

# **Journey of Joy: Teaching Tips for Reflection, Rejuvenation and Renewal**

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# Journey of Joy: Teaching Tips for Reflection, Rejuvenation and Renewal



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## PREFACE

Originally, I had thought of using *Journey to Joy* as a title for this work. However, an actual trip changed my mind. On one leg of a recent summer vacation, I convinced my husband Hank to take a back road rather than the faster highway. I have always loved the back-road route. It's more scenic, more calming, and usually much more interesting. Having talked my spouse into traveling this way, I was enjoying the scenery when I realized this was the way **of** joy—not **to** joy. So also is it in teaching. It is possible to experience joy along the way, not only as a final destination.

In May 2010, I was on my way to *The Teaching Professor* conference. At Chicago's busy O'Hare Airport a businessman helped me out when we both missed our connecting flights. As we settled at the new gate to await departure, he asked the topic of my upcoming presentation. When I told him that it was about the joy of teaching, he remarked that I must certainly be talking about summer. Too many people have a similar view, and too many of them may even be teachers.

This collection is about pursuing a joyful journey in college teaching. It is meant to encourage other faculty who do the challenging work of teaching. Prompted to share these thoughts after hitting a slump in my own teaching a few years ago, this slim volume is part memoir and part advice for others.

When on a journey, you need several things. You need a map, or at least a general idea of where you are going—some kind of a plan. You need fuel or a ticket—some means to move you forward. And, it is often helpful to have a navigator either in the form of a device such as a global-positioning system (GPS) or a companion who will provide directions and assistance to guide you along the way. Most everything else (such as food, shelter, and more fuel) you can obtain along the way. This work is like the navigator that offers direction.

Being on a journey requires being open to the unexpected. So, too, is the journey of joy in teaching. My personal journey of joy has entailed acceptance and even anticipation of the surprises along the way. This outlook brings greater satisfaction and pleasure. As a student of teaching for 35 years, I offer my individual perspective as a way to help others find joy along the way.





# Journey of Joy: Teaching Tips for Reflection, Rejuvenation and Renewal

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## Table of Contents

The Meaning of J.O.Y. ....4

Looking in the Mirror .....5

The Focus Perspective .....6

The Case of Carrie and the Daily Weekend .....7

Look for Charlie .....9

How Not to Get Lost .....10

The Artist Within .....11

Accentuate the Positive .....12

Joy Zappers .....13

Joy Boosters.....14

Make It Authentic .....16

Models of Meaning .....17

The Golden Triangle of Teaching .....18

Pick up the Phone .....19

“Can We Go Outside?” .....20

Let Students Ride the Bike .....21

Unexpected Delights .....23

Two Lessons from Daddy about Teaching.....24

“A” for Advising .....26

Tour Guides for Teachers .....27

Fuel Sources .....28

Concluding Thoughts.....29



## THE MEANING OF J.O.Y.

A few years ago my teaching life had reached what felt like a dead end. Daily, I would see newspaper announcements about the retirement of public school educators who had the same number of years of experience as I had. Subsequently, I found myself longing to be in those photographs or articles. A significant challenge existed in that I was not old enough to touch my retirement funds plus I lacked another viable source of income—a major financial dilemma. At the time it seemed that I was going through the motions of my teaching job, and I had definitely lost a sense of joy.

Around this same time I was offered the opportunity to serve in an administrative capacity. Thinking this might be the solution to navigating through my professional snag, I reluctantly agreed to take on the role as department chair. What was supposed to last one year ended up lasting two! When I was able to return full-time to teaching, I was more than ready but still bogged down with that low-joy feeling. I found myself focusing upon external sources of satisfaction such as the hours, the paycheck, the accolades, and the occasional awards. However, I finally came to the realization that none of these is the source of joy in teaching.

At the beginning of that “return-to-teaching” semester, I gave myself a new challenge. I decided to select one student who appeared resistant to learning and see whether, over the course of the semester, I might change his or her stance. As I thought about my personal search for joy, I created an acronym for the word itself—**JUST OFFER YOURSELF**. For the selected student in each class, I would make a concerted effort to talk with him or her frequently before class started and to find ways to engage the targeted student during class sessions. For instance, in one class I selected the student to play the role of talk-show host during an activity. In another class, one of my targeted students became a member of our school board simulation. From self-reflection and observation, I determined that these students had changed over the semester in terms of involvement. My joy was restored primarily by taking this approach—finding ways to impact students directly and individually. Now I have learned to view joy in teaching as simply this—examining how I can serve others and invest myself in the most meaningful aspects of the profession. Building relationships is critical to finding joy in teaching.

We often hear the advice of “focus on the students.” But, what exactly does this mean? I have found that it involves first getting the focus off self. However, it also entails giving of myself—my creative energies, my thought processes, my time and attention, and my expertise. I am pleased to report that my teaching joy has been restored. The remaining entries give additional insight into ways to find more joy in teaching.



### Travel Tips for Teachers

Watch the local or campus newspaper for articles that mention students enrolled in your classes. Cut these out and bring to class. You might place a sports article that features the name of one of your students on the document camera to project before class begins. This never fails to win a smile and to engage students.

Learn students’ names quickly and call them by name frequently. Your connection to students, their connection to each other and to you will be enhanced if you know their names. As simple as this advice is, it is amazing how many teaching professors fail to follow it.

Seek small ways to offer your vantage point and time to students. When we show that we are willing to listen, students are more inclined to share more openly. I am by no means advocating prying into students’ lives and certainly some students may share too much information, but sometimes they just need an open ear. You aren’t required to come up with a solution. Just respect students enough to hear their concerns.



# LOOKING IN THE MIRROR

Most of us do not naturally choose to spend time reflecting. If we did, we would be less likely to repeat the same behavioral patterns and mistakes. Looking in the mirror at ourselves as teachers is a valuable exercise. At the foundation of such self-reflection is identifying *why* we teach. Take some time to think about your major reasons for teaching. My top five reasons (in reverse order) are:

5. Keeps me young (relatively speaking)
4. Provides challenge & a creative outlet
3. Involves continual learning
2. Gives a chance to interact with young people and to establish relationships
1. Helps me to make a difference in improving the quality of public schools while helping students fulfill their dreams of becoming teachers

Articulating your reasons for teaching will help you stay motivated for the emotionally demanding task of teaching. Having a larger purpose engages us at a more motivated level. As Daniel Pink (2009, p. 133) noted, “The most deeply motivated people—not to mention those who are most productive and satisfied—hitch their desires to a cause larger than themselves.” A closer examination of your reasons for teaching will reveal the depth and extent of your personal motives. In recent years I started sharing my reasons with students on the first day of class. I believe that this helps them to see me as more human and more open to connecting with them.

