



10-1980

TO A STUDENT TEACHER

Thomas R. Berg

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.und.edu/tl-nirp-journal>



Part of the [Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Berg, Thomas R. (1980) "TO A STUDENT TEACHER," *Teaching and Learning: The Journal of Natural Inquiry & Reflective Practice*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 2 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://commons.und.edu/tl-nirp-journal/vol5/iss2/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UND Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Teaching and Learning: The Journal of Natural Inquiry & Reflective Practice by an authorized editor of UND Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact und.common@library.und.edu.

TO A STUDENT TEACHER

I recently received a rather touching letter from a former student who is now student teaching in a public school. She seemed to be more than a little upset by the realization that what she had found in the schools did not correspond to what her college professors had led her to believe would be there. The gap between the "real" and the "ideal" appeared to be so wide that she did not know what to do. Assuming that she had been exposed to undiluted educational humanism in college classrooms, I decided to offer her the sort of tongue-in-cheek advice that might shock her into a reexamination of her own educational stance.

Dear Miss Brooks,

I hope that by now your student teaching experience has improved. But just in case it hasn't, I thought that I might offer a few observations about how to make connections between what you have learned in college and the real world of classroom teaching in an elementary school. First of all, rather than viewing your classroom as a crucible of learning and yourself as a descendant of Socrates, try to think of it as a prison and yourself as the warden. This will put things in their proper perspective. The tiny inmates will soon come to realize that between themselves and freedom lies the absolute necessity to please you. Understand from the beginning that most children are not miniature adults, but incorrigible little dirt balls, entitled to few, if any, of the rights and courtesies that you would afford to a grownup.

Secondly, you should forget all that you were taught about positive reinforcement and the fragile self-concept of the child. The kids are out to get you, and you should protect yourself at all costs. Exploit their weaknesses, point out their mistakes, show them that they don't know as much as you do about anything. Remember that kids who already feel good about themselves have no incentive to work or to please the teacher. You should selectively permit them to feel good about themselves only when their behavior and performance stands as a tribute to the excellence of your teaching skill. Meanwhile, let them see, occasionally, that beneath your charming smile and cheery optimism is a whining, sniveling cynic just waiting for a chance to put them down. Never, NEVER get down on their level. I know that your professors encouraged you to sit on the floor with them, ask silly questions that any child can answer, try to contact them at eye level . . . and so on. But remember that familiarity always breeds contempt. Intimidate them as often as possible with your intellectual superiority or, failing that, with your greater physical size and strength. Avoid, whenever possible, delving into the "affective domain." You may recall from your humanistic education courses that this is the area of feelings and emotions. The problem with the affective domain is that it will be difficult to maintain superiority and control in this area, since feelings tend to be democratic. It will be impossible to argue that your feelings are better, deeper, or more profound than theirs, and thus you will be reduced to wallowing with them in a quagmire of common emotion.

Third, remember that as a teacher you are an agent of the larger society. Your job is to pass on the culture to the next generation--to shape America's future. Always emphasize rote memorization and avoid the tendency to develop critical thinking. After all, who wants a bunch of carping critics spoiling a windfall increase in corporate profits? Relatedly, stay away from any semblance of democracy in the classroom by making all decisions yourself, for we have a tradition of political apathy and non-participation in the country that must be maintained.

Insist always upon immediate and absolute obedience, since your students will become the labor force in our society. No employer wants workers who are always questioning their superiors. Schools must refuse to "meet the needs of the individual," but must rather serve the interests of society. At the very least they should see to it that their students develop needs which coincide as closely as possible with society's interests. Make sure, therefore, that you at least create in your students a "need" to do what society expects them to do, to want only what our culture can provide, and to seek only the goals of which society can approve. There is no point in educating a generation of misfits.

A fourth tip worth remembering is that every teacher eventually runs out of things to say and do. Nobody can be exciting, interesting, and full of ideas for 8 hours a day, 185 days a year. When you find yourself running out of ideas, head straight for the mimeograph room. There you will find a spirit duplicator and thousands of "masters" for worksheets, puzzles, games, drills, outlines, questions, crosswords and the like. Run off several thousand of these "instructional aids." Then wait. Wait until the first kid says, "There's nothing to do, teacher," and then bury the little urchins with seat work. I guarantee that it will take them at least three weeks to figure out how to develop a system for getting the work done without thinking or studying. By then you will have had time to refresh yourself. A side benefit of this approach is that the kids will get so sick and tired of filling out these papers that any lesson you teach thereafter will be received with wild enthusiasm.

One final thought. Remember that you are working with other teachers, some of whom have been in classrooms many years and have grown weary of the task. Student teachers, bursting with energy, vitality, enthusiasm, and holding romantic notions of childhood constitute an insult to these veterans. Incessant bouncy optimism will only make other teachers sick. Don't forget that in today's education system quality

counts for nothing. The great teacher who has been on the job for 15 years is paid exactly the same as the lousy teacher who has put in the same time. So don't try to impress others with how good you are or how well the children are responding to you. Such behavior will just invite hatred and resentment.

Well, Miss Brooks, I hope that these thoughts will help you survive student teaching and prepare you for the real world of public education. Please keep in touch.

Best wishes . . .

Hopefully, this advice will reach her before it is too late.