

2004-05

BRIERLEY LECTURE

ON

COLLEGE TEACHING

Carole K. Barnett
Associate Professor of Management

“Shifting Paradigms: Out of the Comfort Zone and into the Action of 21st Century Learning”

Delivered

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Center for Teaching Excellence
11 Brook Way
University of New Hampshire
Durham, NH 03824

DEDICATION

This presentation is dedicated to three extraordinary mentors -- with gratitude for how their devotion to teaching, learning, research, and service has influenced all that I aspire to contribute to the University of New Hampshire and beyond:

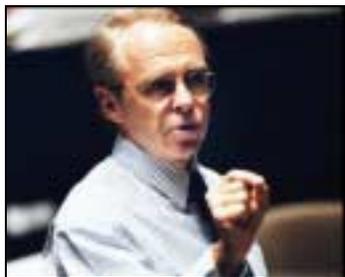
Professor Jean Brierley (Zoology, Michigan State University) – Ph.D., University of Michigan, 1937; M.S., University of Michigan, 1931; B.S., University of New Hampshire, 1930



Professor Emeritus Wilbert (Bill) J. McKeachie (Psychology, University of Michigan) – Ph.D., University of Michigan, 1949



Professor Noel M. Tichy (Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management, University of Michigan) -- Ph.D., Columbia University, 1972; B.A., Colgate University, 1968



2004-05 *BRIERLEY LECTURE ON COLLEGE TEACHING***Shifting Paradigms: Out of the Comfort Zone
and into the Action of 21st Century Learning**

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What a great gift it is to see all of you here in this room with me today! Thank you for coming to this year's Brierley presentation! It is *wonderful* that I may share this moment with all of you. I am very grateful to the University for bestowing this award on me and I confess that I am still wobbling a little bit under its weight. But it is also a great inspiration to me for which I thank President Hart and Provost Mallory who enable this community to value teaching as well as research and public service. A huge part of the reason for that belongs to Professor Lee Seidel, Michael Lee, and everyone involved in the Center for Teaching Excellence. I know that I speak for all of us when I say that I am indebted to each and every one of you. I am also grateful to my faculty colleagues who have received the Brierley Award in years past and who have shed light on my own path in so many different ways. I appreciate the efforts of the dedicated faculty on the Brierley Award Committee who give incredible amounts of their time every year during the review process. I thank my faculty colleagues in the Whittemore School who care so much about developing our talented students. And I could never find the words to express the depth of my gratitude to my colleagues in the Department of Management – their passionate, unyielding commitment to learning and teaching inspires me from one semester to the next, year after year, consistently; and I have been most fortunate indeed to have their attention to my own development as an educator. My colleague, Rita Weathersby has been a powerful force in my life and I am most grateful to her for today's introduction. And it almost goes without saying that few of my teaching endeavors would succeed without the excellent administrative support provided inside the Department of Management by Mrs. Nancy Palmer.

There are three other key faculty members -- to whom I dedicate this lecture -- who are largely responsible for my being on this platform today. One of them is Jean Brierley. Her generosity, foresight, and devotion to the University of New Hampshire are an inspiration to me. I take special pride in knowing that she and I have walked the same hallways, libraries, and gardens of two great universities – New Hampshire and Michigan. For it was in Ann Arbor that we both earned our doctorates – hers in zoology in the 1930s and mine in psychology in the 1990s.

It was in Ann Arbor, too, that another great mentor came into my life: Bill McKeachie. He founded the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT) at Michigan and it was the first required stop on any doctoral student's journey into academic life. In Bill's classroom, I had an unforgettable nightmarish experience: I saw myself on videotape, teaching for the very first time. I must still be suffering from the ensuing post traumatic stress disorder because I have become a poster child for learning through video in all of my courses! The training that Bill and his colleagues designed for us was path breaking, world class, and forever shaped our identities, values, and approaches to human development.

