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The Teacher is Present: Thoughts on Attention and Connection in the Classroom

Thanks so much, President Huddleston, for that warm welcome. And thanks to Rachel Trubowitz, my longtime friend and most esteemed colleague, for that gracious introduction. And thanks also to everyone for coming. It's wonderful to see you all here, especially my family: my husband, Jamie Calderwood; my sister, Carrie Sherman; and my brother-in-law, Terry Whiting. I want to express my gratitude to all those who wrote in support of my nomination for this award, and to the Brierley Award Committee for selecting me and giving me this opportunity to reflect on my own teaching. Thanks also to Lisa MacFarlane, our former UNH Provost, for approving that selection, as well as to Provost Vasudevan, Victor Benassi, Catherine Overson, and the Center for Teaching Excellence for arranging this gathering today. I also want to express my gratitude to Lester Fisher and John Ernest, my former English Department colleagues and prior recipients of the Brierley Award, for the fine example they set for me. Knowing how many dedicated and inspiring teachers we have at UNH, many of whom are here today, I see myself honored as their representative, as someone who shares their work and values. I hope my talk today speaks to that work and those values. It is dedicated to Lawrence and Joan Sherman, my parents and first teachers.

When I learned that I had received the Brierley award, along with feeling both thrilled and humbled, I felt thoroughly daunted by its requirement that I give this talk. When I confessed my anxiety to Tom Newkirk, my English Department colleague from whom I have learned so much about teaching over the years, he encouraged me to turn to my own practice as a teacher. He recalled interviewing me for his book *The Art of Slow Reading* and asking me what I wanted students to learn in my classes. He had expected me to give him a list of things like: how to scan a poem, how to research the historical background of a novel, and so on. And I do believe that all those skills are important. But what he remembers me saying is: “I want my students to learn how to pay attention.” I had, frankly, forgotten saying this, but when I heard Tom quote me I thought, yes, that’s right, that’s what I want. Like Henry James, one of my favorite authors, I would advise young readers and writers: “Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost!” (Art of Fiction 53). And yet I also know that taking in too much information can be overwhelming and disorienting, making learning more, rather than less, difficult. However, I believe that in addition to learning how to open your attention wide to the world, you can learn a complementary skill: how to tighten that aperture and sharpen your focus with great intensity. And this rhythm of opening, then narrowing; widening, then focusing attention seems a key to my practice as a teacher.

All that by way of explaining the title of my talk today: “The Teacher is Present,” a variation on the title of Marina Abramović’s performance piece, “The Artist is Present.” In that piece, which she performed in 2010 for over 736 hours at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Abramović sat in a chair in the center of the MoMA Atrium where individual

museumgoers were invited to sit opposite her for up to five minutes at time. She then simply met the gaze of each visitor without speaking but with great empathy and intensity of attention. Those who participated later described the experience as deeply affecting.¹ Just as Marcel Duchamp revolutionized modern understanding of what constitutes art by designating readymade, everyday objects as “art,” thereby locating artistic value not in the object but in the way the object was seen, Abramović reduced the artist’s relationship to her audience to a moment of pure, mindful attention, an essential connection unmediated by any object at all. Attention itself was the focus of her performance.

And yet, as powerful as I find Abramović’s insight, when I thought of it in relation to my own pedagogical practice, I couldn’t help but recall the essay question from my 1966 SAT English subject exam: “Can you be so open-minded that your brains fall out? Discuss.” (This really was the question that year—who could forget it?) In other words, teaching, it seems to me, demands both mindful, open attention and focused, purposeful direction and it is bringing these dual aspects of the task into fruitful alignment that is key. Henry James also understood this balance when he noted that once a writer has opened up to the world, they need to find their *donnée*: a starting point in all that welter of information that engages them, the initial subject from which their novel will grow. Sarah Orne Jewett called it “the thing that teases the mind . . . and at last gets itself put down rightly on paper” (6). And once the writer has that *donnée*, they need to find the form to contain and shape its development. One of my favorite quotations about writing also comes from Henry James, from his preface to his novel *Roderick Hudson*: “Really,

¹For a documentary of her performance and its effect on viewers, see: *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present*. Dir. Matthew Akers and Jeff Dupre. Music Box Films, 2012. Film.

universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so” (5). As teachers, we are, like novelists, all too aware that relations end nowhere. I know that I could drone on and on, expounding on shapeless expanses of information long past the point where my students have lost even the semblance of any interest they once had. And I confess that sometimes that’s just what I’ve done. Again, the trick is be aware of those beckoning expanses and yet be able to resist them, to draw the boundary so firmly that a compelling and engaging pattern of meaning emerges just before the class hour ends.

