

1985 Distinguished Teacher of the Year

Patsy A. Ceros-Livingston, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Education

College of Education

Thank you, Vice President Michels, and thank you, students, for this great honor. I would also like to thank some women colleagues who have worked diligently and persistently for many years to bring about equality of opportunity for all people in the university community. I, therefore, would like to thank Drs. Frankie Myers, Voncile Smith, and Dorothy Stetson, since without their previous efforts I do not believe I would be standing before you today. I also want to thank Drs. Curtis Hamrick, Jim Sycamore and Dorothy Laird, who have been my mentors in the teaching area. In just a few moments, I want to share with you some of my thoughts on teaching in higher education. I would like to dedicate these thoughts to a very dear and respected friend and colleague, Dr. Kathleen Wright, who was a fine teacher, both inside and outside the classroom, and who, unfortunately, was killed in the Flight 191 crash in Dallas, Texas.

President Popovich, Vice President Michels, deans, colleagues, students, relatives and friends: In the last few years there has been a significant resurgence of interest in upgrading the quality of teaching at the kindergarten through high school levels of education. Some examples of this interest can be seen in the Beginning Teacher Program, the legislatively funded Merit Plan, the upgrading of certification requirements for teachers, et cetera. In fact, Ralph Turlington, Commissioner of Education for the State of Florida, in his 1985 annual report mentioned 16 innovations that have been planned for improving public education by 1989. In my opinion, there is a very real possibility that this interest in the quality of teaching will extend into higher education from consumers, policy makers and the political community.

It is interesting to note that most university professors have had little formal training in order to teach at the university level. In fact, the typical college professor's only previous teaching experience is usually as a teaching assistant while attending graduate school. Some faculty have not had previous experience in the classroom at all. Of those who served as graduate assistants, the supervision and training they received may be totally missing or inadequate, at best. This leads to an interesting paradox, as most universities, both public and private, owe their existence to the public's insistence that teaching is the main function of the university. Although the public, that is, the people

who pay for the operation of the university, may agree that research and service are important functions of the university, it is well known that there would be no universities without the teaching function, which is inextricably tied to students. In fact, an argument could be made that the other major functions of the university, such as research and service, must be taught as well. With this in mind, we may then ask: What are the characteristics of effective teachers at the university level? Are we able to choose behaviors that will separate effective university teachers from ineffective ones? Well, Harry Murray (1983) found that presentation clarity, enthusiasm and rapport differed among university lecturers who received either high, low or medium student ratings. Murray also found that the largest differences among the groups were due to what he names "attention-getting behaviors" such as speaking expressively, moving about while lecturing, using humor and indicating enthusiasm for the content area.

Lowman (1984) has presented a model for effective teaching at the university level based upon research he conducted using informal interviews with reported master teachers at universities in the southeast and New England areas of the United States. He reported that effective teaching resulted from the ability of the professor to create intellectual excitement and to build positive rapport with students. The first of these, the ability to create intellectual excitement, includes the ability to communicate clearly and the teacher's emotional impact on students. It also should be mentioned that Bugelski (1964) once stated that a teacher not only presents material to the student, but the teacher conditions the emotions of the student to the content area. Lowman's other major component of interpersonal rapport with students prevents the student from being distracted by negative emotions.

Weaver (1978) suggests that structure, rapport, the ability to be stimulating and objective evaluation are important for effective teaching in higher education. Still other authors such as Richard Hanis (1977) explored the importance of three aspects of acting and their critical relationship to effective college teaching, such as speech, pantomime and characterization.

Another author, Balch (1981), found that the effective instructor must design the course in an organized manner with objectives and straightforward methods of evaluation. She also pointed out that the effective teacher must also demand top quality work, be empathetic and interested in the individuality of each student. It becomes clear that there are many different characteristics of effective teachers at the university level.