As previously mentioned, several years ago I encountered a major snag in my teaching career and did not know whether I wanted to continue. Thus, I took an administrative detour. Upon deeper reflection, I realized that I had begun focusing mainly on the “duty” part of teaching more than the “devotion” side of teaching. That is, I was caught up in what I had to do in my role as teacher instead of what I got to do. I labeled this dilemma the “pietas of teaching” (Phelps, 2009). Pietas is a Latin word that means both “duty” and “devotion.” It is used frequently in Vergil’s *Aeneid* to describe the challenge that Aeneas faced in his struggle to establish a new nation (which would later become Rome) and his desire to be with his family. He learned that he could do both with balance being a critical factor. As far as my own crisis, I came to understand that I had an unbalanced approach to teaching and that joy arises from the devotion side of teaching. Those things that we “get” to do such as interact with young people, create new ways to explain concepts, and share our love for a subject area, bring more joy. We need to learn to see these aspects more clearly.

We cannot eliminate the “duty” side of teaching. For instance, we have to turn in grades and serve on curriculum committees, but we can reframe our perspective. Thus, while we must spend time grading, we can almost always add pleasure to the activity by playing music, eating chocolate, or sitting by a window. We can also keep our focus on the bigger picture, or target, rather than getting lost in the details of daily teaching. (See “How NOT to *Get Lost*.”) Sometimes we can modify a “duty” aspect of teaching that is diminishing our joy. For example, we might change submission deadlines for student work to reduce our stress (and even the students’ stress level).

## Travel Tips for Teachers

Have a regular plan for reflection time. You might spend time in between classes thinking about the previous session. I like to take an annual retreat where I devote time to examine changes I wish to implement in my



classes. Writing down these plans makes them more likely to happen. Keep a planner for lessons (a spiral notebook works well) and write on the back of each page what worked well and what you will change next time. You will then have a record of your reflections for the next time you teach the same course.

Make a list of those things you have to do as a college teacher. I imagine “grading” will be on that list. And, there are many other aspects of the job that must always be completed. Now make another list of all the things that you “get” to do. Try to make the second list longer than the first one. Work on changing your language even with the things that you have to do. For example, say “I get to grade these papers as a way to give helpful feedback.” To achieve greater joy, emphasize more the “devotion” aspects of teaching rather than the “duty” parts.

Make sure that you are teaching from your strengths. What do students and colleagues tell you that you do best? If you do well as a facilitator of discussion, lecture less. If you feel “in the zone” when you are planning learning activities instead of mastering a new technology tool, create more of these activities. Making this shift can yield more joy.



## THE FOCUS PERSPECTIVE

It is one week before classes start for the semester. What types of thoughts are occupying your mind? Are you mourning the loss of freedom and the chance to read for pleasure? Are you worried about getting everything done in time—the planning and preparation, the department meetings, and the organizational tasks? Are you excited about a new course assignment? Are you looking forward to the routine of a daily school schedule? Are you dreading grading papers?

While I do think about all these matters as I scurry about gathering materials and making sure things are ready for the first day of class, I try to focus primarily upon the unmet students. What will they be like? How can I connect to them? What interests and goals do they have? What’s the best first day strategy to use? How can I achieve the type of climate that I value? If it’s a freshman-level course, are there mainly first semester students enrolled? (Typically, I get a mixed-bag of student classifications in lower-division courses.) Emphasizing a perspective that is student-focused helps me to begin the semester in the right frame of mind.

As the semester begins, I find myself anticipating the possibility of transforming each group of individuals into a class. Momentum-building guides my planning and decision making. Within the first few class sessions, I mainly aim to get students to board the plane that is our class. Some are afraid to fly, some forgot to bring something or seem to wonder whether they made it to the right gate. Others won’t talk to their seat mate or put away their electronic devices. Gaining their attention is vital. How can I make them feel safe, focus on learning, want to engage, and see the relevance of the course? These questions occupy my mind.

It seems to me that what I focus on right before the semester begins can have an important impact on the rest of the term. If I am scattered and anxious about completing various tasks, then I will have a similarly chaotic semester. If I am calm and anticipating the “who” of the semester, then I will relate better to my students. It took me almost 30 years to realize this critical stage-setting preparation and how much control over it that I had.

PAGE 7 ▶



## Travel Tips for Teachers

Build your level of excitement about the start of the semester. What do you most enjoy about the beginning of classes? Try to focus less on what you have to do to get ready—even though you have these tasks to complete. Create a sense of anticipation for meeting your students—similar to being excited about going on a trip.

This may seem silly, but I have found that buying a new outfit—usually a dress for me—will put me in a more positive frame of mind for the beginning of school. For others purchasing a new notebook, pen, flash drive, or other educational technology supply item may do the trick. The psychological benefit of having something new that is school-related creates a mindset that good things are ahead.

Slow down a bit before the rapid-fire pace of the semester starts and think about your reasons for being in the classroom. Focus mainly upon the students—review the class rosters and start learning students' names and majors before the first class session. This will help create a sense of connection to the students and will make name-learning much easier when you get a jump start on the task.



## THE CASE OF CARRIE AND THE DAILY WEEKEND

It's 9 a.m. on a Wednesday morning around mid-term. "Carrie James" (a fictional name) grabs her textbook and class roster and heads upstairs to her first class of the day. It starts at 9 o'clock. She makes a pit stop before arriving at the classroom. When Carrie enters the room, most students immediately stop talking. She quickly calls roll and says, "Let's get started. We have a lot to cover today." Carrie begins the lecture by displaying a list of key terms on the document camera. She lectures for most of the period, closely following the text

outline and then announces a test to the moans and groans of students. As soon as class ends, Carrie returns to her office, shuts the door, and turns her attention to the manuscript that she was editing for publication. She has an hour before her next class which she puts completely out of her mind.

All who work in higher education know someone like Carrie. We may even be like her ourselves. What has diminished her apparent joy in teaching? While the pressure to publish is quite real and has become even greater in recent years, faculty like Carrie miss the joy of teaching by focusing too much of their immediate attention on other work responsibilities thereby missing opportunities to find greater satisfaction in teaching.

Finding joy in teaching involves incorporating aspects of pleasure from other aspects of our lives into our teaching lives. As an example, I love to read. However, participating in a book club for pleasure (as opposed to professional reading) is not for me. It's too restrictive. The freedom to choose to read any book that I want is a large part of the pleasure I derive from reading. Knowing this about myself, I can also look for ways to preserve autonomy in my teaching. Selecting and creating my own materials, designing meaningful learning activities, and developing my own assessment measures are some possible ways to exercise choice as a teacher.

Another source of joy in teaching comes from connecting to students and other colleagues. By closing herself off from others, Carrie is decreasing her chance of finding much joy in teaching. Assuming this scenario is her daily routine, she seems to be isolating herself from the intellectual stimulation that others can provide.

PAGE 8 ▶



One of the best lines in the popular PBS series “Downton Abbey” is spoken by Lady Violet Grantham. When her cousin Matthew, a lawyer, explains that he can do some extra work on the weekend, she replies, “What’s a weekend?” Every day was the weekend for folks like Violet. We all know the meaning of “weekend” even if we don’t change much the pace of our work. If only the weekend could be daily. Perhaps it can.

