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Method, Style, and Manner in Classroom Teaching*

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Do teachers foster good moral conduct on the part of their students? If so, how do they do that? Quite a few scholars are engaged in seeking answers to these questions, including all the participants in this symposium.¹ In this paper I offer my own approach to answering these questions. I do so in a somewhat different manner than has is customary among philosophers of education, for I shall not advance an ethical argument that teachers should foster good moral conduct by their students, or that teachers ought themselves to be good moral agents. Instead, I assume both these propositions, and proceed to examine a view of pedagogy that I believe holds some promise for gaining purchase on how teachers cultivate the moral dispositions of their students. This view of pedagogy is constructed from both philosophical conceptions of teaching and morality, as well as from empirical inquiries into what teachers do in classrooms to encourage the moral development of their students.

Academics, like Caesar, have a fondness for dividing things into three parts. I maintain this venerable tradition by dividing pedagogy into three parts: Method, Style and Manner. Doing so, I will argue, enhances our conceptual grip on the otherwise slippery notion of pedagogy. It allows us to attend, with an important measure of simultaneity, to the moral, epistemic and personal dimensions of teaching. Furthermore, it makes possible a rich and robust understanding of how teachers contribute to the moral development of their students. These are rather extravagant claims for the modest act of dividing the concept of pedagogy into three component parts. Perhaps the best way to see if they are justified claims is to get about the task of describing and explaining them, vesting in the reader the decision on their merit. I turn first to answering the question, What is meant by method, style, and manner, and how might each be distinguished one from the other?

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Distinguishing among Method, Style and Manner

In capsule form, to be expanded upon in a moment, method applies to acts of a teacher undertaken with the intention of bringing about a change in a learner or group of learners. Style pertains to the conduct of the teacher that reflects his or her own personality, without obligation upon any other teacher to act in the same way. Manner encompasses those traits and dispositions of the teacher that reveal his or her character as a moral or intellectual being. In slightly different terminology, method refers to what the teacher does to bring about some sort of result in the learner, style refers to personality characteristics displayed in the act of teaching, and manner refers to the moral and intellectual character of the teacher.

Seeing this distinction for the first time may produce some consternation. Some relief comes from drawing back a bit, asking a few clarifying questions. One of the first of these has to do with the place of an individual's personality in the larger pedagogical landscape. Currently there is little attention given to how an individual's personality affects his or her work as a teacher. At some crude level, we have a sense that teachers who are outgoing, smile often, and act tenderly towards the young will be advantaged as teachers. However, these matters of personality do not extend much beyond these crude approximations in most programs for training teachers, or in subsequent efforts to improve the instruction of experienced teachers. Yet we do have different personalities. Some of us like to tell jokes, while others seldom do. Some people wear straight faces, while others smile a lot. Some of us are outgoing, while others are quiet, perhaps even a bit shy. Some of us like to touch and hug, while others are more stand-offish. Some people have quick wits and ready retorts, while others are more reserved in their reactions to people and their situations.

A bit later, I argue that these personal characteristics are important in pedagogy, and that they have a role in how teachers go about cultivating moral traits and dispositions in their students. At the moment, however, I simply want to mark off this domain of personality with the term "style." Here I use the term 'style' quite differently from its by Alfred North Whitehead, James Garrison, or David Hansen,² all of whom opt for a sense of style that has much to do with the moral character of the teacher. In contrast to them, I use the term "manner" to identify the moral character of the teacher, reserving style for personality features that are constitutive of that teacher as a unique human being.

The notion of manner as used here derives from the fact that in everyday language a person's *manner* is thought to mark his or her traits of character. We speak of persons being honest, deceptive, brave, cowardly, generous, stingy, and so on as ways of identifying relatively stable traits or dispositions they possess.

These qualities make up what I am calling a person's manner. In the context of teaching, however, I restrict the range of the term to good or positive moral and intellectual traits. That is, when speaking of the manner of the teacher, I am referring to the moral and intellectual virtues possessed by that teacher unless there is a notation to the contrary.³ Among the virtues are those identified by Sockett⁴ and others, including courage, honesty, caring, fairness, friendship, justice, openmindedness, and so forth.

