

## EDITORIAL

### TEACHING: SETTLING AND UNSETTLING OF CONVICTIONS

Teaching is a necessary activity in and of the University; however, what University teaching is and what its manners are, are not always understood.

University teaching is primarily inspired by the characteristics of a research activity. Instead of teaching that  $x$  is true of  $y$ , University teaches to inquire why the claim that  $x$  is true of  $y$  is true and to establish epistemologically acceptable bases for accepting the truth claim. To teach is not only to assert that what is taught is true but also to subject it to clarification and explanation as to why it is true. At the same time that a Faculty member teaches that something is true, it is not unusual that he subjects what he teaches to testing, further questioning, and finding out whether or not it is, in fact, true. He is pulled, on the one hand, to teach that which he knows is true or that which he knows is claimed to be true and, on the other hand, to show his students his own professions to knowledge about that which he is teaching. Such professions, which are results of his private researches, he employs to test the accuracy of the truth claim that he is teaching and its adequacy to account for problems central to its claim or arising out of it.

The motive of University in teaching students the way it does is to enable them to discern the nature of knowledge claims and to enable them to appreciate research and to be disposed to think in a manner of engaging in a research. The attitudes of tentativeness, cautiousness, deliberate weighting of arguments and counter-arguments, critical mindedness, even distrust, that University displays toward contemporary knowledge is necessarily derived from the characteristics of contemporary knowledge. The over-riding problem of knowledge today is a search for its own criteria to determine its meaning. It is expressed in the question "What does the term 'knowledge' mean?" The manner of University teaching is, likewise, characteristic of what is being taught. Given that absolute truth or certainty is not a quality of contemporary knowledge, the teaching manner consists of showing students how to develop grounds for accepting certain claims to be true, for rejecting some other claims as false, and for withholding judgment on other claims which are not clearly true or false. When one knows how to arrive at acceptable and well-grounded conclusions, he also knows how to distinguish between them and unfounded conclusions that disregard proof and evidence. It follows that he knows what to accept and what to reject. And when a student comes to believe that there are good reasons for accepting the truth asserted, he also knows that sometimes evidence could turn out later that will show that the asserted truth is false. The intention is not to create anxieties on the part of students but to show them the true conditions of contemporary knowledge or the fictional characteristic of human aspirations. It is not to say that knowledge is, therefore, useless because it is not absolutely dependable. It is to say that knowledge of the truth is relative to the evidence we have for it. To the extent that there is good evidence for it, to that extent knowledge of it is dependable. The point is to know what kinds of

knowledge claims to trust, for how long, and for what reasons. To teach is to engage learners in an act of inquiry such that in their coming to know that which is true they also know the reasons for its being so.

In imparting an attitude of research or critical mindedness to students, University is teaching a view of the teaching activity and of the University teacher, namely, that teaching is hypothesis-making and the university teacher is a hypothesis-maker, a member of the class intellectual/inquirer. As a hypothesis-maker, a university teacher may say of his teaching plan: "Given that these are the intended ends I judge desirable to teach, I hypothesize that this procedure, on the basis of certain warranted information, will lead to the achievement of these ends." If his plan fails, he examines the variables that may have caused its failure. If it succeeds, he tests its capacities for wider general applications and inquires into possibilities for further conceptual refinement. It is his teaching act that he inquires into, even as he engages in it, such that its failures/successes are increasingly identified and understood. In other words, what a university teacher teaches and how he does it he also subjects to scrutiny, criticism, and question. He is at once both a participant in the teaching activity and its spectator. He can withdraw from his participation and engage in critical reflection into what he does and how he does it, into his accepted epistemological stance and moral principles and allegiances from which he draws justification for the conduct of his teaching. In conducting his teaching manner in this way, the teacher evinces a critical attitude toward what he is teaching, how he is teaching it, and which attitude he is also teaching his students. The temper of critical and responsible inquiry into the reasons for doing what we are doing are qualities of university teaching and research activity. In turn, these are some of the necessary qualities of an educated person.

University teaching and research are not necessarily antagonistic to but dependent on each other. What the researches in different areas of knowledge will show regarding our claims to truths about the physical world, the relationships in human society, and about man's nature and his search for meaning will inevitably influence decisions in matters and manners of University teaching.

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