

# Learning to Learn: Educating with/for the Mind-Body

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**Editor's Note:** The November 21 and 22, 1993 meetings of The Polanyi Society in Washington D. C. featured two extended public conversations with William H. Poteat, a scholar and teacher who has encouraged generations of students to explore the thought of Polanyi. Among other topics, the Washington sessions treated teaching. Both the public conversations with him and the crowd of former students in attendance made it clear that William H. Poteat was an exciting teacher. Jerry Gill, who was a Ph. D. student at Duke working with William Poteat from 1964-66, attended the Washington sessions and was stimulated to produce the following reflections on teaching and on a memorable mentor.

**ABSTRACT Key Words:** learning, education, epistemology, curriculum, mind-body, William Poteat.

*This essay focuses on the application of the notions of tacit knowing and embodied interaction to the college classroom. Topics ranging from classroom arrangement and discussion techniques, through curriculum and textbook choices, to attitudes and values are address.*

At the recent Polanyi Society meetings in Washington D.C., when the discussion turned to the implications of Polanyian and Poteatian perspectives for academia, I was able to resist the temptation to put in a plug for my book, *Learning to Learn: Toward a Philosophy of Education*. I am no longer able to resist this temptation and offer below some reworked material from the chapters which seek to apply the philosophical posture worked out in this book to the college classroom. I have sought to include both theoretic and practical considerations. My hope is that these suggestions will serve to stimulate further discussion of this important topic, as well as greater conviviality and learning in our classrooms. I trust that my indebtedness to both Michael Polanyi and William Poteat will be fully evident.

## **I. Epistemological Themes**

I am convinced that a significant majority of college and university professors fail to give sufficient, if any, attention to the epistemological issues and themes which necessarily, if unconsciously, inform their choice of goals and procedures. It would seem that some understanding of what knowledge actually is, how the cognitive process works, and which practical patterns are appropriate thereto would be exceedingly germane to the academic enterprise, but unfortunately such considerations have little or no place in the training of college professors.

Perhaps the most basic and general theme that emerges from my initial exploration is that knowing is a relational reality. The key idea here is that knowledge is not a thing to be possessed but an activity to be engaged in. In other words, cognition happens, takes place in an ongoing fashion in the interaction between and among knowers and the known. To put it the other way around, the latter actually are constituted by means of the former. In this regard, knowing

is quite similar to dancing or any other active, relational phenomenon. Dancing creates both the dance itself and the dancers, in the sense that it is incorporated into and thus participates in the ongoing development of their identity. Knowing, too, participates in the evolution of both the known and the knower; each is constantly being altered by the interaction between them, by their cognitive symbiotic relationality.

When one reflects on the implications of this understanding of the knowing process for everyday classroom procedure, especially at the college level, certain conclusions would seem to follow. For instance, the direct presentation of facts and ideas, as in the typical lecture, for example, creates a static, unilateral situation in which students are exposed to, but have little or no opportunity to interact with, the information. Even when the lecture is creative and lively, and after granting that the students can interact mentally as they absorb the material, it remains true that the relationality of the situation is exceedingly minimal. When one realizes that at least three-quarters of a college student's classroom time is spent listening passively to lectures, certain shortcomings in our educational practices become obvious. In language and laboratory courses as well as in internships, there is general acknowledgment of the necessity for interaction between the knower and the known, although often there seems to be minimal connection between these more relational activities and the regular classroom lecture. Teachers frequently rely upon quizzes, examinations, and term papers as opportunities for students to show that they have interacted with material, but far too often such occasions only indicate the degree of passive memorization and regurgitation. What are needed are classroom techniques and structural procedures that will acknowledge and incorporate the relational, interactive character of the knowing process.

