me a springtime telegram: “DON’T ACCEPT AN OFFER UNTIL YOU HEAR FROM US.” I have heard nothing further, although the telegram is now half a century old. Another lesson learned. I selected Princeton for reasons now unclear to me, although it is fair to say that among the many things I learned in college, the location of Eastern seaboard colleges and universities was not among them, as to attend Princeton I purchased a ticket to Boston, Massachusetts. This was wise, as it turned out, for I used an introduction to visit with B. F. Skinner, E. G. Boring, and S. S. Stevens. Stevens took about five minutes to determine that we had in common being direct descendents of polygamous families.

The formal teaching at Princeton, once I found it in New Jersey, surely did not meet the standards I had known as an undergraduate, but the differing kinds of scholarship represented by the faculty provided the dimension that added quality to the experience. In the presence of dedicated scholars, teaching techniques meant nothing, scholarship everything. Princeton’s form of graduate education appealed to me even more. We graduate students were given a reading list of some 50 books, expected to pass the exams in German and French, required to sustain ‘prelims’ in each of eight areas, wrote a thesis, and defended it before the full faculty. The plan was clearly built on the assumption that one learns because one wants to know.

In those days, Princeton graduate students lived in the Graduate College, a Gothic, monkish place at which we wore academic gowns to dinner, listened to pre-dinner prayers in punning Latin from the Master, and wherein the only women ever seen or even allowed were those who served meals. Friendships with folk in different fields were fostered, and my closest associates came to be architects, art historians, and composers. Of the six students in my psychology graduate class, two remained life-long friends: Alan Baddeley, now of York University, the UK, and the late Bruce Faulds, whose teaching career was in his native South Africa. We argued psychology and other matters long into the nights, learning by teaching one another.

Next to the Graduate College lay the buildings of Princeton Theological Seminary. I had no idea what went on there then, but I do now, for it was my good luck to marry the Dean’s daughter, this act honoring me with a lifetime’s relationship with her and her family. By osmosis I learned something about theology and those who study it. Sometimes great luck lurks in unexpected places. As my wife was raised in an academic family, she was inculcated

to the odd hours and even stranger intellectual concerns of academics. Finding a life-companion who takes academic oddity for granted is a recommended move for teachers.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

What I have learned about teaching is this: The process is not so much about ‘speaking words and doing deeds’ as about listening and asking (Candland, 1980). I am fortunate to have specialized in a subdiscipline—animal behavior—in which research often requires young, eager hands and brains, working in other countries often under trying conditions. This environment thereby leads to a constant ebb and flow of energy, conversation, and ideas.

The ideas about learning and teaching that most readily influenced me are those of Rudolph Steiner (e.g., 1926, 2002) and John Dewey (e.g., 1899, 1996). Most important, however, have been the opportunities to observe other teachers at work. I had the good fortune to be one of 17 folk who jointly designed and offered a year-long course in environmental science. Watching teachers from English, chemistry, engineering, and math, both in lecture and lab, showed me the strength of the diverse ways of successful teachers. In like fashion, I participated for years in a team-taught Introductory Psychology course. Being in the audience to listen to my colleagues’ ways of teaching and watching my fellow students’ reactions were revelatory.

My thinking has been much enlarged by residence for year-long stretches in other colleges and universities, in the United States, the United Kingdom, and India, and my understanding is much broadened by spending time elsewhere overseas attending various conferences and advancing my teaching and learning. My own fieldwork has helped me become familiar with several countries in East Africa and with South India. These experiences add priceless depth to my understanding of how reliant we human beings are on the props of our own culture and how provincial American psychology, and English-speaking psychology, in general, has become.

The most important thing I have learned about teaching is that students will forgive you, and not even notice the transgression, for disobeying every rule of pedagogy, so long as you have passion for the material. When the passion is still, the teacher has become a drone.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

Plato may have been a little harsh in his view of the value of the unexamined life, but he was right that the competent teacher is always examining anything and everything. I have never met a ‘good’ teacher who is not also knowledgeable about subjects other than those he or she teaches: ornithology, musicology, and literature come to mind. Psychology is at once—and yet neither—a humanity and a science, the first feeding questions to the methodology of

the later. Some people see the tension between the two as destructive, as a quarrel to be resolved. I see that inherent tension as what makes psychology interesting and meaningful.

