

**CRITICAL INCIDENTS IN TEACHING: THE TEACHER AS
DECISION MAKER**

Spring 1988
Wednesdays, 4:30 - 8:20

Instructor: Dr. S. Wassermann
Location: MPX 7600



This course is offered for pre-service and in-service teachers who wish to participate in the examination of the pressures that influence the decision making processes of teachers. The course uses contemporary film and literature to raise levels of awareness about factors influencing teachers' decision making through examination of certain critical incidents in teaching. Film viewing and the study of related readings are supplemented by focused group discussions, through which the many facets of educational decision-making may be more critically examined.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. To develop greater understanding of and appreciation for the various and complex factors that influence personal decision making.
2. To use acquired understanding and increased awareness to inform personal decision-making, thereby promoting more critical awareness of personal decision-making.
3. To increase personal tolerance for the risks in decision-making and for the consequences of decisions.
4. To develop more effective strategies to aid in decision-making.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Attendance and participation in all parts of the program
2. Completion of four texts plus all duplicated readings distributed in class
3. Completion of four case study analyses
4. The keeping of a personal journal
5. Final summative project

OUTLINE OF FILMS AND TOPICS (tentative):

- A. INHERIT THE WIND - A teacher chooses to teach content that contravenes the law
- B. CONRACK - A teacher contravenes administrative guidelines
- C. SYLVIA - Curriculum innovation and costs to the self
- D. HIGH SCHOOL - Regimentation and conformity
- E. EDUCATING RITA - The gifts of a teacher
- F. PASSION FOR LIFE - Risking innovation in a conservative climate
- G. A TEST OF LOVE - Personal sacrifices in teaching



Education 498-4

Critical Incidents in Teaching:
The Teacher As Decision Maker

Spring, 1988

Dr. Selma Wassermann

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Introduction

Perhaps the most arduous task of the classroom teacher -- the one that requires the most searching, evaluating and examining, and the one that underlies each of the other tasks -- is that of decision-making. In the face of almost infinite alternatives, the teacher must decide what it is he or she is going to do. Moreover, in the presence of numerous possibilities, teachers must decide how to go about doing it. What factors influence teachers' decisions? An examination of these factors may show that not only is the teacher's job complex, but it is dynamic. Decisions about what and how to teach are subject to intense assault by powerful pressures that shape and reshape the teacher's educational beliefs and consequently his or her classroom practices. One of the teacher's tasks, therefore, becomes that of continually evaluating and deciding -- in the face of data, pressure, community interests, world problems, and the like -- what and how to teach.

Selma Wassermann
"The Teacher As Decision Maker"
TEACHER EDUCATION, 1976

This course is offered for pre-service and in-service teachers who wish to participate in the examination of the the decision making processes of teachers and the kinds of influences that bear upon these processes.

One of the important aspects of professional functioning is the autonomy of professionals to arrive at decisions based upon their sound professional judgment. The ability to examine and interpret data, to analyze assumptions, and to project potential consequences is considered a true mark of professional functioning.

In some professions, a variety of pressures -- political, social, emotional, personal, temporal -- serve to influence professional judgment and consequently, decision making. Such influence may have a deep and pervasive effect upon the degrees of freedom and emotional health of professionals, upon their beliefs and values about the profession itself, and upon their subsequent professional practice.

This course will use contemporary film and literature to raise levels of awareness about factors influencing teachers' decision making through examination of certain critical incidents in teaching. Film viewing, books, and written case studies will be supplemented by focused group discussions through which the many facets of educational decision making may be more critically examined. It is through this process that students are enabled to become more critically aware of personal decision making in their own professional/educational contexts.

Course Objectives

1. To develop greater understanding of and appreciation for the various and complex factors that influence personal decision making. For example:
 - cognitive and affective factors
 - perceived and real consequences of decisions
 - personal beliefs and values underlying decisions
 - assumptions upon which decisions rest
 - real and perceived risks of deciding
 - the process of deliberation
 - the pressure of peer groups
 - assertiveness and avoidance in decision making
 - "vital lies and simple truths" -- the art of self deception in decision making
 - the impact of decisions on the SELF
2. To use acquired understanding and increased awareness to inform personal decision making, thereby promoting more critical awareness of personal decision making
3. To increase personal tolerance for the risks in decision making and for the consequences of decisions
4. To develop more effective strategies to aid in decision making

Course Requirements

[1] Attendance and participation

Students are required to attend class sessions regularly and participate actively in all parts of the program.