An important dimension of the relational quality of knowing is dialogue, especially as it applies concretely to language as a social activity. A chief form of cognitive interaction is conversation or discussion. There is something fundamental about the process of linguistic exchange of ideas, of explaining and questioning subject matter, to actually comprehending, exploring, and creating knowledge. When students have an opportunity to respond to ideas and information, among themselves as well as with the teacher, it becomes real and part of them in a way that it does not when assimilated silently. This is surely understandable when one recalls the absolutely strategic function linguistic activity performs in the incorporation of individuals into a community or into the human race.

Here again, however, the average college classroom shows little acknowledgment of the crucial role of dialogue to relational interaction, and thus the knowing process itself. Far too often, the "discussion periods" are nothing more than recitation or "guess-what-the-teacher-is-thinking" sessions. In their eagerness to "cover all the important material" and save the students from continuously "reinventing the wheel," teachers undermine the very learning process itself by depriving students of the opportunity to interact with the subject matter. One might be tempted to say that in such cases the teachers are teaching but the students are not learning, except that without learning there is no teaching.

In my own teaching I have come to the conviction that helping students learn to do philosophy is more important than teaching them about philosophy. Of course, it is valuable for them to know something about how the discipline has developed and what major thinkers have thought, and so on. We learn to philosophize best in the context of other philosophers. However, it remains true that not only will students soon forget most of what Plato or Dewey said but they can always look such things up in books. What is of paramount importance is that they learn something about thinking philosophically by actively engaging in the process. In this way we can increase the likelihood not only that they will know how to think more clearly and consistently but that they will not have had their interest in such things

aborted at the outset by non-interactive classroom sessions.

Another highly significant dimension of the relational character of the knowing process is necessitated by our own embodiment. The pivot point or fulcrum of our interaction with the world and others, as well as with ideas, is, at the most bedrock level, the somatic quality of our existence. In Western thought and education, learners have been viewed as essentially minds which at best inhabit, and at worst are imprisoned by, bodies. From Plato through Descartes to Bertrand Russell and Jean-Paul Sartre, most philosophers, along with classroom teachers, have tried to ignore or overcome the reality that human persons are embodied. On the basis of the work of such thinkers as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Michael Polanyi, however, it is now possible to acknowledge and even to capitalize on this reality. The relational, interactive quality of the knowing process is mediated by our embodiment, including both perception and movement.

Fortunately, at the college and university level of education, teachers do not have to “contain” or channel the energy and movement of their students, as do elementary and junior high school teachers. Partly for this reason, however, we generally give little if any thought to this dimension of the learning process. In almost all classes, students file into rigidly rowed seats, sometimes in relatively huge numbers, where they sit still and listen to a lecture for about fifty minutes. Not only is their kinesthetic embodiment at best ignored and at worst antagonized, but their perceptual activity is usually confined primarily to one aspect, that of hearing. It is really surprising how few professors make regular use of visual aids, especially the chalkboard. Moreover, their own movement, which can serve as a point of visual focus for the students, is generally minimal, thereby contributing to the one-dimensionality of the educational experience.

In this connection, it should not go unnoticed that the design of most classrooms, with their static, military-like organization, and the teacher’s tendency to ignore such things as visual perspective, also undermine the embodied character of the knowing process. On the one hand, the seating arrangement forces most students to stare at the back of other students’ heads throughout the class hour, never actually engaging each other in face-to-face interaction. On the other hand, most of the class members are situated so as to be excluded from the axis of whatever dialogue might take place. The unilateral delivery of a lecture and the straight-lined design of the seating render all but the front and center seats irrelevant to the dynamic of the class. Far too often, professors do not notice such things, let alone do anything to alter them.

One way to highlight the sort of things I have been suggesting is to employ Paulo Freire’s techniques for consciousness raising. If one takes photos or draws pictures of the typical college classroom arrangement, a great number of relatively submerged realities begin to surface. In addition to the many factors which contradict the embodied character of the knowing process, such as those mentioned above, the entire theme of relationality, including interaction and dialogue, can be seen to be essentially undercut. Not only are the learners cut off from one another, but the teacher is separated from them all, both horizontally and vertically. While this distance may well serve best in the simple dissemination of information, it is surely counterproductive in relation to what constitutes real learning and knowing. Students are systematically excluded from interacting with the subject matter, each other, and the professor, while the professor is placed hierarchically so as to deny any serious mutuality and significant exchange with students. The picture is not one of a more experienced learner engaging interactively with other learners, but of “the expert” handing down esoteric and privileged data to the lowly initiates.

