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When people begin to engage one another, they often depend on some kind of introduction ritual – be it a handshake, high five, fist bump, smile, verbal greeting, or some other way of establishing an acquaintance. Academics tend to present their academic “pedigrees,” as I am about to do. Feel free to skip ahead to the next section! I am currently a Research Professor at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln (UNL) in the Buros Center for Testing. My most recent teaching experiences have been at the graduate level at UNL, where I have taught courses in assessment, ethics, counseling theories, and clinical supervision for the Counseling Psychology program. I completed my PhD in clinical psychology at Fordham University and began a full-time academic career thereafter. Prior to my appointment at UNL, I held faculty appointments at Fordham University, Fairfield University, Le Moyne College, State University of New York at Oswego, and Texas A&M University at Galveston. At SUNY – Oswego, I served as Admissions Coordinator for the graduate programs in the Department of Counseling and Psychological Services from 1993 – 1998; Acting Chair during the summers of 1994, 1995, and 1998; and as Associate Dean of Education from 1998 – 2001. For 4 years at Texas A&M University at Galveston, I was Department Head for an eclectic department of about 25 full-time and about 20 part-time faculty members from far-flung disciplines housed in an academic unit known as the Department of General Academics. In 2003, I was elected a Fellow of the American Psychological Association through Division 2 (Society for the Teaching of Psychology) and also received the Leo D. Doherty Award for Service and Leadership from the Northeastern Educational Research Association. In 2006, I received a Distinguished Reviewer Award from the Buros Institute of Mental Measurements as well as an

Outstanding Service Award from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology for completing a 5-year term as Director of the Office of Teaching Resources in Psychology. In 2008, I was elected a Fellow of the American Educational Research Association. I am currently a licensed psychologist in Nebraska and New York State, and a certified school psychologist in New York State.

My Early Development as a Teacher

Unfortunately, the message that permeated my graduate school experience about teaching suggested that it was not a central identity for clinicians. It could be an incidental one, where one gave short shrift to teaching a few mornings each week and then rushed off to one's real job—often in private practice. Teaching fit the bill for several clinical faculty members in the department in precisely this manner. But it did not work this way for me. Teaching has been my *primary* identity and served as a constant for me across my various positions at diverse institutions. Although I sought licensure as a psychologist in New York, Texas, and Nebraska, I have never used my licenses to establish practices. Rather, I sought licensure in order to bring greater credibility to my teaching as when, for example, I supervise students in fieldwork courses, practica, and internship experiences.

Not surprisingly, in graduate school I had no one whom I considered a teaching mentor. As an undergraduate, however, I valued greatly my relationship with one professor in particular, C. William Huntley. Under his direction I completed my senior honors thesis and under his guidance I first put my toe in the water of academe. My senior research project involved verbal learning of serial lists of nonsense syllables. I presented this work at a regional student research conference. At Dr. Huntley's urging, I

submitted it to the New York State Psychological Association's competition for undergraduate research, where it won an award for a paper judged to be "meritorious for its originality and its contribution to the field of psychology." These experiences cracked the façade of the professoriate and I began to think of teaching as a noble endeavor when done well, and began to visualize it as a possibility in my future.

Although I did not have specific training or mentoring to guide my development, I still wanted to learn to teach effectively. I relied on three things: trial and error, observational learning, and introspection. In trying out new material, I looked for positive student reactions. In some cases, student behaviors indicated their engagement or interest in the new material. These reactions reinforced my efforts. At times, student behaviors suggested confusion or boredom with the new material. These reactions punished my efforts. Observational learning also has played a large role in my development as an effective teacher. At virtually every lecture or presentation that I attend, I notice the process as well as specific techniques used and evaluate their effectiveness. Then I consider whether I could use similar techniques in my classroom. Finally, I used introspection to examine my strengths and weaknesses and developed teaching strategies that capitalize on my strengths. For example, I am a well-organized person in nearly every aspect of my life. In teaching, I know that I can bring a well-developed plan for each class and each semester. Student evaluations consistently rate my organization and preparation extremely high. That said, I often wish I could fly by the seat of my pants from time to time. But spontaneity is not one of my strengths and I have stopped trying to pretend that I can navigate it.

