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I Am Part of All That I Have Met
(Tennyson's "Ulysses")

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I graduated with a BA in sociology from Indiana University in 1971, and received my MA and PhD degrees in physiological psychology from Georgia State University in 1972 and 1974, respectively. In 1975, after completing postdoctoral training at Yerkes Regional Primate Research Center, I accepted my first and only teaching position at Morris Brown College, one of the six colleges that make up the Atlanta University Center (AUC), the largest consortium of historically black colleges in the world. I was hired as an assistant professor of education and psychology and am now professor of psychology.

The highlights of my career include developing and chairing the Department of Psychology at Morris Brown College, designing and acquiring funding to support several research and research mentoring programs, and being associated with highly creative and prolific faculty and students. Our research mentoring programs have produced an extraordinary number of African American students who have presented and published research and who have earned advanced degrees in psychology and related fields. For these efforts, and with a lot of help from my friends (many have papers in this volume), I became a Fellow of the Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP) in 1990 and received STP's Robert S. Daniel Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2001.

My Early Development as a Teacher

I developed gradually from student to researcher to teacher while learning from expert mentors along the way, and am now a combination of all who have taught me and those whom I have taught. This metamorphosis is the beauty of our profession. We research, learn, and share what we learn with our students and other teachers. On my wall for most of my career, and now the title of this paper, is the line from Tennyson's "Ulysses" that reflects my life: "I am part of all that I have met" (Thrilling & Bloom, 1973).

I decided to attend the university only after becoming the widow of Airman Bernard Stahl in 1965. The death of my childhood sweetheart left me devastated and directionless until I decided to apply to Indiana University. I thought that this experience would redefine my life for the next four years, but I received a disturbing letter stating that I had not been accepted, which left me wondering why and what would become of me. Upon investigation, I discovered that I had been on a non-college track in high school. Courses in art, sewing, and piano, taken to

prepare me for my anticipated role of wife and mother, were not sufficient for the university. For several weeks, this failure, among my other losses, was disheartening. However, a second letter soon arrived with a probationary acceptance to Indiana University. To this day, I thank the person who gave me the second chance to begin the rest of my life anew.

Those first college courses in sociology and psychology opened my eyes to a whole new world of learning that was much broader and more diverse than I had ever imagined. Although I majored in sociology, I took several laboratory courses in experimental psychology and found that I thoroughly loved them. At the same time, I became discouraged that much of what I was learning in sociology was based on naturalistic observation and correlation. I was also naïve enough to think that all of the variables that influence behavior could be controlled in the psychology laboratory. My attempt at doing a sociology experiment in a psychology laboratory involved requiring pigeons to peck a key in order to open a window to see other pigeons. This work resulted in my first publication with my lab partner, Robert O'Brien, and Professor Peter Hanford (Stahl, O'Brien, & Hanford, 1973). And, while I was learning about animal operant conditioning in the laboratory, psychologist Joseph Zimmerman was teaching me about applying those concepts to behavior modification in many settings. I still use hands-on active learning and behavior modification techniques when teaching students in the classroom and in the laboratory.

My early development as a student and future teacher was more complicated than I could have anticipated. I had to change considerably during my undergraduate years before developing the confidence necessary to consider graduate school. As an undergraduate, I was extremely shy and was earning just Bs and Cs. When I discovered that I needed at least a B average to go to graduate school, I wasn't sure that I could do it. Sociology professors Carl Wagoner and Priscilla Crawford sensed my insecurities and boosted my self-confidence tremendously as they taught me to accomplish intellectual tasks that turned me into a successful life long learner. Most importantly, they showed me a respect that I had never before experienced. I attempt to emulate these two grand teachers by paying attention to what each student brings to the classroom, encouraging them to set high standards for themselves, and teaching them how to reach their goals. I try my best never to underestimate any shy student.

It wasn't until months after receiving my PhD that I decided to teach. In graduate school, I was learning to become a research psychologist. I had no formal education for teaching. However, I now realize that the informal education I received from those who mentored me, including my dissertation advisor Paul Ellen and doctoral students (especially William C. Aitken, Jr.), gave me an excellent grounding. In graduate school, Bill methodically taught me every laboratory procedure from stereotaxic surgery to operant conditioning. I still attempt to replicate his focused attention to detail, his demonstrations, and his modeling techniques when I prepare students for work in the animal laboratory.

Paul was always challenging students with new ways of thinking about research. He used a type of Socratic Method, which often drove us nuts, but he always seemed to direct us to the solution. He showed a genuine respect for my research ideas and in addition to my dissertation research, he allowed me to carry out my own experiments. It was also a great ego-booster that he allowed me to take first authorship on all of our publications together. He gave me the courage to become a researcher.