Ann Arbor also brought me into the orbit of Noel Tichy who took great pride in quickly knocking me out of *my* orbit. Noel's whole focus was action – action learning, action research, action first, theory later. He was living proof that experience is the best teacher because it tests you first and teaches you later. His arguments were persuasive and he helped me learn about what it means to feel uncomfortable and how to use that for my own and others' growth. In other words, Noel taught me the meaning of getting out of my comfort zone and how to help my students do it, too. He insisted on adding one extra year of qualitative field research into my dissertation project because he was convinced that I would never discover anything of value unless, in his own words, I “got into the street and got my nose bloody.” What he meant was that I had to spend more time mired in the messy realities of the organizations I had chosen to study. I had to become more uncomfortable, more confused and conflicted, I had to let the real time organizational data crack my intellectual shell. Noel pushed me farther and farther out of my comfort zone and more and more into the action of life and learning in every encounter.

So did the thousands of students who have played an essential part in putting me on this platform today. I want to thank them for developing *me* even as I have focused on developing *them*. This year's Brierley Award for Teaching Excellence belongs to my students much more than to me -- for they have shaped me, guided me, kicked me and hugged me, brought me their daunting problems, telephoned me in the middle of my shower(!), and *taught* me what I need to know to be able to help them make a difference in the world. I am so often my students' student.

For each of them, each one of my students, it is absolutely critical that they leave this great university ready to make a difference in the world—prepared to feel, to think, and to act in ways that contribute rather than do harm to their professional communities. Their own survival depends on it and the organizations that employ them are counting on them to make the right choices and help *them* make a difference in the world--right from the start. Organizations need our graduates to possess *that* kind of capability in part because their environments have become increasingly risky and often dangerous.

We all know that the events of September 11th, 2001 shattered our old paradigm and shoved us into a world that felt more painfully chaotic than anything even imaginable before. It yanked us out of our comfort zone and propelled us into a zone of uncertainty where we could not be sure of the consequences of our actions anymore. On that day, the driving force of human action was not the usual sensemaking or information processing or any form of cognition. No, on that day, the driving force of human action was feeling and emotion. There simply was no way for people in the midst of the World Trade Towers to be able to comprehend what was happening. Yet they took adaptive action to the best of their abilities and what drove their behavior in the midst of chaos was an increased reliance on feelings, emotion, and instinct. September 11th marks for me the start of the paradigm change mentioned in the title of this presentation. September 11th marks for me the *real* beginning of the 21st century and the particular type of learning *in the moment* that it demands if we are to survive as a civilization, never mind to advance the human condition.

It seems to me that we are now in the midst of shifting out of the paradigm of “problem solving in the comfort zone” and into the paradigm of “learning what to do in the throb of action itself.”

Before September 11th, in a seemingly more stable and orderly world, there was more available time to collect and analyze data, to think and reflect on potential interpretations, and to deliberate over choices whose outcomes we could predict with relative accuracy. Not so, today. And as educators, we are charged with developing our students' capability not just for surviving in this new world order but for becoming its leaders and managers over the coming decades. As a result, I ask myself every night, "What do I need to be doing differently tomorrow in my classroom to help my students build their emotional, cognitive, and behavioral competencies in the post-911 world?"

I've come to believe that one of the most important competencies that I can help my students to develop is the ability to feel comfortable when they are out of their comfort zones. This requires my establishing an emotional climate where risky learning attempts can take place and no one feels shame. To accomplish this, I invariably coax my students – either one at a time or in small groups – to put themselves in the spotlight before the whole class, when they have only partial information, and they have no clue what an appropriate answer might be (though they *have* done the readings). I reassure them that by the tenth time we've done this type of activity, they will feel very comfortable with it and be able to perform better as a result. To help them imagine the learning process, and to launch them into a cycle of "learning how to learn," I ask them to remember what it felt like when they first tried to learn how to ride a two wheel bicycle:

Remember what it felt like when you were finally coasting but then the whole bike began to lean to the left and you found yourself fighting to keep it going and not let it fall to the ground? Remember that feeling of losing your balance? After a while, you got used to the feeling of being out of control! After a while, you knew the drill – the coasting would slow, the handlebars would tilt left, and down you'd go. No shame any more, just a compulsion to master the darn machine. Years later, cruising on your bicycle around a sharp corner, you'd find that the handlebars were beginning to tilt to the left, but there would be no panic anymore because by now, you've become so familiar with that feeling of being out of balance that you can tolerate it, stay with it, ride it out, and bring those handlebars back up to center after the turn is completed.