Across the span of my own education, I had a few teachers who, for me, were truly exceptional. They differed from one another on a variety of dimensions, yet they shared a passion for their work that was awe-inspiring. Bundled with their enthusiasm was an appreciation of student differences and a respect for students as learners. Like most everyone, I also experienced a few lackluster teachers. From them I learned a few—possibly unintended—things as well, including the importance of self-reliance and the role of the learner in the teaching/learning equation. I came to believe that I could do good or even very good work in the classroom. Not every class I teach is a winner, by any stretch, but I am thrilled when a class meeting has that special panache wherein even I must admit it went well.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

Thankfully, I have not felt that I needed to sacrifice research or service efforts in order to develop as a teacher. I view teaching as an interpersonal relationship. Activities such as advising students, preparing syllabi, and writing letters of recommendation are extensions of that relationship and I do not construe them as service or scholarship (even broadly defined!). Fortunately, I have found it possible to use teaching as a cornerstone for my own writing and service. For example, I have taken advantage of several opportunities for service that exist within the Society for the Teaching of Psychology. The Society also sponsors several publication outlets including its top-notch journal, *Teaching of Psychology*, which allows one to develop ideas that may have originated within the classroom and bring them to the broader stage of scholarship. In fact, my first sole authored publication appeared in *Teaching of Psychology*. Shortly thereafter, I applied to become a manuscript reviewer. A few years

after that, I was invited to become a Consulting Editor. I believe it is fair to say that teaching promoted my scholarship and opened the door for vital professional service activities.

The down side of viewing teaching as predicated on interpersonal relationships is the extent to which a lack of connection feels like personal failure. I dare say all teachers have experienced sullen students whose recalcitrance is legion. Somehow, these same students seem to create something like a pedagogical magnetic field that draws us towards them. Parker Palmer uses a particularly amusing anecdote to make this point, as he describes a guest lecture he provided, during which he experienced a “Student from Hell” (Palmer, 1998, pp. 43-44). This student sat slouched in the back of the classroom, completely disengaged and disinterested. Like a moth to the proverbial flame, Palmer reports how he was inexplicably drawn to this student, to the exclusion of the other students in the class. When I find myself in similar situations, I have tried to use my head more than my heart. I have met with limited success. Cognitively, I realize that there are some unreachable students. In my communications with non-engaged students, I leave the door open and the light on in case one of these students decides to join us. In my head at least, I realize that I am doing a disservice to the other students if I devote too much energy to wayward ones.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

As a clinician, I have sometimes worked with clients who were mandated to receive therapy. Yet in my view, effective therapy rests on voluntariness—a willingness of the client to confront painful or confusing aspects of one’s experiences and to do so within a safe relationship. Even *mandated* clients cannot be forced to *benefit* from

therapy. Clients retain their autonomy. Some clients choose to participate fully and some do not. The clinician's role remains constant, however, whether the client arrived on his or her own or by legal decree. The same philosophy guides my teaching, because I see both teaching and therapy as being all about interpersonal relationships. The relationship is critical in bringing about positive changes mostly in one member of the dyad—the student or the client. According to several counseling theories, part of the actual work of therapy depends upon the use of empathy to demonstrate “that the therapist has been personally impacted by the experiences of the client” (Hetzel & Kroll, 2006, p. 23). I believe the same can be said of teaching.

It took me a while, but I finally came to realize that teaching and learning are mutual responsibilities in my classroom, too. Teachers teach and learn; students learn and teach. When I started teaching, I tended to assume responsibility for everything that happened in the classroom, including students' achievement in the class. I regarded student failures as my failures. Realistically, of course, one cannot expect to reach all students in every class. Some poor performing students will not respond to any—of many—entreaties. Students have a measure of responsibility for what occurs in their learning, too. Beyond one's own class, some students arrive at college for inexplicable reasons. They may be there at the urging of others. They may be there because they had nothing better to do or because it seemed like the next logical step in their lives. All such persons may become excellent students, inclined to work towards self-improvement. I try to enter every teaching relationship with the idea that this relationship is going to work even though I do not know its nature precisely at the outset. Until I see evidence to the contrary, I assume that students are capable of succeeding in my courses.

As in therapy, much of the work in teaching proceeds on faith. It requires a belief in one's work even when supporting evidence may be sparse or unavailable (Carlson, 2009a; Perlman, McCann, & McFadden, 2008). Even with a steady faith, however, I am buoyed by contacts from former students. It is especially gratifying when a student contacts me many years later and tells me something concrete about the impact of my teaching on his or her life.