This means, in practical terms, that the basic format of the course must be discussion. Although occasional lectures are clearly desirable, as a way of providing background, summation, or additional challenge, the only way to help students develop their cognitive skills is to structure a course around the discussion of the ideas and issues presented in texts and lectures. In this way the ideas and issues raised by previous and current thinkers can be transformed into problems that confront the students themselves, and not simply interesting or uninteresting museum pieces. If and only if the students can engage the subject matter, so that it becomes important to them, will real learning take place.

In practice, I try to set the course up as a three-way dialogue between the texts we read, the students, and myself. In the beginning this sort of format was difficult for me, since I come to each class with so many ideas of my own and so much graduate school training. I felt a legitimate responsibility to the discipline and was generally over prepared in the sense that the students could hardly get a word in edgewise. However, over the years, I have become convinced, not only that my primary responsibility is to facilitate the student's learning to learn, but that the best way to honor the discipline itself is by engaging students in it rather than teaching them about it.

A second practical goal for the college classroom is to encourage students, amid their encounter with issues and ideas, to develop empathy for all points of view, especially those which differ from their own. The ability to appreciate where a person or idea is coming from, no matter how bizarre it may seem, is not only important in its own right but is a vital aspect of being able to consider both sides of an issue. At the level of popular culture, we generally evaluate ideas simply: yes or no, good or bad, I like it or I don't. Helping students learn to think, to analyze before they evaluate, is an important function of education. In like manner, encouraging students to appreciate or empathize with a point of view, whether from a text or from the seat next to them, before analyzing it, is also a crucial function of a sound approach to education.

A great deal of the excitement, as well as the substance, of learning by discussion comes from students interacting with each other, from learning to appreciate points of view which differ in some way from their own. Honest discussion involves actually listening to the other person's ideas and reasons before analyzing and evaluating them. Too often we only rehearse our own arguments while another person is speaking, rather than actually trying to follow their line of thought. A true discussion seeks a common goal, rather than the vindication of a particular perspective, and this process necessitates serious listening, a skill on which our own culture places little emphasis.

Of course, all of this applies with equal if not greater force to the teacher. This is difficult for one who has spent years working on the issues involved in a given field; it is easy to become impatient with the naive and "wrong-headed" character of many undergraduate ideas. However, when one actually takes the cognitive process seriously, as well as helping students learn to learn, it becomes increasingly easier to spend more time and effort tracing and comparing students' thoughts in classroom discussion.

## II. Practical Procedures

It is time now to consider some of the procedures which might be used to implement the foregoing principles. As I move to the procedural level, I must necessarily become even more specific and thus more personal. In the following pages, I shall describe various features and procedures of my own courses, with an eye to how they connect with key principles and epistemological themes. Although it is my conviction that these procedures are equally relevant to educational disciplines and levels other than my own, I shall leave such applications to those who wish to make them.

To begin with, because of the necessity of active participation to the knowing process, interactive discussion provides the format most conducive to cognitive activity. When a class is relatively small, say up to a dozen members, it works quite well to structure the discussion in seminar fashion, with each class session being focused around one or two student papers that interact with the textual material in a significant way. I usually ask the students to summarize one or two major themes or moves in the common reading and do something with them by way of comparison, analysis or evaluation. In small classes it works very well to provide photocopies of these papers so that each member of the class can follow and refer to specific points of the presentation. This sort of intensive approach works best with more advanced students, but I have used it to good advantage with relative beginners as well. With middle-sized and larger classes the discussion format needs a slightly different focus. I divide the class into smaller groups, of four to eight students each, rotating them in such a way that a different one has the responsibility of sparking the discussion each day. Depending on the size of the class and the number of sessions available, each group gets between three and six rotations in a given semester. This arrangement not only gives everyone some concrete opportunity to participate directly in the discussion, but it gives me a chance to get to know each student on something of an individual basis. I usually spend the first twenty to thirty minutes drawing out and summarizing the student's various ideas and positions on the chalkboard as we sit in a semi-circle in front of the class. Then we open up the discussion to the rest of the class for further observations and questions.