Before taking my first faculty position, I signed on for a post doctoral position and gained so much more than research experience. My mentor, psychologist Al Pieper, taught me how to prepare continuation grant applications. These experiences gave me the courage to write my own infrastructure grant proposal the summer before I began my first teaching position. Dean Willie F. Payne, at Morris Brown College, called and invited me to write the proposal to fund the research courses and laboratories he wanted me to develop in order to start an undergraduate psychology program at his college. This opportunity was perfect for me. I would become a teacher, would have my own psychology laboratories, and students who would love research.

My early development as a teacher may be atypical: I lost my husband, went to college to keep myself occupied, was invited to teach at Morris Brown College, and found that it suited me. However, there are many new teachers in analogous situations: Graduate students plan on a career in research or private practice and, without any preparation for teaching, become college professors. Perhaps young teachers reading this essay, who also developed into their role by “serendipity” (Beins, 2005), who just “...drifted into it,” (McKeachie, 2005), or crashed into it like I did, will gain some degree of encouragement from my story.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

My dream was to set up psychology laboratories where students would learn the joy of research, a dream that required computerized operant conditioning chambers, animal mazes, and equipment for human experiments. However, at Morris Brown College, all I was given was an empty room and as the only experimental psychologist in an education department, I had no research colleagues. At this time, I read the motto for Atlanta University (Bacote, 1969): “I will find a way or I will make one.” Those words have stayed with me until they now represent me.

I started writing research, mentoring, and infrastructure grant proposals until, at one point, I had too many funded projects to handle alone. That is when I started inviting faculty, graduate students, and post doctoral students to share in the research. This additional supervision made it possible to involve students from other AUC colleges. Eventually, the laboratory became a reality and I had the research mentoring program about which I had dreamed.

In order to make this dream a reality, I needed help from colleagues and at the AUC consortium many cooperative discipline-related ventures existed. However, Morris Brown College did not yet have a psychology department. So, I had to make it a point to meet people

and to ask them for help. My first local psychology colleagues were Stephen Levine and Margaret Weber-Levine. Steve and Marge helped me set up the equipment in my first laboratories, and we worked together on a proposal that funded a center-wide research mentoring program that Marge still directs (National Institute of Mental Health Career Opportunities in Research). In addition, Isabella Finkelstein invited me to participate in a center-wide Minority Access to Research Careers program funded by the National Institute of General Medical Sciences. Both Marge and Isabella provided the funds for honors students from their programs to participate in research in the Morris Brown College psychology laboratories.

In the late 1970s, I was the first psychologist in the AUC to receive a research grant through Joe Johnson, who directed the AUC-Minority Biomedical Research Support Program (MBRS). Prior to this grant, MBRS had not funded psychologists. This grant was just the beginning of a long series of biomedical research grants involving collaboration with faculty at all AUC undergraduate colleges, Georgia State University, Emory University, and the University of Georgia. By recruiting additional research faculty, I was able to expand our research mentoring efforts to include research on achievement (with Henrie Turner Treadwell), funded by the National Institute of Education; research on recovery from brain injuries, funded by the National Institute on Mental Health; animal drug abuse research and social behavioral neuroscience research (with Fernando González), funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the National Science Foundation Center for Behavioral Neuroscience (CBN); and human factors research funded by the Army Research Office and directed by Fernando González. Clearly, faculty at small colleges can compete successfully for research funds to do the research they love and to provide a wonderful environment for undergraduate research mentoring (See also Stahl, 2005).

My list of colleagues outside of Atlanta grew tremendously when I joined the Society for Teaching of Psychology, which gave me access to a variety of philosophies about teaching and techniques that I could use in the classroom and laboratories. My exposure to state-of-the-art teaching practices was further enhanced when I traveled to Joe Palladino's 1988 Mid-America Conference for Teachers of Psychology. I still attend several teaching conferences a year.

The grants and programs in which I participated represent a lot of hard work, exceptional assistance from colleagues, and the development of life-long friendships. Finding the time to write grant proposals is difficult for faculty at small colleges because they have heavy teaching loads. However, once I started to receive funding, I no longer experienced conflicts between research and teaching because I was teaching research. It was that simple. For most of my career, I have spent approximately 50 percent of my time teaching in the classroom and laboratories and the other 50 percent writing grant proposals, doing research, writing for publication, and mentoring students. Although there were times that I had three or four teaching

and research grants simultaneously and felt a bit overwhelmed, I did not hesitate to ask for help from colleagues. Thus, I experienced neither the extremely high teaching loads nor the financial trials and tribulations that faculty often experience at small colleges.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

