

Teacher Constructs and Dispositions: Self-Governing and the Proper Teacher

■ Katharina E. Heyning

Who and what is a teacher in the United States today? How did this person come to be? As elsewhere, the teacher construct or «Lehrerpersönlichkeit» continues to be shaped by tension between what the public expects teachers to be and what teachers actually do. I suggest here that in addition to the various ideals outlined in the article a new self-governing conception of teacher has emerged based on shared notions of «proper disposition». I will illustrate this through a brief examination of how, during the early part of the 20th century, the teacher construct came to be understood through emergent identities of science, welfare and psychology. This is particularly noticeable during the creation of early childhood teaching profession in the U.S. I then shift the discussion to more recent events in teacher education reform laws that outline proper forms of teacher-thinking and doing that are visible but often go unstated in the discourse. These new forms of discipline have significantly changed the teacher-person from the inside-out.

The teacher construct in the U.S. has always been shaped by various expectations, both internal and external. One excellent example is the particular identities that developed with early childhood teachers. Early childhood or nursery school teachers have been a part of the educational fabric in the United States since establishment of infant, dame, primary, or petty schools from the time of colonial rule through the establishment of the first English-language kindergarten in the 1860's. By the early part of the twentieth century the teaching of young children had shifted from a pleasure of the wealthy to a crusade against poverty and a need to «Americanize» working-class immigrant children in large urban areas. Nursery schools were established and sponsored by settlement houses and philanthropic agencies with the belief that these children were lacking specific socio-emotional experiences. Teachers in these schools developed particular identities related to gender-linked notions of welfare and nurture.

Unlike their elementary and secondary school teachers, early childhood teachers have historically identified with the need to protect children by elevating motherhood, housekeeping, child rearing, and child nurture to a more specialized moral status. In America as elsewhere, women have been seen as the agents of moral and cultural nurture, as child advocates, and custodians of the young. These notions were also backed by popular early childhood

theorists of the time such as Fröbel who expressed the special gift women had to teach young children as an «educational calling». The «proper» early childhood teacher of the day was to be female, unmarried, and matronly – the mother of society's children.

Teachers of this period also popularized the «scientific» ideas of educators such as Hall and Thorndike to provide authorization for women as natural guardians of the young. Heavily influenced by the emerging field of psychology, early childhood teacher certification courses were trained to use new «scientific» methodologies of child study. As teachers were trained in these new methods and innovations, they began to equate their role as teacher with scientific method instead of the earlier notions of (largely) maternal nurture.

While I use the history of childhood teachers as my example here, similar things can be said for teachers of older children during the same time-period. Elementary and secondary teachers were assumed to be male-oriented (or not maternal) disciplinarians. The emerging use of scientific method was applied to curricular innovation to provide the most efficient means of delivering lessons to older students. Teachers now had a specialized form of knowledge (pedagogy) that could be learned, but more often was seen as a «calling» akin to preaching or the ministry. At this time in history one could state that the «Lehrerpersönlichkeit» or person of the teacher consisted of a personification of gender specific and scientific ideals, a specialized effect or prestige in «helping» poor immigrant children become truly American and forms a power of control in a particular assumptions that teachers had a specialized or godly calling to do the work they did.

The emergence of early childhood teachers as a group also marked the beginning of one of the first «women's professions» in the United States. It was through teaching and advocating for early childhood programs and welfare that women first began to be seen as «professional» workers outside the home. Although it appears sexist by today's standards to underscore the educational calling of women, the continued emphasis on nurture, child care and advocacy – long associated with women's work – still dominates debates about what constitutes the conception of «teacher» today. On one hand the teacher identifies with the science of education and the application of psychologically-derived child development practices. On the other hand, the historical commitment to child welfare often indicates a teacher construct based on maternal nurturing. Both of these identities are still visible through the

use of psychological language in teacher certification programs today.

For instance, the «science» of teaching children is visible when psychological terms are used to judge the ability of teachers on scientific grounds. The increasing dependence on testing children became common after psychologists popularized intelligence testing in America. It was through psychometrics that psychology first began to establish its claim as the appropriate authority to judge children and administer them in a way that would increase their utility to society. Today, good teachers are those who embrace the scientific practice of intelligence testing to help determine both «normal» and «defective» children by society's standards. A proper teacher is one who assists in the establishment of norms of behavior for children through testing. A teacher is expected to be able to discuss and analyze children using psychological terms.

Nurturing and child welfare issues are also inscribed within the teacher construct. As children are measured against statistical norms of behavior, deviance from those norms are often linked to family culture. The proper teacher knows how to judge families for their ability to produce «normal» well-adjusted, psychologically-sound children. Teachers are trained to believe that parents may need help in producing stable children. Already comfortable with the maternal advocacy role, good teachers are those who include attention to the family and its influence in the child's life. A greater emphasis on the child's family and community is now part of the curriculum the teacher creates.

Starting in the mid-1990's new teacher constructs have become visible in teacher education reform discourse in the United States. I believe they represent a shift in the way the teacher is formed and equate a particular type of self-governing that is largely unexamined. For instance, new teachers in the state of Wisconsin must demonstrate that they have proper knowledge, skills and dispositions before they are given a license to teach. According to the state, a proper teacher disposition would:

- show enthusiasm for the discipline of teaching,
- be committed to reflection, assessment, and lifelong learning,
- be sensitive to community and cultural norms,
- be a thoughtful and responsive listener,
- value critical thinking and self-directed learning as habits of mind.

While knowledge and skills have been a part of the teacher construct for a century, the public examination of internal character is a fairly recent development.