A recent study of working adults in various occupations conducted by Ryan, Bernstein, and Brown (2010) and published in the *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, confirms two factors that create what is known as the “weekend effect.” These factors, which yield a greater sense of happiness, are autonomy and relatedness. The reason we experience more satisfaction on the weekend has to do with our getting to choose how to spend our time and being able to connect with family and friends. Looking for ways to incorporate these factors into our daily work lives will lead to having a daily weekend. For instance, seize and celebrate the choice you have in conducting your teaching life. Exercise autonomy in curricular design activities. And, purposefully interact with people who can enrich your view of teaching and learning, i.e., primarily students and positive colleagues.



## Travel Tips for Teachers

- Examine how you allocate your time during the workday. How much priority does teaching receive? Assigning a low priority to teaching efforts will not yield much joy. Two specific suggestions for investing time to gain more joy would be as follows:
  - 1) Arrive a few minutes early to class in order to interact with students.
  - 2) Use the time between classes to reflect upon ways to improve your teaching, to plan for the next class session, and to hold office hours for helping students. Ken Bain (2004, p.121) found that effective college teachers spend a few minutes before each class focusing on what they want to help students most understand.
- Announce tests well in advance (preferably two weeks) so that students can plan ahead to prepare. Enter this information on the course calendar, write it on the marker board, or use other means to communicate when major tests and assignments are scheduled. This will eliminate unnecessary “surprises” for students.
- Recognize autonomy in areas where it exists and exercise it fully. While there are certainly accreditation standards to meet, college faculty have much more autonomy as teachers than K-12 public school teachers. We should value this aspect of our teaching lives.
- Be willing to connect with students on a personal basis. Greet them by name and ask how they are doing. Share, as appropriate, information about yourself (e.g., hobbies, family, travels). (See “Accentuate the Positive” entry.) Find colleagues who have positive views toward teaching. Spend time with them rather than the nay-sayers who frequently complain about students.





## LOOK FOR CHARLIE

I started my teaching career as a high school Latin teacher. During my first year, a high school freshman, whom I'll call "Charlie", would often meet me at my car at 7:45 in the morning. As I would get out, Charlie would share some story or newspaper clipping that related to Latin. While some might see Charlie as an apple polisher who was trying to win the teacher's favor, that was really not his intent. He was genuinely excited about sharing some connection he had found that demonstrated the influence of Latin. What I almost missed, or dismissed, was that I had played a part in Charlie's quest. What I gained from Charlie was a sense of joy enhancement. His interest and enthusiasm fed mine. Students like

Charlie can serve as wonderful sources of joy. That I still think about this student more than 30 years later raises the consideration of who influenced whom.

Now maybe he had a crush on me or he was trying to impress me, but I honestly do not think so. He was just thrilled with making new discoveries and desired to share them with someone who might appreciate them. A major project in this class was to create a notebook of clippings that illustrated the influence of Latin. Many students dreaded the project and most procrastinated. However, Charlie undertook it with a sense of gusto!

Some days I may have inadvertently squelched Charlie's delight. I may have been too busy, too rushed, or too focused on all I had to accomplish before school started for the day. While it may be easy to push aside the Charlie's in our classes, we would be wise not to do so—he is one of our greatest sources of joy.



### Travel Tips for Teachers

Look for the Charlie's in your classes. There is usually one or two. Encourage these students and show your appreciation for the energy that they invest in learning. Make yourself available when they want to share a news article, television program, or movie that relates to your subject area.

Be careful not to overlook other, less motivated, students. Aim to develop all students' enthusiasm and sense of wonder. When interest has been sparked, even a little, do your best not to extinguish it.

Inspire comes from the Latin meaning "to breathe hope." One of our roles as teachers is to inspire others along with ourselves. How can we inspire a love of learning within our students? How can we encourage those who demonstrate such inspiration now? In short, how can we cultivate more Charlie's?



## HOW NOT TO GET LOST

Most people have been lost at least once in their lives. When that happens, you can ask for directions, find a map or compass, use a GPS device, or continue to go around in circles or perhaps encounter dead ends. In your teaching life, it is easy to become lost. I have certainly lost my way at times. I have felt confused and frustrated—as if getting nowhere. I have wondered if my efforts were worth the trouble or were even on target. Perhaps you have felt the same.

The best way that I have found to keep from getting lost in teaching is to develop a vision statement as a guide or map. This short statement describes what you are trying to achieve in your teaching. It specifies your ultimate goals and provides a “big picture” view. To create a vision statement, spend some time considering questions such as these:

- What are you trying to achieve through teaching?
- What type of learning climate do you aim to create?
- How do you want your students to become?
- What basic beliefs about teaching & learning direct your efforts?

After reflecting upon and writing down your responses, construct a paragraph or, at most, a page that captures your view (or vision) for teaching and learning. Then work to sum up your vision in one sentence. Ideally, this sentence should be student outcomes-oriented. Here is my vision statement: “I desire to help students become thoughtful teachers who care, challenge, and communicate effectively.”

A vision statement can be used to guide your instructional decision making and to diagnose dilemmas in your teaching. When you veer off course, return to your vision to get back on track. When deciding whether to do something in your classes, use your vision statement. For example, I will often ask myself whether a particular learning activity will contribute toward my students becoming more thoughtful (i.e., reflective). I think about whether what I have in mind will enhance my students’ abilities to care, challenge, and communicate. If so, then I proceed with my plans. If not, then I need to rethink how I use instructional time.



### Travel Tips for Teachers

Print a hard copy of your vision statement and post it in a visible spot. This can be on your office wall, inside your planner or calendar, on a note card to display on your desk, or as screensaver on your computer. Most importantly, this statement is not something to bury in a file. You want to be able to see it regularly. Having *and* using it will keep you from becoming lost.

Your vision statement should be uniquely yours. It must “fit” you. Use your own language and that of your discipline. Boiling it down to one sentence is not an easy task. Continue to refine your vision statement over the course of your teaching career.

Share your vision with your students. You can display it during an early class presentation, incorporate it on your syllabus, link it on your webpage or course management shell—wherever you think it is most effectively placed for your students’ viewing. Your vision statement lets students know where you want to take them. It serves as a rationale for why you do what you do.

Vision statements can also be shared with colleagues within or across academic departments. This process of sharing enhances our relationships with other teachers and in turn, helps us appreciate what other faculty do. The exchange can make us feel connected and contributing to a larger purpose.



## THE ARTIST WITHIN

The longer I teach, the more I see teaching as a highly creative endeavor. Initially, a more mechanical view prevailed for me. In my earlier years as a teacher, I undertook a more formula-like approach by following a behaviorist stance of stimulus-response. If I do X, then my students would do Y, I reasoned. Of course, teaching is never that simple. There are so many intervening factors. And, there is limitless room for alternate ways to address teaching challenges.

