

“You Can Get Here From There: One Teacher’s Journey”

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There may be some here who do not recognize the old Bert and I story behind the title of this talk.

The city slicker pulls up in front of Sutherland’s IGA and asks an old timer “Which Way to Millinocket.”

“Well you can go west to the next intersection, get onto the turnpike, go north through the tollgate at Augusta, till you come to that intersection. ...Well no” ...Or, You can keep right on this road. It changes to dirt now and again. Just keep the river on your left. You’ll come to a cross roads, and ...let me see.. Then again you can take that scenic coastal route that the tourists use. After you get to Bucksport....“Hmm.. Hmm... Millinocket...Come to think of it. You can’t get there from here.”

But I have heard another twist to this story. The irritated city slicker gets so mad that he erupts with: “You know, you Mainers are the dumbest people on earth.” To which the old timer responds: “Ayah – we may be dumb, but we ain’t lost.”

Well, when I began my teaching at Vermont Academy 40 years ago, I was both dumb and lost. There I was facing a class of 20 or so ninth graders in World History. I was petrified as I looked out at their bright, fresh faces. Why? I knew a fair amount of history, but as Janet Polasky once observed to me, you never really understand something until you have to teach it.



Fuller Hall on left, Vermont Academy

An early September cold snap had triggered the antiquated heating system in Fuller Hall, so the steamy radiators had cranked up the room to 75 degrees or so. There I was in my Harris Tweed jacket, starting to sweat like Albert Brooks in *Broadcast News*. I didn't dare take the jacket off because my armpits were so hopelessly soaked. When I turned to write on the blackboard I would open my coat a tad and sneak a quick peek at the ever-growing ring.

Every day that fall I would say to myself, "I am not very good at this. I'll never measure up to Don Gould", a master teacher my twin brother and I had worked with five years earlier, during a summer of construction work. Gould had majored in history at Cornell and was just finishing his MAT at Harvard. I learned more history that summer than I had learned in five years of junior high and high school. I wanted to be Don Gould. He is with us today. **Please stand Up Don**

But there I was in the bowels of Fuller Hall, surely failing. Cursing Gould for his charisma.

Luckily, the students were just as scared as I was. One of them is with us today. Jim Davis, who some of you may know as a long-time firefighter in Durham and Lee. Somehow Jim and the others managed to survive that class.

Jim please stand up

My problem in the fall of 1970 was that I lacked the 2 crucial components for effective and enjoyable teaching: Command of Content, Command of Pedagogy. And here I am giving a talk about teaching.

So I want to share what I have learned in my 40-year journey to Millinocket and beyond. I offer little that is novel, but I hope to reinforce some verities by way of my personal experience.

My first lesson was that **SOMETIMES YOU STUMBLE ON CONTENT AND EXPERTISE**

In 1972, I was looking for graduate programs in history when an old family friend told me about a new UMass program in sport administration. I was a Latin major in college. I could hardly believe that you could get credit, let alone a degree in such a field. So Donna and I moved to Amherst in June of 1972, assuming a one-year stay, and then who knows where.

That plan dissolved when I started my coursework. I had enjoyed exposure to many experts at Bowdoin College, but none in my mind surpassed the command of material that Guy Lewis and John Loy projected in their courses on the history and sociology of sport. It was an intellectual alchemy that transformed play and games into real scholarship.

For instance, reading about the Negro Leagues and the work of black sportswriters in pushing the integration of MLB, I learned that Branch Rickey was not the saint my Intro Soc text at Bowdoin made him out to be. And the extraordinarily sophisticated women's basketball leagues of the 1920s opened my eyes to the dangers of collective amnesia. There were important stories beyond box scores and batting averages.

