

C L I C H E S
of
T E A C H I N G

[AMPLIFIED]

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A First Edition
(An Only Edition)

For my son, Jim:

the student teacher of
drum-----or music.

PROLOGUE

How I gagged at all the cliches of teaching during those education courses required for certification twenty-five years ago. One B.A., one M.A., thirty-plus miscellaneous hours, four jillion educational books and journals, eighteen and a half years of teaching and eleven hundred students have added a few cliches and mellowed my thinking. Yes, they do seem like cliches, but there is truth to be explored in each one.

My main point: as you take the coursework for teaching, guard against rejecting educational principles because they seem too old-fashioned or too simplistic. Search for the truths.

Good luck on your learning.

CLICHE #1: Take the Child Where He Is

[What is your alternative? Unless you try to learn (excuse me, the new educanto word is "assess") where he is and start teaching whatever your field of knowledge is at that point--then your alternative is to leave him behind. So there he stays with the knowledge and skill he had when you first met him---and HE fails.

Oh, of course, there are some who will crawl along learning a little because of you, or in spite of you. A really rare one might decide to try to fill in the gaps on his own to catch up.

Question: does this mean if you take every student where he is, that you will bring them all up to the same level of achievement? Not unless all human beings are identical. But by accepting his level and building from there you have taught him he can learn and that perhaps is the greatest gift you can give him.])

CLICHE #2. Never Smile Till
Thanksgiving

[All beginning teachers are sure this originated with that gray haired, gray faced, gray personalityed teacher who is one year from retirement. More than likely, it originated with a first year teacher about April of his second semester!

Be human. Show you have a personality. But expect and require acceptable behavior, both social and academic, from the beginning. It's fairly easy to loosen up. It's almost impossible to tighten up later in the year.

Beginning teachers are quick to recall all their grumpy teachers of years past and cringe at the thought of turning into one. There is a middle ground. You do not have to go to the other extreme of buddy-buddy. Today's students desperately need models of maturity and authority who are interested in them, but who show they can teach effectively without needing to be voted a Popularity Plus.]

CLICHE #3: The Student Who is the
Most Unlovable (Unlikeable) Needs
the Most Loving (Liking).

[Now wait a minute. Can you
force loving or liking? No one likes
everyone, right? Unfortunately,
right.

You will have the obnoxious
student, the mean student, the student
who hates (dislikes) you. They will
be rare--but there.

Maybe you'll never understand him
but try for understanding. Work on
self-concept...his and yours if he's
a master of the crushing word or action.
If all your efforts fail, accept the
situation and accept your limitations.
And try for patience. (My favorite
definition: Patience is the ability
to conceal your impatience.) Add a
little longsuffering (the ability to
endure). You will be amazed that
sometimes even when you've given up
in despair that maybe something you
say or do will reach him and he's not
all that horrible. But maybe not. Be
prepared for that, too (but not defeated
by it.)]

CLICHE #4: Every Teacher is a
Teacher of Reading

[Even intelligent, dedicated,
mature teachers have been known to
climb the wall on this one.

Reading is not just a list of
lessons for grades one through three.
Reading is a skill and skills must be
practiced forever if they are to be
retained. The teacher who teaches
his subject by teaching the vocabulary
of that field, by teaching how to use
the textbook or other tools of that
course, by introducing the resources
the school and community can offer,
by revealing to his students that he,
the teacher, has read an occasional
book not required for a book report
is a teacher of reading. And that
teacher can be in English, history,
science, math, shop, home ec, typing,
speech-----or band.]

CLICHE #5: The Teacher Must Be
Accountable

["Accountability" is the new catch phrase especially popular with administrators, legislators and the news media.

The beginning and experienced teacher has some room for concern - even maybe anxiety - over accountability. Express your concern and you may be accused of not wanting to have your performance tested. Someone will remind you that industry has long had performance testing. No one goes a bit farther and states that industry demands a certain standard or discards the product. It's not the foreman who is discarded. When I carry that analogy along, I see a sky high dump of discarded students with flaws in their learning ability. It's just an analogy I don't like.

The teacher feels concern because of the school systems that jump too hastily onto every new thing whether

it is Sputnik's scare, mainstreaming, open classrooms, team teaching or accountability. Too many districts want to rush out to buy a standardized test from the area's most successful salesman. This just doesn't seem to be necessarily a perfect way to prove that the teachers in that district are accountable.

So what about you and accountability? Yes, you should be accountable but the measurement isn't too precise-- no little squares to darken heavily with a #2 pencil.

Accountability boils down to that old Protestant work ethic so frowned on today. Do the best you can, as often as you can, for as long as you can. When the doldrums hit (you notice I didn't say if), accept them but get a new idea, a new technique, take a break, climb a mountain. Do something to get back into gear as quickly as possible. Be accountable to your conscience and let administrators, legislators, and the news media play with their new fun word.

If your students are learning
and most seem to like learning, then
you've passed accountability.]

CLICHE #6: Teachers Should Be Public
Relations Experts

[Good grief. Lesson plans, teaching, extra practices, the junior class float, the regional try-outs, lunch room duty, an occasional clean shirt, an infrequent movie--who has time for public relations? Hardly anybody from the classroom finds time for community public relations but it is a critical need, nevertheless.

How many citizens think that teachers get all holidays and the summer as paid vacations? How many believe the hours are really from 8:30 to 3:30? How many know the good things going on in the classroom? How many ever hear one teacher praise a colleague, especially one in a different teaching field?