Although we may not see ourselves as artists, we as teachers are very close to being artists. Note how Donald Finkel (2000) defines good teaching as “creating those circumstances that lead to significant learning in others” (p. 8). Figuring out how to do this involves a complex set of creative actions. Unfortunately, the pressures of accountability, unrealistic self-expectations, and the orientation of student as customer/consumer can diminish our tendency toward creativity. However, I believe that we should embrace the notion of teachers as artists.

An artist has a fresh view and an open mind. An artist looks at things from various angles or perspectives. Being an artist gives one freedom to do things differently. An artist is not afraid to try something new. He or she looks for inspiration in all kinds of experiences. As teachers, we should take more of an artistic view of ourselves. When we support a view of ourselves as artists, we can remain (or become) effective as we reach students and promote learning. Seize the creative side of teaching!



### Travel Tips for Teachers

There is artistry in planning, in interacting with students, in delivering instruction, and in determining whether students learned, but we often overlook this aspect of the profession. One place to begin would be changing our perspective. Try putting yourself in the students’ place and asking how they see things and what would work better. Pay attention to things that attract students’ interest outside of the classroom. Look for ways to incorporate these interests into the classroom—for example, music, pop culture, or campus events.

Questions to ponder:

- Why might I not see my teaching as a creative opportunity? What forces impede my creativity? Which ones are within my control?
- How can I seize a chance to be creative? How could I assume more the role of a designer?
- What idea sources might I be overlooking? How might these ideas enhance my teaching efforts and help students to learn?





## ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE

**N**ame three things in general that you like about college students. If this is difficult for you to do quickly, then perhaps examining whether you really like college students deserves more careful attention. Having an affinity for students will definitely impact your sense of joy in teaching.

When it comes to air travel, there are many things that I dislike about it. Going through security feels like undressing; waiting on delayed planes and running to catch connections are most certainly not fun aspects of flying. In the end, however, the negative parts of air travel seem to weigh less than the positive ones such as covering the distance of 1,000 miles in just a few hours. Although students do have some disagreeable aspects—overly dependent upon technology, lack of focus, and a tendency to whine, they also have many positive qualities. When we look for and find these qualities, our joy increases.

The three things I like most about college students are their positive energy and optimistic outlook, their sense of humor, and their spirit of adventure. As an illustration, my daughter and her husband graduated from college last year both at the age of 22, then selected a location to live (1,000 miles from home), and moved there without jobs. Within 6 months they both had jobs. I admire that kind of fortitude coupled with self-confidence. When I was the same age, I was already thinking about “security” — taking a job close to home.

Identifying what you like about college students will strengthen your sense of joy in teaching. You will then not dwell upon the things they sometimes do and say that bother you. If you’re willing to be more accepting of them “as is” you will see their boundless potential.

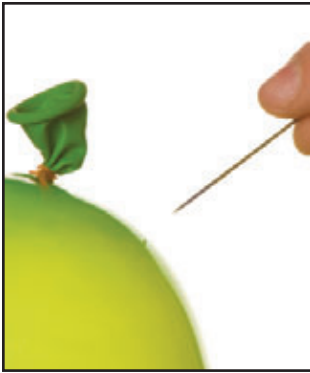


### Travel Tips for Teachers

Before each class session, think of some positive aspect of your students. Reflect upon and consciously notice this particular quality when you observe it during class. For instance, curiosity might be something you have seen in your students (as a whole or as individuals). When students demonstrate such curiosity through the questions they ask or points raised, you can take note of that quality and even point it out to them. If you find yourself dreading a class, then engaging in this mental exercise is especially important.

Limit your interaction with colleagues who tend to “bad-mouth” students. “What’s wrong with these students?” serves as a major theme for those faculty who converse negatively. Even if you disagree with their sentiments, you will be influenced by such toxic talk.

Interact with college students outside the classroom and university. I recently went with my husband to buy some shoes. There were three young salespeople working the floor and we were the only customers there. I sat down and chatted briefly with the two who were not busy. It was enjoyable. Wait staff at restaurants provide another venue for learning more about and consequently, gaining a greater appreciation for college students.



## JOY ZAPPERS

**H**ave you ever felt like someone let the air out of your joy balloon? Things might have been going fairly well when you encountered a discouraging situation and the tensions of teaching became overwhelming. Perhaps you have felt deflated, defeated, or even demoralized. Take a few minutes to identify those times when your joy has been low or non-existent. What robs you of experiencing real joy in teaching? I see three main sources that zap joy.

1. Ruts rob us of joy. It is easy to become comfortable with our approach to teaching. Playing it safe by duplicating a course semester after semester will not bring much joy. At first, doing so may feel freeing and offer a sense of relief. However, whenever we start teaching as if we were on “autopilot,” our joy will diminish.

The way to remedy this dilemma is to try something new—change textbooks, revise major course assignments, teach a different course, learn a new technology tool to incorporate, and/or interact with peers on the subject of teaching to gain new ideas. Strategies such as these help us escape the rut into which we have fallen.

2. Our mindset or perspective can also decrease our sense of joy in teaching. If, for example, our first response to seeing an email from a certain student is, “Oh no, what does she want now?!” then we are likely to experience less joy. A better response might be to say: “How can I help this student who tends to send excessive emails?” Having a different mindset will encourage us to take a different tactic. No doubt, the things that students say can impact our joy level. We have all heard these comments or questions from students:

- “Does this count?”
- “I was absent so I don’t know what to do.”
- “Did I miss anything?”
- “Is this what you want?”

To be honest, these statements and questions cause me to wonder if I want to continue in teaching. However, a more positive perspective challenges me to listen for different messages from students such as follows:

- “Did you see/hear X on the news?”
- “Thanks for your help.”
- “I have a question.”
- “Can you help me?”

These statements and questions serve as door openers for JOY (Just Offer Yourself). They are opportunities to be of service or expressions of gratitude for our service. We need to listen more carefully because students do indeed say them.

3. Another joy zapper is being enslaved to content coverage. Maryellen Weimer (2010, p. 159) calls this a mistaken belief about content that prevents faculty growth. Making coverage the most important part of what we do only leads to frustration. We just cannot keep up the pace. Neither can our students. A changed perspective will help. What we really should be trying to do is to “uncover” content as we allow students to have “ah-ha” learning experiences. Furthermore, in removing content coverage from the pedestal we have created, we should identify the big ideas that we want to stick in our students’ minds. We can consider as well how

PAGE 14 ►

we want students to “be” as a result of our teaching. This focus on the dispositional dimensions of learning can yield more joy when we see growth in students.



## Travel Tips for Teachers

Be prepared to encounter potholes in your teaching journey. No matter where you teach, they exist. Make a commitment not to be led off track by these distractions. Learn to look for certain ruts that attract you. Do you use the same course assessments each semester? Do you continually recycle the same notes or presentations? Have you gotten to the point where you could teach a class in your sleep?