The seating arrangement for these discussions is extremely important. It is a great help if there is a small stage in front, or if the classroom is tiered, as this really facilitates full class participation. Also, the semi-circle of students in the front should not exclude those students on the outside rows of class. If possible, I try to curve these latter rows so as to create an amphitheater effect. Although I move around quite a bit as I "take notes" on the discussion on the chalkboard, I try to spend a good deal of time seated and listening as well, since this counteracts the teacher's tendency to dominate the discussion. All of these procedures are designed to reflect the simple realities of the embodied character of the knowing process.

When each group takes its turn at sparking the class discussion, the members of the group prepare short papers, usually one to three pages, in which they focus on an important point in the day's reading, take a position with respect to the point, and give their reasons for taking this position. In addition to guaranteeing that each group member has at least one thing to contribute to the discussion, these papers, which are handed in after class, provide several opportunities for me to interact with everyone taking the course. I try to make as many helpful and evaluative comments on each paper as I can, and almost always return them at the next class session.

Respect for students as persons entails prizing them as unique and as having certain capacities and potentials which warrant appreciation and development. If a teacher takes his or her vocation as a "calling," which is how I interpret my own experience, then each student will be viewed as intrinsically special, indeed, as "sacred." Each student

progresses at a different pace from other students. Whatever degree of respect and patience I have developed for students has resulted from the fact that I experienced these qualities in many of my own teachers, all the way from grammar school through college. I was both a “slow learner” and “culturally deprived” as a youngster, which resulted in my being a proverbial “late bloomer” in college. If my teachers had not exhibited profound respect for and patience with me as a person, I would never have become a teacher.

The first aim in my own classroom practice is to treat students as adults, as colleagues in our common educational experience. Of course, students between the ages of seventeen and twenty-two are not adults in the full sense of the term. However, I am convinced that it is only by relating to them as adults that they will become adults. In many ways college functions as a rite of passage in our culture, a process by which young people become full members of society. In other words, college students are on the threshold between childhood and adulthood, and the best way to assist them across this great divide is to relate to them as if they already were full, albeit new, members. The whole climate, in the classroom and outside of it, needs to convey one’s commitment to this basic belief.

One crucial way to express this fundamental commitment to the adult personhood of students is to structure each course so as to maximize their sense of having responsibility for their own education. This means that one must eliminate, as far as possible, all such hand holding devices as seating charts and roll-calling, as well as the “threats and prizes” approach to motivation represented by pop-quizzes, elaborate point systems, and so forth. In my own experience, the abuses that result from removing such modes of control are far outweighed by the long-term attitudinal and behavioral transformation which occurs with the majority of students. Moreover, those who have “succeeded” within the constraints of such techniques have accomplished only that, and have not been assisted to grow toward responsible adulthood.

Another important means of expressing one’s commitment to each student’s individual worth and adulthood pertains to the tone of one’s voice when talking to students, whether individually or as a class. It is impossible to overemphasize the significance of this intangible factor, but it is almost as difficult to put one’s finger on it. Time and time again, year in and year out, I have heard students complain about, and have frequently experienced first-hand, teachers speaking to students in a demeaning and condescending tone of voice. This practice is as offensive as it is subtle, and for the most part it becomes a matter of habit without the teacher even being aware of it. Nevertheless, there is nothing more debilitating to the students’ senses of self-worth, to say nothing of being cognitively counter-productive, than this sort of behavior.

