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ABSTRACT

Ferspectives on how college teachers learn to teach and ways to re-invigorate learning and teaching are offered by the president of Pomona College. The importance of stimulating college students and sharing the faculty member's intellectual interests is addressed. It is suggested that learning thrives in an atmosphere of "intellectual collegiality." Based on the view that good scholars make the best teachers, it is suggested that individuals are often attracted into the professoriate by the excitement of learning on the frontiers of learning. Learning needs to be revitalized in such a way that teaching is natural, vital, and honored. The nature of inquiry should be examined to determine why it has become routinized, subordinated to guild and institutional interests, embattled in the public arena, and seen by the young as inflicted upon them. It is important to question whether reward systems at both graduate and undergraduate levels send messages to students that technical skill in conducting studies is more valued than insight and wise judgment about the issues involved. The view by many young faculty that they were not taught how to teach is addressed, along with the view of many parents and alumni that more job-related instruction is needed at the undergraduate level. (SW)

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The Preparation of the Professoriate: A View From the Liberal Arts College

by Robert T. Voelkel
Vice President and Dean of the College
Pomona College

February 1986

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At the CGS 25th anniversary meeting held in Anaheim, California, December 11-14, 1985, a concurrent session featured three speakers addressing Preparation of the Professoriate: Role of the Graduate School. Presented here is a condensed version of Dr. Voelkel's address.

What I want to talk about, and presumably that is what is intended in the phrase "the preparation of the professoriate," is education. Let me tell you how I prepared for this address. I had meetings with all of the Assistant Professors at Pomona College, these meetings were also attended by a few more senior faculty who had been active on personnel committees. At these meetings I asked them to tell me what to say to you, and the chorus came back loud and resounding: we were in no way prepared to teach. Even those who had held assistantships, taught courses, been in colloquia designed to raise educational problems, and were interested in teaching issues testified to the feeling that graduate schools and graduate professors could care less about teaching and made this feeling clear to them. There was no other issue of comparable magnitude which I could provoke from my younger colleagues. Even those for whom the graduate experience had clearly been

searing felt generally well prepared in their fields insofar as they were being prepared to be scholars. But they felt that there was no significant attempt to prepare them to be teachers. There also was no attempt to communicate to graduate students the importance and value of teaching.

Now I know that this is not a new issue. I am aware that these meetings have in the past taken note of the seeming dissonance between the tasks of research and scholarship and the problems of teaching. I am also aware that programs of reform for graduate education have often been put forward, running the gamut from study of the learning process on one end to organizing whole different degree structures on the other. And I wish quickly to dissociate myself from most of these various schemes. In fact, what I say today may run counter to what my younger colleagues might advocate and against some of the rhetoric about the professoriate currently in vogue

I think that those of you who have responsibility for graduate education might well respond to us in the liberal arts colleges in much the same way I do to parents on the one hand and alumni on the other who advocate more job-related instruction at the undergraduate level. Not only do I argue that we are not a trade school and that specific job-related instruction is quickly obsolete; I also point out that our function is rather different. We provide skills in the liberal arts which make it easier to learn the job skills in the proper setting. I believe you can argue much the same way. You can quite properly assert that the particular skills of teaching need to be taught on the job, and that training in preparing syllabi, using one's voice, leading discussions, preparing lectures, being sensitive to the personal development of late adolescents, and socialization into the life of the faculty of the college are our responsibility. You are to train ex-

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Thank you

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perts in the various advanced fields of knowledge, make them independent scholars, and make them ready to adapt to particular situations where they will be placed in the position of masters nurturing their own apprentices. You might further assert that we have not taken on our responsibilities very well, although, I must observe, there is a certain irony to all this. The very junior faculty members who were complaining the most about their lack of preparation in teaching have quickly adapted to the College and are successful teachers generally well respected by their students and colleagues.

From my younger colleagues there was no other issue of comparable magnitude: "we were in no way prepared to teach."

Before I take up my main line of argument, I would like to comment on reform proposals suggested in the past for restructuring graduate education in ways to distinguish the role of the teacher and the research scholar. These seem to me to be misguided. The failure of Doctor of Arts programs and the like is testimony that we in the liberal arts colleges want scholars. We believe, and with good reason, that good scholars make the best teachers. We also recognize that we ourselves were attracted into the professoriate by the excitement of learning on the frontiers of learning. We were drawn into careers in teaching in large measure by the thrill of continual discovery.

Where then is the problem? The thing that struck me most in discussing this address with my younger colleagues was their answer to another of my questions: were your major professors in graduate school good teachers? Almost unanimously the answer was "no." And I was thunderstruck. For I could not relate that to my own graduate training, nor could I deal with it theoretically. If one believes, as I do, that scholarship and teaching grow from the same root, and if one's experience teaches, as I believe mine has, that one has taught most energetically and effectively when one has been engaged in deep learning and re-

flexion, and if graduate education is, as most of us agree, the occasion for the most intense scholarly experiences, then why are graduate professors not perceived to be good teachers? Why is their role in the highest learning not acknowledged?

