

Notes on The Spectrum of Teaching Styles

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Since the audience in these sessions comprised both people who were quite thoroughly familiar with the "Spectrum"* and some who were not, it was decided to approach both sessions through a discussion of scattered issues related to the spectrum rather than presenting a prepared paper which reflect only my specific selected interests at the moment of writing.

So, these notes are based on the comments made during the conference and recorded by Virginia Peters.

These post conference notes represent summations of comments made by the speaker, as intended prior to the conference and answers to questions asked by the participants.

1. The FOCUS is on TEACHER'S BEHAVIOR

When one observes teachers, listens to them, talks about their work, and examines most of the pedagogical literature (certainly in physical education) two striking realizations come to light:

- A. Teachers REFUSE to see that there is an ORGANIC relationship between their behavior and the behavior of students.
- B. Teachers REFUSE to acknowledge the irreversible fact that since there are a variety of "learning styles" there also must be a variety of "teaching styles."

and these two sets of styles must be congruent at any given teaching act in order to accomplish any stated educational objectives - Teacher's objectives, student's objectives or both.

*Mosston, Muska Teaching Physical Education: From Command to Discovery
Charles E. Merrill Columbus, Ohio 1966

This refusal is perhaps anchored in the traditional belief that teaching is Idiosyncratic; that is, totally dependent upon the individual teacher's ability, fancy, whim, mood, needs, purposes, and so on.

If indeed it is so, then there is no sense going on with the discussion. There is no need to study pedagogy. Let us just continue with the prevailing pedagogical anarchy.

Shall we uphold and reinforce the conviction that TEACHERS CANNOT LEARN? CANNOT CHANGE? It seems like a spectacular PARADOX. The very people who are engaged in the transmission of knowledge, the modification of emotional and social behavior of their students are themselves incapable of going through these processes in the face of continuously growing amounts of knowledge in the behavioral sciences and psychology of learning.

2. The GENESIS OF THE SPECTRUM OF STYLES

Four reasons prompted the genesis of the spectrum.

- A. The incongruities between Teaching Behavior and Learning Behavior.
- B. The incongruities between educational philosophies uttered and the actual behavior of teachers.
- C. The voluminous and scattered information and research about learning which does exist but has not affected teaching behavior.
- D. The incredible poverty of work done in analyzing the act of teaching.

The need for a comprehensive theory of teaching or a Universal Model of Teaching Behavior is quite clear.

The need is both intellectual and operational. One must know what one does in order to do it well and do it with integrity. It is the violation of integrity which precipitated the design of the spectrum. It is the violation of the integrity of subject matter in any given discipline which demands better insights into the teaching act. It is the violation of the teacher's integrity which mandates a thorough understanding and analysis of what the teacher does and does not do, says and does not say.

After all the magnificent work done by so many learning psychologists, behaviorists, cognitive psychologists, social psychologists, psychoanalysts, and others it became necessary to interpret the variety of theories into a workable model that can be used in the classroom and the gymnasium. It became necessary to develop an integrated-conceptual model of teaching behavior built on a clear and consistent PREMISE, a model which embraces the variety of known learning PROCESSES and provides for the CONSEQUENCES of the teaching - learning transactions. Thus - the genesis of the spectrum.

3. The question of P & P form

There is no need to defend models in the social sciences. Models are theoretical descriptions of the limits and relationships of an idea, a concept, a construct. Models of teaching behavior serve as a very helpful guide for responsible action. The function of a model is to offer a direction, define boundaries and identify specific content - in this case the content of Teaching Behavior. Teaching behavior here is identified as specific "sets of decisions" which are defined, described, and prescribed in the Anatomy of A Style, the cornerstone of the Spectrum.

Now - the clearer the model, the more consistent the total structure of any model of Teaching Behavior the easier it becomes to APPROXIMATE its content and internalize it to one's own behavior, and hence the idea of P & P, namely - the pure and perfect form of a given style of teaching.

The relationship between a state of P & P model of a given style and the process of behavioral approximation on the part of a teacher serves as a powerful Diagnostic tool for discriminating between RELEVANT and IRRELEVANT decisions in a given teaching learning transaction.

Perhaps good teaching can be defined as reducing the irrelevancies in the T - L transaction, and the excellent teacher is the one who approximates the P & P state and reduces the number of irrelevant decisions to zero.

