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ABSTRACT

This study explored the assumption that superior instruction can result from the supplementing of teachers' subject knowledge with a formal psychological understanding of learning styles and learner characteristics. Preservice language arts teachers (N=113) were asked to state what they thought would constitute appropriate responses to a middle school student's request for feedback about a poem he had written. Teacher responses were such that formalist thinking predominated over instructional feedback intended to increase literary skills. Most teachers felt that positive feedback and praise were always necessary in responding to students' creative work, even when dishonest, although many also offered the belief that evaluative questions should be redirected back to the student, and some felt that poetry was by its nature beyond judgement and evaluation. The researchers express concern over the widespread lack of sincerity demonstrated by teachers' responses and the implication that analytical and critical literary thought is not welcome in the classroom. It is argued that, if preservice teachers' beliefs are resistant to change, there is reason to be concerned with the educational perspectives that a formalistic understanding of psychology may foster. (Contains 17 references.) (PB)

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Running head: BELIEFS

THE PSYCHOLOGIZING OF TEACHER EDUCATION:  
FORMALIST THINKING AND PRESERVICE TEACHERS' BELIEFS

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## Abstract

This study evaluates the assumption common to teacher education programs that, when preservice teachers' subject matter knowledge is enhanced by a formal psychological understanding of learners and learning, superior instruction results. Preservice language arts teachers (N = 113) were asked to determine what they thought would constitute appropriate responses to a middle school student's request for feedback about his poem. The responses of the preservice teachers were such that formalist thinking predominated over instructional feedback intended to increase literary skills. The researchers argue that, if preservice teachers' beliefs are hardy and often prove highly resistant to change, there is reason to be concerned with the educational perspectives that a formalistic understanding of psychology helps foster.

THE PSYCHOLOGIZING OF TEACHER EDUCATION:  
FORMALIST THINKING AND PRESERVICE TEACHERS' BELIEFS

It is not difficult to understand how psychological research and theory have come to be regarded as core components of teacher education programs. Given the charge to have preservice teachers learn to think and behave more adaptively, the rooting of education in basic principles of learning, cognition, and development seems as logical as deriving medical practices from anatomy. It is an unquestioned assumption, then, that the perspectives these future teachers glean from psychology will subsequently inform their practice. In fact, educators have grown so accustomed to viewing teaching in psychological terms that to many it must seem strange to suggest that this is not always a serviceable way of looking at their business. The question that frames this study is whether the generic understandings that psychology provides--at least at the basic, undergraduate level--serve as adequate and useful frames for addressing problems in teaching.

Let us be clear, first, that the psychology whose utility we are evaluating is the formal discipline "dedicated to the quest for nomothetic theory" (Cronbach, 1975, p. 116) that purports to explain regularities in behavior and thought taken to characterize human functioning. Dennet (1987) called this the design stance of scientific psychology that yields descriptions of individuals and the environmental impingements they respond to at a level of abstraction that permits identifying equivalences across contexts. It is this that we mean by formalist thinking. The design stance differs from what Dennet called the intentional stance--the everyday psychological savvy that everyone can be said to acquire as they attend to the interests and behavior of persons with whom they interact. Our study does not question that effective teaching

requires teachers to be psychologically attuned in this latter sense or, indeed, psychologically attuned. What we ask is whether education, or communication, is served when teachers look at their students or their practice through the formal lenses that psychology makes available.

Schutz (1970) illustrated the design stance when he wrote of the knowledge of experts who are at home only in a system of imposed relevances. Experts accept these imposed relevances as the only intrinsic relevances of their acting and thinking. Consequently, their field of inquiry, their area of expertise, becomes rigidly limited (and limiting). Experts define problems strictly within their imposed system of relevances, and expert advice reflects "merely the indication of suitable means for attaining pregiven ends, but not the determination of the ends themselves" (p. 242). By contrast, well-informed citizens seek solutions to problems in the relevance structures most appropriate to the nature of the particular problem. Because they do not restrict their search for information to a single domain, they are better able to explore various frames of reference as they form "reasonable options." Viewed from this perspective, this study questioned whether teacher candidates are learning to approach teaching problems from the decontextualized and isolated domain of an expert or from the broader, contextual domain of well-informed professional educators.

