

Lecture 11: "Beloved" -- What Leaders Can Do

The points I shall attempt to clarify this morning are so intertwined that it is difficult to say which thread to begin pulling. Testing, I suppose, is most nearly independent, so we might start out with a little theory of testing.

First, in order to be valid, the testing process must not have a noticeable effect (or an unpredictable effect) on the phenomenon being tested. (Self evident).

Testing is a sampling process. The samples must be selected at random from the entire array of possibilities.

Even on the basis of these two tendencies alone, it is evident that most tests fail the validity check. Special coaching for a test or designing a curriculum for the purpose of doing well on the test obviates the evaluative possibilities of the test. While a sample test could familiarize the testee with the process of legitimately if all testees are similarly exposed, special reviews can skew results. The only preparation that is both legitimate and effective is a thorough study of the subject that leads to understanding. It is best to disregard the prospect of the test -- to concentrate on the subject. The review is a good learning device; so is a test. But neither one should appear to be the point of a course. And paradoxically, "teaching the test" seems to lower scores. I suspect that if you check with principals that have a marked increase in scores, you will discover that they have decided to cast their lot in with the joy of learning and have let testing be incidental.

Tests are good teaching devices when used as a kind of making. They should be fun, and indeed good students enjoy them. But they must be incidents, not ends of a course.

The concept of learning should guide the curriculum, rather than the acquisition of information or skills. Yes, the skills are important components and yes, rote memorizing and drill have their place in skill perfection. Despite my wanting every child to grow up with a calculator, I consider the memorizing of the multiplication table to be indispensable. Why? Because of its role in estimation, an essential element of understanding. And a lack of understanding is a widespread impediment to students' acquiring the skills of arithmetic. Somewhere along the route which mathematics pursues, probably in the secondary schools, imagination breaks down, with the result that math becomes merely a skill and a chore, instead of an expression of understanding. The small leap of the imagination that calculus requires is too formidable and unrewarding for most students to undertake -- because, somewhere down the line imagination was set aside in favor of immediate efficiency. The result has been widely bewailed in the engineering community -- a growing innumeracy of the American public. For me, the discomfort is not so much the fear of Japanese economic supremacy, serious though it may be, as it is alarm at the rent in our culture which a widening of the division between numerate and literate accomplishes.

Repair on the quantitative side is certainly one of the

current needs of American education, but it is not the one undertaken in this present Institute. Rather, something more basic is at hand -- which, as you might suppose, is the stimulation of learning to learn. If this action is, indeed, the fundamental tenet of education, then it seems to us at the Dallas Institute that the necessary ingredient is teachers who are themselves learners, who can learn from their own disciplines the appropriate mode of knowing which their particular disciplines represent. This is to say that there is something much more general about learning than any skill involved, or, for that matter, any array of skills. Call it an attitude, if you like; or say that every act of learning effects a physical change in the brain; call it a transformation, as is done around here, wherein the soul (in an Aristotelian sense) is altered, is enlarged. I shall call it a "habit", implying thereby an unconscious generalization of experience that remains with a person and shapes his intuition of reality.

Such subjects as testing, estimating, memorization, imagination are topics for discussion with teachers. Your meetings with them should not be merely occasions of passing out instructions. They need to be intellectual encounters -- not formidable ones but some open exchanging of ideas. Teachers are your most valuable asset. Your appreciation of them must be expressed in many ways -- an outright statement rarely but a frequent exchange. What do they think about a certain idea? What ideas might they have?

A faculty must not be just a bunch of teachers that gossip together and complain. It must be a community centered around learning. It is your job to make it so. I don't know what arrangements you have for regular meetings, but I'm sure you have one. From time to time, you need to give a more or less formal lecture; certainly one at the opening of school. Here is an occasion where you establish that you are not so much boss as leader. In the preface of the book we gave you, "Unbinding Prometheus" are a couple of pages on speech-making that might be helpful. (viii-ix) Be humorous if that's your style, but not trivial. You might try being grave. But either way, be earnest. Be somewhat possessive about the faculty, enough so to express affection. And mean it. That might be hard, but remember Hamlet's advice to his mother, "Assume a virtue if you have it not." Draw up into your imagination images of each teacher, one by one, and find in each something admirable. Try admiring them. It's a good exercise.

Building a good faculty is your chief responsibility. You can't teach the students; they do. So think of them as your emissaries, extending your benign presence, but doing so with their own particular style, capabilities, genius. You need to promote their genius by letting them instruct you. Nothing so increases your intellectual stature in their eyes as does your learning something from them.

