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Humanism in Teaching

Kenneth VanderMeulen
Western Michigan University

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HUMANISM IN TEACHING

In the past decade we have seen the number of research studies in the teaching of reading grow at an astonishing rate. We have seen many new devices and mechanical approaches to reading put on the market in recent years. We have also witnessed the proliferation of tests and measurement instruments to help make teachers “accountable” for amounts of reading growth that could be seen on a scale and divided into units. And, we have become aware that discussions about teaching reading have begun to include computer-words, mathematical terms, physical science terms, and newly coined terms especially designed for the “science” of teaching reading.

It seems to be time for the teachers to step back from what they are busily engaged in every day, and look at the whole scene of children in school and those charged with their initial, intermediate, and secondary education. If the trend toward viewing teachers as scientists in laboratories continues in the present direction, it will be to the exclusion of the important picture that each teacher must hold of herself or himself, as a person committed to the great humanistic endeavor of teaching children to realize their infinite potential as adults.

We must remind ourselves frequently that teachers are examples of appreciation of beauty in what is being read, examples of strength of character in making decisions, examples of cheerfulness, of positive approach, of curiosity about the surrounding world. Teaching reading is giving students a more generous portion of personal development than one could possibly have without it, and that is not done through treating the individuals as “organisms” responding to printed “stimuli.”

Therefore, as risky as it may sound, we propose that all teachers regard themselves as artists, developing the members of each class to the highest degree possible through the sensitive yet powerful *art* of teaching. Twenty years ago, Gilbert Highet wrote *The Art of Teaching*, a book with the high purpose of inculcating this feeling in all his readers; teaching is an improvable art that defies measurement by anyone’s ruler. We agree, and find the self-image invigorating and stimulating.

Kenneth VanderMeulen
Editor