It is absolutely essential to the relational and developmental character of the knowing subject to encourage each student’s full participation in the cognitive process. Moreover, if one is interested in conveying and modeling the idea that all sides of an issue and everyone’s opinions have a right to be heard, as well as underscoring the necessity of social interaction to the achievement of knowledge, then one must both encourage and take seriously each student’s contribution. The limitations of time, along with the occasional opinionated student, must be taken into account here. Also, although all opinions have a right to be held and heard, not all are of equal cognitive worth. When all this is taken into account, however, the fact remains that fundamental respect for and encouragement of students is as necessary to developing cognitive skills as it is frequently absent from typical educational enterprises.

Another major goal of my overall approach to the classroom is, of course, the development of standard intellectual abilities and habits. This concern focuses in the linguistic dimension of the social aspect of personhood

and knowing, for language is both the air we breath and the body we indwell, socially and cognitively speaking. Thus, in my own classroom I place a very high value on discussion, which includes both talking and listening, and writing of various kinds. In helping students understand and develop various aspects of cognitive activity, a teacher must not only identify, explain, and practice them, but must also provide opportunity and encouragement for the students to do likewise. Obviously, this means that the teacher must talk less and the students must talk more; this is a hard saying for those of us who are well trained, and even harder if we happen to be verbose or extroverted. Nevertheless, students learn to think in and through language, both written and spoken, and must be given ample opportunity to do so. This does not mean that every minute must be filled with talking; deep and clear thought often needs silence in which to ferment.

Let me reemphasize that the social, relational dynamics of the classroom constitute its very axis. The aim is to create an atmosphere which causes students to look forward to the class, to feel respected and needed in the pursuit of knowledge, and to respect and rely upon each other in these endeavors. On more than one occasion, I have had to arrive ten to fifteen minutes late to a class where the students had gone ahead with the discussion, since the rotating group format was already in place and familiar. I slipped into the back row of seats and observed the social dimension of cognitive activity in process. Whatever misgivings I may have had about the shortcomings of such teacher-less discussions were far outweighed by the satisfaction derived from hearing a number of students remarking, as they left the classroom: "That's amazing; we were actually educating ourselves and each other!"

In discussions, as well as on the students' papers, it is of utmost importance to respect all comments and points of view, constantly trying to connect them to the issue at hand as well as with broader issues. I try to involve as many persons as possible in the conversation, to frame my own contributions in the form of questions rather than conclusions, and to cultivate a kind of community or team spirit in which everyone works with each other in the development of the topic. Frequently, students will interrupt or demean each other's contribution to the discussion, and at such points I try to encourage mutual respect for and attention to both the student who is speaking and the topic at hand. All such "guiding" in the discussion process must be done without belittlement or officiousness but with gentleness and, one hopes, with humor.

These same concerns and practices apply with equal validity to one's conversations with students about their written work. Criticisms and commendations need to be expressed in a concrete and positive tone, and students should be encouraged to continue the dialogue about their work by talking with the teacher, writing comments on the comments they receive, or even rewriting the paper. I usually have a few students who write a number of extra papers in response to my remarks on their regular ones, and even some who carry on a semester-long correspondence. I generally ask all students to hand in their earlier papers with each ensuing paper so we both can have my previous comments available for ready reference.

By operating according to the foregoing theoretic principles and classroom goals, it is possible to discuss with students absolutely any topic with maturity and insight. Although one cannot require responsible thought and behavior, it is equally true that one cannot enable others to achieve these goals merely by the threats and prizes of the traditional grading system. However, by relating to students as if these qualities are expected, more often than not they become a reality. By expecting thoughtful and mature contributions to the discussion of such a wide range of difficult subjects as sexuality, racism, homosexuality, religious beliefs, poverty, and war, students, whatever their backgrounds and abilities, will grow into them. Even the obtuse and abstruse complexities of philosophy can be explored with

undergraduate students if one assumes and acts as if they will be able to do so.