Although there have been appeals to attend to the moral agency of teachers, by philosophers of education, psychologists, and other educational theorists,⁵ we hear little about the careful development of a teacher's manner as part of a program of professional teacher preparation. There is a sense, not altogether bad, that a teacher's moral constructions are his or her own business—save when they offend public decency and become apparent on school grounds. In contrast, it has long been a public expectation that teachers would not only be morally decent and upright persons, but that they would be examples to their students of what is meant by moral decency. In other words, we have long invested moral significance to the act of teaching but have done little to promote moral sophistication in teaching, believing somehow that such matters will take care of themselves if the teacher is a morally decent person. In distinguishing the manner of the teaching from its method, I seek to open up some conceptual space where we might more carefully attend to the moral qualities of teachers, while also attending to their sophistication in teaching children to do such things as read, write, and calculate.

Method is different from manner in that it is action undertaken to accomplish some instructional end, some planned or purposeful change in a learner's thinking or conduct. Method, typically in the plural form, *methods*, occupies much of the professional training to become a teacher, as well as a fair amount of the training one receives in staff development initiatives provided to certified and employed teachers. It is often regarded as the *sine qua non* of teacher education, looming far larger than matters of style or manner. It is not too surprising that method would occupy so privileged a position in teacher education, as it is perceived as the very means of fulfilling the purpose of teaching: To convey something of value to the heart, mind or hands of another. Manner and style appear somehow incidental to this work, and often find a place in it only to the extent they can show how their presence, in some form or another, enhances method.

There it is. Method, Style and Manner. Method encompasses the strategies, techniques and devices one brings to the act of conveying an idea, skill, fact, or insight to another. Style describes the personal attributes one brings

to the activity of teaching. Manner refers to the moral qualities of the person. Seems simple enough, but chances are that the alert reader has a few pointed questions, such as how I can so neatly separate the personal attributes of style from the moral qualities a person possesses, or whether I am being sufficiently alert to how style and manner influence method. Good questions, deserving of answers. To obtain the answers, we have to move onto slightly more difficult ground.

Universalizing Method and Manner, But Not Style

If a method is a good one, there is a sense that all ought to possess it. If a manner is a good one, there is a sense that all ought to possess it. But what about a style? Are there good and bad styles in teaching, such that all teachers ought to have the good ones and avoid the bad ones? Yes, I suppose there are good and bad styles, but there is also a great deal of latitude here. That is, it is possible that a teacher who does not generally hug or draw students near may be an excellent teacher. At the same time, one can easily imagine that a teacher who does hug is also a good teacher. A similar point might be made about humor. Should a teacher who seldom cracks a joke be kept from a career in teaching because such a style is deficient? I think not.

This last example goes to the heart of placing style an equal footing with manner and method. It is vital, I believe, to acknowledge the place of style of teaching, and to permit variation in style. Teachers are entitled to a fairly wide latitude in personality, so long as these differences are not found to be harmful to student learning. As such, features of a personality are not what I would call "candidates for universalization." That is, we do not, or perhaps more accurately, should not, say that being humorous is a better style than being humorless, and that therefore all teachers should be humorous. Rather we allow for personality differences in teaching, accepting them as a feature of what it means to be a human being.

Method and manner are different from style, in that they are candidates for universalization. When Hugh Sockett⁶ advocates for the virtues of honesty and courage, he intends that these virtues will be characteristic of all teachers, clearly implying that those who do not possess them are less competent as teachers. When Nel Noddings⁷ argues for the importance of caring in teaching, she does not leave the impression that she is prepared to accept that some teachers may have it while others do not and that's just the way it is. Both Sockett and Noddings, and most moral theorists with whom I am familiar, argue for the extension of their conception of the moral good to all. Much the same may be said for method. Upon finding methods that work, such as offering praise or allowing wait time following complex questions, we act to universalize the methods, to say that

everyone ought to employ these methods (with the appropriate *ceteris paribus* clauses attached, of course). Thus forms of method or manner are candidates for universalization, in the sense that if we assert that it is good for some to have these forms, it is better if all possessed these forms.

Why is this matter of candidacy for universalization important here? Because it marks a line between a teacher who is shaped and formed by personal attributes and a teacher who is shaped by what is morally good and what works in conveying something to learners. Locating this line and learning to cross back and forth over it offers an opportunity to become not only an effective teacher, but an authentic teacher. Effectiveness and authenticity are the critical constituents in teaching excellence. Indeed, I want to take this claim a step further to suggest that when we observe really good teaching—virtuoso teaching—what we are observing is a teacher who has cultivated a harmonious and synergistic interaction among method, style, and manner. We have, in other words, encountered a teacher who has accepted and learned to make use of his or her personal attributes, who employs a repertoire of methods that are effective and cohere this style, and who has cultivated a manner profoundly relevant to the activity of teaching. This contention will be more thoroughly explored in a moment. Here I want to say a bit more about style in relation to method and manner.

