

**E. F. Sheffield, ed.**

**TEACHING IN THE UNIVERSITIES: NO ONE WAY.**

**Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974.**

**252 pp. \$5.00 paper, \$12.00 cloth.**

**M. MacKenzie, M. Erault and H. C. Jones.**

**TEACHING AND LEARNING: AN INTRODUCTION  
TO NEW METHODS AND RESOURCES IN  
HIGHER EDUCATION.**

**Paris: UNESCO and International Association of  
Universities, 1970.**

**209 pp. \$3.50.**

One of the outcomes of the student rebellions of the 1960's was the eventual involvement of students in the process of hiring and firing faculty and, as a corollary, a new look at university tenure policy. Since then, there has been a growing interest in the subject of improving teaching in higher education and in the development of new methods of instruction. The Centre for Learning and Development at McGill University, for instance, is launching a study of teaching practices and is preparing a handbook of university teaching methods. The jointly sponsored UNESCO and IAU report on *Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* represents an early manifestation of this interest, and Edward Sheffield's book, *Teaching in the Universities: No One Way* is a more recent example. The titles provide the keys to their respective aims: the one deals with "new media for edu-

cational communication, new ideas for learning, and new methods of teaching," the other focuses on "the improvement of teaching in universities."

To answer the question, "What are the characteristics of effective university teaching?" Professor Sheffield sent out questionnaires to 7,000 alumni of Canadian universities, representing fourteen disciplines within French and English institutions throughout Canada, requesting them to name the professors whom they considered excellent teachers and to state their reasons for the choices. One thousand replies were received and, of these, forty-one denied having had any professors worthy of mention. Some names submitted were not considered eligible because the professors had gone on to other careers: Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Robert Bourassa, for example. The final list was narrowed down to twenty-three professors who were then asked to submit statements of their personal philosophies and methods of teaching. Professor Sheffield notes that each presentation is unique:

They differ not only because they reflect different people with different styles of teaching, but also in the extent to which they succeed in revealing how their authors teach. For many of the professors this turned out to be an extremely difficult assignment. . . . Most found it hard to define teaching, let alone creativity in teaching, and some admitted that they really function intuitively. One observed that his performance in the classroom is probably better than his description would indicate. Another found that writing about his teaching was painful because he was forced to confront himself, and still another concluded that trying to explain how you teach is like trying to explain how you breathe. (p.xiii)

Despite the striking contrasts in content, however, Dr. Sheffield found several common denominators. With the odd exception, the authors liked their students and agreed that it was important to treat them as individual human beings rather than as ciphers on a computer printout. They believed, too, that it was imperative to involve students in the teaching process wherever practicable. Nearly all relied on the lecture method "as the chief vehicle of their teaching," but at the same time they recognized the need to deliver the material as though it were extemporaneous. In every case, their students had reported that their lectures were thoroughly prepared, well organized, and demonstrated complete mastery over the subject matter. Professor Sheffield concluded that, "Assuming competence and enthusiasm for his field and a positive attitude toward students, it

is probable that almost any professor can be an effective teacher, in his own way, if he really wants to." (p. 215) This is an oversimplification, of course, and an educator of the stature and experience of Dr. Sheffield would be the first to admit it. As Professor Muriel Armstrong pointed out in her essay, "In spite of the best efforts of a teacher, there *are* students who will not work," (p. 98) and therefore, by extension, do not learn. The question of student motivation is still an enigma, and until more is known about this "missing link" in the teaching-learning process, teachers will continue to be like doctors who treat the symptoms of a disease without ever treating the disease itself.

The task which the UNESCO investigators set for themselves was "to indicate ways in which institutions of higher education, afflicted by all the stresses of transition, can begin to reconsider their methods of teaching and learning," and they cautioned their readers, just as Professor Sheffield did, that they did not pretend to "offer neat or immediate remedies." (p. 21) They maintained that prior to the unprecedented enrolment boom of the 1960's, universities gave "little thought to the way teaching is carried on or to ways of measuring its effectiveness." (p. 16) The ubiquitous negative attitudes of faculty towards any suggestion that pre-service or in-service training might significantly improve teaching performance were deplored by the authors, as was their obvious reluctance to try out new teaching techniques. "For too long, too much of the academic profession has clung to the conviction that is easily elided into the pessimistic conclusion that all attempts to change the situation are foredoomed to failure." The attitude arises in part from the cherished notion that at the university level, "the pursuit of knowledge is the primary objective, and that its communication is a secondary function that may be little more than a by-product." This kind of thinking has fostered the "untested beliefs that good teaching is vitally dependent upon successful research, and that promotion should be determined on the principle of 'publish or perish'." (p. 40)