In the past, teachers had to know proper pedagogical techniques and content knowledge and explain how they could improve their teaching practice based on student performance in the classroom. Now they have to be able to do these things plus reflect on how classroom events help them learn and grow as a teacher. I believe this represents a

new conception of the teacher; a teacher that has a soul aligned with state standards. The means for achieving this is a very public examination of private character.

Teachers must now achieve a correct disposition using «reflective practice.» The use of reflection in teacher education is grounded in notions of discourse analysis. It is often accomplished through a narrative statement or some sort of examined writing placed in a portfolio. The teacher is asked to write about what happened in the classroom and then relate what happened to how they think and learn as a professional. The learning or reflecting comes about when the teacher re-reads what he or she has written and then adjusts his or her disposition (or attitude) toward the past event and creates new meaning. The new meaning is recorded and rated by the new teacher's superiors; usually university professors or peer mentors. As society continues to demand proof that the candidate holds the proper dispositions to be a good teacher, the «devices of reflection» are re-read as a discursive practice that links power and authority in the text, placing it in a social space that can be examined, interpreted and validated.

However sincere the plan may be, this appeal for validation and authentication topples its own methodological cornerstone by engaging the politics of hegemony. When teachers-to-be are asked to «reflect» upon their learning and adjust their disposition, what are the gauging themselves against? Objectivism, as a measure of validity, necessarily requires an appeal to some socially constructed internal measuring stick.

There are multiple levels of assumption taking place during this process. On one level society believes that this method will actually change the teacher's attitude toward their teaching practice. This relates to society's belief in abstract or mechanized processes as a way to improve life. On another level it is assumed this new teacher-person will embrace the proper dispositions laid-out by the state without question. One is not allowed to be an «unenthusiastic» teacher, for instance. On yet another level is a self-governing teacher desiring to change his or her disposition using the self-reflective process.

In my opinion the teacher construct or «Lehrerpersönlichkeit» continues to be shaped by various tensions and assumptions in society, but it is more than what they do or what the public expects. As with earlier times, the teacher-person is still someone who has a godly or spiritual calling. However, the internal soul is more visible than ever before and attempts are being made to normalize the very character of teaching in society through the reflective process. The emergent teacher is one who personifies culture and one who desires to self-govern, embracing a particular understanding of dispositionality. These are more than ideals or power of effect. It is a particular teacher construct that holds

specific meanings and assumptions about society. As discussed in the article, the teacher of old was a direct emanation of spirit that could cultivate pupils without speaking a word. I suggest that the teacher

of today is one who still speaks without uttering a word. It is a teacher that is governed by society, by god and by self – a powerful example of being.

Parenting teachers: care for the individual and national spirit, practice and communality

■ Anja Heikkinen

The many meanings of education and personality

The personality (Persönlichkeit) of the educator has all over the world been crucial for education, since the moulding of the character – currently under the label of social skills and competences – is its major function. The «Lehrerpersönlichkeit» should not be a very German phenomenon. However, the *meaning and implications* of educator's personality vary according to historical and cultural context¹.

What is striking for me in the German-speaking education, is the persistence of dualisms, which the authors of «Person of the Teacher» do not discuss. The citation from Günther Jacoby is indicative: «England is the land of gentlemen, Germany is the land of Persönlichkeiten». Thinking and acting, spiritual and corporeal, general and specific, liberal and occupational, masculine and feminine, public and private remain key oppositions in educational theorizing since Hegel and Schleiermacher. «Educator» personifies this: e.g. the masters of vocational education and schoolmasters embed different cultural spheres, not to speak of the «Lehrerpersönlichkeit» in university auditoriums. I believe that the aims and ideals of education and educators may only be comprehended as embedded in wider, holistic cultural projects and programs: understanding requires specific contextualisation in the political, economical and social development.

According to mainstream educational rhetoric, Finnish educator is an expert on learning and guidance, a reflective practitioner and a researcher of his or her own work. She or he supports learners to self-directed, life-long engagement in gaining knowledge, updating skills and managing one's life. Faculties of education provide MAs and doctorates in class teaching, special education and early childhood education, in vocational and adult education; and pedagogical studies for subject teachers, university staff etc. Pedagogy is a science supporting learning and managing learning environments, use-

ful for the making of learning societies, regions and organizations. «Personality» is only a component in a teacher's competence, based on substantial and pedagogical knowledge and skills. If teacher is an example for learners, she or he should represent an ideal learner. Understanding this controversial situation historically and culturally requires recognition of the dawdling and negotiated nature of culture and of the imbalance between popular expectations and hegemonic definitions and ideals of education and educators.

The heritage of popular education: collective self-cultivation

Nordic countries have been influenced by German-speaking educational tradition, but it has always been domesticated and modified to native conceptions and intentions. What may be specific to the Nordic space is the incorporation of spheres of life, also among sexes and age groups. The basic social units – totalities – have been rural or small town communities, where individual and collective necessities and aspirations had to be negotiated. Especially since the 19th century, popular enlightenment/education (folkelig opplysning/bildning, kansanvalistus/sivistys) crystallized indigenous Nordic educational ideals. Still, distinctive ethnic, geographical, political and economical factors contributed to the «Finnish Sonderweg».

The Finns are the best-survived group of Finno-Ugrians in Europe (and North-West Asia). Even if they had their unique language, habits and religion, their Finnishness remained problematic for themselves and others until 19th century. Since the 12th century, the Christianising and subordination of Finland by Swedes and Russians disseminated formal education, which was based on Latin and Swedish language. The turning point for education was the separation of Finland from Sweden and becoming an autonomous grand duchy of Russia since 1809. From this on the economic, industrial, political, religious and social life had to develop as distinctively Finnish, even though the elites remained Swedish-speaking. In a poor, sparsely populated country with