Thank students for sharing related news items or stories that connect to course content. While at times it may feel like these students are taking the class off track, it shows their interest. Others can learn from them and may start paying attention outside class in a similar manner.

What do you hope to hear students say? Make a list of those statements and questions that bring joy. When you hear one of them, recognize, respond, and reinforce your joy with the student.

Decide what is most important to teach. Imagine that you have three fewer weeks during a semester. Determine what you would eliminate, then do it. With the extra time, integrate more higher-order thinking or application activities to allow the remaining content to last longer in students' memory.



## JOY BOOSTERS

**M**y husband and I recently drove to Colorado to see our daughter and son-in-law. It was a two-day trip—the longest we have ever taken by car. We did much advance planning and even bought a GPS to guide us (since my vision now prevents me from being of much help with maps and directions). Once there, we drove up to Rocky Mountain National Park. Nothing prepared me for the majestic view or the high altitude (almost 12,000 feet). It was breath-taking in two different ways—the awe-inspiring sight of the mountains and the difficulty in catching a full breath. It can be that way in teaching, too. We are taken

aback by some unexpected pleasure at the same time that the sheer difficulty of keeping our heads above water overwhelms us. Planning does matter but sometimes we are able to experience what Parker Palmer (1998, p.1), so eloquently captured with these words: “I am a teacher at heart, and there are moments in the classroom when I can hardly hold the joy.”

Just as there are factors that zap our joy so, too, are there things that boost our sense of joy. While this entire *Journey of Joy* piece has many ideas for boosting joy, this particular entry highlights a few of my favorites.

Joy comes from helping students attain their goals. One of the most joyous occasions for teachers is graduation. I have lost count of how many commencement ceremonies that I have attended, but there's always a feeling of great pride for the graduates—some of whom I helped achieve their goals. Even though we may not have witnessed the students' actual development over time, we see evidence of it on this momentous day. In a way commencement helps us renew our commitment to teaching. Students can be successful; we can celebrate with them. Rather than dreading donning our caps and gowns for the event, we might instead focus on the achievement students feel

PAGE 15 ►



and reflect on any assistance we gave toward their endeavors.

A deep sense of satisfaction in teaching that results in greater joy also comes when we create a new (and effective) approach to teaching a specific concept or skill. We can derive ideas from various sources, e.g., museum exhibits, public television shows, professional development workshops, discussions with colleagues, and professional reading. (See “The Artist Within” entry about the role of creativity in teaching.) The process of designing a lesson brings much satisfaction when students receive the message clearly and have “light bulb” moments of understanding.

By sharing our scholarly passions, we can experience more joy in teaching. We may not think that students are interested but when we are interested in a particular topic, we should allow students to see that excitement in us. Ideally, our scholarly passions relate to what we are teaching but if not, brief references to what we are working on can engender greater interest in the process of learning among students.



## Travel Tips for Teachers

**Give yourself a daily joy score.** On a scale of 1 to 10, how much joy did you derive from teaching today? If that score is consistently low, determine what might boost your sense of joy in teaching. Everyone has different sources of joy. Ask a colleague what brings him or her joy. Continue to search for the specific aspects of teaching that bring you joy.

**Ask students to write down their goals for the semester.** Once you know what their goals are, you have a greater chance of assisting students in reaching them. I had a student whose goal was to be on time. This was a class at 8 o'clock in the morning. Knowing that she had this goal helped me to hold her accountable. The few times she was tardy, I only provided nonverbal cues. On the third time she asked me for advice on getting to class on time. When she tried the solution I offered and it worked (i.e., put your alarm across the room), I was able to recognize that successful goal achievement along with her. This served to boost my joy.

**Take a break.** Long road trips require frequent rest stops. The road becomes monotonous and we need to stretch our legs. So, too, with our teaching, we need to get away from it for brief periods. Semester breaks and holidays provide relief, but sometimes during the course of a single day, a short walk outside can bring renewed enthusiasm once it's time to return to the classroom (or computer).



## MAKE IT AUTHENTIC

The more authentic we can make learning experiences, the richer those experiences usually are for students. A personal example may serve to illustrate. One activity that I use in my introductory education classes is a simulation of a school board meeting. I distribute nametags with roles printed on them such as board president, high school principal, superintendent, etc. Everyone in the class gets one including me—I play the local newspaper reporter. Students receive a meeting agenda and the board members sit up in front of the class to conduct the meeting. Sometimes I must interrupt the process to teach various aspects of parliamentary procedure or to remind them that the superintendent does not get a vote in matters. Audience members (e.g., a parent or senior citizen) are allowed to address the board during the discussion of new agenda items. Over the years this activity has received more specific comments on my student evaluations than any other class activity. More importantly, when I ask students to write a newspaper account of a board meeting three weeks later, they are able to accurately demonstrate their understanding of a school board's functions.

Recently, I saw a local news article about the deadline for filing school board position elections. I went to the county courthouse and picked up a packet of materials. I plan to share these documents with my students and to allow self-selected individuals to run for the board within our class. This is just one example of how I try to keep the learning authentic and make it as close to the real world as possible.

Dee Fink, author of *Creating Significant Learning Experiences*, reminds us to consider what professionals in our fields do in the design of a course. Do they write reports, make arguments, weigh decisions, work with clients, etc.? We should then use those identified behaviors as guides for planning our course outcomes and activities. Certainly, future teachers plan and present lessons. Thus, in my introductory class I have students create a mini-lesson on a famous educator to teach the class. This activity gives students a chance to try out the teaching role and to present some content in a more engaging way than if I were to lecture on these educators and their contributions.

Our sense of joy in teaching will increase when we make the effort to create authentic experiences for our students. It takes the focus off ourselves and places it more on the students. In turn, relevancy will be more evident to students. Even when students don't vocalize it, they often wonder: "How can I use this knowledge?" Authentic learning experiences make the answer more apparent.

### Travel Tips for Teachers



To keep the learning authentic, stay in tune with current events, read the newspaper or other news source. Bring in an occasional guest speaker who works in your subject field. For example, I ask a former school superintendent to talk to my students about the challenges of administering a school district and working with a school board. In other classes I regularly ask teacher panels to share their expertise with my students. If in a statistics course you are teaching how to analyze survey results, consider having the students create and administer a survey to their peers. The chance to work with real data will be more meaningful than only using textbook data.

As you prepare for class, ask yourself these questions:

- How can I make this learning experience more authentic for my students?
- What examples or activities might I use?
- Is there a virtual field trip that I could provide for my students?

Attending teaching conferences and talking with colleagues often yield helpful ideas of authentic learning experiences. Both these professional experiences can also deepen your joy in teaching.



## MODELS OF MEANING

Some of us become teachers due to the influence of another teacher. It can be useful to recall those teachers and to reflect upon their impact. Such teachers can serve as models—not to be imitated but to be remembered. These former mentors do have an impact upon our practice (Palmer, 1998). Of the many models I have, there are three which are most significant.

