

**PROFESSIONAL PERCEPTION AS A PRIOR CONDITION
OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING?**

**Some answers to many questions
in context of a long-termed teaching evaluation**

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INTRODUCTION: A BRIEF LOOK BACK

As I reported in this journal (March 2000) and other media on the evaluation of my role as an academic teacher, I have never expected such a feedback I finally got. (1) This summer semester 1 definitely finished this kind of feedback research of student generations started in 1969 and, therefore, I should like to discuss the important striking inquiries of my colleagues living in Germany and abroad.

As a result of these feedback surveys over many years, a very special pattern of my role as a teacher perceived by my students has already appeared in winter semester 1969/70 and stabilized with every new semester. This pattern of perception and attribution seems to be similar to the well-known type "charisma" or "transformational leadership" having been described by political scientists for many years.

During the past years, this pattern has been proved as very stable (2). As an object of this attribution and the actor too, I suppose that this fact may have many causes that I will discuss as follows.

LEARNING AS AN ENCOUNTER OF INDIVIDUALS - SOME REMARKS CONCERNING MY APPROACH

Learning is an encounter of mostly different human beings whose peculiarities influence the process of learning directly or indirectly. There are persons who will learn or will not learn. And there are also persons who can learn or cannot learn. Learning is participating and separating as well. According to this concept every learning partner has an individual potential. Potentials can grow, stagnate and fade. As a subject and an object

of learning processes, such individual potentials - *ceteris paribus* - can be reduced to basic dimensions as motivation and competence. Unless defined simply or complexly, first of all such potentials are perceived in a very individual way. This way of perception seems to me as a key to the understanding of learning process by that professor and student participate.

Each situation defined by interacting partners has a peculiarity of its own. There are similarities and dissimilarities. Because of the fact that human beings are orientated at their own needs, motives, expectations, problems attitudes, habits, values and aims, each lecture or lesson depends on the motivation and competence of learning partners involved. Not only in context of large learning groups, in every learning relevant situation the professor has to prove his courage to do consistent decisions. He should confess and explain himself as an authority - finally in the original meaning of the subject "professor". He also should make clear how to handle the power of his authority. He should be courageous to put in his experience of life and that of his students as a part of their common learning. He should posit, explain and accept himself as person; not only as a teacher - students alike. If both learning partners act and react honestly and spontaneously, they will gain more than by traditional learning transfer. At its best, every learning partner transcends his limits. Learning is empowering the teacher and the student as well, is bringing about orientation, obligation, participation and challenge to action, is fostering - spoken salutogenetically - comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness, is donating meaning of life.

From the perspective of experience of his profession, of his life and his system of values as well, finally the professor should remain the decisive partner in the process of common learning! He is responsible for the plans, contents, transfers and outcomes of these processes. And he is paid for that!

Not dissimilar to psychotherapy, the crucial point of the quality of this common learning are the relations between the partners themselves. Basic process factors are self-disclosure and feedback evolved on both sides. Both these factors are also responsible for the realization of learning partners' needs and aims. Open - and feedback-minded partners motivate themselves and others by clear and consistent objectives. They are acting as pattern, and standard or even as behaviorally relevant "model". Conversely, partners who shut each other verbally or non-verbally are mostly having serious learning problems. From my point of view aims, contents, processes and instruments of learning should promote personal growth and selfresponsibility. Growth and responsibility mean to accept one's own limits and other people's authority that have been proved as credible and authentic. Authority as a charge or mandate for a time always has to be discussed and criticized. Authority as a mandate deliberately seeks the "risk of failure" and, thus, prepares his own cutback. Consequently, education by guardianship shifts to education by partnership.

Authority as a functional charge and temporary mandate does exclude that pop-concept which defines freedom as an absence of any frustration. On the contrary, any education that explicitly promotes personality growth should start from the anthropological fact that human beings are social human beings. Groups and organizations as main structures of social relationships always mean success and failure, chance and resignation, fulfillment and frustration. Therefore, an education that pursues growth and responsibility should also have in mind a conception of tolerance towards frustration. Tolerance towards frustration means individual acting in social relationships not by "lust principle" but mostly by "reality

principle" day by day. Human beings acting in this way are self-conscious, responsible, authentic and (fruly) free.

Thus, learning is demonstration, experience and acceptance of individual, social and cultural limits, too. Consequently, exams are necessary. They serve as standards for comparisons of learning relevant patterns of behavior. Again, they should offer chances for future and, therefore, they should never arouse dangerous frustrations but only limiting ones.

Of course, the room for action is not a wide country: it will be circumscribed by the "scylla of perissiveness" and the "Charybdis of failure" as Freud once put it. Everyone who does not blind himself against the reality of life knows that states of limiting deprivation and frustration, often individually perceived as so-called stress, by all means can motivate remarkable achievements, inspire creativity and, thus, stimulate personality growth (3).

PERCEPTION AS A BASIS OF PEDAGOGICAL LEADS

As a part of a special business of reciprocity called learning, a professor has a number of value-oriented options which we derive from the fact that learning partners do evaluate situations in a very personal style. To emphasize the special responsibility of the professor in this business, we call these options "pedagogical leads". We discern between two main types of these "leads": Type 1 characterizes "leads" which are committed for the students. These ones help the professor to posit himself within situations which are perceived differently. According to this type, the professor can use four "homogenous" leads called "Telling", "Challenging", "Involving" and "Self-Directing". Each of these "leads" is defined by a proper mix of "Direction" and "Support". On the other side, type 2 starts from roughly similar perceptions of student's potential or behavior by the professor respectively the student himself. There are three "leads" which are characterized by dynamics and flexibility. Dynamics and flexibility translated into the every-day life of the professor mean that he moves on the spectrum of perception which both partners have defined independently of each other. "Leads" of this type are open and partnership-minded. We call these "heterogeneous" options "Telling to Challenging", "Challenging to Involving" and "Involving to Self-Directing". Similar to type 1, each of these "leads" is defined by a proper mix of "direction" and "support", too.