As a teacher then, I see myself located at the intersection between my students and the texts of a literary tradition. To teach my students how to pay attention to those texts, I must open my attention both to the tradition and to them. But I must also then focus that attention to provide a structure within which meaning can emerge, both for myself and for my students. So for my talk today I’d like explore this dance between mindful openness and directed focus, first in my relationship to the literary tradition I teach, then in my preparation and strategies for teaching those texts in the classroom, and, finally, in my work with individual students to help them discover and develop their own ideas in response to my teaching.

I. Tradition and the Individual Teacher

To return to that moment when I first I heard that I would be asked to prepare this talk, I was, as I’ve admitted, dismayed. I drew a total blank. But then I read Nancy Kinner’s excellent 1996 Brierley talk online and was heartened by her admission that she felt the same way. Suddenly, where there was nothing, there was too much to say. Ideas came flooding into my mind. Snippets of texts and comments from colleagues and family and former teachers swam

into view like phrases on the black fortune-telling 8-ball, the child's toy to which my sister and I would address questions and watch as some gnomic phrase appeared in a murky window. I thought of how in Greek mythology, the goddess Memory is the mother of the muses. Then I thought of Google and how Google is now almost like an artificial, omniscient mind of God, but then, oddly, I thought, not of Google being like human memory, but of my memory being like Google. How is this vast instant artificial memory affecting how we see ourselves and our own capacities? How strange. How interesting. And now that this flood of information is upon us, how do we make sense of it? The sociologist Barry Schwartz has described a "paradox of choice": too many choices, he finds, result in an inability to make choices at all, a kind of paralysis of the focusing, decision-making ability.

The paradox of choice is perhaps even more paralyzing now as choices multiply and press themselves upon our attention. I think of Michael Ferber's 2016 Lindberg Lecture on the virtual impossibility of "keeping up" with today's massive accumulation of scholarship. However, here I have to remind myself of how remembering and forgetting are in a constant dialogue. Human memory could not function at all if every thought, every event, every book and article, was retained at the same level of focus. Our minds are constantly pruning some branches that others branches may thrive and grow; even some trees must be lost so that others have the benefit of the light--the intellectual attention—that their absence provides. However, there is also a problem with who gets to choose which branches, which trees. Gertrude Stein describes this process of curating and thereby creating a cultural composition--a meaningful pattern--and how patterns of cultural emphasis change. After the Great War, she writes, the way people saw the world changed, not because anything "inside them" changed but because what they paid attention to changed; what *interested* people shifted and so did their reading of the world: figure

and ground changed places (20). This is why the diversity of the university and similar institutions is so crucial. If the publishing house, the newspaper, and the university create and disseminate knowledge—curating, analyzing, and organizing information to transform it into conceptual patterns—then who does the curating, who does the choosing, is crucial. I will have more say on this in a moment.

As for the flood of information, was it ever thus? My mother once told me that as an eight-year child she suddenly realized that she would never know every person in the world and she cried. When I heard this story I immediately thought, “Well, I could live with that,” but being who I am and not my mother, I then suddenly realized that I would never read every book in the world and *that* was disturbing. As teachers age we are often forced to abandon our illusion of control over this flow of ever-changing information; at best we can only achieve what Robert Frost believed poetry could provide, “a momentary stay against confusion” (251). Nevertheless, those small visions of order—our syllabi, our bibliographies, our classroom conversations that rise in their own dramatic arcs to moments of understanding just before the bells ring, are consolation for the blooming, buzzing confusion outside the door: all around us, the sense of a “Goldengrove unleaving” and the consequent grieving (Hopkins 902). And yet there is also a constant, perpetual renewal. T. S. Eliot in his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent” writes that the great works of literature form a transcendent order that lives in a kind of eternal present, but then he immediately notes that this order keeps shifting as new works are added to the canon; they enter in dialogue with the existing tradition but in so doing bring the sense of their own time with them—and so affect how we read all the others that went before them (50). So, yes, in any given moment the literary canon appears to have a kind of transcendent reality, but not so much if we see, not only that this canon is perpetually changing,

but also that powerful arbiters, such as the editors of anthologies or the designers of university courses, bring some texts back to life, allow some to wither, and ruthlessly prune others. The creation of literary canons is not transcendent, but embodies the responses of people with the privilege of making their choices matter.

