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# A Response to Cognition and Consciousness: The Humanities and the Elementary School Teacher

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A RESPONSE TO COGNITION AND CONSCIOUSNESS: THE HUMANITIES  
FOR THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER

by

Marilyn Roehm

The following response to Dr. Greene's paper comes out of a perceptual-existential approach to psychology. This approach is sometimes referred to as Third Force Psychology. It expresses a deep concern with questions of man's being and becoming. It is a point of view that sees people as growing, dynamic organisms. It regards human beings not as things to be made or molded but as unique events in the process of becoming. It is of great importance for education. "In particular, it provides the framework for a 'self as instrument' approach to teacher education".<sup>1</sup>

For quite some time now we have been preoccupied with the "behavioral competencies" approach to teacher education with an emphasis upon teaching teachers how they ought to behave. If, however, behavior is a function of perception, it is then obvious that we must concern ourselves with the "inner life" of our students. Simple exposure to subject matter is not enough. "The maturation of an effective professional worker requires changes in the student's perceptions—his feelings, attitudes and beliefs and his understandings of himself and his world."<sup>2</sup> This is no easy matter, for what lies inside the individual is not open to direct manipulation and control. *It is unlikely to change except with the active involvement of the student in the process.* Of all the perceptions existing for an individual, none are so important as those he has about himself. Each of us has many ways in which we see ourselves. I suspect that this is why early in her paper, Dr. Greene suggests that "The contemporary question is 'Who am I?' or 'What can I make of myself?'"<sup>3</sup>

"A teacher's understanding and acceptance of himself is the most important requirement in *any* effort he makes to help students know themselves and to gain healthy attitudes of self-acceptance".<sup>4</sup> Changes in self and self-consciousness are revealed in the ways one sees himself and sees the world as he acquires knowledge, skills, and roles and experiences shifts in beliefs, goals, attitudes, and values. It is Dr. Greene's proposition that through the study of the humanities this self-understanding or self-consciousness can be facilitated.

As a psychologist, it has become increasingly clear over the years that self-understanding requires something quite different from the methods, study plans, and skills of a "know-how" sort that are usually emphasized in education. Methods and techniques, group work, role playing and other devices are useful at certain points. But these educational techniques are *not* what is primarily needed. They can be used merely as a kind of external manipulation. When so used, they do not further, and may even defeat the purpose we are seeking here. What is needed is a more personal kind of searching, which will enable the teacher to identify his own concerns and to share the concerns of his students.

One significant approach to this personal kind of searching is suggested by

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Dr. Greene. "Treating philosophy as a distinctive human *activity*, I have in mind the asking of particular kinds of questions—interesting questions, what some call "queer" questions, unanswerable by purely formal statements or by statements of empirical fact . . . They have to do with the clarification of terms."<sup>5</sup>

Further support for the concept of helping students to develop a method of inquiry and an active involvement in learning comes from a study by P. E. Jacob.<sup>6</sup> Jacob studied the change in attitudes among college students as a result of completing courses in the liberal arts. Significant relationships could *not* be established between college courses completed and changes in student attitudes. It seems clear then, that teaching which deals exclusively with the recognition (identification and definition) and recall of facts has little influence on behavior.

It follows then that "If the humanities are to be relevant today, it seems to me, they must connect with the struggle to *be*".<sup>7</sup> "Among the things I am suggesting here is that such awakening can be advanced by involvement in the humanities *if* that involvement is self-conscious and pervaded by worthwhile questioning".<sup>8</sup>

The basic principle of learning, as I see it, is this: Any item of information will affect an individual's behavior only in the degree to which he has discovered its personal meaning for him. The production of effective teachers will require helping each student to explore and discover his personal meanings about subject matter, people, purposes, and learning about methods and about himself. The source of many of our failures in teacher education, it now seems clear, is that we have not sufficiently understood that professional training must operate on these deeper, more personal, levels of learning. We have assumed that knowing and behaving are one and that the time-honored ways of teaching subject matter are appropriate for teaching people to teach as well. "Our effort has been involved with teaching our students *about teaching* instead of helping them to become teachers".<sup>9</sup> Instead, professional teacher education must be an intensely human process designed to involve the student deeply and personally.

Dr. Greene's paper gives us another avenue for helping the student become more aware of the past and through a study of the humanities, a clearer "self-consciousness". She discusses the humanities as resources, as "possibilities which—if appropriated and acted upon—may arouse individuals to self-consciousness and the kind-of knowing that transforms what is given into what might be".<sup>10</sup>

It becomes increasingly evident that for the humanities to effectively meet the challenge of strengthening our hope for more informed sensitive teachers, the teachers of the humanities will have to directly involve their students in the process of their own education.

In conclusion, I would like to quote a section from Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet*:

No man can reveal to you aught but  
that which already lies half asleep in the  
dawning of your knowledge.

The teacher who walks in the shadow  
of the temple, among his followers, gives  
not of his wisdom but rather of his faith  
and his lovingness.

If he is indeed wise he does not bid  
you enter the house of his wisdom, but  
rather leads you to the threshold of your  
own mind . . . 11

FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Arthur W. Combs, *The Professional Education of Teachers: A Perceptual View of Teacher Preparation* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1965) p. 14.
- <sup>2</sup>Combs, *ibid.*, p. 12.
- <sup>3</sup>Maxine Greene, *Cognition and Consciousness: Humanities for the Elementary School Teacher*, this volume, p. 7.
- <sup>4</sup>Arthur T. Jersild, *When Teachers Face Themselves* (Teachers College Press, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1955) p. 3.
- <sup>5</sup>Greene, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
- <sup>6</sup>Phillip E. Jacob, *Changing Values in College* (New York: Harper and Row Pub., 1957).
- <sup>7</sup>Greene, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
- <sup>8</sup>Greene, *ibid.*, p. 15.
- <sup>9</sup>Combs, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
- <sup>10</sup>Greene, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
- <sup>11</sup>Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1923) p. 56.