PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON A PERSONAL LEVEL

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Introduction

Most people can identify a teacher that stands out as having greatly influenced their life. Perhaps these great teachers share some common characteristics (Landvogt, 2001). Could the common thread of great teachers be great personality? In my first nine years of teaching I have come to recognize the importance of personality for maintaining effectiveness and creating interest in my classroom. Perhaps if teachers experienced professional development on a personal level, they would be able to connect with students and become a teacher of great influence.

Teacher training tends to be student centered with an emphasis on content or learning styles. But where are the considerations of the teacher addressed? What attention is paid to the teacher and his role in education? Possibly for the last sixty-six years the teacher’s consideration of himself has been isolated, self-focused on such questions posed by Sanford in his book, *Developing teacher personality that wins* (1938, p.22).

1. How important is my work as a teacher? How do I really feel?
2. Am I willing to spend extra hours planning, studying, developing? Self sacrifice?
3. Am I reproducing myself? Does anyone want to be like me?
4. Am I altruistic? Do I have a cause that superintends my perspective?

In other professions, personality and work relationships encounter increasing attention. Personality testing is big business, says a recent article of U. S. News & World Report. According to the article, personality testing is a $400 million industry used by one-third of U. S. businesses (Hsu, 2004). Although personality tests are not 100% reliable, people use them to identify strengths and weaknesses in order to, hopefully, improve.

Professional development for teachers, focusing on standards, practices, outcomes, and testing, lacks a commitment to people. Education is not about the indoctrination of standards, rather it is about the development of people, including teachers (Mead, 2003). More effort devoted to the task of personal reflection and synthesis of style could actually promote the desired increase of standards. Therefore, teachers’ personal development, structured in a
personal manner, should receive as much attention as students’ development (2003). For centuries teachers have been noted for their contributions to society and there was, presumably, not an overt focus given to professional development. Some degree of personal awareness must have connected student success with teacher success as a mutual experience.

Mutuality of study encourages personal development of both the teacher and the student, promoting active learning and creative thinking (Bennice, 89). The scene of mutual participation between a wise philosopher and his student reveals a subtle connection of personality with development. The philosopher, acknowledging the intellect of both teacher and student, must make adjustments to his modus operandi until the student can handle the level of participation which he is expected to achieve. This process of continual adjustment requires sensitivity to cognition and intuition.

The teacher roams the halls of intuition and cognition in search of doors through which he may enter with his own personality. The personality traits of teachers and practices of professional development are the halls and rooms respectively. If a teacher refuses to enter the hall for fear of what he may face, he is destined to remain in one solitary room, exercising limited influence.

So as not to fear what personality has to offer, this review considers a few personality traits encountered in the halls of intuition and cognition. Then, in order to find courage to leave one’s comfort zone, entering these halls in search of other rooms, this review conveys some perspectives of teacher professional development.

Review of the Literature

*Personality Traits Encountered in the Halls of Intuition and Cognition*

*Definition of personality.* Defining personality may be more a question of philosophy than science (Jang, Vernon, & Livesley, 2001). Typically, personality is characterized by different traits and to varying degrees (2001). The difficulty lies in assessing one’s degree of particular traits. It is generally accepted that authentic and reliable evaluation be performed in person by a professional. Psychologists differ on questions of causality; does personality affect
decisions or do environmental factors affect our personality? One article suggests that personality and genetic predispositions are corollary events, holding the potential for genetic prediction of personality (Code, & Langan-Fox, 2001). Jang, Vernon, and Livesley (2001) conclude that the obstacle to genetic prediction is an inadequate definition of personality.

One of the more popular instruments giving substance to the concept of personality is the Myers-Briggs inventory. Four pairs of traits interact on a continuum of identification. The four parts are; extrovert-introvert, sensing-intuitive, thinking-feeling, and judging-perceiving. According to this model each person tends to function more on one side of each pair, constructing a four part personality “type.” Based upon this, there are a total of sixteen different personality types, each possessing a unique summary of stimulus/response profiles (Personality Pathways, 2004).

These considerations of personality are simplified by the following “ancient” definition; “Personality is a dynamic organization of traits and dispositions which [clarify] how an individual responds to, and interacts with his environment” (Tuska & Jenks, 1974, p. 14). These traits and dispositions are grouped into three parts, basic needs, passions, and self-constraints (1974). The basic needs consist of the physical, emotional, mental, and even spiritual needs that make up the very core of who we are. The passions drive us to be acknowledged, appreciated, and find purpose in life. The self-constraints enable us to control our needs and passions so that we can live together in a civilized manner (1974). When the parts of personality are balanced we say a person is self actualized (1974).

