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I was born in Houston, Texas and raised by my maternal grandparents. My grandfather was an immigrant from Hungary and my grandmother was the daughter of a Baptist minister. My passion during my secondary school years was music, playing viola in the high school and All City orchestras. In 1965, I left Texas to study psychology, anthropology, and sociology at Weber State College. I received my B.S. in 1968, and spent the next period of my life flying airplanes for the U. S. Navy. Honorably discharged in 1970, I was accepted into the interdisciplinary graduate program in social psychology at Northwestern University, where I completed an M.A. and Ph.D.

My first teaching job was at Georgetown University. While there, I was offered a chance to conduct applied behavioral science research in Heidelberg, Germany. After 10 years as the director of various research projects for the Human Resources Research Organization, my family and I moved to Spain where I founded a community college for the English-speaking residents living on the island of Mallorca. For the next five years, I served as director of the Community Learning Centre. At this time, I also created a summer camp program for children on Mallorca that I continue to run every July and where several of my students have conducted cross-cultural research (e.g., Balcetis, Dunning & Miller, 2008; Stastny, 2007).

In 1989, I followed my son, who graduated from high school in Mallorca, back to the USA. He began his studies at Northwestern and I spent a year as a visiting professor at the University of Arkansas at Monticello. Since 1990, I have held the position of professor and chair of the Psychology Department at the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK), where I also serve as chair of the Institutional Review Board.

I am a past-president of the Nebraska Psychological Society (NPS), the UNK Chapter of Sigma Xi, and the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association. Currently, I am the special topics editor for the *Journal of Psychological Inquiry*, which publishes undergraduate research, and the coordinator of both the RMPA Wertheimer-Portenier Teaching Conference and the NPS/PERK teaching pre-conference.

My teaching interests include social psychology, cross-cultural psychology, organizational behavior, and environmental psychology. In teaching these courses, I am committed to promoting undergraduate student research as a means for learning critical thinking skills.

I am the fortunate recipient of several teaching awards including the University of Nebraska system award for “Outstanding Teaching and Instructional Creativity,” the UNK Award for Mentoring Undergraduate Research, the Robert S. Daniel Teaching Award from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology, and the 2009 U. S. Professor of the Year Award from CASE/Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

My Early Development as a Teacher

One of my favorite sayings is by Jackie Robinson, who broke the color barrier in baseball. He suggested that our lives are unimportant, except for the influence we have on others. This is certainly one of the greatest joys of teaching—the difference we are allowed to make in the lives of our students.

In my life, three teachers/mentors stand out as having made a real difference in who I have become. The first was my junior high-school orchestra director, Daniel Bristow, who had a B.A. from Julliard and Ph.D. from Columbia. When asked why he taught junior high school, Dan said that it was his last chance to have a real impact on people’s lives. He was a teacher who

inspired us to be better than we thought possible. Gary Carson, my first psychology teacher and mentor at Weber State College, taught me how to become involved in students' lives beyond the classroom and he remains a close friend to this day. It was Gary and his wife LouAnn who took me in and gave me a place to stay when I ran short of money the beginning of my sophomore year. The third is Philip Brickman at Northwestern who taught me that real teaching often happens outside the classroom, in informal settings where ideas can be nurtured, coaxed and molded into clarity. Summer get-togethers at the beach on Lake Michigan were the setting for many a dissertation topic. For whatever success I have had working with students, I owe a large debt of gratitude to these outstanding teachers and the principles by which they lived. I have tried my best to emulate them.

My first teaching experience took place in Dr. Carson's Introductory Psychology course. Our textbook used the life of the sculptor Henry Moore to illustrate Maslow's hierarchy of needs. While I had never heard of Moore, I was well aware of several musicians whose lives, I thought, contradicted Maslow's contention that one had to satisfy lower level needs in order to achieve higher level needs. I asked Dr. Carson if I could conduct a mini-lesson on the subject. Talk about chutzpa! I remember beginning my lesson by asking how many students had heard of Moore. None had. I then asked how many had heard of Mozart. Most had. I used the example of Mozart, who at times couldn't satisfy basic needs for food and adequate shelter, to illustrate my contention that the needs outlined by Maslow were not necessarily hierarchical. The technique worked. I was hooked and knew I wanted to be a college professor, and this "Socratic" method is one I still use to this day.

My earliest formal college teaching experience occurred during graduate school. Northwestern University prided itself on not using graduate teaching assistants in the classroom.