### **III. Matters of Curriculum**

The obvious implication of this point of view is the importance of structuring a classroom program so that students have ample, indeed primordial, opportunity to engage each other in discussion concerning whatever subject matter may be deemed important. What is not so obvious, however, is the implication that this dialogical interaction should also involve the teacher. The chief difficulty is that, by and large, teachers are not familiar with the dialogical mode in relation to students. To lecture and answer questions from students is one thing, and to observe and supervise them discussing with each other is still another thing. To participate in a real discussion with students, as a more experienced but equal learner, is altogether a different thing. Not only have few teachers themselves been educated to do this, but the entire academic process has conditioned most of us, no matter how “enlightened,” to operate from an authoritative posture in relation to students.

It is a difficult task to re-tool ourselves to relate to students in a dialogical mode. We must rethink such obvious things as curriculum setting and activity patterns, but also such subtle things as tone of voice, the ability to listen, and not always having the last word. Although it can sometimes be humbling and painful, having someone tape one’s classroom procedures, so that one hears and sees oneself in action as an authoritarian dispenser of information, is extremely valuable. In addition, allowing students to see one’s own thought process, whether orally or in writing, including mistakes and corrections, goes a long way toward helping them feel that they, too, can learn to overcome their difficulties and mistakes. Being exposed to how a more experienced learner goes about this process enables students to learn how to learn.

I have worked at remembering that, even as it is important for my students to learn the vocabulary and mode of thought integral to the subject matter of our course together, so it is important for me to know the value system and interests of their lives outside the classroom. If I wish them to speak “my language,” as it were, I must be willing to learn “their language.” Even though the world inhabited by students may not seem very significant to teachers, it is absolutely important to remember that not only does it provide a helpful means to communicate with them and thus “educate” them, but it is the world of the persons to whom we have dedicated our help. Frequently students will loan me a book or record or invite me to attend some event which they value highly. I try always to engage such opportunities, not only for their sake but also for mine. I invariably learn from these encounters, and my students are motivated thereby.

In choosing textbooks for dialogical learning there are several factors to bear in mind, in addition to such obvious concerns as appropriate topic and level. One is to ensure that a solid variety of points of view on the issues involved is represented; true dialogue requires the incorporation of differences and alternatives. Another important factor is the inclusion of different cultural perspectives. For too long in America, and even in the Western tradition, we have conducted our educational programs as if other cultures, including the minorities in our own society, were inferior at best and nonexistent at worst. As the demographics of our shrinking world clearly indicate, this is no longer possible or wise. A third, related factor pertains to the desirability of using texts written by, or at least including the writing of, female authors. Not only is this a valuable and increasingly significant aspect of our own cultural development, but it contributes a great deal to the reeducation and broadening of both males and females with respect



to what constitutes a fully human person. One simple fact to bear in mind is that in almost all colleges and universities in the West, females far outnumber males; it is only appropriate from a motivational and modeling point of view to capitalize on the use of women writers and thinkers.

Students need to be enabled to recognize, explore, and draw conclusions about the relational interconnections between and among the various dimensions of the real, the true, and the good which they encounter within and outside the classroom. This, of course, requires that teachers be able to model and engage students in this sort of cross-disciplinary interaction. While it is very important for teachers to continually broaden their knowing, even at the expense of their own expertise, it is also helpful to realize that it is not necessary to know a great deal about a field or an issue in order to inquire or guide others into it. What is necessary is an interest in a variety of subjects and a commitment to the process of learning to learn. At one point Whitehead defined a good teacher as “an ignorant person thinking.”