So, just as the poet engaged in this dialogue with tradition and the present moment becomes aware, as Eliot writes, of “great difficulties and responsibilities” so does the teacher (50). How to be both an individual situated in a particular time, place, and history and yet do justice to the vision and interests of those situated very differently from oneself? The challenge is to open your attention to the broadest range of life, to expand what is interesting you to include what is interesting others very different from you. To teach with this kind of justice in mind is to commit to an ongoing work of self-interrogation and renewal, a continual re-situating of the self in relation to the world. This process demands humility concerning the limits of one’s awareness, limits which will never be fully overcome, but must be challenged again and again. It demands an attitude toward knowledge that accepts its contingency and the consequent demand for improvisation: intellectual curiosity paired with flexibility and openness to change. As a result of this demand, over the thirty-five years I have taught American literature, my syllabi have undergone continuing revision, becoming ever more diverse and, I hope, ever more engaged with our literature’s multiplicity. I now teach the Lakota Sioux writer Zitkala-Ša in dialogue with the Nebraska writer Willa Cather, Nella Larsen with F. Scott Fitzgerald, Langston Hughes and Li-Young Lee with William Carlos Williams. Including these so-called minority voices in my courses means rising to the challenges they present to the supremacy of “mainstream” writers, challenges that require a constant re-visioning of the conversations that make up the American literary tradition as we know it in our moment.

II. Mindful Preparation and Classroom Process

My preparing to teach this tradition is emotional as well as intellectual, for as Ralph Waldo Emerson comments in his essay “The American Scholar,” “Instantly we know whose words are loaded with life, and whose not” (60). The poet Mary Oliver, in a memoir of her partner, the photographer Mary Malone Cook, notes that, “It has frequently been remarked, about my own writings, that I emphasize attention. This began simply enough: to see the way the flicker flies is greatly different from the way the swallow plays in the golden air. It was my pleasure to notice such things, it was a good first step.” However, she says that it was observing Malone “when she was taking photographs, and watching her in the darkroom, and no less watching the intensity and openness with which she dealt with friends, and strangers too, [that] taught me what real attention was about. Attention without feeling, I began to learn, is only a report. An openness—an empathy—was necessary if attention was to matter” (71). This insight is one that I have long taken to heart as I prepare for a class presentation that I hope will be more than just a report, perhaps even loaded with life.

In retrospect, I realize that in preparing for this goal I have two-step process: a first and a second reading of the text. The first is what could be called a linear reading, a careful rereading of the work from start to finish, an attempt to see it freshly, no matter how many times I have read it before. I try to do this in the week or days just before the class. My aim is to renew my emotional responses as well as my intellectual understanding. I mark passages in pencil that catch my attention and star those that seem especially meaningful. In a true first reading we travel as on a road, not knowing where the text is taking us. Feelings emerge along the way and

there should be a sense of surprise when we arrive at our final destination, but also, perhaps, an awareness of inevitability that has been building unconsciously. A second, re-reading is like surveying that same terrain, not from the road, but from the air. Now we can see the pattern whole and know where those twists and turns are leading. My own second readings are quick, just a skimming through the portion of the text assigned for that day, reviewing my marginal notes and refining a series of questions that I will draw on to direct discussion toward an understanding of the issues and patterns I want students to see. However, I also need that goal to remain flexible and open to what I might learn from my students in the course of that class. This piece of my preparation I try to do as close to actual class time as possible, preferably immediately before.