However, in May, 1970, we went on strike along with hundreds of other colleges and universities after students were killed at Kent State during an anti-war protest. At Northwestern, we set up an alternative university program of peace studies that continued to the end of the term. I taught a class on attitude change using Don Campbell's copy *Canvassing for Peace* (1970) by Bob Abelson and Phil Zimbardo. The purpose of the course was to prepare students to work for peace candidates. This experience convinced me of the value of using real-world applications in engaging students in the learning process. The class went well, and my professors noticed, so the next year I was given the opportunity to teach a developmental psychology course to nurses at Northwestern University's Medical Center. Many of the students were older than I, which provided me with two valuable lessons: how to teach non-traditional students, and how to teach a subject for which I had minimal preparation.

Working at Defining Myself as a Teacher

My most notable failure as a teacher occurred during my first semester of teaching and was an example of how much I didn't know about teaching a subject for which I had minimal preparation. I was asked to teach statistics and chose to do so using the Personalized System of Instruction (PSI) method. I was not particularly knowledgeable in either the topic or the teaching method, a fact quickly ascertained by my students. I came away frustrated and disappointed. It was a humbling experience and a good antidote to my young arrogance and unwarranted self-confidence. I learned a healthy respect for the skills and experience of my colleagues and a realization that there was much to learn from others in becoming a good teacher. As a result, the next time I was asked to teach a class outside my area of expertise, I talked at length with colleagues who had taught the course about the importance of the subject, key issues to be covered, and concepts that were confusing to students. I also gathered teaching demonstrations

and exercises to help me make key points and reviewed others' syllabi to discover essential topics to address.

Over time, I have come to believe that good teachers require students to think, to solve problems, to pose questions, and to wonder about the “why” behind the “what” that we know. In his 1901 book *American Traits*, Hugo Munsterberg contrasted the education received in high school with that received at a University. He pointed out that the high school distributes knowledge that has been collected, whereas the university strives to teach the student to take a critical attitude toward all collected knowledge. The high school teaches facts while the university should teach students the methods whereby they can uncover the facts for themselves. My greatest satisfaction as a teacher has been in finding ways to involve undergraduate students in the critical examination and expansion of the knowledge base. I know that some people will say that this is scholarship, not teaching, and that some folks are convinced they are two different things. I am not. To me, they are different words for a very similar process that is at the heart of teaching and learning, the process by which we come to understand that which we didn't understand before.

The Examined Life of a Teacher

In thinking about the teachers whose influence made a difference in my life raises several interesting questions. What makes one teacher more influential than another? What qualities do highly effective and influential teachers possess? What do effective teachers do to engage students so that they learn more, achieve more, reach for more?

I find these questions interesting and to answer them I have done what academics always do—consult the literature (see Buskist, in press). I have also observed other teachers, and most importantly, I have listened to my students.

Harry Kirke Wolfe is arguably one of the most important psychologists and educators of the early 1900s. His impact on the education of a vast number of students is probably matched only by his unfortunate obscurity. Because he did not train graduate students, his legacy has been more indirect than that of some more famous psychologists. Throughout his professional career, he labored diligently at the University of Nebraska to enhance the education of his students, working with them individually in the laboratory. His undergraduate lab ranked third in the nation in producing students who would later attain doctorates. Three of his students who became presidents of APA commented that Wolfe had influenced them more than any other mentor (Benjamin, 1987, p.69). Wolfe received no teaching credit for his lab work and neither did his students. Yet enrollments in his courses continued to mushroom. A student of his once remarked that they were willing to “venture the work for the sake of the zest” (Benjamin, 1999, p. 52).

Like Harry Kirke Wolfe, the greatest joy I have in teaching is the process of mentoring undergraduate research. My earliest experience with undergraduate research took place in 1966 when I was an undergraduate student and Dr. Gary Carson was my mentor. My topic was leadership and conformity. My motivation was to seek a way to resolve a long-standing late-night dispute within my circle of friends using something like evidence instead of opinion. What thrilled me was the creation of new knowledge (Miller, 1967), a thrill I try to encourage with my own students.

During my time at UNK, I have mentored over 200 undergraduate research projects that were presented at regional or national conferences. My students and I have very similar goals—to discover that which we did not know before. We tend to avoid replications and extensions and often take risks in examining little known or at least little written about phenomenon. As a result,

we have published over 20 articles together in professional journals and they have published about 27 articles as sole author, which again highlights the relationship between scholarship and teaching. Many students identify this experience as one of their most significant academic endeavors and I find that my lectures have become enriched with examples drawn from the many undergraduate student research projects that it has been my privilege to mentor. At this point, there are very few topics in my courses where I cannot refer to the results of a student research project to expand students' knowledge of the subject matter. And don't think that that doesn't affect their attention—it can be very exciting to realize that students just like them can contribute to the knowledge base.