No sensible college student would condemn his college because this would suggest to others that he received an inferior education. So a sensible teacher will do everything truthfully possible to build up his school system

in the eyes of the public and every-
thing possible to improve deficiencies.

Public relations take time but
it is one way to greatly improve
education with little cost. And
teachers can do it better than even
the best administrators.]

CLICHE #7: The Teacher Must Be
Dedicated

[This cliché is most often tossed out to teachers by laymen when they plan to vote against a millage increase for teachers' salaries, by parents who can't understand why you don't attend every one of your student's dance and piano recitals or little league ball games, and by administrators when they want to reward you for a job well done by giving you another time consuming assignment----at no extra pay.

In spite of when it's used, the cliché is quite true. Dedication alone does not make an effective teacher, but if there isn't some degree of dedication, the teacher becomes just a warm (or even cold) body meeting minimum requirements.

Will it surprise you to learn that dedication is not always rewarded either by extra money or recognition? Oh, sometimes it is, but you'd better be content with that feeling of inner satisfaction---and who can put a price tag on that?]

CLICHE #8: The Teacher Should Build
Self-concept. (See also #3)

[A student's learning is dependent upon his concept of himself and a teacher has a rare opportunity to build or demolish a good self-concept. Remember Maltz' Psycho-cybernetics?

The beginning teacher, especially of older students is quickly aware of the cockiness, brashness, downright rudeness of many students. So often the sarcastic response just automatically seems the most appropriate. But, it seldom is unless the teacher/student relationship is so close that the comment can be meant and accepted as wit--not sarcasm.

The cutting remark is the classic ego deflater but so is the scathing look, and so is ignoring. That "Mr Invisible" who is in your class--the one you can't remember at the end of the day if he was even present--is

probably being sure he's hidden by
the person in front. You can be sure
that's a self-concept that needs bol-
stering. Of course, he may be just
one lazy kid but that's self-concept,
too. People can change--and you can
help it be a change for the better.]

CLICHE #9: Telling Isn't
(Necessarily) Teaching

[New teachers who have just left college classrooms where 99½% of the teaching was telling have a hard time with this one.

The ears are not the only avenue of learning and in some students they are the least reliable. One to one tutoring would simplify teaching because then you could see how that one best learns. But you have a bunch of ones so you have to use a bunch of approaches.

Someone came up with this information. You might analyze your teaching and your own learning in the light of it:

We remember:
10% of what we read
20% of what we hear
30% of what we see
50% of what we see and hear
70% of what we say as we talk -
one finds out what he knows,
believes, thinks and feels as
he talks
90% of what we say as we do a
thing.]

CLICHE #10: Be Well Dressed in the
Classroom

[This one had to originate with that gray haired, gray faced, gray personalityed teacher who wouldn't be caught dead in a pair of jeans in the unlikely chance he could ever find a pair to fit.

Believe it or not, research studies have shown that students learn more from teachers who dress conservatively than they do from those teachers who dress in the overly casual style of their students. Could it go back to the old bit about young people needing models of maturity?

Some wit said, "Dress appropriately, get your reports in on time and do what you like in the classroom." There is some truth to that. If the boss is not having to listen unendingly to tirades from staff and parents about bizarre attire, or constantly having his required paper work delayed (he has a boss, too!), then your chances are better of his allowing you more freedom to teach your way--if you can defend it educationally.]

CLICHE #11: Study Skills Must Be
Taught

[Why, everyone knows the student should have learned how to study before he gets to you!

But who will teach the skills? Will the English teacher be able to teach the skills the student needs in science? Will the grade school music teacher (who may teach 450 students a week) be able to teach him the skills he needs in beginner band?

Who teaches notetaking? Who teaches the index? Who teaches library skills? Do music students know where the music books are in the library? Can they find the biographies of inspiring musicians? Whose job is it to show them?

If the teacher feels inadequate in this, and well he might since study skills are unbelievably neglected, the least he can do is collect some resource material and make it available

to his students. And the teacher can keep learning and pass along his knowledge. (I was out of college and teaching before I discovered spelling dictionaries or specialized dictionaries in literature and history.) Didn't I tell you study skills are neglected?]

CLICHE #12: Praise in Public,
Reprimand in Private

[Ho-hum. Surely, some Pollyanna who was last in a classroom in 1950 wrote that one. It's just too saccharine.

Oh? What about yourself? Think back on your feelings when a teacher gave you an unexpected, ungushy word of praise. You can still feel the warm glow. Likewise, even if it was way back in the first or second grade, even a mild reprimand can still hurt.

That show-off, loud-mouthed, smart-aleck (the psychologists call it "acting out") wants attention and your verbal harshness in front of his friends, no matter how well deserved, usually will backfire. Your shy students will shrivel and the show-off's buddies will just give him more of the attention that he is after. Often it works to say quietly, "See me after class," or "I'd like to see you in the hall a minute." Then you can say what needs

to be said without being overheard.
It's important to attack the behavior,
not the person.

A bonus to this method is that on
that occasion where you've accused
the wrong culprit, you haven't dug
yourself a deep hole to try to escape
with some semblance of dignity.]

EPILOGUE

But what if you don't choose teaching? Have my cliches been a waste of my time?

I think not. The nouns would have to be revised, but the concepts of acceptance of self and others, of public relations, of seeking success within your own self, of a lifetime of learning will fit any field of endeavor.

Again, good luck on your learning and God be with you in making your life's decisions.