A good example of the results of this process comes from my most recent review of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Considering how many times have I taught the novel—almost every year for thirty-five years --you would think that it would have grown stale to me. And yet every time I read it, I find the growing friendship between the young white boy Huckleberry Finn and the escaped slave Jim immensely poignant and powerful. However, this past fall, following the events in Ferguson, Missouri and hearing the pleas that “black lives matter,” I found it even more so, to the point that my voice broke in front of my students when I read aloud the passage where Jim stands up to Huckleberry and, asserting his dignity, demands an apology from his young white friend for treating him like trash (183). Although it was not the first time this passage had moved me, in our present moment its significance came into sharper focus and prompted a thoughtful discussion around issues of blindness, invisibility, and recognition that lasted throughout the semester. Classic literature, as Toni Morrison wrote of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, “heaves, manifests, and lasts” (xli). It need not be perfect, and

this novel is certainly not, but it needs to touch us where the most important questions in our experience lie and, as teachers, we need to share these deeper responses if we are to connect our students to what is most important, most alive, about the texts we teach. And now I turn to that classroom and the people who are present within it.

I usually begin with a brief lecture creating a framework for the text we are about to discuss: situating it in relation to its historical context, its critical reception, and the texts we have previously read, as well as providing some critical tools the class might need to talk about it. Then I ask students for their immediate responses and questions about the text, no holds barred. They can say, for example, that they don't like reading Henry James, they can't follow his sentences, and his characters are boring--and I always tell them that plenty of very smart people also don't like reading Henry James, including his close friend and fellow writer, Edith Wharton, but I also tell them that they need to explain why they responded that way. Although their visceral responses are important, they need to explore and try to articulate the reasons behind them. I find that, when allowed to have this first word, students often, actually always, bring up points that I would have made myself. Sometimes they sound awkward and unsure, sometimes confident and articulate; the key thing is that they have ownership of those insights.

My task in this phase of the class is to pick up their threads and weave them together, opening up the larger implications of what they have noticed, explaining why their perceptions are important and how they connect to central critical and scholarly issues. My aim is to give them confidence in their own ability to read and respond. The relative freshness of my own reading usually allows me to recall relevant passages rapidly so that I can make fluid connections between their insights and the issues I want to highlight. It's an improvisational process, a riffing off the comments of individual students. Here the assigned reading functions like a jazz

standard in the Great American Songbook, the canon of American popular music whose songs—“My Funny Valentine,” “Caravan,” “Am I Blue”—are endlessly open to contemporary interpretation. While T. S. Eliot identified the call and response between the poetic tradition and the individual talent, African American musicians had already discovered and refined that dynamic in the art of jazz improvisation. And like a band leader, my role is to invite participation and collaboration, to push us all toward a reading that is spontaneous and improvised, but ultimately shaped and ordered, which does not mean closed.

To reach this ultimate goal I usually shift from this improvisational phase at some point to a somewhat more structured discussion, based on the questions I prepared before class. These questions help us move through the text, producing a collaborative analysis through a series of close readings. Often I put my questions on the board and ask students to respond to them in small groups without my supervision, documenting their answers and reporting back to the class as a whole. This gives them a chance to get to know each other and share their ideas with peers. We then compare notes on how the different groups responded. If all goes well, by the end of class a collaborative reading has emerged, coherent yet still open to differences of evaluation and interpretation.

Reviewing this classroom process in light of the notion of first and second readings, I now see that students come into class with what is essentially a first reading; their responses are often perceptive, but also inarticulate or disorganized. Since the landscape they have travelled is not yet visible to them as a whole, I try to give them that aerial view, to help them see the shape, the full dramatic arc of the text, thereby bringing their own reading to fuller awareness and giving them a sense of potential mastery and, perhaps even more important, of present appreciation. Fitzgerald said of his novel *The Great Gatsby* that he wanted to write something

that was “beautiful and simple + intricately patterned” (Letter 170). His one-time friend Ernest Hemingway said that he wanted to write stories that resembled icebergs: seven-eighths of their meaning submerged beneath the surface. My goal is help student see those intricate and beautiful patterns, those submerged meanings. Teaching the stories of Sarah Orne Jewett, for example, my aim is to help students attend to the silences between the characters and to sense how those silences are full of meaning: moments of unspoken empathy between people who, through dialogue, have come to trust each other. Seeing this pattern helps students appreciate what her stories show us about building a sense of community and why it matters. My aim can also be helping them to see the psychological horror at the heart of Henry James’s story, “The Beast in the Jungle,” where dialogue fails, and the silence between two characters results from a failure to see, a failure of trust and empathy, with devastating consequences. That’s important too.