4. Mobility along the Spectrum

"Is it necessary to experience the entire Spectrum?" Is it necessary to travel from style to style in the order of the Spectrum?" These, and similar questions of MOBILITY are quite frequent. These can be answered with some degree of safety on two different levels:

A. Intellectual - Theoretical

B. Behavioral - Operational

A. One must move "From Command To Discovery" (the sub-title of the Spectrum) in order to comprehend the intellectual cohesiveness of the Spectrum. All our previous attempts at fragmentary presentations have failed to convey the ideas imbedded within the embracing structure of the Spectrum; nor did these attempts provide for total emersion in the MOBILITY within the Spectrum, a characteristic which is perhaps the most powerful attribute of the Spectrum.

Any partial familiarity with parts of the spectrum seems to bring about confusion, increase frustration, and enhance idiosyncratic "hang-ups" concerning the teaching act.

Lack of knowledge of the entire spectrum serves as a hindrance to the operational level. This is due to the tightness of the steps in the SHIFT in decision making when one moves from style to style.

Since each style has its own PREMISE, PROCESS, and CONSEQUENCES it also uniquely defines its DIRECTION, BOUNDARIES, and DECISIONS CONTENT. And therefore no partial familiarity can provide the necessary "behavioral approximation" which will reduce the irrelevancies in decision making and thus help the teacher approach excellence.

B. On the operational level, the situation is somewhat different. It has been observed that with some students it is possible to start with any style in any subject matter. Certain students can learn and will respond well when taught by command, reciprocal teaching, guided discovery, and

so on. They will fully and actively demonstrate "learning styles" which reflect S - R models, cognitive-mediation models or whatever.

This observation enhances the teacher's need to know and behave the entire spectrum so that he will be able to make style-preference decisions whenever it is called upon by the learning style of the student, the structure of the subject matter or the nature of the T - L transaction itself.

5. Mobility Inability

Assuming the existence of theoretical and operational mobility along the spectrum, in either direction a special phenomenon is observed when individual teachers attempt to travel along the spectrum.

Some teachers seem to "get stuck" at a given point on the spectrum. This happens in either direction: From Command To Discovery or From Discovery To Command.

There seems to be at least three main reasons for this freezing point:

- A. Philosophical - Each teacher brings to the teaching act a personal philosophy, a set of values, a "life style" or in a work: a past!

Each teacher, at least publicly (in class) and overtly projects the sets of rights and wrongs concerning his role, the students role, and the rules of the transaction. (Rules - the exact sets of expectations; Expectations of the student and those the student can expect of the teacher. These expectations may be verbalized or may be implicit with the general behavioral styles of the given teacher)

Now - if the teacher is called upon to behave in accordance with "his past" - security prevails. Again, it makes no difference which style is one's favority (due to one's past). The point made here is that mobility along the spectrum CONFLICTS with one's state of Teaching Equilibrium until one can internalize the existence of alternative behavioral models which, in fact, reflect different philosophical points of view concerning the role of the teacher and the role of the learner.

At Rutgers University, during our experiments with the Spectrum (both in the public schools and in various seminars in Colleges) we have observed that this philosophical singularity is perhaps the major determinant of the freezing point on the Spectrum.

When shifting from the theoretical to the operational level, this philosophical barrier creates an equally powerful hindrance to mobility.

- B. Emotional hindrance - It has been observed that some teachers react violently when they are faced with a shift in a teaching style. There seems to be an inability to accept oneself in a new role along the shift in the decision-making continuum. Equally powerful is the inability to conceive of the learner in his new role in decision making. This conflict is most threatening to some teachers and when the dissonances (both cognitive and affective) reach the breaking point (e.g. fear of losing control and face).

These teachers RETREAT to the style of teaching closest to their "secure" past. (You have heard the expression that "one teaches the way one was taught in the elementary school")

- C. Linguistic hindrance - Each style of teaching along the spectrum has its unique language. A language intrinsic to the PREMISE of the style, a language specific to the PROCESS of the style and a language which safeguards the CONSEQUENCES of the style.

Since a language reflects thoughts, feelings, and one's sets of values, a demand for change of language prods into the heart of one's emotions and one's philosophy.

Just consider the implications of shifting from exclamatory statements (!) which are so prevalent in the command style to questions in problem solving or to ONLY questions in Guided Discovery (in a style of P & P).

It seems that these three factors which hinder mobility are so intertwined in the teaching act that all three need to be studied and modified in order to facilitate mobility along the spectrum.

Let us conclude for the moment and suggest that one of the most significant aspects of mobility inability is the consequence of DEPRIVATION:

Deprivation of both student and teacher from a more variable, richer, perhaps more satisfying educational experience.