

Letters to the Editor



Psychologist Nobel Laureates

Dear Editor:

I want to quibble with your inclusion of Georg von Békésy with Roger Sperry and Herbert Simon (July/August 1994 *Observer* in the preface to the Sperry obituary). Von Békésy is one of nine contributors to psychology who have received the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine but whose primary identity and/or work was in biology; the others are Pavlov, Sherrington, Eccles, Frisch, Lorenz, Tinbergen, Wiesel, and Hubel. I don't see how his claim is better than any of theirs. I believe that their involvement in the development of psychology should be acknowledged, but the title of Nobel Laureate psychologist should be restricted to Sperry and Simon. All were discipline-spanners, but only Sperry and Simon moved into psychology, identified with it, and contributed to its advance.

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Stetson and Sperry

Dear Editor:

In his fine appreciation of Roger Sperry in the July/August *Observer*, Robert Doty refers to Sperry's "indebtedness to his young professor of psychology at Oberlin, R. H. Stetson."

Stetson was a first-rate psychologist and a master teacher from all accounts, but young he was not, not by the time Sperry studied under him. Stetson was born in 1872, earned his PhD at Harvard in 1901, was Head of the Department of Psychology at Oberlin from 1909-1939, and became Emeritus in 1939. At that time he became Director of Oberlin's Oscillograph Laboratory which was devoted to the study of motor movement.

The nature and controls of movement were Stetson's lifelong preoccupation and most of his research was devoted to

getting at the fine grain of movement, both topographic and "twitches." At the turn of the century his very detailed studies on rhythm helped clarify the difference between ballistic movement and what he called "slow tension movements." By the mid-1920s he had moved to the study of speech movements in what he called "motor phonetics." With the advent of that wonderful invention, the oscilloscope, he was finally able to study the very finest articulatory movements of speech.

It would have been very natural for Sperry to be infected by Stetson's functionalist preoccupation with action as expressed in movement at the time Sperry took his Masters in 1937. Sperry ultimately worked at a different level than Stetson, but the problem of the "why" of movement, from his work with Weiss and Lashley through his split-brain discoveries, was surely set for him by his association with Stetson.

Stetson wrote an excellent general psychology textbook after he retired. It was written for superior students, and from it one can get a good sense of the kind of person Sperry was associated with in his formative years in psychology: a genuine experimentalist, and a theorist with a philosophical bent.

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The Editor welcomes your letters to the Editor

Submit typewritten letters of up to 300 words in paper form and, if possible, on computer diskette: DOS (5.25" or 3.5" diskette) or Macintosh (3.5" diskette). Indicate which word processor you used or, ideally, save as an ASCII or text file.

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who came to us with our problem. "What seems to be the nature of the problem?" "What might be some likely causes of the problem, based on what I know about myself, and the situation?" "What kinds of things might I do to solve the problem?" These questions speak to the "expertise" aspect of mentoring.

Avoid the "Negativity Trap"

But reflect for a moment on our role as a mentor to others. Sharing our expertise is important, but we usually do our best work when we draw on the "attitudinal" aspect of mentoring—by encouraging others and reminding them of their capabilities and positive qualities.

Sometimes we can get caught in a "negativity trap"—blaming ourselves or blaming our students. When this happens, it's important to remember to serve ourselves as well as we would serve others—tuning into our strengths and positive qualities. Encouragement and acceptance can produce the same pay-offs for ourselves as they do for others!

Conclusion

Self-mentoring can optimize our enjoyment of teaching and keep us "alive" in the classroom as we mature in our profession. If you're not already doing it, give it a try!

Recommended Readings

- Angelo, T.A., & Cross, K.P. (1993). *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Davis, B.G. (1993). *Tools for Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lowman, J. (1984). *Mastering the Techniques of Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Marky Lloyd is professor of psychology at Georgia Southern University. She is currently president of APA's Division Two (Teaching of Psychology). She is the author of *Adolescence* (1985) and co-author (with Wayne Weiten) of *Psychology Applied to Modern Life* (1994).