Now you may doubt whether my younger colleagues are correct, or whether I heard them correctly. But their voices echo a theme of the professoriate leveled by the force of the Association of American Colleges in its study entitled *Integrity in the College Curriculum*. A constant theme of this document is that the guild of the professoriate has grown accustomed to fostering the interests of the guild rather than honing the cutting edge of disciplinary inquiry. An oddity of this document is that, although its theme is the curriculum, its polemic is addressed at professors. And the argument resounds, whether it is addressed to basic skills that should be learned or to the aims of majors: professors need to focus more fundamentally on intellection and less on perpetuating the life of their own group and its interests.

"You can quite properly assert that the particular skills of teaching need to be taught on the job."

I am asserting that we, in graduate and undergraduate education, have a common problem. It is an old problem, and it regularly reappears. We must revitalize learning in such a way that teaching is natural, vital, and honored. We must examine the nature of inquiry as we support it to find out why it has become routinized, subordinated to guild and institutional interests, embattled in the public arena, and seen by the young as inflicted upon them. We need to provoke in our different enterprises the excitement of discovery and never allow this excitement to be cooled by cynicism and despair. We need to recall to ourselves and our students how learning has always been a lonely, socially exposed, ill-rewarded, but absolutely captivating vocation. Perhaps we need to de-professionalize the professoriate.

We should reflect together about what it is in higher education, and in its culmination in graduate education, that deflects our attention from the

basic truth that learning generates all the energy for our enterprise. One thing which bedevils us is the complexity, expense, and cannibalizing of human energy entailed in many research processes. In the specific case of research in the natural sciences we, even in reasonably well funded small institutions, often wonder how scientific research can be conducted by our professors when they work alone under financial and temporal constraints. Moreover, it should also concern all of us that group research allows the dissipation of control over measurement, accuracy, calculation, and the drawing of conclusions. Real intellection may actually be obscured by industrial process. It may well be that your professors and my professors should get together and talk about what is really happening to disciplines and ideas, rather than continuing the research business as usual.

One could make similar observations about the growing quantification in the social sciences and the increasingly powerful manipulation of huge data sets. It is no revolutionary proposal to suggest that technical skill in producing various studies is not equivalent to insight and wise judgment about the issues involved. But we may need to reflect on whether our reward systems at both graduate and undergraduate levels send messages to students that technical skill is more valued than wisdom. I suspect that my younger colleagues would not have said their graduate professors were not good technicians.

"We may need to reflect on whether our reward systems send messages to students that technical skill is more valued than wisdom."

Since I have spent my entire academic career in an undergraduate institution, it would ill befit me to be very specific in prescribing particular activities in graduate schools. However, if we have, as I believe, a common problem, then I am bold enough to offer some direction towards re-invigorating learning and teaching in higher education. My suggestion is that we take another look at a common metaphor by which we have understood our en-

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terprise and by which have tended to guide our policies. We look on education often in terms of the medieval crafts where masters took on apprentices and trained them to become masters themselves. Of course, this metaphor is natural, for our universities were originally guilds of the learned professions and the teachers. But there are enormous problems built into living with this metaphor. In a highly complex and technical society, the craft guilds have long since given way to industrial organizations, and the simple relationship of master to his apprentice has long since been superseded. In a certain sense, our universities have been industrialized as well. The complexity of learning and research has extended us well beyond the model of the crafts. We now have our own factories.

In all of this transformation, we may well have missed seeing that the original metaphor had its real difficulties. The master trains the apprentice in the skills of the trade. The man or woman of learning shares his or her intellectual life. The key to education at every level, but especially at the level of higher learning, is the teacher drawing the student into a share of his or her ideas and into the quest for more learning. If it is correct that my younger colleagues did not see their graduate professors as good teachers, then they either were not drawn into the intellectual life of their professors, or they did not realize they were. By the same token, the universal cry of protest from my younger colleagues that they were not taught how to teach may well indi-

cate a lack of understanding that they are not merely to train apprentices but to share with their students an intellectual quest.

The professionalization of the professoriate may well have allowed us all to drift into forgetting that learning thrives when we are colleagues. In the small liberal arts college there is no more crying need than for intellectual collegiality. My suspicion is that this is true of graduate education as well. Indeed, I would argue that it is at the graduate level where this becomes most crucial. It may also be at the graduate level where it is most difficult to achieve, for there one must meet the demands of professionalization head on.

"...that they were not taught how to teach may well indicate a lack of understanding that they are not merely to train apprentices but to share with their students an intellectual quest."

From my own graduate training I remember well two things my own major professor, my *Doktorvater*, said to a group of us who knew who the master was but also felt that we were junior colleagues. In addressing the concern about how we would know when we had really arrived at the status of Doctor he said, "you will know which books not to finish." In answering a question about the scope of the dissertation defense he said, "this ought to be an enjoyable experience when you discuss your work as equals with your professors." As one whose college depends upon your graduate schools for

its next generation of faculty, I hope you send us lots of men and women with the intellectual self-confidence not to finish books they know are not good and with the experience of intellectual collegiality with their graduate professors. They will along the way have been trained in the rigors of scholarship, and they will devote themselves to continual learning at colleges and universities where they pursue their professional careers. They ought also to be excellent teachers.

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