Having dropped out of kindergarten, I did not really like school until the sixth grade. Before that time, most of my teachers did not seem to like being in school any more than I did. However, Mrs. Ballard was different. She obviously liked kids and loved learning. Her enthusiasm and caring manner changed my whole attitude toward school. I have her to thank for making me view school as a welcoming place and for never leaving it. One reason why I work in the field of teacher education is as a tribute to Mrs. Ballard who demonstrated the difference one teacher can make in a student's life. I want future teachers to realize this possibility.

In high school I had Mrs. Houchin for three years of Latin. She modeled continued learning as she was always reading, traveling, taking classes, and staying physically active. She recognized my leadership potential by taking me to state competitions, and she served as an inspiration to me as an adolescent. It is no surprise that my first years of teaching were in the same field, Latin.

In college my major advisor was a very unassuming man. His humility was evident by the nameplate on his desk. Instead of "Ph.D." behind his name, the letters "J.P." appeared. I finally found out that they stood for "Just Plain." Dr. Hale was focused on students, helping them grow as individuals and understand themselves and the world more.

What do we do with such models as these? Should we try to become like them? I think teaching models are not to be copied so much as used to remind us of our enormous potential to have a positive influence on others. We should use models as sources of inspiration for becoming who we are as teachers. I agree wholeheartedly with Maryellen Weimer (2010, p. 156) that "...the best teaching is always teaching that genuinely and authentically represents the person involved." Parker Palmer (1998), with his emphasis upon integrity and personhood, would concur. Earlier in my career, the evolution of my teaching self felt like I was playing paper dolls with myself as the main cardboard figure. Frequently, I would change the whole clothing ensemble to explore what worked for me and who I would be as a teacher. Jay Parini (2005) compares this developmental process to creating masks in search of our "teaching voice."

To offer ourselves as teachers and thus increase our joy (**Just Offer Yourself**), we must truly be our individual selves. Otherwise, we have little to offer. The journey of discovering this teaching self is just another reason why our profession is never boring.

### Travel Tips for Teachers



Allow plenty of time and space to find out who you are as a teacher. Do not try to be anyone else—it takes too much energy and reinforces what Maryellen Weimer (2010) calls a "mistaken belief" about learning to teach. My teaching self-image has always been guided by the desire to be professional yet personable. Yours may be entirely different.

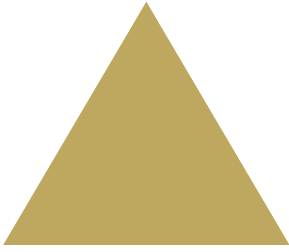
Becoming a teacher is a process. It is not a one-time event. Just as there are alternate routes to most destinations, there are multiple pathways that lead to who we ultimately become as teachers. Hearing about a colleague's journey is helpful but should not be duplicated.

Identify past teachers who have made a significant impact on you. Think about how they achieved this effect. How do you want to be in the classroom? What strengths could you capitalize on in order to facilitate learning? What is most unique about you? How can these personal qualities best serve you and your students? As Parker Palmer (1998) stressed, Socrates' dictum to "know thyself" really matters in teaching.



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# THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE OF TEACHING



How would you visually represent the teaching-learning process? Do you view it as a circle, a rectangle, a tree, or a butterfly? Possible perceptions are infinite. At the risk of making such a complex enterprise too simplistic, I conceive of teaching as a triangle. I call it the “golden triangle” because if I can get all the elements in sync, then the magic of learning usually happens.

The subject matter or content resides at the center of the figure. Each vertex of the triangle is one of the participants in the teaching-learning encounter...teacher, student, and student. Whenever I think about how to promote learning, I see this image. It helps me remember the most important elements and not become too focused on techniques. Basically, the teacher interacts with individual students and with students as a whole; the students interact with each other and with the teacher; and the central focus is the subject. Parker Palmer (1998) supports a subject-centered approach to teaching in his thought-provoking book, *The Courage to Teach*, which influenced my triangular image.

Additionally, Ken Bain’s (2004) work with effective college teachers provides insights into their views of what it means to teach. Primarily, effective teachers view teaching as fostering learning. Bain (2004, pp. 50-60) presents thirteen planning questions that are well worth consideration by college teachers.

The three critical planning questions that I pose most often are as follows:

- How can I communicate the content most clearly?
- How can I promote student interest in it?
- How can I engage students with each other and me around this content?

I feel it’s essential that I determine how to get students to focus on the subject within the first three minutes of class. I might open with a question, use an attention grabber such as a short video-clip, or pull from students’ experiences (“have you ever...?”). To keep the content central, I aim to help students “grapple” with it (Bain, 2004). Possible strategies include debates, discussions, big questions, cooperative learning teams, and role plays.

Inspired by Bain’s (2004) notion of a “promise” approach, I developed a pledge (similar to a guarantee) that I provide to students at the beginning of the semester. It spells out what I am willing to do to facilitate student learning. My intent is to show my good faith effort and to encourage students to fulfill their side of the arrangement. Here is my pledge:

*I promise to do the following:*

- 1. Plan organized and meaningful class sessions;*
- 2. Clearly explain expectations and requirements;*
- 3. Provide prompt feedback;*
- 4. Be available to students; and*
- 5. Treat each student in a fair and ethical manner.*

*As a professional, I willingly and sincerely intend to fulfill this pledge.*

PAGE 19 ►

Each student receives a signed copy of my pledge. This action holds me accountable throughout the semester.



## Travel Tips for Teachers

When you become lost or confused in your teaching practice, return to the basics. Ask yourself such questions as these:

- “Am I relating to the students?”
- “Am I helping or hindering students’ efforts to connect with the content, with me, and/or each other?”
- “What could I do to ensure that I am best helping to facilitate the learning process?”

Design a visual image of your teaching approach. Having this type of tool can help you stay on track with what you value most in the teaching-learning process. It can also serve as a compass for your journey.

Examine your courses in terms of the “promises” upon which they are based. Clarify these outcomes. This is the starting point for any course revision or development.

Learn from the “best” college teachers by observing them, reading their work, talking with them, and appreciating your potential to continue to grow as a teacher throughout your own career.



## PICK UP THE PHONE

One year, around the fifth week of the semester, a student followed me to my office after class. I had collected a written assignment from this freshman-level college class. The mini-case to be read had been posted on our course management system. “Jennifer” asked for more time to complete the assignment. She was having trouble accessing the online component and planned to take her laptop over to IT for assistance. (Note: The IT office is eight buildings away from where I teach.) The help desk number is one which I regularly call so before Jennifer left my office, I asked her to wait while I called IT to see if I could help her figure out the problem. The technician asked if a certain update had been downloaded (the

student verified that it had), and this was the source of the difficulty. The student was to remove that program update from her laptop.

When I hung up the phone and gave Jennifer the solution, she just beamed and said, “thanks.” As she turned to leave, Jennifer paused and then took out of her backpack a form for a student organization. She asked for my signature (as a faculty sponsor). I do not know whether Jennifer had planned to ask me to do this when she came to my office but my guess is she had not.