You might ask yourself at this point: But why has she not mentioned the knowledge of content as part of the teaching process? Obviously, the teacher must have something of importance to communicate to the student. In other words, the professor must know his

or her content area. It is probably not of much use for the teacher and the students to sit around a mutual pot of ignorance and share it. However, knowledge of one's content area is not enough. Unfortunately, the assumption that knowledge of subject matter is enough to teach it has pervaded higher education for years. In fact, the only area that future university professors are taught in graduate school is usually the content area. This seems to be true of all disciplines, including education. I might mention that those of us in education, just like the other professors, have usually not completed a teaching curriculum in university teaching. We have primarily learned to teach through imitation or attempting to imitate the teachers we had or through trial and error. Most professors have had little direction and practice in writing usable behavioral objectives or teaching the content which should be tied to the objectives and then constructing evaluation instruments that measure the objectives. Some disciplines, more than others, have some scholarly experience in this area but little or no practical experience. I personally remember teaching courses as a teaching assistant at Florida State University wherein the professor simply handed me the book and told me to go and teach. What I learned was through trial and error. If I had imitated that professor totally, I would to this day do as he did, which was to lose his temper while teaching and literally place his hands on top of the door and swing back and forth upon it. I would have surmised from observation that swinging on the door was somehow connected to the improvement of student achievement. Yes, yes, my friends, there is a difference in knowing and doing. For example, a faculty member may be very adept at conducting research and remembering the results of that research but, in a complete dichotomy, forget to apply the findings in the classroom. For example, we as university teachers may know some of the rules for constructing valid and reliable test items but never use those rules in constructing our own classroom tests. We may know a significant amount of the research on the writing of various types of items and the entire area of evaluation of student achievement and still have the student choose two out of three essay items to answer on a paper and pencil test and never think about the fact that different students are then being administered different tests and, therefore, error in applying grades to student performance on a common scale has been introduced at a significant level. As faculty members, we may know that behavioral studies have shown that eye contact is important to maintain attention in the classroom, but we may not look at the students, referring to talk to a blackboard. We may know that one possible method of interacting with students as well as to maintain attention is to move around the classroom, but we may still remain tied, as I am today, to the lectern. We may know that a monotonous voice usually leads to daydreaming and other off-task behaviors on the part of the listener, but we may still read or speak in a very boring voice. We may know some of the relationships between schedules of reinforcement and types of social reinforcers and their effects on human behavior, but use punishers as the primary method of controlling the classroom atmosphere. We may know that tests should be based on

what has been taught, but we may then construct a test that either has no relationship to the objectives of the course or has such confusing directions or poorly constructed distractors that no one can pass. This kind of situation, by the way, leads to an instructor being placed in the position of grading a student on what the teacher hasn't taught and, of course, the student hasn't learned. In fact, over the years I have decided that we sometimes confuse what I call, for want of a better word, creative exercises with measuring student achievement of instructional objectives. A good example of using a creative exercise versus a test item based on a specific objective is when the professor says there is no correct answer to a test question. My question then is: How did the professor grade it? We may know that we should have a key constructed for an essay item prior to administering the item, but we may still decide the correct answer based on student answers as we read. We may know that the research literature has indicated that it is important for the professor to "demand" effort on the part of the student and to insist on the student participating in the teacher-learner process as an active participant, but still never call on a student to speak in the classroom or even check on whether assignments have been completed, if assignments have even been given. We may know that it is impossible to teach a student that is not there, but never ask a student where he or she has been or why he or she is always late to class. One of the cop-outs that I have heard for years is that the student is an adult and, therefore, should be treated as one. I have never understood how being unprepared, late or absent makes one an adult. We may know that immediate feedback is better than delayed feedback with regard to evaluation of student achievement, but we may return the student's test weeks after the test or, in some cases, never. We may know the ill effects of not knowing upon what a grade will be based, but we don't give the basis of the grade before the course begins or we change the criteria for grades as the course continues through the semester. We may know that humor is an important element in classroom instruction, but never laugh or may take ourselves so seriously that we are unable to laugh at our own foibles. We may know that the establishment of rapport is important in the classroom, but never learn our students' names or ever interact with them. We may know the importance of personality characteristics and their interaction with learning, but never observe or pick up on student behaviors that are occurring in the classroom – for example, the gestures that students make when they don't understand. Sometimes we simply ignore these signals and move on with our prepared material. However, if we were to look at our students, we might see that the theory of the *tabula rasa* was correct: There is a blank slate, or a blank stare, or the student is shaking his or her head in a negative manner, or there is a pained look on the face or a frown. We may know that students do what is expected of them in about the same ratio as faculty do what is expected of them. That is, consequences are important and yet we may never demand that students participate with us. We may know the effects of competition as well as the effects of cooperation on student achievement, as well as emotional responses, and yet continue to use the