Bengston (1991) demonstrated that psychology's design stance can denigrate intentionality by encouraging one to look past context. Undergraduates in an educational psychology class were asked to address the following teaching problem:

"A teacher of an 8th grade 'gifted' enrichment class is interested in students learning to be poetically expressive. S/he assigns them the task of composing a free verse poem. A 13 year old boy submits the following:

When the wild west winds are blowing  
the tall trees will tremble.

When heavy rains fall from the skies  
and a torrential downpour hits the earth,  
when the tall trees are struck with lightning  
and whole forests catch on fire,  
that is when we feel nature at its greatest.

After the teacher reads it, the student asks, 'Do you like it? Is it good?' How ought the teacher to respond?"

The episode is representative of the position in which teachers often find themselves when they evaluate their students' creative work.

Bengston (1991) presented the problem to college undergraduates enrolled in an educational psychology class, and so it is to be expected that they would view it through the expert's lens that formal instruction in psychology provides. As a consequence, formalist thinking and design stance considerations predominated. Most stated they would praise the poem independent of its literary merits--for example, they argued that teachers should say they like the poem because children must be motivated and their self esteem strengthened. In general, their concern was almost exclusively with what they understood to be the psychological well-being of the child--his self-esteem, budding creativity, need for praise and encouragement and for positive reinforcement, stage of development, and so on.

It is also possible, of course, that the responses of the psychology students in Bengston (1991) may have been caused in part by their misapplication of psychology and its principles as

regards language arts instruction. They may have deployed a decontextualized psychology largely because they lacked the literary grounding necessary to temper the formalisms they espoused. After all, they knew little about teaching language arts and literature and had not been schooled in appropriate language arts "methods" courses.

Our interest in the preparation of teachers prompted us to seek out the responses of preservice language arts teachers. As part of their teacher education program, these teacher candidates receive instruction both in educational psychology and literature/language arts theory and practice. Moreover, they will become the future teachers of students such as our young poet and will face similar decisions in their professional careers. We wondered whether their training in literature and language arts methods would save them from the formalist thinking and psychologizing engaged in by the psychology students in Bengston (1991). Essentially, our study asks how literary interests are faring against formalist psychology in the struggle for the minds and professional dispositions of preservice language arts teachers.

#### Methods and Data Source

We asked three teacher educators of language arts methods at two large, public universities in the South and Southwest and a private university in the South to assign Bengston's (1991) teaching problem to their students as a writing assignment. Participants included 113 undergraduate preservice teachers enrolled in language arts methods classes (91 female; 22 male)--all had taken at least one psychology course, most had taken two or more. All had a grounding in literature and English composition. The assignment was made late in the semester, after students had nearly completed the language arts methods course. The problem was read out loud by the professor and also presented to the students in written form. Students had three days

to return a typed response that they were told would not be graded. We hoped, in this way, to receive responses reflective of personal beliefs. The researchers coded and analyzed responses in keeping with case study methodology (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1989).

### Results

The instructional responses of the preservice teachers in our sample, although clearly well meaning, were primarily based on homely platitudes, facile psychologisms, and formalist perspectives--design stance considerations--rather than on sound instructional principles. Five formalisms characterized the responses of the preservice teachers, but two predominated. The one most mentioned (67%) was that a teacher must always respond positively, that "a teacher should always be positive about what a child creates." Regardless of the merits of the poem, "good teachers should always find something good to say." In fact, "the most important thing a teacher could do is to be encouraging and to respond positively to the students' effort."

First and foremost, the teacher should react in a positive manner. Since the poem was intended to be poetically expressive, he should not present a negative reaction [for] the student might then acquire a fear of expressing himself in the future.

The phrase "positive feedback" was mentioned, in some context or other, by most students, who saw such feedback as essential to learning and to healthy development.

