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## *In My Opinion*

### WE ARE NOT "BORN" TEACHERS

How many times have we heard the statement "Teachers are born, not made"? Recently a similar statement was made by a government official. He was implying, I believe, that additional education, training, hard work, and personal sacrifice do little to improve the ability of teachers.

I reject this view, for several reasons. First, I believe our actions and decisions play a vital role in determining our destinies. Second, if I were to accept this statement concerning teachers I would be compelled to accept a similar view of electricians, athletes, and lawyers. Third, I would have given up teaching after one year.

Not every warm, humane person is qualified to teach the life sciences, as some science educators believe. When I remember teachers I have known and respected and when I observe teachers as they set the stage for learning to occur in their classes, several qualities come to mind. Good teaching requires high intelligence and a special knowledge of the subject being taught. The good teacher has the skills necessary for questioning and problem-solving and can establish an environment that encourages inquiry. If a person has the intelligence, knowledge, and skills and is also a humane, honest, open person who likes to assist others, and if he works hard, he *may* then become an excellent teacher.

It is true that we are the result of our genetic inheritance and past experiences; thus there *are* limits upon the choices we can make and the kind of future that will result. But these limits are not absolute. Within these limitations, and sometimes by transcending them, we can all become better teachers. (Mourning our mistakes does no good; it only results in wasting the present.)

The statement "Teachers are born, not made" gives support to Aristotle's dialectic: the notion that all things are paired as opposites. Thus we could consider that any venture that is not a success must be a failure. This implies that good teaching, like good art or the successful practice of medicine, is an absolute. This is simply not the case.

At the start of each academic year I am imbued with fresh enthusiasm. We all are. And this is neither a messianic hope nor a vague romanticism. If we are willing to read the new literature, redesign old laboratory investigations, study and make use of some of the new technology, and recommit our lives to helping people learn, we can all be better teachers.

*The Editor*