



Michael David Brown

animal rights stance of a female premed student? I don't want to cavil about the way the authors cast the study, for I may have invoked entirely the wrong thing to comment on. (Yet, why is the young woman's rabbit foot pink? Why are the only two other students mentioned by name male? Perhaps the authors intended to insert these elements to heighten the oppressive atmosphere in the class for Wendy and to indicate to us that Aikman's sexism is pervasive, even normative.)

So that I don't completely ignore pedagogy, let me comment very briefly on Aikman's retort to Wendy "that [her] opinions, once they're openly expressed, are in a sense public, and can be supported or criticized like any other opinion." Once again, Aikman's naivety is breathtaking and self-indicting. No matter how Wendy's position came up, it certainly has nothing to do with acceleration or spring velocity. Even so, an opinion expressed by a student has less public weight than an opinion expressed by a teacher, and Aikman's ongoing challenge to Wendy embeds an opinion of his, which, though unexpressed, is entirely public. Finally, we have no evidence that Wendy's original expression of her opinion was meant to twit Aikman; Aikman, however, seems to have made her opinions the butt of his jejune, early-morning yuks. ■

## VIEWPOINT

### Dusting Off Our Personal Teaching Philosophies

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It has been ten years since I first wrote a statement of teaching philosophy in graduate school. When I reviewed it recently, I was surprised to find that what was theoretical then truly has meaning for me now. Oddly (for me), I still believe the same things I did ten years ago, but now I have more basis for believing them. Given budget cutback worries, committee responsibilities, student advising, the pressure to publish, and the seemingly endless minutia of day-to-day life, it might be time for all of us to pause for a moment and reacquaint ourselves with those philosophies we formed at the beginning of our careers. When we do, we find ourselves looking up from the immediate pressures of tasks and seeing ourselves again in our primary

roles as teachers and learners. Undergirding the most specialized of disciplines lies the individual teacher's approach to the process of education in general. When I looked back (or up) at what I believe, here's what I found.

### Natural Law and Human Persuasion

I believe all educators should be students of natural law and of human persuasion. The logic of the scientific method and the illogic of the human psyche and heart must both be understood and applied in the business of teaching. Given this, I believe, as a teacher, I have three seminal responsibilities to my students.

- The first is to communicate the organized knowledge of my discipline in a clear and understandable way. But presenting the information is not enough. The presentation must reflect the teacher's engagement with the knowledge and invite the students' engagement with it. Engagement is the threshold of understanding, one of the distinguishing features of the truly professional teacher.

- The second is to be well-versed in the teaching of specific skills that are inherent in my discipline. Movement skills are the special province of the physical educator. Here the organized body of knowledge from the natural and social sciences engages the phenomenon of human movement potential. The applied setting can be as diverse as teaching preteens how to hit a softball, the rehabilitation of an injured knee, teaching how certain physical activities correlate with health and longevity, or simply imparting the appreciation and joy found in doing physical activity for its own sake.

- Finally, my third main responsibility is to serve as a facilitator for insight and self discovery. Ultimately, we must lead students to insight, to their own integration of organized knowledge and applied skills. Helping students learn to make sense of experience and solve problems is perhaps the greatest and most important role for an educator. I believe that personal insight, like luck, is rarely accidental. Branch Rickey, the sports owner responsible for baseball player Jackie Robinson's breaking the

color barrier in professional sports said, "Luck is the residue of design." The great educator teaches organized knowledge and skills, but more importantly facilitates insight and discovery through his or her unique connection with the body of organized knowledge and skills.

### **Specific Responsibilities to My Students**

Inherent in these roles are certain responsibilities to my students. First, to *prepare a well-planned course* of study with specific objectives and expectations for performance. The unambiguous setting of realistic yet high expectations is, in my view, the best prescription for student success. Second, I try to recognize and *appreciate the individual differences* in learning styles and personality traits. I try to enhance those traits that are unique and positive in the individual. And third, I attempt to serve as an agent of the personal as well as academic maturation of my students. One's effects on a student academically may only be a small part of one's contribution to the total person. Emerson said, "What we are really looking for is someone who is capable of helping us become the person we are capable of becoming."

I take great joy in bringing humor and enthusiasm to my students. Enthusiasm comes from the Greek, *en theos*, meaning "the God within." Humor, for me, is a personal instant vacation, an antidote to the complexities of life. "In tragedy," said British

playwright Christopher Fry, "every moment is eternity; in comedy, eternity is a moment."

### **Responsibilities Students Have To Me**

I believe there are three critical responsibilities that students have to me in particular, and their fellow classmates as well. I cannot insist upon these, but I can let my students know

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that the teaching/learning process is interactive and dynamic. The first is to *maintain an open mind*. This is the foundation of learning and understanding. I can model this attitude in my behavior in the classroom; indeed, I must if I hope to expect it from my students.

Secondly, students need to recognize that they must work hard to *master fundamentals*, including definition and nomenclature. This is

the most laborious and difficult task for students in my experience. The impatience for "applied" and "practical" knowledge before one masters basic elements is understandable — yet we do not do ourselves or our students favors by not insisting upon a firm foundation. A sensitive and skilled musician can genuinely interpret a piece of music only if scales were practiced endlessly first.

And finally, I expect students to *participate actively* in the learning process. This contributes to the growth of the individual student, his or her peers, and to my own personal and professional growth.

In seeking to become better college teachers, we find ourselves torn in two directions. On the one hand, we, as faculty in particular disciplines, spend much of our time attempting to define our differences from other disciplines and in the pursuit of specialized knowledge. On the other hand, we feel an interest in getting on top of the literature concerning teaching tactics and methodologies; processes by which we hope to become more effective teachers. Torn as we are, we often forget that our strategic approach to teaching, our personal beliefs and values, are finally — and more than anything else — what defines us as teachers and learners. |||

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