I think it is important that a teacher, mother, aide, or anyone respond positively to students. I think that positive responses are a must in the development of healthy and stable individuals.

Many preservice teachers observed that teachers have the responsibility to offer feedback that is "specific," but they generally interpreted this feedback in terms of encouragement. For

example, "teachers need to give positive reinforcement and be specific so students can understand where to go next." In general, preservice teachers appeared to have difficulty differentiating between specific feedback and specific "praise." One wrote of "specific compliments."

The teacher should respond enthusiastically. Giving specific compliments such as, "I especially enjoyed the alliteration you used in the first line" helps the student know that the praise is genuine.

Some of the future teachers expressed awareness of the influence they will come to have on students and of why positive feedback is essential to how this influence will be remembered by students. One put this clearly in perspective.

As a present student and a future educator, I think that a teacher's comments should always be positive. I feel that negative comments sometimes leave lasting scars. They can affect students a lifetime.

The second most expressed formalism, clearly related to the first, was that students should, above all, be praised and encouraged (52%), that "any work accomplished by a student deserves praise [our emphasis]." Preservice teachers generally expressed that, regardless of a poem's merits, a teacher must praise the poet.

Encouragement. Praise. Appreciation. These are the actions necessary to continue the effusion of this student's creative juices. I believe this teacher should fall down on her knees and thank Providence for this student. If this genuflection is deemed too demonstrable or obsequious, glowing praise is in order, a double-barrel of praise a la Siskel and Ebert: "Two thumbs up!"

One reason that students should be so praised is that "encouragement and positive feedback help the student continue their personal growth." Failure to praise places at risk the young writer's budding creativity and future efforts. Generally, the object of praise was identified as the poet's "effort" or "attempt" at creativity and thought.

The teacher should praise the student for correctly following the instructions and for giving the assignment a good deal of worthwhile, creative thought. Through these positive reinforcements, the student will feel as though he has accomplished the assignment to the best of his abilities and is capable of creating more in the future.

Several preservice teachers observed that, even when there is nothing "tangible" to praise, "the teacher should praise the student for following the specifications of the assignment." Others echoed the sentiment that teachers should "offer praise no matter what. There is nothing to gain by being critical."

Three additional formalisms were in evidence, though to a lesser degree. Students noted that criticism is the enemy of creativity (31%), that "a negative response could destroy the child's expressive process" and "may discourage the student from future open and expressive writing." "Criticism of a student never helps the child grow."

Criticism may hinder the students creativity in future projects and he may not want to participate in writing activities for fear that his work will not be regarded as good. My teacher [educator] has pressed upon us the fact that we as teachers should never criticize a student's work when it came from within.

Some students argued that criticism and negative comments should be avoided because "any negative comments may discourage the student from future open and expressive writing."

Criticism, wrote one preservice teacher, would be akin to "attacking the author."

Another formalism was that teachers should not answer the young writer's questions; rather, evaluative questions should be redirected to the student (30%).

The teacher should redirect the student's question so that it is the student who is responding to his/her own questions. The teacher should reassure the student that it is not the teacher's opinion that is important, rather it is what the student thinks of his/her own work.

Many agreed that a teacher's evaluation of a student's poem does "not really matter. It only matters what the student thinks of his own poem." The value of the work is itself determined by whether the student himself likes his poem and thinks it is good. If the student is pleased with his poem, then "it matters little if the teacher likes it." This perspective provides students "with ownership of their own writing."

Another reason given for redirecting the question to the student was that teachers should not express personal opinions. "Teachers should respond more in a 'learning manner' rather than a 'personal manner.'"

A teacher should not tell a student her personal opinion about a poem. Children need to learn to trust themselves and be proud of themselves and not to depend on other opinions for their sense of self-worth.

One preservice teacher observed that, when teachers express personal opinions, they

take away the ownership of the student's work. As teachers we should stay away from telling students whether or not we like or dislike their work. We must act as facilitators and guide them in a way so we gather information from them in order to understand what their thinking is.

