



Education 498-4

**Critical Incidents in Teaching:
The Teacher As Decision Maker**

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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 uses contemporary film and readings to raise levels of awareness about factors influencing teachers' decision making through examination of certain critical incidents in teaching. Films, books, journal articles and written case studies are 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 become more critically aware of personal decision making in their own professional/educational contexts.

Course Objectives

1. To promote 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 promote awareness of the relationship between decision making and personal empowerment
3. To enable students to use increased understanding to inform personal decision making, thereby promoting more critical awareness of personal decision making
4. To increase personal tolerance for the risks in decision making and for the consequences of decisions
5. 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, in addition to the required readings, at least two other 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 two 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 twice. 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

Required Reading:

Ann Berlak and Harold Berlak, Dilemmas of Schooling. London: Methuen, 1981.

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

Selma Wassermann, "Teaching Strategies: What's Important?" Childhood Education, Fall, 1988.**

Weeks 1 - 2

Issue: Conform? Or dare to be different? -- Teaching content that contravenes the law

Critical questions:

- ** What are a teacher's options with respect to choosing what to teach?
- ** Should teachers always stay within the established curriculum guidelines?
- ** When is it all right to extend the curriculum beyond those guidelines?
- ** Who should make curriculum decisions?

Case #1 [Film]: Inherit the Wind

Case #2 : The Firing of Bill LaConner **

Related Readings:

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

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.**

Edward B. Jenkinson, "The New Age of Schoolbook Protest," Phi Delta Kappan, September, 1988.**

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

Weeks 3 - 4

Issue: Conform? Or dare to be different? -- Acting in opposition to administrative directives

Critical questions:

** What are a teacher's options in deciding about what curriculum experiences are best for his or her students?

** Should teachers always obey the administrative directives?

** When is it all right to take the decision into your own hands?

** Who should decide about what activities are best for one's own students?

Case #3 [Film]: Conrack

Case #4: "My Friend Connie"

Related Readings:

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.

Weeks 5 - 6

Issue: Conform? Or dare to be different? -- Innovation in response to pupil need

Critical questions:

** What are a teacher's options with respect to deciding to develop new curriculum that is more appropriate to student needs?

** Should teachers always teach with the materials that are officially issued?

** When is it all right to depart from officially sanctioned texts?

** Who should choose curriculum materials for the students in one's class?

Case #5 [Film]: Sylvia

Case #6: "Gary"

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.

Lynley Hood. Sylvia! A Biography. London: Penguin Books, 1988.

Weeks 7 - 8

Issue: Daring to make a difference? Or, "they won't let me." -- The joys and pains of teaching

Critical questions:

- ** What expectations do we have for our students?
- ** How are our decisions influenced by those expectations?
- ** What administrative constraints impede our actions in behalf of students?
- ** How are our classroom practices influenced by administrative constraints?
- ** What prices do teachers pay when professional judgment must give way to practices imposed by outside authorities?

Case #7 [Film]: Stand and Deliver

Case #8: "The Lifeboat Incident"

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.

Paolo 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.

Patrick Welsh. Tales Out Of School. New York: Penguin Books, 1987.

Weeks 9 - 10

Issue: Daring to make a difference? Or, "The personal cost is too great." --
Personal sacrifices teachers make

Critical questions:

** What personal sacrifices are teachers called upon to make in the normal course of their work?

** What personal sacrifices do teachers make in behalf of extraordinary students in extraordinary circumstances?

** Should one's professional work involve personal sacrifice?

** Are the prices teachers pay too great?

** What makes it worth the cost?

Case #9 [Film]: *A Test of Love*

Case #10: "The Day I Cried in Kelowna"

Related Readings:

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

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

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.

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

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

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

Weeks 11 - 12

Issue: Daring to make a difference? Or, "creating students in my own image."

Critical questions:

- ** What kinds of teacher actions empower students as individuals?
- ** What kinds of teacher actions promote student conformity?
- ** What satisfactions do teachers get when students emulate them?
- ** What satisfactions do teachers get when students are liberated?
- ** What does it take for a teacher to allow the liberation/empowerment of his or her students?

Case #11 [Film]: Educating Rita

Case #12: "The Play"

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. **

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

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

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

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. London: Penguin, 1968.

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

Week 13

Issue: Daring to make a difference? Or, "How much do I believe in myself and in what I am doing?"

Critical questions:

- ** On what issues am I prepared to compromise?
- ** On what issues am I prepared to take a strong stand?
- ** How much do I believe in myself and in what I am doing?
- ** On what issues would I be willing to put my job on the line?
- ** What personal prices do I pay for my compromises on the issues I deeply believe in?
- ** What personal gains do I make for my taking a stand on the issues I deeply believe in?

Case #13 [Film]: Passion for Life

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 PREACTIVE 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.