
Yet Another Essay on Whom I Want to Be When I Grow Up

Michael Tierce, Associate Professor of English

(Full text of Dr. Leggett's remarks are available from Mike)

I recently had the great pleasure of seeing my major professor receive a distinguished teaching award from the South Atlantic Association of Departments of English (SAADE). Listening to Dr. Leggett deliver the customary acceptance remarks, I was reminded of being an undergraduate in one of his sophomore literature courses at the University of Tennessee. I knew he was cool because he could not only explain what Keats meant by "beauty is truth, truth beauty," but he could also comfortably discuss how UT's bend-but-don't-break defense would doom us to another losing season. It took only one more upper-level English course to convince me that he was the man I wanted to be when I grew up (this is still my goal, by the way).

While working with him on my dissertation, I learned that in spite of his widely acclaimed publications and his reputation as one of the university's most successful classroom teachers, he continued to worry as much about his sophomore survey courses as he did his graduate seminars. In other words, he continued to worry about his teaching. Though it's next to impossible to get any consensus on what makes a successful teacher,

most of us would agree that good teachers worry about their teaching. And that is the thesis of the following excerpts from his acceptance remarks.

Excerpts from "Three Notes on Teaching"

By Dr. B.J. Leggett

It's a great honor to be recognized by SAADE. It is not, however, an unmixed blessing, since it carries with it the assignment of a paper on the "philosophy and techniques for successful teaching" (in the words of the award letter). . . .

Is it possible—and this is the point toward which I have been maneuvering—that we don't write more about teaching or that we don't write better about teaching because (for reasons too complicated to explain) we don't possess forms or conventions adequate to the pedagogical essay? What would be a means of expression adequate to the kind of essay on teaching literature that would be equal to the essay on literary criticism? . . . I recommend Nietzsche's aphoristic style as a way of writing about teaching principally because it is undogmatic. . . . It says, in effect, what I'm advocating is serious and I believe it (at the moment), but it's

not the premise of a systematic argument or a part of a larger truth. . . .

Note 1: There is no philosophy of teaching.

The first note takes as its text or intertext two lines from a Wallace Stevens poem called "On the Road Home": "There are many truths/ But they are not part of a truth." My observation is this: there are many philosophies of teaching, and consequently there can be no philosophy of teaching. . . . It's important to recognize, however, that the absence of a definitive philosophy or methodology of teaching should not lead us either to despair or to relativism. Not all teaching is equal. Not all methods of teaching are equal, and the absence of the "true" method should cause us to defend even more passionately the method we currently champion but also to examine it more critically. . . .

Note 2: Nothing works.

. . . In spite of our private satisfactions and pleasures—and teaching on the whole is a pleasurable activity—it usually ends in failure. We're warned against serving two masters. Teaching is an attempt to bring into harmony the mostly incompatible claims of two masters. The tension between the two is contained in the ambiguity of the verb to teach. If you're asked, "What are you teaching?" you might answer "graduate students" or you might answer "modern poetry." We teach people and we teach a body of texts or a discipline. And, except for the best five or six students in the class, to satisfy the strictest demands of one is to frustrate the demands of the other. . . .

Why Do I Teach?

Stanley Sims, Instructor of Mathematics. Eleven years at KSC.

"The reason I enjoy teaching is that I'm a bit of a 'ham.' Teaching requires capturing the interest and attention of students, and then stimulating their emotions and response in order to engage them in the material. I enjoy being front-and-center and commanding the attention of an audience."

Elaine McAllister, Associate Professor of Foreign Languages. Eight years at KSC.

"I teach because it is the most stimulating 'job' I have ever had. Students and colleagues make it both personally and intellectually rewarding."

NOTE 3: The opposite of good teaching is not bad teaching.

. . . If we agree that teaching includes a wide range of activities, many of which must be pursued in and around [academic] departments, then this false scholarly model, which says that the time spent around [academic] departments is time stolen from one's real task, does a disservice to teaching. . . . We didn't promise to be great teachers, but we did promise implicitly to spend time working at it and to worry about it. . . . The scholarly model to which I am objecting is seen most frequently as an attitude of indifference to teaching, and the enemy of good teaching, I conclude, is not bad teaching, not enthusiastically bad teaching, to which we can all aspire, but indifferent teaching. 🍎

CETL Goes Online

Starting spring quarter, CETL has entered the "electronic super-highway" by way of KSC's Gopher system. With the help of Nola Humphries in Academic Computing, we have our own directory accessible from any computer linked to KSC's network.

CETL Online is reached through the CWIS (College Wide Information System) directory and the "Schools/ Divisions/ Department" sub-directory. Once into the directory, you will find:

About CETL. Brief overview of program and operations.

Current Reaching Through Teaching. This is a full-text display of the latest teaching newsletter.

Past Newsletter Index. This is an index (identical to the one in this issue) of all Reaching Through Teachings from 1988. Each vol-

Presidential Innovation (continued from page 8)

The focus of the project was a visit to campus in early May by Neil Merrell, a nationally known expert in service learning who met with student and faculty to discuss how to institute service learning both as course activity and independent for-credit course offering.

- **Global Classroom**

Faculty from history, political science, the library, public administration and nursing were funded to create a workshop on multiculturalism in the classroom. This one-day workshop, run in late April, focused on infusing international and multicultural materials throughout the existing curriculum.

As part of this process, faculty were encouraged to train students to identify key elements in the global community, recognize the dynamics of a global society and develop com-

petencies in relating to people of many cultures within our society.

- **Developing Multimedia Expertise.**

Faculty from psychology, communication and visual arts were funded to assess current and future multimedia capabilities that may be shared by the three departments.

Part of the process was to bring in a consultant to evaluate existing technologies in these three departments and across campus, to demonstrate existing capabilities that may not be readily apparent and to help the departments plan for the 21st century "electronic" classroom.

- **Ivey Teaching Method in World History**

Oliver Turner Ivey was a renowned teacher of world history who engineered a highly innovative and effective method for teaching about the world. The History Department received an innovations grant to run a workshop on the Ivey method for its faculty, who, in turn, will conduct seminars for area high school history teachers.

Once these sessions have been carried out, a policy will be created that will better prepare KSC Social Studies and History majors to teach world history in high schools.

- **Professional Development in Education**

The School of Education was awarded a grant to continue its professional development program begun in 1992 with its conference on teacher education.

The program involved faculty from across our teacher education curriculum and selected education majors who explored the problems and solutions of educational reform, to create implementation goals and strategies. 🍎