What role, then, does teachers' subject matter knowledge and literary expertise play in instruction? One preservice teacher explained.

I would premise my opinions with the warning that the student should not take my opinion as truly valuable. I would remind the student that my opinion is just that--my opinion--and the only person that really mattered was the student and how he/she felt about his/her work.

Last, some preservice language arts teachers argued that the value of poetry cannot be judged (27%), which we view as a literary rather than psychological formalism. "Poetry is a subjective form of art." "a subjective form of personal expression." An English major suggested that "poetry is, unfortunately, a form that lacks correct and incorrect measurement." In poetry, as in creativity, "there is no . . . right or wrong." The "goodness of a poem is completely based on subjective opinion."

Psychological constructs were in ample evidence--positive reinforcement, self-esteem, confidence. Positive reinforcement "is the best way to develop a child's self esteem and positive self concept," "is the best way to encourage the learner," and "is what helps to keep our children in school and doing well." A typical response was that

positive feedback builds a child's confidence and self-esteem. Giving the child a sense of accomplishment through positive feedback will not only boost their

confidence but also boost their ability to try harder the next time, because they are wanting to please the teacher. I believe a teacher should always have an interest in their students' work and be sincere in how they respond to each.

One preservice teacher defined the crux of the matter in terms of a well known psychological perspective.

It seems to me that schools are sometimes insensitive and don't really understand the hierarchy of needs. I would say that as long as the student is happy with it and he knows what he wrote and why he wrote it then it is good. By encouraging a child to evaluate and appreciate their own work without relying on a teacher or adult to validate their work, a child will become self-actualized and secure with their thoughts, abilities, and creativity.

In fact, several students seemed predisposed to approach the instructional dilemma as psychologists rather than as future teachers. They worried that the poem betrayed a sign of emotional trouble in the child and that steps should be taken to explore the child's emotional stability.

The poem seems to show a lot of violence and destruction. Such strong emotions from a young student worries me. It makes me wonder about his home life. I would also look at the student's actions in class. Does he/she show a dark or violent side that matches his thoughts? If so, I would ask a counselor to speak with the student to make a professional opinion. If the student views other subjects just as dark as nature, I would really suspect a problem. Any suspicious behavior should be investigated.

One feared that "the student has a deep seeded thirst for violence and destruction."

A strong theme that emerged from the preservice teachers' responses was the sense of duplicitous honesty in which they would engage. That is, they were prepared to tell the young poet the "truth" only if that truth were positive and would not offend. As with specific feedback, students seemed unable to differentiate between an honest response and an honest "positive" response that would not offend. For example,

Any individual, whether a child, or even an adult asking your opinion about anything deserves honesty, but there is an extent and a manner to go about it.

You are dealing with a person's feelings who apparently value your opinion greatly, so responding positively is the most important factor.

One preservice teacher observed that "the teacher's response should be truthful, yet positive."

This duplicitous honesty created responses with disjointed logic.

The teacher should always respond to the student in an honest and positive manner whether the teacher agrees or disagrees. Overall, the teacher should be open, honest, and positive about students' work, and that is when the student will work to their fullest potential.

We would be remiss if we did not acknowledge that, interspersed with the problematic responses we have identified, many preservice teachers also noted that they would engage in what would quite reasonably be considered sound instructional practices. For example, several wrote that they would instruct the student in various aspects of the craft of poetry--the use of imagery, the meaning of certain lines, the choice of words to convey meaning. One wrote that she would have the student read his poem aloud so that he could better appreciate rhythm and

cadence. Even when this was the case, however, the imagined instructional practices took lower priority to the imagined psychological moves, and to the formalisms that resulted from them.

When instruction was offered, it was usually hedged in such a way that, for example, should the poet show signs of a withering self-esteem due to the effects of having his poem criticized, instruction would be either withheld or camouflaged. Both a genuine desire to provide instruction and the sense of duplicitous honesty were evident in the following passage.