normal curve to evaluate students. We may know from the research literature that it is far better for students to be evaluated against a standard than to be graded relative to each other, but continue to evaluate students relative to each other.

You might ask: Does this person who is speaking think that she is an effective teacher and that all of the rest of us are not? The answer is no. I do not think I am a completely effective university teacher. I believe that all of us need to work together in a cooperative endeavor to improve university teaching. What can we do? McKeachie (1964) has suggested that teaching clinics at the university level may be one means of improving the teaching process. Some universities have set up teaching institutes where faculty are taught some methods and techniques to use in university teaching. As an example, the literature points out that it might be helpful for the Theatre Department to teach some of us some of the basic techniques in presenting material. For example, Murray and Lawrence (1980) found that university lecturers trained by a professional actress in vocal variation, pausing, movement, gestures and related behaviors showed significant improvement in rated effectiveness compared to untrained lecturers. An institute of the type that I am suggesting might also include the sharing of teaching techniques that seem to work within certain disciplines and courses as well as across disciplines. One program that has attempted to improve university teaching is the Lilly Post-Doctoral Fellowship Program, which took place from 1974 to 1980. The Lilly Endowment granted \$50,000 a year for three years to institutions that were willing to examine how to orient recent PhDs to the teaching profession at their universities. The endowment made a grant to 16 participating institutions to support six to 10 fellows selected by the institution. In addition to their teaching on campus, all the Lilly fellows and program directors attended two conferences during the year which were designed to encourage discussion of teaching and learning theories and to consider the influence of institutional values and goals on faculty and approaches to teaching.

Another possible method of improving teaching is to conduct research in the area of effective university teaching. Needless to say, a great deal of research has been conducted; my personal review of the literature covered primarily the last 15 years, and it included 284 pieces of research. Schwartz (1980) suggests that criteria for effective university teaching should be established in higher education. She also felt that the faculty would expend more energy to teach well if they knew their effort and performance as teachers would be respected and rewarded. In that same vein, McKeachie (1964) states that good teaching must be rewarded at the university level. He goes on to mention that rewards for merit in the academic world are promotions, salary increases and general recognition. He further points out that if teaching is not given the attention it should be given, professors will probably not spend their time and energy in attempting to improve it.

Another possible method of improving teaching at the university level is through in-service training. There have been many international conferences as well as national and state conferences on improving university teaching. However, we have either learned about new techniques from our colleagues on an individual basis or attended conventions away from the campus. Therefore, in-service training could be handled through an institute based at the University. In fact, Commissioner Turlington (1985) pointed out that the Florida Board of Regents is going to initiate an institute for instructional research and practice, and a local institute should certainly be able to interact in a positive fashion. Still another possible method of improving teaching effectiveness at the university level is to develop an atmosphere in which a professor can seek assistance in the teaching area and be reinforced for doing so.

Although teaching is certainly not the only important function of the university, it seems to me that it is one of the most direct functions which are tied to the students. In fact, Redefor (1975) has suggested that prospective students should seriously ask colleges what they do to ensure good teaching. Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to close by mentioning something that we do in our master's level school psychology program. In our assessment courses, after the student has received some background information and is at that point where he or she is going to evaluate a person, I usually enter the testing room and say to the student, "Are you ready to test?" This signals the student to check the following: Have the appropriate release forms been signed? Has the testing environment been set to be most conducive to get the best performance we can from the child? Is the student familiar with and adept at handling the test materials? Has the student previously established rapport with the person to be evaluated? All of these behaviors are subsumed under the question "Are you ready to test?" And my challenge to all of us in higher education today is: Are we ready to teach? Thank you.

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