According to Tuska and Jenks (1974), teachers enlarge their circle of influence when they work towards balancing these parts of their personality. This balancing, operating on different levels, contains both cognitive and intuitive activity and can be seen within these personality traits; desire and passion for learning, flexibility, teachability, community awareness, and creativity.

Desire and passion for learning. Desire to learn may have been a struggle for some time now as indicated from comments of the past and the present. Over sixty years ago Sanford
(1938) claimed that rote work detracted from personal initiative and passionate scholarship. Today, Kohn (1999) goes so far as to cynically state that standardized testing makes our schools worse rather than better because testing kills desire. Kohn may have a point shared by others concerning standards. Bedny and Seglin (1999) believe that the imposition of standards may counteract personality interactions, negating any positive effects the teachers could have had. The cynical way in which Kohn reacts could be more destructive than it is helpful. However this type of reaction dates back to at least the 1800’s, “Genius is a nuisance, and it is the duty of schools and colleges to abate it by setting genius-traps in its way. Samuel Butler, 1835-1902 (author, essayist and critic)” (Fisher, 1999, p. 5).

Despite any feelings of disagreement with the emphasis on high stakes testing, teachers are resistant to voice their concern (Marlowe & Page, 2004). Marlowe & Page further express it is dangerous when teachers do not think for themselves and are hesitant to speak for fear of possible repercussions. It can be inferred that teachers must overcome fears through desire, opening doors for more valuable instruction (2004). A more appropriate response is related in the Roeper Review, where Landvogt (2001) shares the experience of one teacher. This teacher found that when she allowed for students to express their desires and interests, following up with encouragement to do more, it actually increased the overall interest of her class.

Landvogt expands the breadth of impact teachers make when they add to their personal characteristics an ability to instill a sense of passion (2001). If a teacher falls away from the calling to inspire, he may well fall into the trap of cynicism and lose the capacity for good judgment. At this point the focus becomes “what” rather than “why” and learning is reduced to a list of facts rather than a gift of reason (2001).

Flexibility. Teachers make the difference in determining the quality of teaching. Through flexibility of mind and spirit they are capable of adjustment to any “new” requirement that is thrown their way (Levine, 1989). Because change is inevitable and classroom instruction is naturally isolating, flexible teachers can seize the opportunity to make a difference in students’ lives. This is done through the flexibility owned by a healthy personality; typified by such
qualities as empathy, enthusiasm, and poise (Tonelson, 1981). Poise is reflected best in the humble nature of someone who is teachable.

**Teachability.** We do not readily recognize our own faults, often living in denial or willful ignorance of them until such time as it becomes unavoidable to deny them (Sanford, 1938). At this point, our response can forever settle what caliber of person we are. Teachability is a rare quality and is especially needed among teachers. Teachers, who through constant habit, come to unconsciously act as an authority, are likely to push people away and further isolate themselves (1938).

A teachable spirit enables a teacher to pay attention to the abilities of students because he is not preoccupied with his own status. Confident and relaxed, a teacher then strengthens his students’ interests through sincerity and commitment (Landvogt, 2001). Commitment often spills over into community involvement.

**Community awareness.** Responsibility to community lies with both teachers and administration, who do well to develop formal policies of how the community and families should be involved (Chavkin, 2000). Teachers can make a difference through informal communication and relationships with the community, but this is rarely done without the formal development of policies for community involvement (2000).

Fredericks and Rasinski (1991) specifically suggest the importance of literacy as a community-based interaction, assisting education through community events and expectations. The attitude that “it takes a community to teach a child” exists within such a situation of community accountability and ownership. It could be argued then, to the extent that teachers care for the community in which they teach, the community will care for the teachers and students in their schools.

One attempt to promote involvement and communication between educators and communities is the development of technology-based communication. Ramirez (2001) indicates how this technological connection with the community also increases student accountability and achievement. Also, utilization of technology allows more time for teachers to concentrate on
other aspects of education, like creativity.

**Creativity.** Creativity is an active expression from someone who cannot hold-in the deluge of ideas and perceptions that form their conscious and subconscious state of existence. However, according to a recent article in *Phi Delta Kappan*, “What’s missing from teacher preparation … is not content knowledge but training in ‘how to manage a classroom, bring classes alive, and make sure their students actually learn’” (Gough, 2000, p. 262). Apparently, creativity is not given enough place in the formation of practices and methodology. Creativity’s enemy is the “fear of failure” or fear of not being accepted (Kagan, 1967).