Advice for New Teachers

What do great teachers have in common? What is my advice? My advice is free and therefore worth what you pay for it. I propose these few precepts:

Teaching is the Art of Learning

When the teacher loses interest in learning, students sense this lack of personal passion, and when so noted evaluate both the subject and the teacher as unworthy of their attention.

Respect for the Subject Matter is Essential: So is Respect for Other Subject Matters

Plato, Eliot, the Minotaur, and the corpus callosum—my introductions to college-thinking—all relate to our understanding of ourselves, as do poetry, history, chemistry and sociology. The mix is the strength of psychology, not its weakness.

Respect for Students is Demanded

Remembering this dictum is more than simple civility. Philip Wheelright's postcard established my career. All influential teachers know the importance of civilities, an encouraging comment to a student, and how these models can make great changes in how our students come to live and appreciate the world.

The Teacher's Task

The human mind, at any age, holds a store of ideas and materials, all capable of reorganization. New material is not so vital as encouraging rethinking, reorganizing, reclassifying, and re-evaluating what the student already knows.

The Teacher's Temperament is Critical to Success

Teachers show their souls in subtle but prepossessing ways. Understanding one's own temperament and how it affects others is a life-long task. Understanding and adjusting one's own temperament is an essential aspect of learning for anyone who presumes to teach others.

Evaluate Yourself

Try new ways, so long as they are authentic to your temperament and voice. Provide a means for students to evaluate you, especially about methods that you are unsure of. Forget standardized forms, as they lead inevitably to standardized, passionless teaching. Alas, legal and professional forces have now made it difficult for beginning teachers to experiment, thereby making it impossible to find, in time, their own authentic voice and technique.

Avoid Textbooks

Few events have so ruined the teaching of psychology as textbooks filled with “facts” but void of thought, imagination, and viewpoint. Far better to read and discuss a few original works showing the author’s voice and concerns than to toss to the student a text with thousands of unconnected “facts.”

Final Thoughts

Just as there are three kinds of students, so, in my experience, are there three kinds of teachers: the mental, the ornamental, and the detrimental. Mental teachers enjoy the subject matter, especially its mysteries and problems, and take pleasure in communicating their pleasure. They believe that students have minds stuffed with information unorganized yet often vivid, if repressed by years of “education” and awaiting only the teacher’s leading questioning for continuing mental organization and insights to occur. The mental teacher knows much about but cares little about teaching ‘techniques’ or the ‘science’ of pedagogy.

The ornamental teacher enjoys the pulpit and imagines that all listeners are spellbound by the tone and quality of the rhetoric. They think most of their thoughts and personal experiences to be gems of knowledge. They mistake student attention for audience appreciation of their talents as performer. In fact, if the students are attentive, it is only because they have learned that they will be tested on this teacher’s interpretations, not on what they as pupils might bring to the conversation.

Detrimental teachers are certain of their knowledge. Therefore, they believe, they must offer pieces of their minds to be placed unchanged in the mind of the student. If a student has an original thought outside the knowledge of the teacher, it is regarded as inappropriate. This teacher ‘owns’ knowledge and often uses the whip of the grade.

A quick way to distinguish teachers of the three kinds is this: A teacher who blames a “bad” class on the students’ ignorance will surely be detrimental. The teacher who prefers students who admire his or her ideas or presentation is often ornamental. The teacher who can overcome these natural tendencies and love the subject matter will be a great teacher to many, no matter how awkward the presentation.

As for students, every student will respond in time to some teacher, bad or good, but never to one indifferent. The symbiotic response occurs, when it does, because there has been a match in temperament. If it is true that all philosophy is but a footnote to Plato, (and, I would add, all psychology a footnote to Kant), then the relationship between student and teacher is not a rational one, as we pretend: it is an emotional one.

Therein hangs a problem, as Socrates well knew and as we forget from time to time. The emotional nature of knowledge leads student and teacher alike to misread their feelings.

True love of knowledge is directed at knowledge itself, not at the presumed possessor. The student understands this distinction only on the dimmest, and therefore most dangerous, of levels. If nothing else, teach the difference between love of knowledge as distinct from love of the presumed possessor of it—for the world is full of charlatans who think that possession of a little knowledge or powerful emotions entitles them to respect and affection.

Wise and honest teachers learn so by coming to understand their own temperament and motivations to teach. The task is never be complete, but the path offers a lifetime gift to teacher—namely the impetus to continue learning and refining one’s own temperament, coming to see one’s illusions and preconceptions, thereby coming as near as humans may to teaching wisdom.

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