That fall, UMass granted final approval for a new PhD program in Sport Studies. I was among the first group admitted to the program, along with my friend Bob Goodhue. At the same time, we both were admitted to the MA program in the History Department. Better yet, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts was going to pay for it all!! It seemed too good to be true. An academic career like my heroes John Loy and Guy Lewis. **John Loy and Bob Goodhue please stand up**

But I quickly learned the next lesson on content and expertise. **SOMETIMES YOU MUST TRUST AND FOLLOW YOUR PASSION WHEN THINGS DON'T LOOK SO GOOD.**

To begin with, the rest of the world was not UMass, where my professors in history and business were enthusiastic about the prospects of sport studies.

Beyond my brothers Pete and Erl, my family had no idea what I was up to. When Donna and I visited my dear aunt in Kennebunkport Maine, she introduced me to an old family friend – “this is my nephew, who is getting his PhD in sports.” The Mainer looked and said: “Ayah, sounds like a good one.”

That was a fairly typical response. Worse yet, when it was time to hunt for a faculty job, I discovered that my expertise did not match the marketplace, which was 5-7 years behind UMass in embracing sport studies and sport management. I was lucky to get a job in athletic administration at the Eastern College Athletic Conference, where I got to work closely with coaches like Charlie Holt at UNH. Luckier still, my boss allowed me time to continue my scholarly research and writing, which is how I landed my first faculty job.

SO CONTENT HAS PRIMACY, BUT SOMETIMES WE MUST WAIT FOR CIRCUMSTANCES TO ALIGN WITH OUR PASSIONS.

Just think, for instance, of a graduate student in finance, who in 2003 was shopping for jobs based on her expertise in derivatives, mortgage-backed securities, and credit default swaps. At that moment in time, search committees might have rolled their eyes and said “why should anyone care about that stuff.”

MY THIRD LESSON WAS THAT SMALL INVESTMENTS IN PEDAGOGY CAN PROVIDE ENORMOUS RETURNS NOT ONLY IN TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS BUT ALSO IN JOB SATISFACTION

If your experience is anything like mine, graduate school offered nothing on how to teach. In fact the notion of pedagogy was antithetical to the ethos of scholarship. Content and research ruled. At best we had a mentor who was also an inspiring teacher. But simply modeling a mentor can prove frustrating, because our students do not necessarily share our love of content.

This I learned the hard way. Outside of doctoral seminars, I had seen only lecture with some slides and limited discussion. Before class, write the key terms on the blackboard (that's blackboard with a small b). Run through them via lecture. Ask a few questions. And hope for some raised hands. That was my approach. I cringe at the memories of eyes glazed like Dunkin Donuts.

So I looked for ways to juice up the lectures. At Robert Morris College I had a colleague with amazing ability to milk an overhead. Now, there are younger faculty here today who may not even know what an overhead is. Let me show you what we did to dazzle students before Powerpoint:

The drop-down entry
 The elegant fade-in
 The bouncing entry

Of course such technological wizardry had limits. The great epiphany for me occurred in 1986 when the chair of our English Department secured a sizeable FIPSE grant with Carnegie Mellon University to implement a program called Writing Across the Business Disciplines. About 30 faculty members were paid to take a summer seminar on developing writing intensive course components. This absolutely transformed my teaching. Writing became a tool for learning and not just for evaluation. How could I have taught so many years without knowing this??? It was as if I had been trying to coach an ice hockey team without ever having the players step on the ice and practice their individual and team skills. Imagine a coach simply lecturing, showing film, and asking questions in a classroom, day after day, without ever having the players actually practice the skills they would need in competition. Why you would end up with – the New York Islanders.

Since then I have been much more attentive to pedagogy. There is much to learn all around us. My wife Donna has worked in the Psych Department for 22 year years. A decade ago, at her urging, I attended one of Richard Kushner's Psych 401 classes in Spaulding Auditorium. I watched 250 students in rapt attention for 50 minutes. At that time, Richard was receiving standing ovations on the last day of class. What was his secret? Granted it was before the age of texting and smart phones. But I saw a pattern. Every ten minutes or so, Richard would bark out a question to answer or a problem to solve, then order: "Go ahead – talk to your neighbors." And suddenly that auditorium was a swirl of energy. One minute later, he would bring them back down to discuss some answers. Up and down, up and down. I didn't know whether I was watching Richard Kushner or Richard Simmons. But I knew I was watching a master at the top of his game.