It is encouraging to find evidence in the Sheffield treatise, researched five years later, that belies this ostrich-like stance. For example, Professor Armstrong states that preparation of lecture material *does* and *should* consume a formidable amount of professors' time (anything from two to eight hours just to polish up a presentation already prepared), but their teaching effectiveness is not necessarily furthered by efforts "to make original contributions to knowledge in the subject." It is far more important for them to keep abreast of "other people's contributions," while at the same time "finding relevant examples, [and] checking newly-published

sources.”\* She notes here a euphemistic distinction sometimes made between “research for students” and “research for colleagues,” the latter referring to scholarly pursuits undertaken for the sake of survival in the battle of “publish or perish.” (pp. 98-99) Secondly, she proposes that professors should keep informed of innovations in teaching such as modular instruction and computer-assisted instruction. She is fascinated by these new techniques because they can spark interest and enthusiasm in teaching. Her presentation wryly concludes with the comment: “That is why I am looking forward to reading other essays in this collection so that I can discover the techniques which others use, and which I can adapt for use in my own classroom – just as soon as I get off some committees and find the time to try them!” (pp. 104-05)

In addition to a potpourri of timely and insightful views on what constitutes effective university teaching, followed by an astute analytical and descriptive editorial commentary, Sheffield provides the reader with a comprehensive, well-annotated twenty-seven-page bibliography on the subject. Thus, he has fulfilled his purpose of making a contribution towards solving one side of the complex teaching-learning problem. But there is still the other side: how to ensure effective learning. Professor Cockshutt in her presentation states the issue succinctly: “The role of the teacher is to help students learn. The responsibility of success or failure thus falls on us both.” (p. 195)

The authors of the UNESCO report assert that to resolve the issue, “What now seems clearly to be needed is some means of giving the student the skills and the opportunity to develop his learning capacity, to participate more in the learning process, and to judge his performance by criteria other than the ability to regurgitate information in a written examination.” Teachers are urged to shed their prejudices against psychological theories of learning and to take a more positive attitude to “professional training programmes and other regular means of acquiring information about advances in the behavioral sciences (or, indeed about new ideas and their applications). . . . The majority of teachers in higher education are simply unaware that there is anything useful to be gained in this respect.” (pp. 42-43)

Professor Sheffield has presented at least twenty-three modes of

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\*This obviously begs the question of whether there should be two species of professors — one who mainly teaches, probably at the undergraduate level, and one who mainly does research, who teaches fewer hours and at the graduate level. As long as it does not create a ‘pecking order’ this may be one solution to the issue.

university teaching that have been judged as excellent by the only legitimate criteria – the opinions of students; and there is some evidence of a change of attitude towards new ideas. The conclusion to be drawn from the UNESCO report is that by opening the gates of higher education wider than ever before, we have solved the problem of “getting the horse to water” but we are no nearer to understanding “how to make him drink.” Until that issue is resolved, the teaching-learning process at university, or indeed at any level of education, will remain less than satisfactory.

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**Carl Bereiter. MUST WE EDUCATE?**  
Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975.  
146 pp. \$2.75.

This book comprises the most recent statement of the reputed American educational psychologist who is now Professor of Applied Psychology at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Toronto. Bereiter, who earned his reputation as a scholar in the field of compensatory education as a result of his early work with Siegfried Engelmann, continues to use the behavioral methods of rote-learning found effective with poor black children in the States, with Indian and working-class children in Ontario. While it has been subjected to radical, if not conclusive, criticism from many circles, Bereiter has never abandoned his key concept of “verbal deprivation,” according to which: “The language of lower-class Negro and Mexican American children is not even an underdeveloped version of standard English but is a basically nonlogical mode of expressive behavior which lacks the formal properties necessary for the organization of thought.”\*

In the Preface to *Must We Educate?* Bereiter takes a side-swipe at those, such as Edgar Friedenberg and William Labov, who took his word on verbal deprivation in vain and, referring to them as “undiscriminating readers” (p.v.), ignores their criticism and proceeds as if it did not exist. This is unfortunate for one who proclaims himself to be in the scientific tradition and as if to prove it, quotes

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\*Carl Bereiter and Siegfried Engelmann, *Teaching Disadvantaged Children in the Preschool*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966.