All I want to do in the classroom – with ideas – is help my students to practice riding the bike no matter how tippy and jerky and uncontrollable it may feel in the first few practices. And somehow, somehow, they do come along for the ride. I think it is in large part because of the emotional climate in the classroom – there is trust, hope, no fear of shame, eagerness to succeed, yet fear of failure and lack of confidence balanced by my flatly stating "I know you can do this." And they can. And they do.

To the extent that my students can function in highly uncertain conditions and/or in high velocity environments, yet trust their feelings and instincts, sure of what they know and simultaneously aware that they lack a certain measure of critical knowledge, they will probably succeed enough of the time that they actually *will* survive and equally important, they will develop confidence in their ability to surf the edge of chaos (Pascale, 2000). That is a condition, not a location (Flower & Guillaume, 2002, p. 18) – the edge of chaos is a condition, not a location. Sitting on top of a moving bicycle that is out of balance and tilting leftward toward the ground is a condition. It's possible to do it over and over again until one gets used to it; and then, most of one's resources

can be allocated to invention and problem solving – i.e., to learning in the moment of action. The closer we move toward the edge of chaos, the more possibilities there are for serendipity, mutations, and invention -- and that is a fair definition of my notion of learning in the moment of action.

Each year that our students graduate from the relatively stable, equilibrium seeking environment of the university, the external environment fills up a little bit more with organizations that operate in the post-911 paradigm -- and they *must* import new, young talent in search of meaningful work who can help fulfill their organizations' missions, transform inputs into outputs, and at the end of the day, make the world a better place. I think that my role as a faculty member is to prepare business students to be ready for that kind of engagement. It requires the integrity of their feelings, beliefs, and actions as well as an unshakable confidence in their moral values and principles. Let me give you a glimpse of some of the challenges that these graduates typically face in the new paradigm of organizational life. Here are the words of a former President and COO of a Fortune 500 company – it seems to me that he is describing a business environment that is the equivalent of riding a two wheel bicycle that is about to tilt and crash down into the ground:

There was a whole area of things that I didn't think we ought to mess with, that we ought to leave it to people to come up with on their own. And that was: how do you serve your customer, how do you execute strategy, what strategy do you want to choose, and how do you operate in your business? And I don't, . . . I really don't care. I really don't care. If you want to come in at 10:30 in the morning and leave at 2 in the afternoon, that's fine. As long as you're accomplishing your objectives, that's fine. You want to get rid of hierarchy and forms, that's fine. You want to wear baseball caps in the office, we've done away with dress codes and all the rest of that in the company. It doesn't really matter. You want to try a new product? With your customer? You don't have to ask me, just do it, I mean, just figure out how you make it happen. And we just took away a lot of the clutter. And we actually, we made the system loose in terms of capital allocation, loose in terms of expense statements and all. If you've got a good idea and you want to fly up to New York and talk to someone about it, I'm not going to look at your expense form. I'm going to trust you to be doing the right thing [01:10].

Most of my students – undergrads and graduate students alike – would think that that's an attractive employment arrangement – even *without* hearing the amount of salary they'd earn! Thousands of American organizations operate in this manner. How am I supposed to prepare students to function in such an environment? I believe that the answer is: out of the comfort zone and into the action of 21st century learning -- which means that here at UNH, I need to help students *learn how to learn* (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Barnett & Pratt, 2000).

The first phase of learning how to learn involves students' mastery of *single-loop learning* -- a collaborative inquiry aimed at error detection and correction through changing strategies and assumptions within a constant framework of performance norms. It is geared toward effectiveness. The second phase involves their mastery of *double-loop learning* which refers to collaborative inquiry that takes the form of a restructuring of organizational norms as well as associated strategies and assumptions. The third and last phase involves *triple-loop learning* (or

"learning to learn") and it is characterized by organizational members engaging in either single- or double-loop learning as they gain insight about previous contexts for learning. People use reflection and inquiry into previous episodes of organizational learning or nonlearning. Discovering what facilitated or inhibited learning, they invent new learning strategies, produce them, and evaluate and generalize what they have produced. Encoded in individual images and maps, the results are reflected in organizational learning practice. Triple-loop learning involves participants in learning about organizational learning.

