

The JOY of Teaching

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If teaching is to be regarded as a joyous activity, there are several initial biases that must be accepted. The first of these is the insistence that learning is a pleasurable endeavor, despite all of its hardships and despite the discipline necessary to achieve it. We are curious beings, we humans. We want to know! Our capacity for stifling this innate drive for knowledge is strong, but it is not omnipotent. Second, learning and teaching (the two are inextricably related) involve a combination of freedom and discipline. At times one of these characteristics will dominate over the other, depending upon circumstance, personality, and subject matter; but there will remain an unresolved tension between freedom and discipline. That is why there exists the eternal debate over the easy teacher versus the hard teacher, the one who requires much in terms of freedom and the other who requires much in terms of discipline. Third, there is no one way to teach. Pluralism in our attitudes toward teaching and learning is essential. Both of the above mentioned teachers have their virtues. Finally, teaching is a vocation in the classic sense of that word; *vocatio* means "calling." Those who are called to teach, and know it, are fortunate indeed. They are, to paraphrase Stendhal, fortunate to have a passion for a profession.

Plato calls this passion the *pathemata*. It is what binds men and women together, their sufferings, what they care about. It is significant that, from the musings of Kierkegaard in the first half of the nineteenth century to contemporary psychologists like Rollo May, our modern age has been characterized as one of apathy, without passion. Our lack of care for one another is well documented. Its manifestation in the teaching profession at all levels, elementary, secondary and higher education, has reached crisis proportions. A vocation is a passion, a joyous commitment, in this instance, to the mysteries of teaching and learning. How do we transform this knowledge of the passionate, caring teacher into a useful philosophy of teaching, especially a philosophy which expects to be joyous?

The model to which many turn for their sustenance is Plato's teacher, Socrates. He is one of those pivotal figures in history whose life is constantly worth reexamining, in much the same way he admonished his pupils to constantly reexamine theirs. Socrates is, however, a curious model for the university professor. He never published a single word. He did not teach in any official capacity. His classroom was the marketplace of Athens.

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Surely he would have been denied tenure at any of our major universities! What, then, is so valuable in his activity as a teacher? Two things. Socrates insisted that knowledge could not be separated from wisdom. Together these are the characteristics of virtue. Simply put, the teacher must be a person of virtue, or at least a person in search of virtue. Neither we nor our students ought to find ourselves with a profession, but nothing to profess. We cannot be learned if we are rich in technique but poor in conviction; else we will find ourselves in the unenviable position that Sam Keen describes in a marvelously rich book entitled *To A Dancing God*. We will have gotten an education but lost an identity. The pursuit of virtue is a dangerous one because of the temptation to conclude that one has found it. The arrogant teacher who insists on disciples is one form of this perversion. Socrates had an answer for this, as well. The passionate teacher and seeker after virtue must be possessed of the knowledge that he knows nothing. Socratic ignorance is the saving grace of the philosopher and the teacher. It teaches us knowledge of our ignorance about all things.

How is this philosophy of the Socratic, passionate teacher relevant to our everyday teaching activities? It requires that we think of our teaching in terms of the care structure of learning. We must, this philosophy insists, passionately care about our subject matter, about communicating it to others, about students as fellow learners, about the process of learning, about the classroom environment, about the fair and just evaluation of students. Expressing these kinds of concerns openly will communicate passionate care to students. As anyone who has taught successfully knows, students are quick to recognize this care, indeed they often thirst after it.

What are the specific methods, if any, of creating a care structure such as that described? Because I accept the pluralist bias referred to above, I cannot speak of methods as though they were the *only* concrete and necessary guidelines to success. They are simply means, albeit important means, I believe, of creating the caring environment, the passionate environment of teaching and learning. First, and perhaps most obvious, there must be a contract between teacher and student, a clear and precise understanding of what is going to be done and what is going to be expected. Second, and perhaps equally obvious, the joyous teacher must be the accessible and fair minded one. An expression of care about the judgement and evaluation process does wonders to the students' confidence in our ability to communicate. Much of this caring environment can be created if the classroom or the learning environment, wherever it may be, is thought of as a sanctuary. This metaphor of the classroom as sanctuary is not intended to convey the notion of a holy place. Rather, it is meant to symbolize the notion of the classroom, the laboratory, whatever, as a haven of trust where risk taking is encouraged and allowed. Surely teaching and learning involve taking risks. This is especially true in the context of the Socratic model, which takes teaching and learning to be ultimately concerned with self-awareness, self-knowledge and virtue. We do not wish our students to lose their identities.