[2] Readings

Students are required to read at least four books listed in the outline, plus all duplicated materials distributed in class. (Readings marked with a double asterisk will be distributed in class.)

[3] Case study analyses

Students are required to submit four case study analyses based upon either written or film cases. The analyses may follow the format of case study questions; they may focus on selected case study questions; or they may depart from case study questions altogether, following the writer's own approach. The most important aspect of case study analyses, whichever format is chosen, is the writer's ability to apply intelligent analysis to the critical issues in the case.

[4] Journal

Students are required to keep a journal of personal insights, comments and reflections throughout the course. Journals are to be submitted at least three times; and while they are read by the instructor, their contents are never evaluated.

[5] End of semester summative project

Students are required to write a case study of a personally experienced, professional incident that represents growing awareness of the student's own behavior in decision making contexts and shows how this awareness has been informed by course experiences.

Evaluation

Students are evaluated on the basis of their fulfillment of course requirements. The following criteria are used in the final evaluation:

- the degree to which the student has satisfied course requirements, based upon the instructor's evaluation

- the quality of the student's work

- ** the student's non-defensive awareness of both quality of work and satisfaction of course requirements

A grade of A indicates the student's completion of all course requirements with demonstrated excellence in quality of performance

A grade of B indicates the student's completion of all basic course requirements with demonstrated good quality in performance

A grade of C or lower indicates the completion of less than all basic requirements and/or less than demonstrated good quality in performance

Schedule of Class Activities

Weeks 1 - 2

Issue: Teaching content that contravenes the law: How far can we go?

Film: Inherit the Wind

Related Readings:

David Bercum and Douglas Wertheimer. A Trust Betrayed. The Keegstra Affair. Toronto: Seal Books, 1987.

Clarence Darrow. The Story of My Life.

George Dennison. The Lives of Children: The Story of the First Street School. New York: Random House, 1969.

Thomas J. Flygare, "Some Thoughts on the Tennessee Textbook Case," Phi Delta Kappan, February, 1987, pp. 474-475.**

Charles L. Glenn, "Textbook Controversies: A Disaster for Public Schools?" Phi Delta Kappan, February, 1987, pp. 451-455.**

Edward B. Jenkinson, "The Significance of the Decision in 'Scopes II'" Phi Delta Kappan, February, 1987, pp. 445-450.**

Jonathan Kozol. Death at an Early Age. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967.

John T. Scopes & James Presley. Centre of the Storm. New York: Holt, 1967.

Selma Wassermann. "The Teacher As Decision Maker," TEACHER EDUCATION, Spring, 1972**

Case: "The Firing of Bill LaConner" **

Weeks 3 - 4

Issue: Acting in opposition to administrative guidelines: How far can we go?

Film: Conrack

Related Readings:

Sylvia Ashton-Warner. Spinster. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1962.

Pat Conroy. The Water is Wide. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972.

George Dennison. The Lives of Children: The Story of the First Street School. New York: Random House, 1969.

Daniel Fadar. The Naked Children. New York: Macmillan, 1971.

Ned Hentoff. Our Children Are Dying. New York: Viking Compass Books, 1970.

James Herndon. The Way It Spozed to Be. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968.

Jonathan Kozol. Death at an Early Age. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967.

Herbert Kohl. Thirty-Six Children. New York: New American Library, 1967.

Stanley Milgram. Obedience to Authority. An Experimental View. New York: Harper & Row, 1980.

Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner. Teaching As A Subversive Activity. New York: Delacorte Press, 1969.

Case: 'We're Worried About Standards'***

Weeks 5 - 6

Issue: Curriculum innovation and the costs to the self: How far
can we go?

Film: Sylvia

Related Readings:

- Sylvia Ashton-Warner. Spinster. New York: Simon & Schuster,
1962.
Sylvia Ashton-Warner. Teacher. New York: Simon & Schuster,
1963.
Sylvia Ashton-Warner. Myself. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967.
Sylvia Ashton-Warner. Spearpoint. New York: Knopf, 1972.
Sylvia Ashton-Warner. I Passed This Way. New York: Knopf, 1979.

Case: "The Lifeboat Incident"***

Weeks 7 - 8

Issue: Conformity vs. the rights of the individual: How far can we go?

Film: High School

Related Readings:

Ernest Boyer. High School. A Report on Secondary Education in America. New York: Harper Colophon, 1983.