To achieve that goal, I draw students into the spotlight where they are challenged to move closer and closer toward the edge of chaos. They are encouraged to feel uncomfortable and to not try to hide it! Instead, the goal is to become comfortable with being uncomfortable. I've learned to pay attention to the emotional climate in my classroom in order for all of this to work. I am concerned to a reasonable degree about the knowledge and skills that students develop and demonstrate through final exams, analyses, and other proficiency tests. But knowledge becomes obsolete fairly quickly – content fades. So my focal concern is process -- how students *feel* in the chaos spotlight, in the moment of learning in the midst of the action. To the extent that students become familiar with the *feeling* of being out of balance, the chances are excellent that they will be ready to meet future challenges in highly uncertain or high velocity environments. The human capacity for remembering one's past feelings, recalling them in novel but similar circumstances, and engaging them anew is well documented – but I think that the phenomenon has been most eloquently articulated by the great African American poet Maya Angelou who recently said:

*I've learned that people will forget what you said,
people will forget what you did,
but people will never forget how you made them feel.*
(Maya Angelou, 2004)

And so the power of emotional information becomes more apparent. I've evolved to this position based in part on my own experiences as a student. As an undergrad in Ann Arbor, I was fortunate to be mentored by a wonderful social psychologist, Rafe Ezekiel. He agreed to sponsor an independent study for me – I was so eager to intensively study an organization because it was becoming clear that organizational psychology was going to be my life's work. Rafe was delighted to sponsor my independent study and he even had links to an intriguing organization that he could set me up to study right away. I was thrilled. I asked him, "Which organization is it?" He said, "Oh, it's over in Ypsilanti." Me: "Oh. What's its name?" Rafe: "Alcoholics Anonymous." Me: "What?!!!" Rafe: "Alcoholics Anonymous." Me: "But I can't study *them!*" Rafe: "Why not?" Me: "Rafe! I don't even *drink!*" Rafe: "Oh, that's okay, they don't discriminate over there – they accept everyone."

Trusting in Rafe's wisdom, I pursued the study of Alcoholics Anonymous. I felt exquisitely uncomfortable in every single encounter that I had with the members of the group. I have rarely in my whole life ever felt so out of balance – riding the proverbial bike and constantly on the verge of a tilt and crash. But in time, I got used to the feeling of being uncomfortable and it ceased to distract me in my pursuit of knowledge and understanding about organizations.

From my earliest childhood, it was obvious that I would become devoted to learning and discovery. Later, around age 8 or 9, I began to tell my aunts and uncles that I was going to become a psychologist or a lawyer. My mother was thrilled with both options. My father was unaccepting of any destiny for his daughter other than becoming the Chief Operating Officer of his corporation and one day running it for him. I remember asking him, once, if he meant that I'd be a partner. He replied that no, he just wanted me to run the place for him. I told him that I didn't think that was such a good deal.

Overall, my father disdained university education – he had spent too much time at NYU's School of Commerce, Accounts and Finance as a young man, sorely disappointed that the classrooms were filled with knowledge but little wisdom -- at a time, in 1928, when the nation desperately needed economic solutions. So my father generated his own solutions through his entrepreneurial ventures and reminded me at every opportunity that universities are a waste of time.

But, on the other hand, my mother romanticized university education. She had arrived at the Statue of Liberty in 1914 as a 3 year old refugee from what was then Russia, now Ukraine, along with her non-English speaking parents and her eight siblings. Once settled into immigrant life in New York, her formal education peaked at 6th grade. With eight other children to feed, clothe, and educate, her parents ran short of funds for her right around her 12th birthday. She became a self-educated, passionate student of literature, the arts, history, and religion.

In the end, my mother prevailed and I was enrolled as a freshman at NYU. But only six weeks into my first semester, my father's business failed, he declared bankruptcy, the family's economic stability evaporated, and I had to withdraw from college. The experience was devastating. I vowed that one day I would reclaim my educational opportunity and although it took a couple of decades, I eventually succeeded – from Psychology 101 to the dissertation. I was blessed to have a second chance without which I would never be sharing my story with you.

Today, on the occasion of this treasured award, I can honestly say to you that teaching provides me with the most concrete and immediate sense of achievement in my academic life, and at the same time, with the greatest challenges and anxieties. Nothing takes me out of my comfort zone as much as teaching does. Every course is a new bike ride for me and the only certainty that I have going into the classroom is that I have felt uncomfortable like this thousands of times before, and I'm familiar enough with it that I can ride it out for the sake of growth and development – both my own and my students. What a fitting conclusion to the lesson that Rafe Ezekiel aimed to teach me in Ann Arbor. Years later, I have come to understand that he was promoting the notion that if you can let the world change *you*, then *you* can change *the world*.