I HAVE ALSO LEARNED THAT PEDAGOGY MUST CHANGE TO ACCOMMODATE AT LEAST SOME OF THE CHANGES IN EACH NEW GENERATION OF STUDENTS

Since February 4 2008 Donna and I have spent a great deal of time with Navy SEALs at all levels. Last spring we heard one of their rising stars give a talk about Special Operations since 2001. His core point was that the SEAL command recognized a great paradox in having so many seasoned veterans from a decade of war. While there was a massive amount of experience to be shared with new recruits, that same experience might well be misplaced,

reinforcing a tendency to fight what he called the “last war.” Many brave and patriotic young Americans have died because their commanding officers were fighting the last war.

We don’t think of teaching as a war – although there are days when we all feel some battle fatigue. At the same time, I have come to recognize that we are in an educational struggle with all kinds of competitors. The terrain is constantly changing. The students are constantly changing. We need to avoid teaching to the last generation, because in a real way our hybris, our arrogance, our comfort zone may bury our students and perhaps our institution, just as much as Douglas MacArthur’s arrogance and hybris buried the brave GIs in Korea.

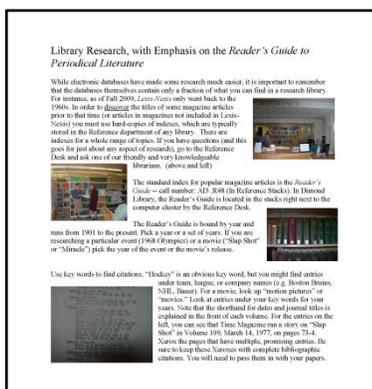
This is particularly true in our use or misuse of new technologies.

10 years ago there was still a belief that laptops and the internet would revolutionize education. Now, I don’t allow laptops in class unless I say so. The laptop is simply a large cell phone. Facebook is the enemy.

With technology changing so fast, we all have a stake in supporting the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning – especially in their work on Multimedia Learning.

I have leaned on Lee Seidel and Victor Benassi over the years to help me solve nagging problems. One example is a primer I developed for my inquiry course. I knew that students were increasingly assuming that research for a literature review began and ended with Google or with a data base. I wanted them to use the Library for something other than a café or a meeting room. So I wrote up a primer walking them through the steps of using an index, finding if we subscribed to the serial, locating the item in the stacks etc. Still, many of the students had trouble following the steps, which seemed so simple to me.

I called Victor. “How about adding some visuals?” he said, knowing the research on multimedia learning suggested students learn better if text is accompanied by coherent and contiguous images. So I went over to the Library with my digital camera and



The first class to use the new primer had no problem finding material. I felt triumphant. Of course there were limits. When I asked what they had learned, one student quickly piped up – “I learned that Microfilm sucks”

I could only laugh at that one.

THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON HAS BEEN FINDING MY CORE PURPOSE AS A TEACHER

One theme running through the Brierley talks is the notion of empowering students, which is one step in this core process. Students at UNH have saved me twice from professional oblivion. I certainly owe them empowerment.

One trigger is to learn their names. Like Nancy Kinner, I try to learn all student names by the third week of class. My mnemonic has been to figure out who they look like, then put a note by their name on the roster. So for instance, if I had Bob Kertzer in class I would put a note by his name – Brad Pitt.

Sometimes that approach to memory has gone awry.

Almost ten years ago, I faced a class of 75 students. This would test my ability to learn names. But as I took the role on Day 1, I thought I had an easy one, for this student named Mike looked just like Sam the Sham of the Pharaohs.



Any minute I expected him to start bawling out “Whooley Booley.”