My teaching philosophy and style are a combined function of my personality and values and enhanced by my educational background and techniques I have learned from mentors over the years. I have changed tremendously over time and the grades of my students have improved likewise. I first noticed the change in student performance when a department chairperson asked each faculty member to turn in grade distributions for classes, but not because we had grade inflation. To the contrary, due to the college's mission to allow nearly anyone to try college level work, we needed to monitor grades to make sure we were pacing students appropriately in order to modify our sequencing of courses, and to provide tutorial assistance when necessary. However, I was surprised when I went back several years and looked at my grades. I found that the longer I had been teaching, the fewer Ds I had in my grade book. Puzzling over these few Ds, it occurred to me that I was so determined to see these students learn the material and succeed that I had unconsciously developed a philosophy that "If you can earn a D, you can work a little harder and earn a C." I constantly monitored students and changed my approach to my classes as we moved along. While attempting to keep up the pace and cover the material preplanned for the course, I began class each day with some knowledge of where I had lost a few students along the way and tried different approaches to bring them up to speed. This strategy is easier, and perhaps more necessary, in research courses than in survey courses because every new research topic is related closely to what went before and some topics become incomprehensible for students who fall behind.

My intense desire to see my students succeed required that I learn many new approaches for the classroom. I had a rough beginning in my first classes. At Indiana University and Georgia State University, I was strongly influenced by several radical behaviorists (remember them?). As a student, I learned about "The Keller Plan," (Keller, 1968) and Holland and Skinner's programmed instruction (Holland & Skinner, 1961). We were testing the Keller Plan at Georgia State University and I attempted programmed instruction before the higher level programming languages were available. Both of these approaches were time consuming to develop and quite frustrating. My strong behaviorist background stays with me today; however, I found that I preferred one-on-one contact with students in the classroom and laboratory.

When I first began teaching, I truly believed that if I did my part in the classroom and paced students appropriately through the material, they would all learn it. I totally overlooked other important variables such as motivation and prior knowledge. I was at a liberal-admissions college trying to teach students who barely graduated from high school in the same classroom

with valedictorians and salutatorians. At first, it was a challenge just to develop classroom presentations and activities that would be understood by the weakest student without losing the interest of the very well prepared student (and visa versa). It took a few years of trial and error learning, and tricks I learned from others, but I believe I now have a talent for tuning in to what each student brings to the class, designing creative ways to fill in some gaps with the weaker students while providing activities that allow well-prepared students to experience psychology at a higher level. No class is the same; unpredictable situations happen daily. I have to be ready for them. I now realize that each semester, a few students, especially those who have weak academic backgrounds and those who work full time (or both), merely want to pass the course. However I believe that each student can improve on their past performance and I still don't give up on those D students.

My personal learning curve for improving both my teaching and research has been long and drawn out and doesn't seem to be leveling off yet. It is a continuing process. My research is not as good as Paul Ellen's and my teaching is not as good as Bill Aitken's. Just as I have never been able to control all of those variables in the laboratory (those rats are smarter than you think!), I still am a bit shy about giving speeches and I am not the smoothest lecturer on campus. That doesn't matter so much anymore! Long ago, I stopped measuring my achievements relative to others' achievements. Now, all that matters are the achievements of my students—and they are doing well. My rewards are the smile on a student's face when he says "Thanks for helping me pass your class!" or the welcomed telephone call from a former student who says "Graduate school is soooooooooo hard and I am soooooooooo glad you made us learn the APA format!" That is how I now know that what I am doing is working for them.

Advice for New Teachers

After reading these essays, you undoubtedly have found that each teacher is quite unique, providing you with a few new ways for approaching a career in teaching. I believe that there are certain ideas that, if applied during the early years of teaching, will not only help you find your own uniqueness, but will accelerate your development so that you are less stressed and can enjoy the teacher more than you might otherwise. Here are a few of these ideas.

- What is your passion? Figure that out, integrate it into your teaching, and you have the main ingredient for a fulfilling career.
- Identify the type of institution that will offer you the environment you need to thrive. Many institutions have broadened their view of scholarship to include teaching (Boyer, 1990).
- Follow Charles Brewer's (2002) Ten Commandments of Teaching, especially: "Be patient with your students and yourself."

- Use the resources available to you and share with others when you find a particular method to be successful. Check resources in this volume and the STP's Web site <<http://www.teachpsych.org>>. Read both the journal *Teaching of Psychology* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (for education news, due dates for grant proposals, conferences, etc.)
- Be approachable to students and make sure they know that you are available to help them.
- Ask for help when you feel overwhelmed. Although teachers love to give advice, they will also take a class for you, give a test for you, or give you one of their tests, in a pinch. Just ask. We like to help. That is why we are teachers.

Final Thoughts

Relax, be yourself, and enjoy the process. Attend teaching conferences and workshops for support and new ideas, and walk up and introduce yourself to others. Many of us, who have contributed to this volume, will be there waiting for you.

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