Thank you for letting me share this time and these thoughts with you.

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PROFESSIONAL BIOGRAPHY

Carole K. Barnett is an Associate Professor of Management in the Department of Management at the University of New Hampshire's Whittemore School of Business and Economics.

She received the Whittemore School's MBA Class of 1999 and the MBA Class of 2003 Teaching Excellence Awards, the 1999 Whittemore School of Business and Economics Teaching Excellence Award, and from 2001-2003 held the *UNH Class of 1938 Professorship* in recognition of teaching excellence.

She conducts multi-level research on organizational learning, leadership, change, and transformation. She has published academic and practitioner oriented journal articles as well as cases based on her research of Ford Motor Company, General Motors, Navistar International Corporation, GE Lighting, GE Capital, GE Medical Systems, GE Plastics, ValuJet Airlines, Polaris Industries, and others. Her edited volumes focus on organizational effectiveness. She teaches graduate- and undergraduate-level business courses on the subjects of organizational design and behavior, strategic and generative leadership, group dynamics, and organizational culture. She designed and since October 2001 has directed the leadership "Executive Institute" for BAE SYSTEMS' senior executives at the University of New Hampshire.

Carole joined the UNH faculty in 1994. She is a graduate of the University of Michigan where she completed the B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. in organizational psychology.

University of New Hampshire

The Jean Brierley Award for Excellence in Teaching

The Jean Brierley Award for Excellence in Teaching is our highest level recognition for excellence in teaching by a full-time faculty member. A bequest from the estate of Jean Brierley, Class of 1930, established this career teaching award to recognize outstanding accomplishment in the classroom. Professor Brierley established the endowed fund in 1973 to recognize teaching in any field or discipline at UNH. The recipient will be invited to give an annual presentation sponsored by the Teaching Excellence Program (e.g., lecture, workshop session, seminar) on campus or in the community to help celebrate and promote good teaching.

About Jean Brierley:

Jean Brierley (1908-1986) graduated from the University of New Hampshire in 1930 with a baccalaureate degree in Zoology. After leaving the University of New Hampshire, Ms. Brierley became a teaching assistant in the Zoology Department at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor until 1937. The University of Michigan awarded her the degree of Master of Science in 1931 and Doctor of Philosophy in 1937. In 1938, she moved to Texas State College for Women in Denton, Texas, where she was an Assistant Professor in Biology. She joined the faculty at Michigan State College in 1945, teaching freshman biology and natural sciences. She retired from the faculty at Michigan State University in 1973 as a full Professor.

Professor Brierley was a member of many professional organizations including the Genetics Society of America, Society for the Study of Evolution, Michigan Academy of Science, Sigma Xi, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AASS). She was active in civic affairs as a member of the League of Women Voters, Common Cause, the Sierra Club, National Organization of Women, and Concerned Scientists. Her many interests also included travel.

About the Jean Brierley Award:

Professor Brierley established an endowed fund in 1973 to recognize teaching in any field or discipline at the University of New Hampshire. This fund was completed upon her death as a tribute to those members of the UNH faculty who have distinguished themselves as teachers. One award is rendered each academic year as our highest level recognition for excellence in teaching. In conjunction with the UNH Center for Teaching Excellence, recipients host an annual event to advance the teaching mission of the university.

Jean Brierley Award Past Recipients:

2003 John Ernest, English
 2002 Richard England, Economics
 2001 P.T. Vasudevan, Chemical Engineering
 2000 Ronald Croce, Kinesiology
 1999 William Condon, Animal and Nutritional Sciences
 1998 Terry Savage, Philosophy/Humanities, UNH-Manchester
 1997 Robert Kertzer, Kinesiology
 1996 David Hebert, Education
 1995 Nancy Kinner, Civil Engineering
 1994 Marc W. Herold, Economics
 1993 Wallace Bothner, Earth Sciences
 1992 Christopher F. Bauer, Chemistry
 1991 Lester Fisher, English