And all of this depends on getting to know my students: beginning with something as simple as learning their names within the first two weeks, in that window of opportunity when they are still deciding whether you really have their interests in mind. And then being alert to each one’s distinctiveness: the student who wants to be a poet; the student who is recovering from addiction; the one who is suffering from severe depression and the one who is taking five courses while working virtually full-time; the first-generation undergraduate who dreams of earning a Ph.D.; the evangelical Christian feeling lost in a secular school; the only African American in a class of whites; the veteran returning home from combat; the gay student who is out of the closet; the gay student who is still there. Although each one may have some aspect of “difference” from myself and others in the class, each one is also much more than this difference. Our identities are all complex and multiple, intersecting at some points and not at others. A

literary text provides a ground for all these unique individuals to speak to each other about a common set of themes and questions—and therefore creates a structure within which we can build a community that is, ideally, respectful of how we are different and mindful of what we share.

III. Attention and the Individual Student

Turning to the writing conference and student essays, I think of Linda Loman's anguished speech about her failing husband in Arthur Miller's play *Death of Salesman*, where she cries "I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the papers. . . . But he's a human being So attention must be paid attention must be finally paid to such a person" (56). Attention is precious. Andy Warhol once famously said that "in the future everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes."² But fame with its emphasis on spectacle or turning a celebrity into a signifier rather than a person is not what I am thinking of here, but rather of Marina Abramović's moment of pure, undivided, human attention. Just a few minutes of such full attention can be powerful. In my own teaching practice, this is nowhere more true than in the individual writing conference, beginning with the conference on what a student decides to write about.

While I usually provide suggestions and prompts for assigned essays--some scaffolding with leading questions linked to our classrooms discussions--students are often uncertain about what to write about or have trouble focusing their ideas. In that case, I invite them to meet with me one on one. I begin by asking, "What interested you in the texts we've read so far?" It's

²There are several versions of this quotation, which began circulating in the late 1960's. This version was confirmed by Warhol in a July 27, 1978 diary entry.

very rare that a student doesn't have *something* that has interested them, even if they can't figure out how to turn that interest into a topic to write about. After giving them permission to explore their own responses, I work with them to build a hypothesis that grows organically out of their engagement with a particular piece of writing. Why do you think this was interesting to you? How does that connect to what we talked about in class? This is the discovery moment when we locate what James called their "donnée." I then explain to them how having this focus for their exploration will lead to their having a principle of selection when they reread the text and conduct research for their essay: What questions are they trying to answer? Why are they important? And I also explain to them that when they find those answers they will have the basis for their paper's thesis, which in turn will provide the principle of selection for the details they will include in their argument in support of it. And here is where James's comment that "relations stop nowhere" comes even more forcefully into play. Without a clear thesis statement, their argument will go wandering into fruitless and confusing digressions, losing itself in those expanses of shapeless information. A clear statement, however, will focus and direct the argument toward their desired goal, which is persuading the reader that their thesis is correct, and not only correct, but worth thinking about. It matters.

Then there is the conference about revising a draft. In the writing conference, as in the classroom, I ask the student to speak first about the text: "So what do you think of your paper?" If at all possible I like them to diagnose any problem themselves or at the very least to acknowledge that there is a problem. I want to build on their own desire for competency, their own desire to express themselves. Just as they will spontaneously identify key issues in their classroom comments about a reading, they will virtually always know when something is going wrong with their essay. If they can't nail the problem themselves, they know there is one. They

know where they struggled. “I got stuck and just kept repeating myself.” “I ended up with a conclusion that doesn’t seem connected to my thesis.” “I seem to be just retelling the story.” They may not, and often do not, know *why* they got stuck or confused or ended up repeating themselves. And for that reason they don’t know how to fix it. Here is where I come in as diagnostician.

I have generally found that each student’s essay, even those that seem the most conventional, is a unique combination of responses, stylistic traits, patterns of insight and error. Each has a stylistic and intellectual fingerprint. As for clarity, however, all A papers are alike and each C paper is different in its own way. The most undeveloped writer’s work, if that work is a good faith effort (the paper written in bad faith in another matter) is perhaps the most difficult and demanding to read: one must open oneself to its contradictions, its lapses in logic, its confused syntax, and its malapropisms; one must read around and underneath the text to what has not been said or only partially said or said in distorted and convoluted ways, to search for the core ideas and feelings that might be struggling for expression. One lends one’s own mind to the student in the hope of helping them discover what it is they are trying to say and therefore who they are. Sometimes, certainly, I may see weaknesses in a paper that the student doesn’t and then my job is trickier. I need to initiate the conversation and walk the student through the essay in hopes that they can see the problem as I see it. If so, we can fix it together.