Another principle for curriculum development flowing from my discussion of the mediational and contextual character of the known is the significance of concrete or action-oriented education. Beginning with my analysis of the knowing process, through the examination of the nature of the knowing subject, and including my exploration of that which can and should be known, I have repeatedly emphasized the pivotal character of embodied and social interaction. Knowing, knowers, and the known are all a function of symbiotic processes; they give rise to and sustain one another, even as dancing, dancers, and the dance yield and define one another. It is not surprising that an educational posture based on such a relational and reciprocal understanding of cognitive activity should stress the importance of active involvement in both the physical and social dimensions of its program. Without this concrete behavioral component, educational curricula will remain abstract and “intellectualist,” failing to connect with and affect the lives of the students.

By means of our traditional, elitist approach to education policy we have consistently placed intellectual activity above and as more important than physical activity. However, we have also interpreted the former as the acquisition of information and concepts rather than as the practice of cognitive skills. It is this bifurcation against which Dewey fought in his efforts to restore the pragmatic center of the educational enterprise. In his view, education is not preparation for life, whether in the form of mindless skills or in the form of inert knowledge. Rather, since life is education, at the most fundamental level, education must also be life.

One of the “master teachers” I was privileged to study with is William H. Poteat, recently retired from Duke University. In some ways, Professor Poteat’s pedagogical posture was the very opposite of many other teachers. I came into Poteat’s classes having spent four years teaching according to the principles and example offered by other teachers. At first, I was surprised, even frustrated, by Professor Poteat’s seemingly disorganized approach to class discussion and complete disuse of the chalkboard. However, it soon became clear that he was able to share a deep and overall grasp of the issues involved in the text, together with their implications and presuppositions. At the beginning of each class, Professor Poteat would summarize our previous exploration and use it as a point of departure for the current discussion. The class session itself ranged far and wide, with many students contributing what seemed, at best, to be collateral observations. Professor Poteat operated completely without notes, except for his markings and summaries on the pages of the texts.

As the term progressed, however, I became aware that I was in the presence of an extremely brilliant and effective scholar-teacher. There seemed to be no field or thinker with which Professor Poteat was unfamiliar, and he often effectively summarized various positions and issues for those of us who were not as well informed. Our subject

was philosophy, but our teacher, ranged broadly and deeply across history, psychology, religion, the arts, and natural science. More importantly, he was not primarily interested in imparting his knowledge to us, but in helping us come to understand and wrestle with the issues for ourselves. It was for this reason that he was uneasy with my own penchant for diagrams; he thought that they could too easily be construed as summaries of “the truth” by the students. Unfortunately, this seemed to make him distrustful of using the chalkboard at all. I think his teaching would have been improved by the incorporation of some board work, for it is an extremely helpful way of tracking the twists and turns of a class discussion.

The most impressive characteristic of Professor Poteat’s teaching style was his ability to integrate a deep commitment to and knowledge of issues and ideas with an extremely personable and informal atmosphere. Without in any way being a clown or “performer,” he could come to class wearing a cowboy hat acquired on a recent hunting trip to Wyoming, or begin each class with the latest good news/bad news joke. Whenever he listened to a student speak, in class or met one on campus, he interacted with them as if they were the only person present. I was fortunate in having Professor Poteat as my dissertation adviser, for he offered realistic guidance and assistance together with personable encouragement and understanding. One of his colleagues once described him as “a person who could tell you that he was anything from an antique book dealer to a Texas oil magnate and you would come away believing him.” In short he is an extremely knowledgeable and convincing person.

Professor Poteat asked students to prepare three-page papers on topics of their choice from whatever text we were working on. If it was a small class, we took turns reading these papers; otherwise we simply handed them in after class. The challenge of doing a responsible job on, say, “Kierkegaard’s Notion of Faith” or “The Meaning of ‘Meaning’ in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*” was truly formidable. It was here that I began to learn how, in Professor Poteat’s words, to “go for the jugular; once you have brought the beast down, you can carve it up at your leisure.” The use of repeated short papers, in which students focus on an issue in the text and take a position on it, complete with reasons, has been a crucial aspect of my own teaching method ever since. The writing of such “thesis papers” is not the only skill worth learning, but it is an exceedingly helpful one, both for students and those in other walks of life.