I believe that teachers should provide specific feedback. For example, I might talk to the student about why he chose certain words and how some of the images are contradictory. But you have to be very careful, because teenagers, especially at that age, are very sensitive about their work and most respond very poorly to criticism. So you have to be careful what feedback you do give. And it is more important to love poetry than to know its technical nature.

We found that nearly 80% of the preservice teachers in our study would not answer with sincerity the poet's questions, "Do you like it? Is it good?" Of 113, 42 (37%) believed that positive feedback must take precedence over answering the questions honestly. They would say they liked the poem no matter what, praising it independent of its merits. Reasons varied, as we have illustrated. Several admitted that they would feign enthusiasm they did not have for the poem. Fifteen (13%) explicitly expressed that teachers must not answer such questions, either because of the relativism of poetic expertise or because it was only the student's own opinion that mattered. Thirty-three (29%) avoided the questions, restated them, changed them, or failed to answer them. In essence, they also did not provide an answer. Nineteen (17%) liked the poem,

believed it was good, and would so tell the poet. Four (3%) would answer that they liked some parts of the poem and not others, but each made a point to note that they would be guided by the importance of "positive feedback." None would tell the child that they did not like the poem and thought it not good, although several admitted to not liking it.

### Discussion

In spite of their training in literature and language arts methods, the preservice language arts teachers in our study addressed our teaching problem much like the educational psychology students in Bengston (1991), and this gives us cause for concern. This concern is grounded on our view of teaching as a rhetorical transaction that depends for its success on teachers having the responsibility to say what they mean and to mean what they say. We borrow this phrase from Cavell (1969), and we presume with him that the dialogue of teachers and students must have meaning to each--in the sense that it must be true, significant, and comprehensible--if there is to be the mutual trust and regard upon which the educational conversation depends (also see Eisner, 1991, for discussion of this responsibility in research and in educational practice).

When conversants require that this meaning be part of their discourse, the result is what Habermas (1979, 1984) described as the "ideal speech situation"--a conversation in which candid communication flourishes and in which teachers use reason, scholarship, and professional expertise to help students improve whatever craft is being learned. In Habermas's ideal speech situation there are four validity claims, or criteria, for a speech act. As it is for Cavell (1979), the first validity claim is truth, in the sense that what is spoken should be factual, as best the speaker knows it to be so. Those in charge of pupils have the clear responsibility to be, harkening back to Schutz (1970), well informed. The second claim, comprehensibility, requires that what is

communicated be accessible to and understood by the listener. To this end, teachers have the responsibility of ascertaining what their students are capable of understanding. The third claim requires that speakers be sincere in their utterances. As a consequence of this claim, the listener learns to trust the intentions of the speaker. But trust must be reciprocal--to be sincere, speakers must also trust their listeners. Last, it must be right for speakers to perform the speech act, in the sense that their claim to the communication is justifiable. For teachers, this requires that they know and understand the nature and import of their discourse--what is usually referred to as subject-matter expertise--and that they have met the first three criteria. It is largely this last claim that makes a communicative act, to use one of Cavell's (1979) criteria, significant. When the validity claims are not realized, speech acts can and should be rejected.

The preservice teachers in our sample would not have responded to the writer's questions about his poem in the reciprocal conversational mode of Cavell (1969), the ideal speech situation of Habermas (1979, 1984), or the well-informed professional's stance of Schutz (1970) that we sketched in the introduction. Instead, their instructional strategies were guided by formalist beliefs about what they believed to be sound pedagogy--that is, by design stance considerations. As a consequence, the psychological aims of these future teachers led them to treat what the student actually said in his poem to be of little account. In effect, honest criticism and instruction were generally avoided--the instructional priority was attached to the child's feeling good about his work and himself independent of the work's merits. The instruction suggested and the perceived subjectivity and relativism of poetic expertise doomed the content of the poem to irrelevance. For these reasons, we believe that the suggested instruction was not very instructive.