Advice for New Teachers

In the preface to *Principles of Psychology*, William James wrote, "In spite of the exclusion of [certain important subjects], the work has grown to a length which no one can regret more than the writer himself" (1890, p. v). During the past twenty years, introductory psychology texts have accelerated this trend, expanding both the number of topics covered and the amount of material devoted to each topic. Many beginning teachers believe that it is their responsibility to fit all of this material into a 15-week semester. It is not. I believe that many things are more important than comprehensive coverage including (a) stimulation of continuing interest in the subject (b) an appreciation of what counts as evidence in scientific inquiry (c) encouragement of critical thinking skills and (d) application of psychological knowledge. So what can the new teacher do to manage the explosion of information in our field?

One strategy for limiting the number of topics is to teach what we know best. This strategy has two advantages: We may communicate our own excitement, which can stimulate continuing interest in our students, and we may be more likely to help students develop critical

thinking skills because our favorite topics are ones in which we have placed more thought. A disadvantage associated with this approach is that it may not provide students with a balanced view of the field, which may limit their interest if our areas of expertise do not overlap with their own. A second teaching strategy would be to try to cover everything provided in the text in a cursory manner. However, this strategy is very likely to prove deficient in engendering an appreciation of how psychological knowledge is created and it gives little time to develop critical thinking skills. A third strategy would be to teach students what they are most interested in learning. Simply by surveying students at the beginning of the course, the instructor could tailor the course to students' interests. This strategy is most likely to stimulate students' continuing interest as well as provide them with real world applications of psychological knowledge. On the other hand, coverage of the field is very likely to be limited, leaving students unprepared for later courses. A fourth strategy, and the one I would recommend, is to encourage student-directed learning outside of class. If students can independently review and process material not covered in class, more material can be learned without sacrificing student interest, critical thinking, or research methodology. To encourage students to be independent learners, teachers can require them to master the material not covered in class through review papers, tests, chapter outlines, and student presentations.

There is no shallow end in teaching. Teaching starts with a bang and, if you do it right, it doesn't end with a whimper. Teaching is one of the few jobs where you are expected to perform immediately while learning how to do it at the same time. To address this challenge there are a number of good books that provide advice to new teachers (Bain, 2004; Filene, 2005; McKeachie, 2005). From these, I have selected a few general principles that I strongly endorse. First, plan your class sessions so that you are able to involve your students actively in the

teaching/learning process; that is, encourage active rather than passive learning. It is better for students to assimilate and digest fifty ideas or concepts during the semester rather than just passively to record several hundred. Second, teach from your own experience, not from someone else's. If you're comfortable and having fun, students will feel it and share your enthusiasm. In each course spell out your expectations for your students in the first class, reiterate them at regular intervals, and stick with them. Students do not deal well with surprises, particularly related to their attainment of grades. Establish high academic standards, including rigorous, but fair, grading criteria. Offer students the support and encouragement they need to meet or exceed those criteria. Finally, share your joy in being a teacher. Demonstrate your enthusiasm for the subject matter, teaching, and students. Take an interest in the students themselves. Develop positive rapport with your students, which makes it more likely that they will attend class and participate in learning activities.

Final Thoughts

In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Professor Dumbeldore says "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities." (Rowling, 1999, p. 333). At my age, I am beginning to look at the choices I have made during my career and what I hope to leave behind. When we reflect on what we have contributed during our time as teachers, it is the impact that we have had on other people, on students, on colleagues, and on members of our community that really counts. Those of us who teach are in a unique position to make a very real difference in the lives of talented, young people, and we must be ever vigilant to retain both the vision and the resources we need to make that difference.

I would like to close with another of my favorite quotes. It is by the Principal, Holy Trinity High School, Charlene Szumilas (1997) who said:

We hope that during their time with us, our students gain an understanding of what it takes to live a worthy life. That they understand what injustice is and will work to correct it. That when they see those less fortunate, they assist them. That they reach out to others in need even when they themselves are struggling. That they give generously of themselves and their talents. Above all, we hope that they help those with whom they come into contact to see the value of an educated heart.

As a teacher, I think my greatest satisfaction comes when I am able to help students see the value of an educated heart.

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