Teachers acting as a creative participant, accepting the ideas and responses of students into a collection of negotiable concepts, are able to lead students to analyze and synthesize their findings into a useful body of knowledge (Gruber & Boreen, 2003). Teacher participation may be a key to creative instruction whether the creativity is personally initiated or borrowed through various resources. Resources geared to assist teachers with creative planning are even available online from such corporations as Disney (“Online Resource Encourages Creative Teaching,” 2000).

An article from *Curriculum Review* lists four creative strategies, as taken from a keynote speech by Philip G. Zimbardo; provide cooperative learning, perform demonstrations, employ special topics, and host special guests (“Four Ways to Give Students a Psychological Edge in the Classroom,” 2004, p. 6). All of these strategies involve the participation of both students and teachers. It is likely that such a classroom will foster new experiences, create new materials, and challenge the status quo according to Ritchhart (2004).

In the halls of intuition and cognition teachers encounter many more personality traits than desire, flexibility, teachability, community awareness, and creativity. This sampling highlights some traits that can arouse such feelings as fear of failure, anxiety, isolation, and apathy. Yet, for teachers to arrive at the rooms of development, they must go through the halls and face the challenges. If one knows where he is going, it is easier to find courage. Therefore, some perspectives of professional development should assist in finding the courage to venture out of
one’s comfort zone.

*Perspectives of Teacher Professional Development*

Intro to perspectives. Certain personality traits require a degree of vulnerability that is uncomfortable to the average person. Teachers are no average lot, they willingly place themselves in front of a difficult audience of self-absorbed young people bent on making all experience gratifying. Yet, making one’s self vulnerable to such a demanding crowd could be easier if teachers possessed a rationale for the end; professional development that is meaningful because it is personal. Forming a rationale to this end takes us through the following perspectives of professional development; history, needs, danger of comparisons, philosophy, and practices.

History. Apparently, prior to the 1970’s, professional development maintained a fairly content-centered approach to professional development, “… schools have not always made a clear commitment to the personal growth of teachers and children” (Knoblock & Goldstein, 1971, p. vi). I would suggest that at least as far as students go, education has improved its emphasis on the learner with the development of such ideas as multiple intelligences, learning modalities, and technology centers. Knoblock and Goldstein (1971) further stated that there must be equal emphasis on both the student and the teacher especially as relates to continuing education. Teachers perceived themselves as “keepers of the peace, curriculum, and school tradition” rather than as classroom resources (1971, p. 14). They went on to predict a new type of teacher will fill the classrooms of tomorrow. Teachers with intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, feeling confident and ready to take risks, will create experiences that may or may not fit societal norms (1971).

Recently, teachers are at least encouraged to incorporate various methods of instruction and are given help in training. *Education Week* ran an article claiming a waiting list of 7,000 teachers to attend workshops offered by the U. S. Department of Education (Cavanagh, 2004). These workshops supposedly demonstrate research-driven techniques of improving instruction using a variety of methods. Furthermore, they are conducted by “real” teachers that exemplify
the incorporation of personality into instruction through personally designed lessons (2004).

Needs. The fear of vulnerability keeps teachers from allowing their personality to come through in their teaching, prohibiting students from a completely real experience, fostering a lack of integrity in education (Knoblock & Goldstein, 1971). We need to help young teachers find their own style, one that fits their personality and their content. This style should reflect their habits of discovery and fend off apathetic reception through elements of surprise (Wiesner, 1967). Perhaps a lower level of emotional intelligence contributes to teacher fear and subsequent hesitation to allow personality into instruction. This much was suggested in a comparison study of teachers-in-training and drama students in the UK. It further implies that teachers would personally benefit from drama and performance training (McKenzie & DaCosta, 1999).

“Traditionally, staff development focuses on getting other people to change. … Since we know that growth starts from within, the most effective forms of staff development begin with the self” (Levine, 1989, p. xv). From the model for professional development by Hogan (1995), we see that if a group of staff attempts to use their own personality to develop and adjust the teaching/learning environment, they are likely to meet with opposition. This opposition occurs for a couple of different reasons. First, people do not feel comfortable with change, and would rather continue as before, maintaining the status quo. Second, lack of effective communication and feedback about the process prohibits the transformation of new and creative ideas (Hogan, 1995). Staff feel left out and apathetic about information that is vague and/or untraditional. Teachers prefer to have expectations clearly spelled out until they are able to catch the vision. Of course, in the end, this means they must be convinced of the relevance as well as the usefulness (1995).

Teachers are capable of incorporating personality into instruction, they are just not accustomed to the practice. This type of change is indicative of the paradigm shifts beginning to surface in modern education and further illustrates the need for a shift of professional development, one that emphasizes the teacher and the power of his/her personality (1995). It is
not enough for teachers to “arrive.” Teachers must persist with a passion for self-improvement.