It concerns us that the responses the preservice teachers gave failed to meet, in almost every sense, Cavell's and Habermas's criteria for ideal speech and that they were so deeply decontextualized. For reasons embedded in their understanding of psychology, they were not predisposed to say what they meant. As a consequence, they did not mean what they said. It is also troubling that, in citing their responses, students gave themselves psychological license to avoid truth and sincerity. In general, students justified their solutions by citing what they perceived to be general, psychological principles that operate across contexts--that criticism is the enemy of creativity or that feedback should be positive. They attached priority to psychological well-being over skill development. The result was that they had lower expectations of what a 13-year-old may fairly be expected to handle and to achieve--certainly academically, as a writer, and possibly interpersonally.

Preservice teachers who would have been positive across the board tended to do so in the name of writing. However, it was psychological considerations such as enhanced self-esteem that were seen as setting the stage for authentic self-expression (which was most frequently marked as poetry's primary function). But their conception of authenticity even psychologized writing by equating "being truthful" with a procedural--content-free--sincerity. In effect, they reduced the poet's task to a version of self-expression equivalent to merely transcribing whatever one happens to think about some matter to paper. We suggest that authenticity is something that readers (teachers) have the sensibility to discern and that authentic reading serves authentic writing.

We find the preservice teachers' conception of authenticity problematic because it devalues meaning what one says both as an educational aim and as a means for achieving that

aim. Like Habermas, we acknowledge that the ideal speech situation engenders its own sense of responsibility. Good manners and the everyday psychological savvy that we discussed earlier dictate that, when instructing children, honest criticism should be couched in terms that students are capable of understanding and be delivered in ways that do not cause the opposite effect we intend. Brutal honesty is seldom desirable, and this is not what either Cavell or Habermas (or we) mean by sincerity. Also, the truth must sometimes be withheld, if the speaker should judge that the listener is not, in some way, genuinely ready or able to engage in the speech act. There is nothing in these commonsense safeguards, of course, to license subterfuge, the duplicitous honesty that we observed, or, most especially, the distortion of truth in the teaching conversation.

What we are also pointing to as problematic is that, despite their avowed literary interests and training in language arts methods, the majority of the future language arts teachers in our study sought solutions to an instructional problem primarily by following psychological recipes. They let a design stance perspective save them from having to be responsive to the poem's meaning and to their pupil. Moreover, their formalistic understandings of the psychology they purported to use licensed them to proffer duplicitous and gratuitous talk as a substitute for honest, reciprocal--ideal--conversation. In essence, psychological formalisms saved them from having to think--about the child, the poem, the instruction--and allowed them to routinize their imagined instruction. Although meant kindly, their responses are ultimately patronizing, estranging, and manipulative in their effect.

What is also at issue is whether the psychological "expertise" displayed by these future teachers (and fostered in many psychology classrooms) is additive to the instructional process. This is to ask whether the knowledge that preservice teachers glean from psychology aids and

supplements their understanding of pedagogy. James (1958) cautioned teachers that what psychology has to offer education could be written on the palm of one's hand. Nonetheless, he believed that "psychology ought to give the teacher radical help" (p. 22). The psychological formalisms that these preservice teachers expressed and believed to be sound psychological moves would not only fail to provide them any radical help with their future instructional practices but would, instead, hinder instruction and learning.

Clearly, then, the answer to the question with which we began our investigation is that literary interests are faring rather poorly against formalistic psychology in the struggle for the minds and professional dispositions of preservice language arts teachers. We hope, of course, the reader will agree that the problem goes beyond the teaching of any particular academic subject or discipline. What can fairly be asked is why, if psychology's theoretical lens provides insights into learners and learning, did the preservice teachers' training in educational psychology not save them from stereotyping and from the kinds of psychologizing reported? And how, if psychology is a friend to education, could it help create the kind of relativism that slights truth and pertinence and deems meaning what one says to be purely subjective and not the social--collaborative--achievement that it is? The answers are unlikely to lie in the suggestion that teacher candidates perceive educational psychology classes as more relevant than classes dealing with subject matter expertise. Sirotnik (1990) discovered just the opposite to be true.