More on Style

Thus far I have referred to style as personality differences, with examples such as being generally happy, being serious minded, being funny, and so forth. While style includes such attributes, it also touches upon something deeper than common, everyday personality differences. When Parker Palmer writes in *The Courage to Teach*⁸ that his guiding question is “Who is the self that teaches?” much of his answer points to what I call style. (As one reads Palmer carefully, one finds a mixing of manner and style, but I take much of what he discusses as a matter of style.) He refers often to what he calls the teacher’s “inner landscape,” and is clearly fond of the aphorism, “We teach who we are.”

Palmer is concerned with much of the spiritual character of self and teaching, but the inner landscape could be something less ethereal. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a case in point, helping us to see that people are different in relation to whether they are introverted or outgoing, whether they are prone to judge the world or accept it for what it is, and so on. A recent work, *The Enneagram Intelligences*,⁹ presents an elaborate conception of personal characteristics, particularly as they are manifest in classroom teachers. Another recent work, *Pedagogy: The Question of Impersonation*,¹⁰ addresses how the personal becomes manifest in pedagogy. My sense is that these works are

attempting to nudge our understanding so that we might see that teaching is a very personal endeavor, as well as an endeavor requiring traits and skills that are possessed by all who would refer to themselves as teachers.

Take, for example, a teacher's contention that her teaching cannot be understood in the absence of acknowledging that she is a woman, or an African-American woman, or a woman born or reared in poverty. Here we touch on the matter of a person's identity and how this sense of identity becomes manifest in a style—a way of approaching the world and acting in it. To what extent are we prepared to acknowledge that one's personal history bears on who and what one is, and that this history may, will, or should affect the teacher that one is (or is becoming)?

We have, I think, underplayed the importance of style in our studies of teaching, or we have confounded style with manner—with the moral and intellectual qualities we deem it desirable for all teachers to have. My intent in separating style from manner, and from method, is as noted previously: To create some conceptual space for the personal differences among us, and to permit us to take such differences carefully into account as we "construct" ourselves as teachers. The failure to look attentively at one's style, or to dismiss or impugn it because it does not seem "suited" to some idealized conception of what a good teacher is like, leads to a form of inauthentic teaching that is difficult for the teacher to sustain and problematic for the learners who must somehow get along with a teacher whose method, style and manner are of out "tune" with one another.

Though not a candidate for universalization, style must have an accommodating relationship with method and manner, just as they must have an accommodating relationship with style. To recall a point made just a moment ago: Virtuoso teaching is found among those teachers who have achieved a harmonious and synergistic connection among method, style and manner. This point is elaborated in the next section.

How Method, Style and Manner Cultivate Character

There is a pervasive belief among educators that traits, such as moral traits, are picked up by learners as a result of being around teachers who possess these traits. This view gives a position of exceptional power and privilege to modeling as a means for imparting moral and intellectual dispositions. Often as a result of our profound belief in the power of modeling, we set moral guidelines for teachers, stipulating what behavior is appropriate and inappropriate when teachers are in view of their students. While I do not wish to contest the importance of modeling,

I do want to argue that it is too simple a view of how teachers cultivate the moral discernment of their students.

I am currently engaged in a three year research project that is attempting to illuminate how 11 teachers in two different schools foster or impede the development of moral virtue in their students. We began this endeavor believing, as many Anglo-American ethicists believe, that virtuous conduct is acquired by being around persons who are virtuous. To our surprise, however, we found teachers using a variety of methods to foster morally praiseworthy conduct by their students—without themselves exhibiting this conduct. It is not that the teachers in this study lacked virtue (at least not so far as we are able to ascertain), but that they set expectations for and specifically called on students for virtuous conduct many times a day, without themselves demonstrating or modeling this conduct.¹¹ These teachers were clearly aware of what they were doing, and if asked, on viewing a video tape of their teaching, whether they intended to make the moves they did, they almost always responded in the affirmative.

The teachers were not able to describe these methods in detail or develop categories in which they might logically be grouped, but if asked whether a particular move on their part was part of a pattern to encourage the development of morally praiseworthy conduct on the part of their students, they again responded affirmatively. What surprised us at the time, but in hindsight is in fact not so surprising, is that the teachers in this study devoted considerable care and attention to setting up moral communities in their classrooms and encouraging moral conduct on the part of individual students.

Another surprise, this one not so obvious in hindsight, is that the teachers we judged to be quite good at these endeavors were excellent managers of their classrooms, and extremely proficient at attending to subject matter studies and the development of higher level cognitive skills. So fascinating was this finding that it led two members of the research team to speculate that attention to virtuous conduct provides a powerful means for deft classroom management.¹² That is, teachers who intentionally set out to develop moral communities and to encourage morally good conduct by students have classrooms that informed observers would describe as beautifully managed, highly proficient settings for accomplishing educational activities.