As briefly as possible we will demonstrate this approach by an example (4):

Miss Kate Brown is convinced that she will master the coming semester test because of "my outstanding talents and attitudes to study and life" (self-inquiry!). The professor does not agree with her opinion at all. On the contrary, he has known her as a very lazy and incompetent girl for many semesters. He feels sure of her self-deception. He believes that Kate is looking for a convenient chance to blame external factors for her own failure.

In context to this case, we select those two "leads" from our manual named UNI.LEAD which do fit to this problem the best respectively the worst. Considering our premise that the professor has the ultimate responsibility for the learning processes especially in cases of deviant perceptions of student's potential and behavior, we prefer the option "Telling" as the "best" choice: "The professor immediately demands a complete behavioral change in

context to her studies. If Kate does not follow his direction, she will have to face sanctions concerning her studies at all.

Chart

Individual perception of motivation und competence as a base of so-called pedagogical leads

Dimension	Discription of the mix	Competence Range (estimated): 1-3	Motivation Range (estimated): 1-3	Problem and diagnosis	Profile of fasks and pedagogical leads
Student's potential - seen by Kate Herself:	Learning partner will and can face and manage the challenge	Estimated 3: That means: Solid knowledge; solid experience; able and active, to handle problems; terms-minded; eager to get feedback by relevant & powerful others	Estimated 3: Energy will be concentrated exclusively on aims and problems; distress-resistant; committed ethically to work; eager to look for challenging tasks and other meaningfulness giving activities		
Student's potential - seen by the professor	Learning partner neither will nor can face and manage the challenge	Estimated 1: Poor knowledge; poor experience; unable to handle problems; not terms-minded; not interested to getting feedback by relevant & powerful others	Estimated 1: Poor energy; poor distress - resistance; hardly interested in aims & objectives; poor ethical committment, will not work but have to work to live	Deviant perception, e.g. self-deception; unrealistic self-concept; professor has to conter this position to prevent further personal desorientation and social isolation	Authority as a consistent trainer will be demanded

Internal structure of pedagogical leads

Components	1. Telling	2. Challenging	3. Involving	4. Self-Directing
Directive	strong	strong	weak	weak
Supportive	weak	strong	strong	weak

As the "worst" choice we would prefer the option "Self-Directing": "The professor does not want to dispute with Kate anymore. Finally, Kate is responsible for her own life. Therefore, she has to bear the consequences of her attitudes and actual behavior". The professor does not intervene and leaves her alone with her self-deception problem."

Apropos pedagogical lead "Self-Direction": this option would be a good one if Kate deployed exemplary achievement motivation and competence.

CONSIDERING RANGE AND PERSPECTIVE: A "MENTORISTIC" APPROACH?

Critical arguments based on the philosophy of science and related methodology can be formulated. Surely, the application of a single technique - here: the semantic differential - over many years cannot be the best choice for teachers' evaluations and similar projects. Thirty-seven years ago when I finished my doctoral dissertation in Canada and worked as a personnel counselor and trainer for small factories founded by German immigrants there, I was preferably using simple tests and other techniques which were highly appreciated by my partners. Some years later and meanwhile working as professor in West Germany, I could transfer this "practice-oriented" approach to my teaching and coaching. Although I have invited very early my students to evaluate my lectures and related activities, I did not plan to carry out a systematic evaluation project. Besides, in those days totally different problems ruled the minds of professors, students and politicians, too.

Mainly the critical arguments against my implicit "mentoristic" approach and, thus, very narrow range are to be taken very seriously. But remember this again: my philosophy of teaching and learning emphasizes the single person, the individual. And this programmatic focussing is - as every teacher who has to face many lectures with many youngsters knows - a challenge with a sisyphos perspective! Not speaking about the costs of this perspective which have to be paid day-by-day and which do not only distress one's health, devotion and vocation - Max Weber did not refer to politicians alone - should remain the guidelines of my work.

NOTES:

1. Kliem, Ottmar, Teaching as attribution - how 3227 students of 56 semesters evaluated the lectures of their professor", in: *Facta Universitatis*, vol. 2, no.7 (March 2000), pp. 337-44 see also: *Prüf den Prof - einmal anders. Wie 3159 Studenten die Vorlesungen eines Professors bewerteten. Persönliche Anmerkungen zu einer vorläufigen Bilanz nach 28 Jahren*, in: *Neue Hochschule*, Oktober 1997, 33-35 I have to make clear that the questions and arguments I am discussing here have been mostly formulated by German professors and students since 1997.
2. Since our first sample collected in 1969, the deviation of individual attributions has been very small and stable over the three decades proved by the common Standard Deviation (S.D.) and the uncommon "semantic" coefficient of correlation Q_{xy} (by Peter R. Hofstätter)
3. I have already held this position in the late sixties when totally other philosophies and activities dominated the European scene; see also: *Kreativität als pädagogische Aufgabe*, in: *Die neue Hochschule*, Oktober 1974, 9-15. Or see: *Auf dem Wege zur Führungskraft?* in: *Neue Hochschule*, 4/1988, 13-17.
4. These items are excerpted from my training's manual UNILEAD that I have been using in my lectures titled "Personnel training and career counseling" for diploma students of information technology, facility management, chemistry and business studies for many semesters