Making the faculty into a corporate body requires some cooperative activity. Having a series of seminars purely for

intellectual enjoyment is the most obvious way. Choose some important text that does not belong to any one of them. You might be the moderator for the first session or the first series but appoint one of the teachers to lead the discussion each time. Remember that the purpose is for them to admire each other, not you. (That's a side benefit.) Of course I'm fantasizing here, as you need to do when thinking of next fall. Your own genius will let you solidify a fantasy into a plan that will unify the faculty by admiring each other, an admiration in which you share.

You recognize, I suppose, that I am working back around to that sacred classroom business. Of course your teachers are not to be trusted to prepare, to present, to work hard. No one will work hard if he/she is not observed. You'd be a fool to think otherwise. Well, I suppose we're in business to be that sort of fool. You really can't do much about their not being trustworthy, if that's what you've decided. But you can rephrase the statement to placing the emphasis on yourself: "I don't trust them." "That you can do something about, if you're willing to be a fool.

Trust is a thin gossamer veil that the sea nymph Ino gives to Odysseus, and the raft is already breaking up. You really have no choice, "if you want to get to shore, if you want a good faculty, if you want your students to learn. You must respect your teachers. You show that respect by trusting them to do well what they are commissioned to do -- most dramatically by not invading their classrooms. And not letting others do so. The students will get the message right away; something serious is going on here, and I'm part of it. As it is, the signals say: your learning is the lowest ring on your totem pole; we've put someone we don't trust in charge of your learning.

Now that's not the experience you have, is it? I just don't know what it's like. When you go in the classroom you praise the teacher, admire the students, say something entertaining, and offer some helpful suggestions. And the teacher thanks you. Is that thanks hypocritical? No, the chains have become so familiar that they don't even rattle much anymore. But they most surely eliminate the magic from the classroom.

Juanita Nix came to me after Duane Emejulu's presentation yesterday, and said, "I see what you mean. If we might have teachers like that in our classrooms, we need to change our ways." Well, you do have teachers like that. They're just encrusted in bad habits and terrible constraints. Release those Ariels from their trees and your spirit will wing its way through the whole community.

Trust and respect are the bases of "governance from below," the only way an effective educational enterprise can be run. You support your teachers, not constrain them, just as the district supports and not constrains you. Remember, all the people in the hierarchy, on the Board, in the state agency, and in the legislature are of good will. They want the same as you, that the schools turn out virtuous, well-educated students. Treasure to yourself the maxim that you cannot be held responsible for both process and results, both how the class is run and what comes

out. And your responsibility is to results. The superintendent has said improvement will come school by school, meaning through each of you individually. Now, as for noncompetitive learning, one early morning last week I wrote a paean of praise to competition in order to demonstrate to you that I knew its virtues well, and then I lost it on the computer. So I shall not repeat the effort and simply state that I believe in free enterprise, that I understand the profit motive, that I would not have this small, inexpensive computer that ate my praise to competition were it not for competition.

There is a part of the economy known as the "Not for profit" institutions. Peter Drucker, a major sage of industry now at Claremont, once labelled this sector much the most complex of the three--industrial-finance, governmental and non-profit. And he said there has been no adequate study of its economy. I do admit that he has come out of the wrong side of competition between students with accompanying fees. But he is wrong. He sees it from the standpoint of management that presumes profit. That motivation is not there. Education is purpose driven. And that purpose does not coincide with the market. The argument is complex, but our interest in it is simple: it makes for bad education, for a divided student body, and an aggressive society. Good in sports, yes. Bad in intellect.

That is as far as I shall take it today. It is another subject to contemplate. And I do point out, that what you have been experiencing here is non-competitive learning. Think about it.

We can end with the words of Alistair Ment (author of "Ten Good Schools"): In those schools generally agreed to be "good" ones:

The schools see themselves as places designed for learning . . . Emphasis is laid on consultation, team work and participation but without exception the most important single factor in the success of these schools is the "quality of leadership at the head". Without exception the heads have qualities of "imagination" and "vision", tempered by realism, which have enabled them to sum up not only their present situation but also attainable future goals . . . They appreciate the need for specific educational aims, both social and intellectual, and have the capacity to communicate them to staff, pupils and parents, to win their assent and to put their own policies into practice. Their sympathetic understanding of faculty and pupils, their acceptability, good humor and sense of proportion and their dedication to their task have won them the respect of parents, teachers, and students.

It is a difficult description to live up to. But from what I've seen of you, you're equal to it.