As we spoke to these teachers about their work, particularly as we viewed with them video tapes of their teaching, we found something else. These teachers were aware of their individual styles as teachers, and had made self-conscious efforts to work within the ranges permitted by their personal styles. They would say such things as, “I’m not very funny, and I would like to be, but I have fun as a

teacher by doing . . .”, or “I may be too tough on these youngsters, because I am a no-nonsense kind of person, but I try hard to show them that I care deeply that they become good students—I think they are able to see this in me. I hope so.” Again and again, teachers would comment on aspects of their style, such as: “I repeat things too much.” — “I spend too much time with troublemakers.” — “I never seem to be able to do this for my own children, but I’m pretty good at it with the kids in my classroom.” — “I know I lose my cool when they do that; it just frosts me to see students behave that way. I try not to let it get to me.” It became increasingly obvious to us that these teachers were very aware of their personal traits and characteristics, which they accepted, found delight in, learned to suppress, or figured out how to enlarge, or simply learned to live with.

In looking back on these episodes with the teachers, observing their video tapes, reading over the coded text of our interviews with them, and discussing our thoughts with them, we have found it particularly illuminating to speculate on the integration of method, style, and manner in teaching. What keeps jumping off the pages of data and reels of tape is that the teachers we think are exceptional at conveying virtue are also superb classroom managers, excellent instructors in content and subject matter areas, and have considerable insight into who they are, what they are about as teachers, and what kind of place they want their classrooms to be. We do not always find ourselves supportive of or in agreement with what these teachers aspire to or how they characterize themselves, but we cannot deny the seamlessness with which they have developed a manner, method, and style that shows up as virtuoso teaching in classrooms.

Given the way I have framed these early findings from our research, you may infer that I am suggesting that a considered interest in morally praiseworthy settings and student conduct is a considerable advantage to a teacher, for both management and academic instruction. I am indeed suggesting that such a relationship obtains. I am also suggesting that a teacher need not be a paragon of virtue in order to be effective at fostering virtuous conduct in students; however, the manner of the teacher cannot be too discrepant with the methods employed, else the teacher risks being inauthentic, a state likely to be soon discovered by his or her students. What is fascinating about it all is how manner, method, and style appear to touch one upon the other, and what follows from bringing them into harmony one with the other. The teachers who do this are not only the best moral educators we have encountered, they are the best teachers of content, and the best managers of their classrooms. No small feat to describe in three little words: Method, Style, and Manner.

Endnotes

1. The symposium topic is "The Impact of the Moral on Teacher Education," with paper presentations by Hugh Sockett, Barbara Stengel, Alan Tom, and the present author, with critical reaction by Nel Noddings.
2. Alfred North Whithead, The Aims of Education, in *The Aims of Education and Other Essays* (NY: 1929, 1967); James W. Garrison, Style and the Art of Teaching, in J. W. Garrison & Anthony G. Rud, Jr., Eds., *The Educational Conversation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 41-60; David Hanson, The Moral Importance of Teacher's Style, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 25 (5), 397-421.
3. Users of the English language make a similar move when speaking of teaching methods. When there is no qualifier the term refers to good, effective, successful, or positive methods. That is, when the term 'method' or 'methods' is employed in the context of classroom teaching and is used without qualifier, we understand the term as referring only to good method(s). I am adopting the same linguistic convention for the term 'manner'.
4. Hugh Sockett, *The Moral Base for Teacher Professionalism* (NY: Teachers College Press, 1993).
5. Cite Greene, Hansen, Martin, Noddings, Strike, In the psychology literature, one finds a great deal of useful literature around the topic of moral development; see xxx. Among other theorists writing on this topic, see Goodlad, Phillip Jackson et al, Kevin Ryan, Wynne
6. In *The Moral Base for Teacher Professionalism*.
7. Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1992.
8. Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998.
9. Janet Levine, *The Enneagram Intelligences* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1999).
10. Jane Gallop, Ed., *Pedagogy: The Question of Impersonation*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995.
11. The methods used by teachers to foster virtuous conduct on the part of their students is described in Gary D Fenstermacher, On the Concept of Manner and Its Visibility in Teaching Practice, a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, April 19, 1999, Montreal, Canada.
12. Virginia Richardson and Catherine Fallona, Classroom Management as Method and Manner, a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, April 19, 1999, Montreal, Canada.