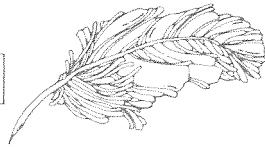

REACHING THROUGH TEACHING

A NEWSLETTER HIGHLIGHTING CLASSROOM PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE AMONG KENNESAW'S FACULTY

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THE EDITOR CONSIDERS...



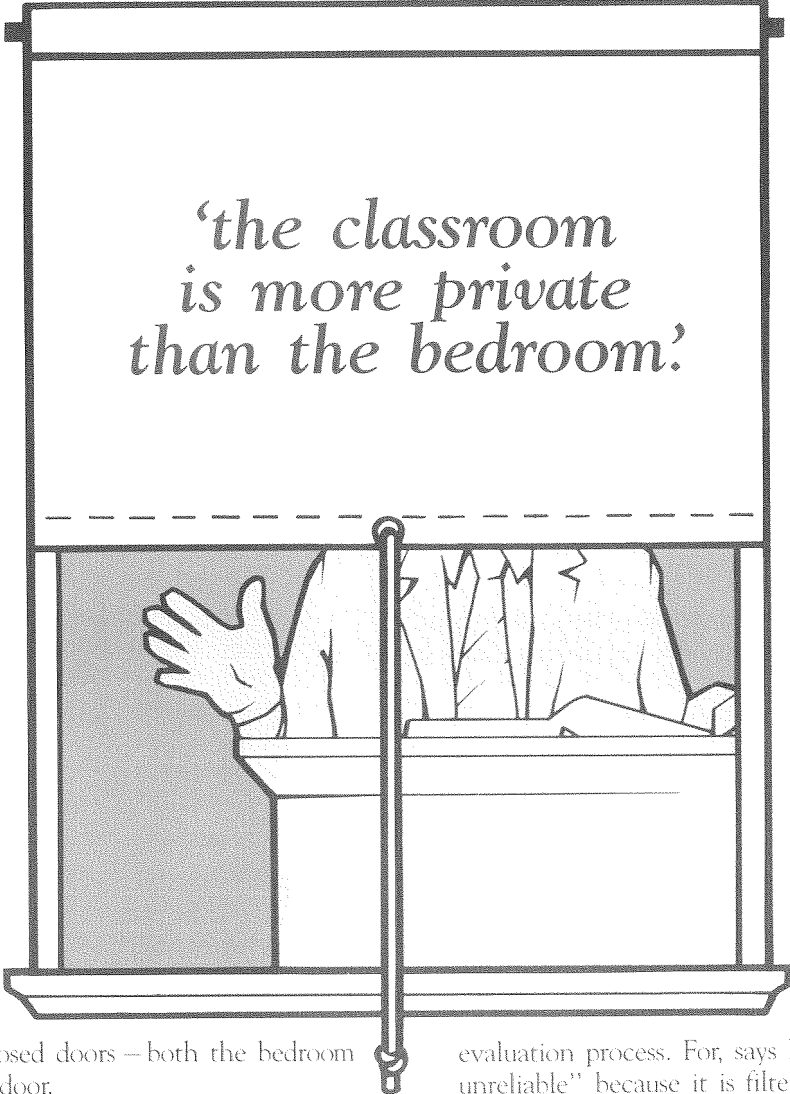
TEACHING: A PRIVATE OR PUBLIC FORUM?

JANIS COOMBS EPPS

Director of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL)

At a recent conference of the American Association of Higher Education, Dr. Joseph Katz, well-known educator, theorist, and researcher quipped that "the classroom is more private than the bedroom!" Those of us in the audience snickered because the analogy sharply brought into focus how carefully we guard and keep private what happens behind closed doors — both the bedroom door and the classroom door.

Dr. Katz's comments had particular relevance to me



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as I remembered the spirited discussions my department held recently about the role of observation in the teacher evaluation process. As I talked with other colleagues across campus, I realized that our department was not the only one embroiled in heavy debate about whether or not peers or chairs ought to come into our classrooms to watch us at work and judge our performance. Katz argues that we do, indeed, need to examine the dynamics of the classroom in order for good teachers to become better. He cautions us, however, about observation being tied to the evaluation process. For, says he, "observation can be unreliable" because it is filtered through so many variables: age, sex, belief system, etc.

I remember, as a student teacher, being observed over and over again. With each scrutiny I was always nervous, though with each encounter I became better at concealing it. When an outsider entered the room, in subtle ways I changed and my students changed. Even though the observer was unobtrusive, we were keenly aware that a visitor was in our midst. Yet, once I became a professional, fellow teachers and I often collaborated on assignments, team taught classes and freely moved in and out of each others classrooms. What was different about their observations of what I did? During my student teacher

days I felt that the observers were there to find my fatal flaws. They said all of the right things. "We are here to help you become a better teacher." But deep inside I knew that their comments would help launch my career or hinder it. On the other hand, the sharing that existed among trusted colleagues and myself has indeed helped to improve my teaching. But those sharings (it is hard for me to call them observations) were comfortable and thought provoking precisely because they were conducted among trusting friends and did not carry a judgement with them.

As teachers we are protective of

our turf. We guard carefully the place where we practice our craft. How secretive we become as we push our way through crowded hallways to reach our isolated classrooms, and once there, close the doors and shut out the world creating a private place for just us and our students. A private dynamic exists between teacher and student — a way of behaving, of interacting that subtly changes when a stranger enters the classroom and breaks that pact, thus keeping the observer from really knowing what happens behind those closed doors.

When I was in the fifth grade I was a student in an observation classroom. You know the type...an isolated classroom with the one-way glass. At first we were all extremely aware that the glass was there, but pretty soon we forgot all about it, at least most of the time. Every now and then, however, when I grew bored, I would look at that glass to see if I could see shadows, and I wondered if there was someone glaring at me. To some extent the one-way glass kept our class in line. Chipper was the spitball king and Jeffrey could shoot stinging rubber bands straighter than Tonto could shoot an arrow. When they became too loud or boisterous, the teacher would silently, secretly point to the window and the boys would cool out for a while. As a student, I always hated that glass. It violated my sense of the privacy that is a part of the teacher — student pact.

Yet, how are classroom teachers ever to improve if no one gets a chance to see them in the act of teaching. On the surface it would seem that there is no better way to know what's happening in a classroom than to actually be there. On a deeper level, though does the observer's presence shape and subtly change the dynamics of the classroom?

Reaching through Teaching welcomes your comments and opinions on this issue. ●

REACHING THROUGH TEACHING

Please share with us your ideas about teaching and the exciting strategies you use for making your classrooms successful. Our next **deadline for submissions is June 1, 1988**. Please send all articles to Janis Coombs Epps in THE CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING (CETL).

Giving guidance and vision to CETL, under the direction of Janis Epps, is a Faculty Advisory Council made up of Kennesaw's "Distinguished Teachers" and the 1986-87 study group on "Taking Teaching Seriously." Members of the Faculty Advisory Council to CETL include:

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