George Dennison. The Lives of Children: The Story of the First Street School. Philip W. Jackson. Life in Classrooms. New York: Holt Rinehart, 1968.

Pablo Freire. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Herder & Herder, 1970.

John Goodlad. A Place Called School. New York: McGraw Hill, 1984.

John Holt. How Children Fail. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1964.

Bel Kaufman. Up the Down Staircase. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1964.

Stanley Milgram. Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View. New York: Harper & Row, 1980.

David Owen. High School. New York: Viking, 1981.

Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner. Teaching As A Subversive Activity. New York: Delacorte Press, 1969.

TheodoreSizer. Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984..

Case: "The Case of the Bared Breast"***

Weeks 9 - 10

Issue: The power of a teacher to make a difference

Film: Educating Rita

Related Readings:

Houston A. Baker, Jr. "What Charles Knew: Homage to an English Teacher" in THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW, March 22, 1987.**

John Barth, "Teacher: The Making of a Good One," in HARPER'S MAGAZINE, November, 1986, pps. 58 - 65.**

Arthur Combs, ed. Perceiving, Behaving, Becoming. ASCD Yearbook, 1962. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Michael Csikszentmihalyi and Jean McCormack, "The Influence of Teachers," Phi Delta Kappan, February, 1986. **

Beatrice Gross and Ronald Gross. Will It Grow in a Classroom? New York: Delacorte, 1974.

Don Hamachek. Encounters With the Self. New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1971.

Bernard Johnston. The Literature of Learning. New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1971.

Elliott D. Landau, Sherrie Epstein & Ann Stone. Child Development Through Literature. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1972.

Dan Lortie. Schoolteacher. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975.

Mark Medoff, "In Praise of Teachers," New York Times Magazine, November, 1986. **

George Orwell. Such, Such Were the Joys. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1945.

Louis D. Rubin, Jr. (editor) An Apple for My Teacher: Twelve Authors Tell About Teachers Who Made the Difference. North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1987.

Muriel Spark. The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie.

Selma Wassermann, "The Play," in Teaching and Learning. Fall, 1986. **

Selma Wassermann, "How I Taught Myself How to Teach," in Teaching By The Case Method. C. R. Christensen, ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Graduate School of Business Administration, 1987.

Richard Yates, "Doctor Jack-o'-Lantern," in Eleven Kinds of Loneliness. New York: Delta Books, 1982

Case: "The Day I Cried in Kelowna"***

Weeks 11 - 12

Issue: The risks of innovation in a non-supportive climate: How far can we go?

Film: Passion for Life

Related Readings:

Wilfred Aiken. The Story of the Eight Year Study. New York: Harper & Row, 1942.

Sylvia Ashton-Warner. Spinster. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1962.

Pat Conroy. The Water Is Wide. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972.

George Dennison. The Lives of Children. New York: Random House, 1969.

Daniel Fadar. Hooked on Books. New York: Medallion, 1970.

Beatrice Gross and Ronald Gross. Will It Grow in a Classroom? New York: Delacorte Press, 1974.

Jonathar Kozol. Death at an Early Age. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967.

Kim Marshall. Law and Order in Grade 6E: The Story of Chaos and Innovation in a Ghetto School. Boston: Little Brown, 1972.

Case: "My Friend Connie**"

Week 13

Issue: The gift of a teacher: How far should we go?

Film: A Test of Love

Since this is the last class, there are no related readings or written case supporting this film.

Additional References for the Teacher As Decision Maker:

Information on teachers' decision-making processes can be found in the ERIC documents described below:

ED 231 786

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION: Teacher Decisions for Establishing a Learning Community Classroom. Joyce Putnam. 58 pp.

ED 243 846

A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF TEACHERS' DECISION MAKING. Walter C. Parker and Nathalie J. Gehrke. 22 pp.

ED 251 439

CURRICULUM DECISION MAKING AND THE BEGINNING TEACHER. Report No. 9058. Sharon F. O'Neal and James V. Hoffman. 37 pp.

ED 251 449

TEACHERS' THOUGHT PROCESSES. Occasional Paper No. 72. Christopher M. Clark and Penelope L. Peterson. 159 pps.

ED 251 451

A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE PREAMBLE AND INTERACTIVE DECISION MAKING OF AN EXPERT CLASSROOM TEACHER. Research Series No. 148. Joyce Putnam and G. Gerald Duffy. 34 pp.

