

## INTRODUCTION

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This issue of *Listening* is devoted to exploring aspects of undergraduate education in small, liberal arts universities in the United States. Readers may wonder, why? Why are we reconsidering issues that, since Sputnik, have been subject to frequent, lengthy, exhaustive study? The obvious answer is that despite this, no consensus has been reached regarding how to solve even the most salient problems, nor even the exact nature of those problems. Perhaps then, to introduce the present articles in a manner that will be an invitation to read on, it is best first to explain what readers will *not* find herein. Readers will not find in this volume: jeremiads; calls for revolution; expressions of unguarded optimism; scathing attacks; defensive special pleadings; advocacy of do-nothingism; shame and blame; guilt trips; etc. I hope that readers will recognize the types of writings caricatured in this list as the sort that tend to turn off thinking by cultivating a tone that precludes alternatives, no matter how scholarly the presentation. One of the reasons for this, I submit, is that the authors of these types of writings do not focus as much as they may claim on the actual needs of both teachers and the taught in the current educational context, and especially not on how those needs may be intermeshed.

The authors of the present articles have attempted to focus on the ways in which the needs, and thus satisfaction of those needs, of teachers and students are bound up with one another. Moreover, the view here is that the perspective that sees these needs explicitly in terms of their interrelation is the one that holds out the most promise for defining problems and seeking solutions.

In her article, "Total Quality Learning: Connections Between the Teacher and the Taught," Dr. Kathleen Owens, professor of education and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences of Lewis University, presents a useful review of current critiques which maintain that there is an unacceptable distance between teacher and taught, a situation that has diminished both the quality of undergraduate education and the confidence of the public in the system of higher education. Dr. Owens also provides a focused and balanced historical perspective on the origins of this distance. In addition, she highlights the implications for the teacher-student relation of a student body diverse in ethnicity, achievement levels, and goals. Most importantly, she points out that there is a dearth of information regarding the quality and quantity of student learning in all colleges, from elite to those with a mission to serve all segments of the population. Thus, focusing on the relation between teacher and taught helps cut through the fog generated by demographic differences, and allows us to see that equal opportunity for all is a real possibility when that relation is understood to be the core of education. Dr. Owens' suggestion that emphasis on research does not serve students well is supported in a recent article in *Science* (Aug. 28, 1992, p. 1200), "Teaching vs. Research," in which Norman Hackerman, ex-president of Rice University and former chairman of the National Science Board, is quoted as expressing the view that what is needed is not better research, but better teaching, not only at elite institutions, but at all colleges. For, Dr. Hackerman, believes, the "other 99% of the students . . . are the ones who support us." In a similar vein, Dr. Owens believes that the challenge of excellence in teaching is one that smaller, comprehensive schools are most suited to meet.

Given the historical and current profile of college teachers and students provided by Dr. Owens, Br. Mark McVann takes us into the religious studies classroom with him for a close up view of what happens when a teacher understands the relation of teacher to taught to be the wellspring of learning, its very *fons et origo*. Br. McVann shows that class discussions in which both teacher and taught accept their responsibilities—the teacher to guide and challenge, the student to study, are the most fertile ground for learning, under either adverse or supportive conditions. What emerges from Br. McVann's presentation, including his quotations from student evaluations and response to them, is that the relation between teacher and taught is a personal relation, but not a personalized one, a crucially important distinc-

tion that is too often obscured. Moreover, it is obscured especially by those who do not see the classroom as a medium for the growth of personal responsibility in the form of critical thinking, and thus do not see the accession of personal responsibility as what it is: the liberating force that enables learning.

In her evaluation of the relation between teacher and taught, professor of psychology Mary Vandendorpe focuses on the way in which both teachers and students can benefit from their mutual exploration of issues and theories in psychology in general, and in developmental psychology in particular. Prof. Vandendorpe points out that all too often psychology instructors adopt a narrow biological, physiological, and/or deterministic perspective, and fail to present alternative theories to students; she points to the necessity of exposing students to the controversies raging in the field today as a means of empowering students to develop their capacity for independent thinking. Prof. Vandendorpe also maintains that for authentic student empowerment to be generated, it is necessary, but not sufficient, for free choice and decision making to be presented through the content of instruction; in addition, freedom must be enabled in the very structure and form of the classroom encounter between teacher and taught. That is, students must be allowed and encouraged to exercise their own free will, i.e., to raise questions and challenge conclusions. These experiences are vital for development of a mature sense of identity. Moreover, providing the conditions for the maturation of their students enables teachers to experience and enact the generativity that is the key issue of their own life stage. In this way, students and teachers grow and learn together. For Prof. Vandendorpe, owing to the fact that human development is the subject matter of psychology, the psychology classroom is particularly favored as an arena for student maturation.

Approaching the relation between teacher and taught from a different, but equally significant angle, professor of music Daniel Binder asks, in effect: how should the humanities and the arts be presented to students so as to do justice to both the indispensable richness of the products of human creativity and every person's capacity to be enriched by those products? Using music history as his paradigm, Prof. Binder shows that the exposition of music history in textbooks has paralleled, aided, and abetted the exclusionary historical processes that gave rise to the view that only those works deemed to be "masterpieces" are worth listening to. The most harmful aspect of this approach is that it disempowers those who consciously seek, or unknowingly need, the en-

richment art provides. By abstracting art from the context of human action, a fatalistic and thus dehumanizing, and ultimately unsatisfying experience is generated. Thus, for Prof. Binder, respect for the integrity and real needs of both teachers and students requires a contextualization of music history in the actual lives and life conditions of real human beings who are the agents of historical processes. In addition, an authentic, meaningful relation between teacher and taught in music history (and by extension, all of the arts and humanities), requires an expansion of the canon of music history to include those whose contributions have been excluded—American composers, women, and minorities. This expansion is required not to fulfill the demands of any pressure group for political correctness; it is required rather because the masterpiece syndrome, itself a product of an ideology of domination, has fostered the abstraction of the arts and humanities from the very context in and through which they have meaning for us.

According to professor of mathematics Paul Kaiser, “Without adequate preparation in mathematics, students do not even have the option whether to pursue a career in the sciences or not.” Here again, we run up against a persistent exclusionary educational tendency in the United States, the country that most prides itself on its openness. To put his point most strongly, Prof. Kaiser maintains that inadequate mathematics education on the high school level makes it virtually impossible for all but a few to opt for the study of mathematics and science in college. The result is steadily declining enrollments in these disciplines. This is a curious contradiction in a nation that purportedly both understands the necessity for outstanding achievement in mathematics and sciences in order to attain national goals, and prides itself on being the land of opportunity for all. In line with this, Prof. Kaiser surveys some of the cultural trends, and proposals for reversal of those trends, that have generated the tragic underrepresentation of women and minorities among college students of mathematics and science. Most importantly, Prof. Kaiser understands that the solution does not lie in adopting a narrowly pragmatic perspective that sees mathematics and science merely as means to social ends. On the contrary, his discussion of how mathematics and the teaching of mathematics have enriched his own life, and his expressed desire to communicate that enrichment to others, show that he too sees the relation between teacher and taught as the very heart and soul of the educational process.

Readers of this issue will find that the ideas presented in the

articles are both intricately worked out and challenging. In an afterward, I will present some reflections from the perspective of another discipline: philosophy.