Well halfway into that first day, Mike raised his hand to answer a question. Ready to show off my memory skills, I confidently nodded his way and said smartly – “Yes Sam.” Back to the drawing boards

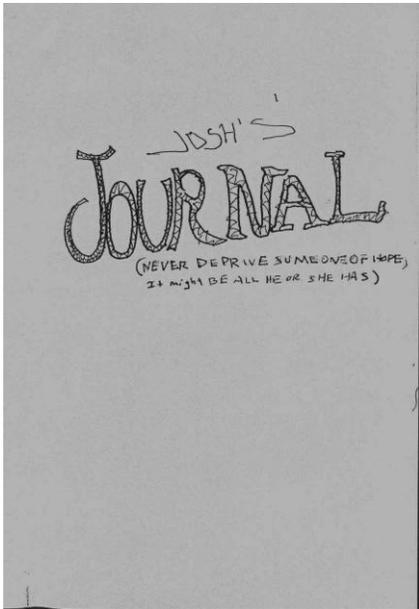
But students are more than names. And education is more than memorization. I have come to believe through the deaths of my sons that the students and I are bound in a collective experience of redemption and transformation. Bad day after bad day, they have given me the chance to redeem myself, and a chance to move beyond the depths of my personal struggles. I believe that my core job as a teacher is simply to reciprocate. For this process to work I must embrace them more as sons and daughters -- in teaching, in marking up papers, in advising. It can be tough love, but still love.

This is one of the areas where our outstanding coaches can serve as models for us all. Athletes’ mistakes are painful, obvious, and costly. But our coaches must believe in redemption and transformation or they cannot succeed. And in the end, when that final buzzer sounds, the redemption of any coach is in the hands of the players. Think about that level of reciprocity. If you accept my belief that education is ultimately about mutual

redemption and transformation, then you know we have some outstanding masters who came to join us today.

We all need hope – in the lab, in the gym, in the lecture hall, in the moment of advising or discussing or criticizing.

My oldest son Josh kept a journal when he went through his 17-month battle with brain cancer. Here is the inside cover page of his journal. “Never deprive someone of hope. It may be all he or she has.”



So I want to thank people who have continued to give me hope.

Friends across the campus and community. If I named names we would be here a long time.

Students and alums -- some are here today. You are what distinguish UNH as an institution.

Victor Benassi, Lee Seidel, Mike Lee and Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

My sons Josh and Nate taught me that life should not be navigated or measured by medals and awards, but rather by a love of my craft and my community. I accept this award with thanks to my wonderful colleagues in the Department of Kinesiology who challenge and inspire me with their dedication to innovative teaching that is linked to research and service. Especially Mike Gass and Ron Croce, who continued to push nominations when I told them to lay off.

My Family – Hardy-Harris-Burnell-Kudrikow – here with us today

Josh, Nate, Ben, Parker, Mindi, Tim

And most important of all, I thank my wife Donna, who has been half of me on this whole journey. Without her, I would not be here today.

Let me finish with a lesson from my son Josh

My value as a human will never matter as much as it did when I cared for Josh, part of a tag team with Donna. I would wake him in the morning to give him a needle to keep his white cell count up during chemo. He would look up at me and say: "Hi Dad, How are you?" always trying to make ME feel better because he cared for all of us even though he was the one who was staving off death.

Josh was a drummer with the kind of rock band dream that inspires many teenagers. After his death, I would periodically find scraps of paper containing lyrics to some poem/song he was writing. They continue to inspire me. Here is one called *Love*:

"LOVE"

 TO ME, LOVE IS TWISTED.
 THE WAY IT CREEPS UP ON YOU
 NOT SIGNALING OR CARING,
 THEN SUDDENLY BREAKS
 THROUGH YOUR HEART
 EMERGING CURIOUS.
 LOVE TESTS,
 LOVE TO ME IS TWISTED
 BUT IN A GOOD WAY,
 LOVE CAN BRING YOU INTO
 A NEW VIEW; A VIEW
 THAT YOU'RE NEVER READY FOR.

We are truly blessed to live and work in a community like UNH, where our students, our colleagues, and our craft continually provide us with new views that we are never quite ready for.

Thank you for helping me get to here from there. Thank you for coming...