My simple action of picking up the phone gained Jennifer’s trust and strengthened our relationship. Was I making her dependent by helping her solve the technical problem? I don’t think so. There were no more special requests or technical emergencies during the semester. And, as an added bonus—Jennifer became more engaged in class by more readily volunteering to participate.

PAGE 20 ►



## Travel Tips for Teachers

A lesson I relearned from this encounter was to take the time to help, to connect with individuals, and to teach students how to problem-solve (even outside our particular discipline). We should seek ways to be of service to students without reinforcing their dependency.

The small things can make a big difference in teaching and in finding joy. Making that phone call only took a few minutes but the student's appreciation for the help and the amount of time saved were significant. Sometimes we miss such opportunities because we are too busy. The sharper our student perspective is focused, the more likely we will recognize these chances to reach out and develop students and to deepen our satisfaction.



## “CAN WE GO OUTSIDE?”

No matter what level of students I have taught (ranging from high school freshmen to college seniors and graduate students), this has been a perennial question they have asked. While sometimes great weather does entice students to want to be outside, the question is actually code language for “Can we do something different?” Even when students do not verbalize the question, you can tell from their nonverbal behaviors (e.g., slumped shoulders, shuffling feet, glazed eyes), that they are thinking this question. Boredom is not easily disguised.

A response to bring more joy would be to think of different approaches to engage students **before** they get to this desperate state of being. Here are a few ideas I have used:

1. Play a video clip related to the lesson topic. (YouTube has some great ones.)
2. Allow students to use their mobile devices in class. (For example, text a review question to a classmate; or use polleverywhere.com to answer survey questions in class.)
3. Let students write on the marker board. Sometimes I take into class a stack of education-related quotes and let a student choose which “quote for the day” to post on the board.
4. Have students take sides on an issue and hold a debate in class.
5. Hold a talk show on some course topic. Ask for a volunteer host (usually someone wants to be David Letterman!)
6. Hand out play money on the back of which students should write their most valuable ideas; then redistribute these slips to other students to read aloud.
7. Create a role play situation to illustrate a concept. Students can improvise speaking parts or you can give more guidance with a mini-script.

PAGE 21 ►

8. Go outside! I have let students use sidewalk chalk to design public service announcements on course topics as a way to educate peers not enrolled in the class. They truly enjoy getting to leave the classroom—and I like seeing their learning continue in a wall-less environment.



## Travel Tips for Teachers

Remember the discoveries on trips you may have made by getting off the beaten path. Try to incorporate this same spirit of adventure in your teaching. Aim to do something different every week in your classes. A commitment to do so will keep your teaching fresh and your joy level high.

Say more frequently: “Today we’re going to do something different.” Collect ideas at conferences, from colleagues, and from professional sources as well as from pop culture (television, movies, etc.).

When students make a repeated request during the semester, pause before automatically responding with “No.” Consider how you might say “yes” more often. This may entail your changing something but that is not always negative. Think how surprised students will be when you do say “yes” to what the expected answer would be “no.” Your joy will increase from being open and flexible.



## LET STUDENTS RIDE THE BIKE

One of my favorite activities is to go for a bike ride. However, I have learned not to tell anyone that I am a cyclist because it is too embarrassing to give a description of my “ride.” It’s a 1981 blue Schwinn model with a wire basket on the handlebars and coaster brakes. I enjoy riding in our neighborhood and on the nearby bike trail. I never race anyone nor even go anywhere special. I just enjoy looking at the scenery and being outdoors. Engaging in this activity brings me much joy, in part by returning me to my childhood when I would spend countless hours on my bike.

I still remember learning to ride a bike and then many years later, teaching our daughter to ride without training wheels. That moment of exhilaration comes when a parent “lets go” and allows the child to balance the bicycle solo. The same process happens in other learning situations. We have to let go and let the student ride alone. Our goal as teachers should be to make the student less dependent upon us for assistance.

Recently, I had to miss three weeks of classes due to a detached retina. During this time I re-learned this lesson of letting the students ride the bike. I found that I had to let students be more in charge of their own learning. While a graduate assistant took over my classes, she was not adequately prepared for the task. The students had to be more responsible for figuring out what was most important to learn. And, I had to trust that they were capable of doing so. It was a glorious day when I was able to talk to the class on speaker phone while still at home. I reassured them that I would soon return to class, and that I missed them (which I did dearly), and that I knew they were capable of doing the work. I then explained a major assignment that had been given in my absence.

Once I was back in the classroom, I had limited mobility due to my continued eye problems. Never one to sit while teaching, I had to do so because of my difficulties with depth perception. I tried to continue letting students



ride the bike by allowing them to write on the marker board, hand out papers, post materials on the walls, run the computer, and even escort me back to my office. This entire experience reminded me to allow students to have more control of the learning process.



## Travel Tips for Teachers

Don't expect perfection. Students will be wobbly on the bike at first. When I would ask students to write on the board, I knew that I could write larger and more legibly but I allowed them to see the effects of their publicly displayed efforts. (Note: These students plan to become teachers so this is an important skill for them to learn.) As students gain confidence and skills, their performance without training wheels will improve. Resist the urge to take back the bike.

Whenever a student asks for help, respond with a question to find out what they have already tried. "Where have you looked for an answer?" is a possible question to pose. Sometimes the answer is right there on the syllabus. While it may seem easier to simply tell the student what he wants to know, it's better if we can equip students with the skill of "figuring it out" or problem solving. You might help students understand why you approach their questions with a question by saying: "Would you ask your boss when a project is due when you know she previously announced it? How else could you find out?"

When possible, build in choice. One of the greatest pleasures of riding my bike is choosing my route each evening. Having the freedom to create my own route makes each ride more interesting. There is no one set way to go. To give students more ownership of their learning, find ways to incorporate choice. For example, have students select one of three articles to read, or let them decide when to turn in an assignment (within a certain timeframe).

Finally, have Band-Aids handy. Letting students ride the bike may result in mishaps. Some students need a little extra support. In fact, you may often find yourself in the role of cheerleader by reminding students that "You can do this." There's nothing weak about offering encouragement. Think of all the people who have spurred you on along the way. In facilitating students' growth, you may be fulfilling a similar function. That can be a joyful experience.



## UNEXPECTED DELIGHTS

**O**n a recent trip to visit my sister Pam in Florida, I walked every morning. Expecting to see seagulls or perhaps an alligator in her locale, I was pleasantly surprised one morning to come upon four burrowing owls in the grass. They were about ten inches tall and they just stared and blinked at me. Being just five feet away from these owls almost took my breath away. I ran back home to get my sister so she could see them too. This unexpected delight made my day and even my week's stay! If you have ever seen a rainbow when there has been no rain, you know the feeling. To me it is pure joy to find a unique sight in nature. For you this same joyful response might come from listening to music or eating fine food or watching a play.