ED 251 808

BEGINNING TEACHERS: How Do They Make Decisions About Reading? Martha Combs. 15 pp.

ED 257 806

THE STRUCTURE OF SCHOOL: Teachers and Authority. Robert E. Reir. 37 pp.

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JOURNAL

EDUCATION 493-4

CRITICAL INCIDENTS IN TEACHING:

THE TEACHER AS DECISION MAKER

PERSONAL DECISION MAKING

Making decisions is, for most of us, a difficult and complex process. As we reflect upon "the right thing to do" or what we "feel we should do," we sift through a variety of layers of feelings and thoughts, often unconsciously. Sometimes this deliberation and the arrival at choice is a very arduous process. The more at stake, the more we anguish over how to make the "best" choice.

The job of teaching is tough enough under the best of circumstances. It is further confounded by the fact that teachers are called upon to make hundreds of decisions during each teaching day, from a very simple choice of response to the question, "May I sharpen my pencil, Miss Fulpul?" to the more complex choice of "What mark should be given to Bill for his English essay?" It has been said that this heavy load of decision making, a normal adjunct of a healthy and dynamic classroom, is the primary factor underlying teacher fatigue and stress.

Does it help a teacher to be more aware of the pressures and pulls that bear on each decision to be made? Is it more helpful to have a clearer notion about one's personal feelings which run undercurrent to the choices to be made? Is it more helpful to be more consciously aware of potential consequences? Of hidden expectations? Of unconscious motivations? Of strongly held beliefs and

values? The experiences in this course work toward bringing that personal awareness into the forefront of consciousness. The assumption is made that when we have a clearer and more conscious awareness of the many factors "in play" each time we are called upon to make choices, that such increased awareness not only helps to inform our choices, but also works to alleviate some of the stress that results from having to decide in the absence of a more complete appreciation of what the choices involve.

Journal writing is one task that helps to elevate such personal awareness. There is no specific format for journal writing. However, what you write, and how you write it should allow you to examine, introspectively, important dimensions of your own decision making processes. You may choose to write in response to the case studies and readings done in class. You may choose to write in response to critical incidents in your professional life. You may choose to write about how you have been experiencing the process of raising consciousness in the decision-making process. Whichever path you choose, your journal entries should provide you with a personal record of your perceptions of self vis a vis the critical aspects of the process of choosing.

While the materials in this course are tilted in the direction of teaching, it is recognized that students from other professions may also be enrolled. For these individuals, we suggest that you work with the "big ideas" of the course, and manipulate the materials to your own context.

You are asked to make at least one journal entry each week. Journals will be collected and read (but not marked) -- unless students specifically request that some of the entries be private. In such instances, that privacy will not be violated.

YOU AS DECISION MAKER: Some Aspects of Decision-Making
That May Be Worth Writing About

1. A career-related dilemma in which you were/are faced with having to make a decision of some significance
2. Your perceptions of the key factors that create/created pressure for you in this process
3. The procedures you use/used to collect data to inform your decision
4. Factors that bear heavily on your choice: i.e.,
 - ** anxiety, insecurity, lack of confidence
 - ** the assumptions you made that underlie the choice
 - ** the perceived consequences of the choices
 - ** the perceived "villains" in the incident
5. Feelings that pull(ed) you toward a particular choice
6. Personal beliefs/values you hold (held) that play a role in your decision
7. Personal coping mechanisms -- i.e., how you move(d) yourself from avoiding having to make the choice toward taking the action of deciding
8. Perceptions of the impact of your decision on SELF -- i.e., in what ways did your decision work to enhance/diminish your respect for yourself?
9. Your ability to be non-defensive in examining your role in the process

10. The process you went through (are going through) during your deliberations about how to decide
11. Perceived risks in translating decisions into action
12. Your behavioral responses when the power to decide is taken away from you
13. How you see yourself as a decision maker

Some people
come into our lives
and quickly go

Some stay for awhile
and leave footprints
on our hearts,
and we are never,
ever the same

The secret curriculum is
in the teachers own lived
values and convictions
(Kozol)

As the teachers are, so will the
students become, with the
exception of those rebellious
students who become their
teachers in reverse.
(Jourard)

Teachers are so uncertain of their
professional identity that they risk
nothing of themselves in fulfilling that
identity. In short, they seldom if ever can
be brought to the point where they would
sincerely love their jobs than their identity.
(Fadare)