The most important thing I gained from Professor Poteat was a greater confidence in the learning process itself. He trusted himself and his students, together engage in cognitive activity, to be able to learn and help each other learn. Here is a very learned person who is so involved in learning to learn, and in enabling others to learn to do likewise, that he and they cannot help but do so. Professor Poteat was not as much worried about getting all the information and interpretations exactly right as he was concerned with approaching them in a fashion that would allow fellow learners continued and enriched learning. This attitude, this way of life, was pointedly illustrated one day when a student complained about the direction of our conversation by saying “But surely this is a psychological question, not a philosophical one.” Professor Poteat simply grinned broadly and replied, “I don’t know about that, but it sure is something interesting to pursue, is it not?”

My own teaching is not as open-ended and free-wheeling as Professor Poteat’s. I have tried to combine the ordered rigor and constant use of the chalkboard with the broadly interdisciplinary and personal character of Professor Poteat’s style. In addition, I have been strongly affected by the somewhat “radical” ideas of the 1960s, Dewey’s pragmatism, and Freire’s “politicism.” All of these emphases have been woven into my particular personality and life experiences, even as those of my mentors were woven into theirs. What we all have in common is a commitment to

the participatory nature of cognitive activity. Our common stress is upon the need of students to learn to learn by being involved in dialogical interdisciplinary, and responsible interaction with other learners, including the more experienced learners, "teachers."

All of this boils down to a definition of teaching as a form of learning. The teacher teaches best who places the learning process at the axis of teaching, both in theory and in practice. I have often joked with students that the whole enterprise of higher education is a "cover" for a way of allowing professors to go on learning and get paid for it. In my own case, this is not far from the truth; I have always felt a bit uncomfortable taking money for doing what I would choose to do anyway if money were not a consideration. In my view, teaching is primarily a form of learning, a way of continuing to participate in the dance of cognitive activity and helping others learn to do so at the same time. Surely, there are few vocations so important and so rewarding. To borrow and alter the title of Joe DiMaggio's autobiography, I feel extremely "lucky to be a teacher."

## Contributors To This Issue

**Jerry Gill** studied at Duke University with William Poteat from 1964-1966. He has taught at Rhodes College, Eckerd College, Eastern College, and currently teaches at College of St. Rose. Recent publications include *Mediated Transcendence* (Mercer University Press, 1989), *Merleau-Ponty and Metaphor* (Humanities Press, 1991), and *Learning To Learn: Towards A Philosophy of Education* (Humanities Press, 1993). Forthcoming is *Wittgenstein and Metaphor* (Humanities Press, 1994). As his article implies, Gill has enjoyed teaching cross-disciplinary courses such as "sports and social values" which he has developed over the years. He has directed a semester in Greece program for the last three fall semesters.

**Terence Kennedy**, an Australian by birth, has been a professor of moral theology at Alphonsian Academy in Rome since 1983. His doctoral thesis which focused on the thought of Michael Polanyi was directed by Bernard Häring.

**Robert P. Doede** has a Ph. D. in Philosophy from King's College, University of London. His doctoral thesis (1992) developed an embodiment account of mind by bringing together some of the crucial insights into mind and language found in the writings of Michael Polanyi, Martin Heidegger, and (the later) Ludwig Wittgenstein. Besides presenting papers at some Polanyi Society gatherings, he has written two Polanyi-inspired articles: "What the View from Nowhere Doesn't Reveal," *Crux*: (Sept. 1991/Vol. XXVII, No. 3), and "The Body Comes All the Way Up," *International Philosophical Quarterly* (forthcoming, Spring 1994). He is now working as a wait-person while he searches for a teaching post in philosophy.

**Walter B. Gulick** teaches at Eastern Montana College in Billings, MT; he was a Fulbright Scholar at the Technical University of Budapest in the Spring term of 1993. Gulick is book review editor for *TAD* and has been an active member of The Polanyi Society for many years.