Of course, there are numerous frustrations in teaching. I may be my own greatest frustration. When I make a clerical error, such as failing to hit the "submit" button on Blackboard so the e-mail to students never goes out, it is maddening and often has untoward consequences. Some might say that it is these kinds of actions that can make us appear more human to our students, but in my experience it also frustrates or annoys students. I do not doubt that, at some level, they understand and do not believe my actions were intended to create an obstacle for them. Still, an obstacle that could have been avoided is now in their path. It seems that all one can do is attempt to learn from such mistakes and avoid repeating them.

While teaching, I attempt to be both a participant in the process and an observer of the process. As an observer, I take note of such things as levels of student engagement and curiosity. If I hear students sighing a great deal or see them burying their heads in their notebooks taking an abundance of notes, I conclude that they are not especially interested or drawn in by whatever is going on at the time. Nevertheless, many appear to be trying to slog through the session and to avoid missing the key points. At these junctures, I regroup and consider how I can change my approach.

After every class meeting I replay the session in my head and consider what went well and how one or more aspects of the meeting could have been better. I think about what students said, did, or asked at various points and evaluate whether the students' input was handled well. If not, I typically make a note to revisit the concern at the next class meeting, often by relating it to the ongoing content. Sometimes I contact students directly, usually by e-mail, to see whether their concerns received sufficient attention.

Cognitively, I understand formal teaching evaluations very well. Emotionally, however, it is quite another story! On the intellectual side, I view formal assessment of teaching as both formative and summative. Although student evaluations frequently comprise the primary means by which teaching effectiveness is documented officially, one can use these data in more formative ways. I identify the "lowlights" in my evaluations and consider how I might improve student perceptions in those areas. I also do a kind of self-assessment, wherein I answer each of the survey questions and reflect upon the areas in which I might grow. Emotional issues creep in as I scrutinize my evaluations on a more molecular level in the form of individual student responses (anonymous, of course). Even after 20-something years of teaching and uniformly above average ratings, I am wounded by a single student's negative appraisal of my work, for which I know I have given my all. It is part of my ruminative nature to re-process events of the semester and to identify where something may have gone poorly for even one student.

I regard teaching as a never-ending work in progress. With practice, I strive to increase my teaching effectiveness and, so far, I always seem to find some way to try to

do it better next time. Teaching a course for a second or third time is considerably easier than teaching it the first time, but it does not mean there is no preparation needed. I think students would be extremely surprised to learn how much I value and use their input, formal and informal, in making revisions to a course that some teachers might view as already prepped. My revisions frequently involve finding current examples, expanding coverage of a topic, adding a new component, or developing more hands-on learning activities. I continue to learn and to take great comfort in the words of other teachers and find many good ideas in works presented or published by other teachers, usually other teachers of psychology. As I read or re-read their works, I often appreciate their wisdom in novel ways. Another way that I attempt to improve my teaching is to review every issue of the journal, *Teaching of Psychology*, for articles relevant to my teaching and my role as a teacher.

Advice for New Teachers

Bring your “A” game each and every time you teach. Bring your passion, too. Hold the bar high for yourself and your students. Let students know that you believe in their abilities to meet your high expectations. Capitalize on your strengths. Use your sense of humor, especially by laughing at yourself when circumstances call for it.

In their summary of 15 years of teaching tips, Perlman, McCann, and McFadden (2008) stressed the need to be intentional in one’s teaching. “Good teachers plan and are mindful of the decisions they make regarding what they do, and do not do, in their teaching” (p. 31). I believe this idea, too, is critical to becoming a good teacher. One must have a plan for each class session as well as for the entire semester. After all, one would not embark on a journey without a map and a plan for navigating the terrain.

Even with a plan, one might choose or be forced to take an alternate route. Yet one still works towards arriving at the original destination. In teaching, too, we sometimes choose or are forced to modify our plans, but we should not lose sight of the final goal, commonly articulated in our course description and course objectives.

Finally, I would advise new teachers to do their part to preserve academic integrity. Quite possibly, this task is one of the most loathsome responsibilities faculty members must shoulder. It becomes less onerous for me when I frame it more as an advocacy effort. I view the preservation of academic integrity as offering protection for honest, law-abiding students, which accounts for the vast majority of them. Through no fault of their own, good students are placed at a disadvantage when wrongdoers are not held accountable (Carlson, 2009b).

Final Thoughts

Teaching provides many opportunities for all sorts of things to happen—good, bad, and in-between. It comes with its own “restart” button, thanks to the semester structure within which most of us teach. Coupled with the work-in-progress nature of teaching, I feel I have the chance to maximize the good (and minimize the bad) outcomes of teaching. There are not many professions that offer this kind of structure. Fortunately, teaching is one of them!

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