The mechanics of creating a sanctuary for learning are easy to state, difficult to apply. Knowledge and wisdom must be valued, both in the general and particular sense. We should make no apologies for being enthusiastic about what we know and what we do not know. If we cannot maintain that kind of enthusiasm or if we find ourselves constantly expressing excuses about our "lack of time" or our students "growing incompetence," perhaps we ought to take a sabbatical from teaching or teach something new, to rekindle our fire.

The sanctuary of learning is a place where everyone's opinion is important — not right, but important. This does not require only that students listen to the instructor; that is easy given the authoritative nature of the professor-student relationship. It demands that we create an atmosphere where students listen to one another, where, in the learning process, they regard each others' opinions as important. In the sanctuary of learning there are no stupid questions. The "haven of trust" is one where teacher and student alike ought not fear the "I don't know." This is not an excuse for flippancy; rather it is an admission that we all are seekers. In a purely mechanical sense, if a teacher is capable of creating a community of trust where students are not fearful of asking questions, the teacher will know more readily what is being communicated and what is not. Finally, the sanctuary of learning must allow the unpredictable, in at least two ways. We are all of us bound, for the most part, by our course subject matter; but we should interpret those boundaries carefully. The urge to "cover the material" at the expense of useful and meaningful inquiry down an unfamiliar path is a deadening experience, for student and teacher alike. Second, and more important, we should allow the unpredictable in terms of the capacities of our students. The phenomenon of allowing expectations to govern judgement of performance is well known. It too has a deadening effect. The sanctuary as the unpredictable is open always to the renewing capacity of the human being. It acknowledges the capacity for change and difference, perhaps even growth.

If we are successful in finding the techniques and methods that express our passionate concern for knowledge and wisdom, i.e., virtue, no matter what our model or metaphor of teaching is like, then we will have experienced the joy of teaching. Joy, however, connotes rewards; and Socrates was condemned to death by his fellow citizens. That other teacher worth emulating, the dangerous innocent from Galilee, was crucified. It is worth noting that teaching is a "dangerous profession." This knowledge should not make us timid. It should reinforce our awareness of the importance of teaching. Certainly the university environment is not altogether conducive to making teaching a joyous endeavor. That ought not make us bitter; it merely reinforces our knowledge of the tendency of institutions to cut off possibilities for creativity. Where, then, is the joy? Socrates spoke to that issue as well. If teaching is really a calling, a passion and a joy, it becomes its own reward. One cannot buy a home with that nor send one's children to college with it; but one's soul can rest on it!

What Do YOU Communicate?

Waldo W. Braden

In this paper I wish to discuss some of the complexities that take place when a teacher talks to students. Finding the answers to the mystery of any communication is as challenging today as it was when the ancient Greeks first attempted to perfect the art in fifth century B.C. What occurs in the teacher-student confrontation, like any other kind of communication, is complex, complicated, and difficult to describe. No one, not even experts in the College of Education, has discovered how to punch the variables into a great computer, to program the results, and to feed them back to solve the problems of teachers who are lazy, incompetent, unprofessional, reluctant, or misplaced. Usually these types have much more than communication problems and require counsel from departmental chairmen or deans.

My primary concern in this paper is the improving of your communication. Ask yourself the simple question: What do I communicate when I face students? The question is not, how do you communicate, but WHAT! Before I conclude I will return to this query.

Five Obstacles

A good place to start our search for answers is to look at five common types of obstacles that impede effectiveness in the classroom. They are prevalent in many forms, in many departments as well as in the political forum.

1. The first obstacle I call the elitism fallacy. The intellectual and particularly the college professor is prone to conclude that research, careful analysis, and deep thought produce a successful communicator. Once the elitist is on his feet, he assumes that profundity will automatically issue forth in torrents. Living in an ivory tower, he is likely to feel that he has a corner on answers to complex social, political, and professional problems. He is the type who frequently complains, why won't they just seek my advice about solving the problems? Of course the elitist may not take time to make his observations meaningful even to colleagues in his own field.

2. The second obstacle I label the lecture fallacy. To you who have spent hundreds of hours in classrooms either as a student or a teacher, there should be little need to explain this obstacle. You have probably seen a professor snarf at work, droning away over his stale notes. He views teaching as a one way street that moves from his manuscript to the student's notebook or recorder. Often he mumbles on, paying little attention to

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