



11 Consequences of Failing to Address the 'Pedagogy of Poverty'

BY MARTIN HABERMAN

Once before a speech, I was introduced with: "Professor Haberman has published 200 articles." A large person in the first row grumbled, "And how many are worth reading?" I began my speech by answering his question. "Six or so. But if you have time for only one, I would recommend 'The Pedagogy of Poverty Versus Good Teaching.'"

Over the past 55 years, I've interviewed more than 5,000 teachers and observed in even more classrooms. I continue to visit classrooms and, when requested, coach classroom teachers. It's painful to report that the teacher acts I described in this article 20 years ago are still the typical acts of teaching performed by all teachers. The only teacher act I would add to the 14 described in the article is the following: "Assigns questions to be answered by using Google or some other search engine."

What's different today is that there is no longer any debate regarding what everyone assumes teaching is. The public, teachers, school administrators, legislators, teacher educators, and, alas, students themselves essentially agree on what constitutes the acts of teaching. It is a source of consternation that I am able to state without equivocation that the overly directive, mind-numbing, mundane, useless, anti-intellectual acts that constitute teaching not only remain the coin of the realm but have become the gold standard.

There are at least 11 consequences of using these acts to define teaching. These consequences enable us to predict trends that will continue into the future.

1. There will continue to be no difference between what teachers do when teaching diverse students in poverty and when teaching students from advantaged backgrounds.
2. There will continue to be no connection between what teachers do and any theory of learning.
3. The widespread use of these acts will not decrease in spite of growing research on effective instruction.
4. Veteran and novice teachers will continue to perform these same ritualized acts. (This explains why those

with no teacher training teach the same way and get the same results as those with extensive coursework in education.)

5. Since these acts characterize the behavior of teachers in a class of 35 or more and in a class of 10 or less, lowering class size provides no benefit. Discipline may be easier, but learning will not improve.
6. Teachers will make no distinctions in how different subject matters are taught.
7. Teachers will continue to teach skills, concepts, and appreciations using the very same ineffective acts.
8. The age of the learners or their competencies or interests won't influence or interfere with teachers performing these acts.
9. There can be no teacher growth, since these acts won't be discontinued or replaced. This explains why professional development doesn't change instruction.
10. Teachers have always reported that the greatest problems they face are classroom management and students' lack of motivation for learning. Since these acts of teaching themselves generate and exacerbate students' problems, teachers will continue to have discipline problems and unmotivated students for the foreseeable future.
11. These acts have become so firmly ritualized and pervasive that the public, parents, students, and educators will crush any attempt to redefine or transform teaching.

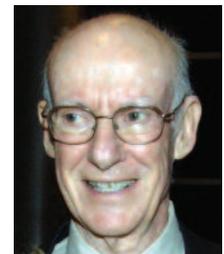
A profession has a common body of knowledge held by practitioners that is derived from a body of theory and research that is unknown to the general public. Teaching is not a profession, because the teacher acts that constitute the pedagogy of poverty have no theoretic or research base and are well known to anyone who ever attended a school.

In this searing article published almost two decades ago, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee professor Martin Haberman describes what he believed was standard practice in urban classrooms in those days. Ask yourself to what degree this list — and Haberman's analysis of it — is still accurate today.

— Kim Marshall,
Marshall Memo no. 321

When I read it and looked critically at my own practice, I felt very uncomfortable. The description of teachers' practices and the insightful explanation of consequent students' behaviors caused me to seriously rethink aspects of my teaching.

— Jim Scott, CEO Science,
Science Curriculum Directorate



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