

TACTYC CLOSING COMMENTS

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We have lingered over many topics concerning children, parents, teachers and curriculum issues today. There is still much to learn about how to help all of our children so that ultimately they can all lead good lives. As you return to your work with the children, keep these main points in mind:

- 1 Remember that adults know more about almost everything than a small child does – except what it feels like to be that child, and how the world makes sense to him or her. Those things are the children's expertise, which a teacher must learn in order to be able to reach and teach them.
- 2 Remember also that through their behavior children *often* ask us to help them become the kinds of persons we want them to be, because that is what they want to be. They want to be the kinds of persons we like -- especially while they are still very young! We won't harm them by being clear about what we think is good, right, valuable, and is worth knowing and understanding.
- 3 Take care not to confuse what is exciting, amusing, and fun with what is educative. Excitement is appropriate for entertainment and special occasions; it is short-lived pleasure - easy come, easy go. But what is educative requires sustained effort and involvement, often includes many routine elements, and offers long-term deep satisfaction rather than momentary fun and excitement.
- 4 Remember that learning and development take time – change may not! We can change behavior quickly by using threats and punishments; but when these are removed, there is no real development. And remember that it is very hard to grow around impatient people!
- 5 Remember that meaningful relationships have to have *content*. Relationships cannot be developed in a vacuum; we have to relate to each other *about* something – something that matters to the participants in the relationship. The content of our relationships with children should not be mainly about rules, regulations, and conduct, but about their increasing knowledge and developing understandings of those things within and around them worth knowing more about and understanding more deeply and more accurately.
- 6 In teaching, as indeed in life, we constantly make decisions. Every decision carries with it its own potential errors. There are probably no error-free decisions. So we have to think ahead about the possible errors embedded in each decision, and then choose the 'least worst errors'! In this sense, life is a series of choices of which errors we prefer.
- 7 It is a good idea for all of us as teachers to strive for a balance between being sufficiently skeptical to be able to go on learning, and sufficiently convinced about the rightness of what we are doing to be able to go on acting - for to teach is to act. And effective teaching requires *optimal* confidence in the rightness of our actions.

- 8 As teachers, all we have at a given moment in a given situation is our own very best judgment. Throughout our professional lives we study and reflect in order to refine that judgment; we exchange with colleagues, consider others' solutions to the problems we face, examine the available evidence - all in order to improve our judgment. But in the last analysis, our very best judgment is all there is.
- 9 Teaching involves many conflicting pressures and situations. We cannot respond fully or equally to all of them. We have to decide what is worth making an issue over. Don't make an issue over everything. Select those issues that really matter to you. But don't have too many: a half a dozen issues will do! Then take your stand on them with clarity, confidence, and with courage - for the sake of the children.
- 10 Cultivate the habit of speaking to children as people - people with minds - usually lively ones. Appeal to their good sense. It is not necessary to be sweet, silly or sentimental at one extreme, or somber, grim or harsh at the other. Let us be genuine, direct, honest, serious, and warm with them, and about them—and sometimes humorous too.
- 11 The goal of education is not enjoyment; that is the goal of entertainment. The goal of education is to engage the minds of the learners so that their understandings of significant phenomena and events become deeper, clearer, and more accurate. When we succeed at engaging their minds, the learners find it enjoyable. But enjoyment cannot be our goal; but it can be a by-product of good teaching.
- 12 I really believe that we cannot have optimal environments for children in preschools, child care centers, and schools unless the environments are also optimal for the adults who work in them. Certainly on some days what is optimal for the children will be obtained at the expense of the adults (like Halloween parties), and on other days, vice versa. But on the average, on a day-to-day basis, both the children and the adults must find their lives together satisfying, interesting and worth living.
- 13 Cultivate your own intellect and nourish the life of your own mind. For teachers, the cultivation of the mind is as important as the cultivation of our capacities for understanding, compassion and caring - not less, not more - but equally important. In other words, see yourself as a developing professional; become a student of your own teaching -- a career-long student of your own teaching.
- 14 Respect your adversaries and resist the temptation to be defensive. Remember, whenever you respond defensively it is partly because you believe the attack, or believe part of the attack; and when you are defensive you are responding to the attacker's rules! Sometimes the attacker is right. But it seems best to respond professionally rather than personally. Furthermore, it seems to me that adversaries and enemies tend to become alike!
- 15 Never take someone else's views or opinions of you or your work more seriously than you take your own! Take others' views seriously – there may be much to learn from them - but not more seriously than you take your own; for that is the

essence of self-respect, and I believe that children benefit from being around self-respecting adults.

16 Always assume that the people you work with have the capacities for greatness, creativity, courage and insight. Occasionally this assumption will be wrong, perhaps. But if you always make it, you will be much more likely to uncover, encourage, strengthen, and support these qualities in them.

17 Never under-estimate the power of ideas! Bad ones as well as good ones! Ideas are distinctly human creations, and if they were not powerful many people would not have been imprisoned, exiled, assassinated, sent to Siberia, burned at the stake, or crucified - because of their ideas.

18 I think the great struggle of our time – and no doubt for generations to come – is the struggle for *equality*. But we might ask: equality of what? People are not equally tall or musical or mathematical or athletic or beautiful; but they are equally human! They are equally human in the sense that they all have hopes, and dreams and wishes and fantasies and aspirations and fears and doubts. They all want to be treated with respect and dignity and want to feel loved by someone. In these ways it seems to me, all of the world's people have much more in common than they have apart!

19 I have tried to share my own views of what education is about. To me it is about developing in the young certain dispositions. These dispositions should include being reflective, inquisitive, inventive, resourceful, full of wonder (wonder-full?), and puzzlement. These dispositions should also include the habits of searching for evidence; they should include also the dispositions to be tender, courageous, caring, compassionate and include some humor as well! But I refer you to the definition of education provided by the British philosopher, R. S. Peters:

To be educated is not to have arrived at a destination; it is to travel with a different view. What is required is not feverish preparation for something that lies ahead, but to work with a precision, passion and taste at worthwhile things that lie at hand (Peters, 1965, p. 110).

20 I believe the time has come to rephrase the goals of education away from the emphasis on producing rocket scientists to compete in the global economy. Instead it seems to me the main goal should be to do whatever we can to help every child to grow to become a productive participant in his or her community and to be able to lead a satisfying life, whatever his or her occupation might be. For this goal to be reached, we must emphasize the arts as well as the other basic kinds of learning.

21 I really believe that each of us must come to care about everyone else's children. We must come to see that the well-being of our own individual children is intimately linked to the well-being of all other people's children. After all, when one of our own children needs life-saving surgery, someone else's child will perform it; when one of our own children is threatened or harmed by violence on the streets, someone else's child will commit it. The good life for our own children can only be secured if it is also secured for all other people's children. But to worry about all other people's children is not just a practical or strategic matter; it

is a moral and ethical one: to strive for the well-being of all other people's children *is also right*.

References

Peters, R. S (1965) Education as Initiation. In R. D. Archambault (ed.) *Philosophical Analysis and Education*. London: Routledge Kegan Paul: p.110.