**Danger of comparisons.** Comparisons of teachers, whether directly or indirectly, are dangerous activities, even if the intent is well meaning. Our society, education included, is competitive and individualistic by nature (Huber, 1995). Although a comparison of teacher’s methods and motivations would prove revealing and insightful concerning effectiveness, the potential for disillusionment and distrust among staff is probable. Therefore it is not advisable to engage in such comparisons (Huber, 1995). One teacher’s best scenario will not look the same as any other teacher’s. This is not to say that comparisons are not useful or that value cannot be added through shared experiences. Instead, educators must walk the line of comparison very carefully with a well thought, locally-tailored process, balancing communication between teachers and administration (1995).

For students and teachers to find meaning, teacher personality must blend with classroom instruction (Tuska & Jenks, 1974). This blending will involve developing relationships that work towards student and teacher cooperation. Teachers, applying methods of introspection, reflection, and synthesis will improve their understanding of opposing perspectives, identifying any gaps between their personality and their instruction (1974).

**Philosophy.** The best teachers never quite arrive, but through balanced living and practices they work with purpose and determination to make a difference (Tuska & Jenks, 1974). According to Levine (1989), adult development, in general, is active rather than passive. Therefore, professional development that fosters an active role of the participant is more likely to succeed (1989). Using writing as a means to reflect, open dialogue, and create ownership, Levine reminds us “it is a lot easier to disown something we say than it is to divorce ourselves from what we write” (1989, p. 223). The writing, directed by each individual, is more likely to lead to change because it reflects the desires and interests of that individual. So, when activity joins interest, teachers are able to connect their personality with their instruction (Tuska & Jenks, 1974).

**Practices.** Through local writing groups teachers are empowered to find their own
voice, discover their passions and weaknesses, and search out creative methods of improvement (MacLeod & Cowieson, 2001). Autobiographical writing enables teachers to create a personal history of development that is meaningful (2001).

Although mentors recommend journaling as a positive way to express frustrations and work through first-year experiences there is no opportunity for feedback, and therefore development is limited (Toner, 2004). Several teachers are turning to a practice called blogging. A blog is an interactive log posted to a website whereby others can read and offer encouragement or suggestions. These web-logs, called blogs, provide personal and professional vignettes from other teachers around the globe, allowing others to read, think, and respond in their own time, without inhibitions (2004). Blogging can give someone a chance to “vent,” share a story, encourage another teacher, seek advice, or just write for the sake of writing. Toner says that, “knowing where someone is coming from can be virtually impossible” (2004). He then cautions people to be discerning in what they share. The power of blogging is that it enables teachers to escape an otherwise isolated position, connecting with and contributing to the development of teachers in meaningful ways (2004).

One teacher participated in a summer workshop utilizing writing and research to analyze and critique her own methods of teaching. She concludes her article by stating that she found her voice and is currently active in promoting writing as a way to foster personal development for both teachers and students (Criswell, 2004).

Two interesting examples of practices are given by Nielsen (1991) who describes professional development as either knowledge survival packs parachuted into our educational war zone or mockingbird attempts to imitate others ideas - ending in isolation and lack of identity. According to Nielson, too often, professional development ignores the professional, seeking to develop the person through impersonal means while indoctrinating a profession with dogmatic unattainable ideals. However, when someone goes out on their own, the trouble is not creating a new way, the trouble is getting someone else to listen (1991).

Summary
While teaching holds a certain mystique of practice and subsequent ideal of positive influence over culture, pinpointing and standardizing the best scenarios continues to be a matter of intrigue. Culturally, we find it disturbing to discover wide differentiation of thoughts and activities that are successful. Even more uncomfortable is the realization that our personality can positively or negatively influence our teaching. There are no pat answers for resolving personality conflicts and no quick fixes to alter our teaching. In order for positive change to occur, schools and teachers must both be willing to change and possess the energy to complete their initiative (Joyce & McKibbin, 1982).

It is time for a re-focus of professional development, employing more personal means of reflection and collaboration. There is already a shift in this direction through the development of such practices as local writing groups, web logs, writing workshops, and personally developed activities. When motivation for improvement emanates from personal choice and professional interaction it holds more potential for making a lasting difference in our teachers, schools, and children. For the future of our children, it is in the schools’ best interest to consider professional development that contains a more personal element of involvement and accountability.
References


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Biography

Fred G. Rinehart teaches mathematics at Galion High School, having obtained his B. A. in mathematics from Cedarville University. He is currently in the Master’s degree program for Education, Curriculum and Instruction at Ashland University. He is married and together he and his wife homeschool their four children, ages 8-12.