I discovered the power of this kind of attention as a student myself. In high school I loved English and had lots to say in class. Plenty of things “teased” my mind, but I couldn’t manage to get my ideas put down rightly on paper. Then I spent a summer at Phillips Andover Academy, where a teacher took the time to meet with me one on one to talk about an essay I had written on Edward Albee’s play *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. He patiently went through

virtually each sentence in those four or five pages, telling me what I had led him to expect at each point and where I had left him with questions unanswered or points unsupported. He made me aware that someone other than me was reading my work: an awareness that marks the transition from what composition theorists would call a writer-based essay to a dialogical reader-based one. My words mattered to him. That meeting permanently changed the way I wrote. And it probably took fifteen minutes.

And sometimes I might not see something in an essay that is, in fact, a strength. I tell students never to be afraid to come to me say that they're disappointed with a grade, to say that they think that I have misjudged their work. After all, having just read twenty students' papers on *Huckleberry Finn* in a row, I might have missed something in theirs. If so, I want them to bring it to my attention and I will be grateful, not resentful or offended. Such a meeting is a true teaching opportunity and I tell them beforehand, "I may or may not raise your grade, but I guarantee that I won't lower it and we may both learn something." Just last year a student wrote a paper on Howard Nemerov's "The Vacuum," a short poem about a man grieving his wife's death. The poem closes with a surreal comparison of the speaker's "hungry, angry heart" to a vacuum cleaner howling and "biting at air" (122). I thought my student's interpretation of that final comparison was mistaken and confused, and marked her down for it. However, in conference she argued that I was the one mistaken in seeing the image as an expression of anguish and despair, and persuaded me that it was, instead, an expression of the speaker's renewed appetite for life. I raised her grade and thanked her for helping me see the poem with fresh eyes.

And that was not the only time that the student and teacher roles have reversed in my classroom. In fact, my most exhilarating moments as a teacher have been when students have

taken an idea from me and developed it beyond what I had imagined possible: illuminating texts that I thought I knew well in stunning new ways. To take just one example, there was the undergraduate interested in environmentalism and sustainability who paid attention when I commented in a rather off-hand way that F. Scott Fitzgerald not only describes expensive parties of ineffable gorgeousness in *The Great Gatsby* but also makes us look at the mess that's left behind and the nameless servants who must clean it up (43). She took this idea and ran with it, producing a remarkable eco-critical analysis that brought the novel's critique of a materialistic society's wasteful exploitation of people and natural resources into sharp focus. Her insights now shape the way I see and teach the entire book. This student, and many, many others, brought their own concerns to my classroom, opened new avenues of exploration, and highlighted new patterns of meaning. They took my ideas and ran with them into the future. And that, for me, is what teaching is all about.

IV.

In closing, I recall Marina Abramović lifting her hopeful face to encounter the gaze of each visitor who is seated before her. Just so, I choose to believe that every student who enters my classroom is worthy of my attention. And I try my best to make myself worthy of theirs. As for our time in history, it's true that new technologies have brought us a dramatic expansion of democratic access to information. We are in the midst of a powerful and deeply confusing moment of transition. However, I suspect that alarm at confronting all this communication is alarm in the face of mortality itself. Years ago in Burlington, Vermont I watched monks from Tibet put the final painstaking touches on an elaborate mandala of colored sand that they had labored over for days, but were now preparing, in a demonstration of Buddhist detachment, to

sweep away. Will my own painstaking mandalas of scholarship, my own carefully designed syllabi also be swept away with time? If so, and very probably so, I think that I can face that disappearance with equanimity, not bitterness, since new patterns of meaning will grow as my students bring my ideas into the future and do with them what they will. To return to the dialogue with Tom Newkirk that prompted this talk, I have come to see that for me teaching is, at its heart, an art whose greatest reward is the spark of connection that arcs between minds in the classroom, that ephemeral achievement of a shared vision, evanescent in the moment but long-lived in memory, mother of all our muses.

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