We do not suggest that all psychological instruction leads to these sorts of formalist perspectives, nor that psychology itself is root cause of this phenomenon. One need only watch the evening news or tune in to any talk show to see that psychologizing has become a staple in the diet of American culture. We suspect, however, that formalist instruction and the quest for

nomothetic theory are prevalent enough in psychology classes and teacher education programs to be a cause for concern. For all that psychologists deplore decontextualism, a fair amount of what is taught in psychology and education courses consists of learning how to decontextualize--how to categorize behavior, personality, thinking styles, and environmental events in the abstract terms that various theoretical formulations employ or that educational research thrives on. Instruction in psychology often disregards Cronbach's (1975) caution that "we cannot store up generalizations and constructs for ultimate assembly into a network" (p. 123). As a result, students fail to appreciate that, "when we give proper weight to local conditions, any generalization is a working hypothesis, not a conclusion" (p. 125).

We also do not suggest that the instructional predispositions that our preservice teachers espoused would also be espoused by experienced language arts teachers. As with the overemphasis of affective processes over cognitive processes that Weinstein (1989) discovered, these predispositions may be tempered by time and experience. But even in this respect we are discouraged by Wolf and Gearhart's (1994) suggestion that the role of teacher as professional critic of student writing is one "not easily undertaken" (p. 427).

Although many elementary teachers are adept at connecting children, text, and topic, they often stop short of analysis. They experience literature with their students without critiquing it; they assign narrative writing without analytically responding to their students' narratives. (p. 427)

To illustrate this point, Wolf and Gearhart describe the teaching practices of a language arts teacher who "feared that critique would discourage her young writers, explaining that anything the children wrote should 'be praised verbally or on paper'" (p. 436).

We also acknowledge that the formalistic responding of the preservice teachers might have been minimized if we had treated teaching writing as a *well-defined problem*. For example, we could have used a more obviously flawed poem and asked, how can the writer be taught to employ vivid images and avoid clichés? Or we could have provided a poorly written essay and avoided altogether the issue of artistic relativism. We suspect that even our most noninstructive respondents would then have been instructive. Does this mean, then, that we selected an ill-defined problem to prevent the instructive capabilities of our participants from surfacing? We think not. We tried to be candid about our biases, and one of them is that we do not see teaching as an activity reducible to deciding how to convey information across contexts. Teachers are responsible for making judgments about what is worth learning under circumstances in which it is not self-evident what becoming informed requires. A concern for the young poet's feelings and the difficulty of assessing his work makes the injunction to mean what one says a less obvious priority in the circumstances of the dilemma posed by our narrative. But that constitutes an unfair bias only if one supposes that teachers (and their students and everyone else) do not regularly confront situations in which they might lose sight of their purposes or find plain speaking inconvenient for the wrong reasons.

The narratives of the preservice teachers in our study are consistent with Pajares' (1992, 1993) account of the determining role that a priori beliefs can play in preservice teachers' perspectives during teacher education and, subsequently, in teacher decision making. If Pajares and others are correct that the beliefs of preservice teachers are hardy and often prove highly resistant to change (e.g., Clark, 1988; Nespor, 1987), there is good reason to be concerned with the educational perspectives that a formalist, decontextualized psychological view of human

functioning helps promote. Such "habits of mind," as James (1892/1985) observed, are damnably difficult to break.

In summary, we suggest that the psychologized, design stance view of well-being that preservice teachers are often exposed to in psychology classes makes light of Cavell's (1969) practical injunction to be truthful, significant, and comprehensible, and of Habermas's (1979, 1984) validity claims for an ideal speech situation. We take it as self-evident that education is ill-served by such lessons. An understanding of psychology as revealing the qualitative character of human activities without reducing them to formalist schemes would be a positive force in enabling future teachers to understand themselves in their natural and cultural contexts. This understanding could be, should be, one major distinction between a teacher educated and a teacher trained.

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