When it comes teaching and learning, I believe that joy in teaching comes from two primary sources. First, one must have the “right” perspective of where joy exists. I think joy emerges from the unexpected question, the unanticipated answer, the interesting insight, and a host of other surprises connected to learning. It comes when we embrace the wonder of learning! The longer I teach, the more I become a student of teaching and learning. When I think I have it all figured out, then I should retire.

The second source of joy resides in our ability to view teaching as a service profession. By this, I do not mean customer service which is primarily focused on customer satisfaction. Service in teaching equates mainly with it being a helping profession. When we serve others, our greatest joy can result. For instance, I like to bake. Although I do find fulfillment in the process of mixing and creating a batch of goodies, the real joy comes when I share with others what I have baked. When I give it away (at least some of the batch), therein resides the joy experience! In my view, I think J.O.Y. (i.e., Just Offer Yourself) results when we give of our time, our knowledge and expertise, our caring support, and our guidance for learning.

As Erikson (1963; 1968) posited in his theory of psychosocial development that begins with the infant stage of trust vs. mistrust, adulthood involves the tension between generativity vs. stagnation. When we resolve this developmental challenge in favor of generativity, we willingly invest in the lives of the next generation by sharing our knowledge and giving insightful guidance. We possess a concern for guiding the next generation (Erikson, 1963). As teachers, we are fortunate to work in the realm of education. Our profession makes it easier to gravitate more toward generativity as we serve students.



### Travel Tips for Teachers

Learn to anticipate and to expect something new, positive, and exciting each class session. If you anticipate boredom, you will probably find it. Before starting class, ask silently, “What unexpected treasure will arise in teaching today?” Then look for something special to occur.

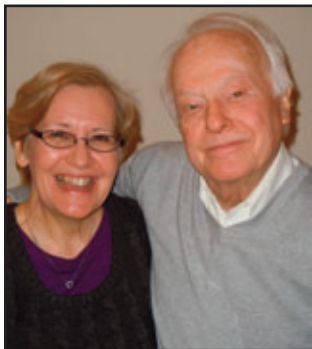
Develop a list of personal indicators for what brings joy in teaching. Here is my list:

- I talked less.
- The students talked more.
- We were all challenged to think.
- I connected with the students and helped them connect with the content and with each other.
- We laughed (at least once).

PAGE 24 ►

Sometimes we do not reach these goals in a class period, but I find that having them makes me mindful of what I think really matters.

Make a commitment to be of service to students in order to promote their learning and development. Be accessible (but not totally), actively look for ways to offer assistance (e.g., by designing a tip sheet), and think about the larger goals you are trying to meet through your teaching.



## TWO LESSONS FROM DADDY ABOUT TEACHING

**M**y dad is an engineer. If he had selected my career, I would have been one, too. He was never too fond of my becoming a teacher. Even though education is far from his chosen field, I have learned a few things about teaching from him. Two in particular come to mind.

One Thanksgiving break when we went to visit my parents, I brought (as usual) a stack of student projects to grade. On Black Friday, my husband and I went shopping. I left the papers on my parents' kitchen table. Several hours later when we returned, I was mortified to find that my dad had "graded" these papers! On each paper he had written "KUTGW" and drawn a holiday graphic such as a snowman, wreath, or wrapped present. I did not know what the code letters meant until he remarked, "Keep Up the Good Work." While my dad's feedback was not focused, it did offer encouragement. In class the next week when I returned the papers (papers that included my comments as well as my father's) the students beamed when they saw the added bonus and chuckled at the tale of how it had happened. This experience reminded me to find something positive and encouraging to write on student work. (I also stopped bringing un-graded papers into my parents' house.)

The second lesson derives from a memory of an incident that occurred when I was 17 years old. I was not supposed to drive my dad's car because the brakes were bad. One Saturday morning when my parents were not home and my older sister needed me to pick her up at a friend's house, I drove that old Studebaker. I ended up diverting the car into a cotton field when the brakes did indeed fail as I approached a red light at a major intersection. When my dad came to get us, I knew I was in big trouble. However, I really did not get yelled at, grounded, or punished. He merely let the situation teach me.

When students mess up, I try to take the same approach in my teaching. Students will forget an assignment, buy the wrong book, not take notes, and a whole host of other oversights and mistakes. As helpers and teachers, our tendency is to rescue students, to intervene in the situation. Or sometimes we may be inclined to lecture, raise our voice, or become exasperated. Better is to remain calm and allow the consequences of one's actions to do the teaching. (You can bet that I never made that driving mistake again and today I keep my car very well maintained!)

PAGE 25 ►



## Travel Tips for Teachers

View every encounter as having something to teach you about teaching. Placing ourselves in new learning situations is an excellent way to gain insights. In addition, talking with people who are in fields outside of education can provide helpful applications to teaching. Observing parents interacting with children can also be a source of guidance for your teaching.

Aim to provide useful, written feedback. Tell students not just what they did incorrectly but how they can improve. To be effective, feedback must be targeted (Ambrose et al., 2010). Remember also to include some positive and encouraging words on student work. Adding a personal touch to your feedback makes it more palatable for students to accept.

Keep your teaching skills up to date by attending conferences and reading about effective teaching practices. Just as we have regular service checks for our vehicles, we should do the same with our teaching. Look for opportunities to engage in renewal activities to keep your teaching fresh.

Be matter of fact in handling your responses to student mistakes. There is no need to belittle the student. Realize that the consequences of the student's choice can be the teacher rather than any words that you might say.





## “A” FOR ADVISING

Whether we embrace the role or not, one of the most important aspects of what we do as college teachers is advising. I try to see all students in my classes as advisees. At present in our department, one faculty member is officially assigned to advise all undergraduate students. The rest of us advise graduate students—a much easier task. Nevertheless, most of the undergraduates whom I teach require or receive my “bonus” advising.

“Are you busy?” is the most common opener that students use after appearing at my office door. I am still searching for the best response—one that is welcoming and not sarcastic. The truth is I am always busy as are most faculty. However, the key is not to turn away students by our nonverbal or verbal response to their question which really means, “Can you help me?” These interruptions are often golden opportunities to pump the wellspring of joy.

When it comes to advising, how can we find JOY—“Just Offer Yourself?” The giving of our time and providing a listening ear may be all that is really required. Advising encounters allow us to build relationships with students that are not as easily strengthened in class settings.

If we see helping students fulfill their dreams as part of our purpose, then our attitude and approach can follow this same path. We should ask ourselves: “What does the student need to reach his or her goal?” Sometimes it is information, e.g., program or graduation requirements; sometimes it is skill development, e.g., library research or study skills; and sometimes it is merely reassurance that things will be okay. Advising is a perfect opportunity to demonstrate caring which makes a difference to students, according to research (Meyers, 2009).



### Travel Tips for Teachers

1. Offer a handshake and business card when students are brave enough to come by your office. It really does take effort for students to make it to your door or to stay after class. Give students a sticky note with a helpful name, website, or phone number for future reference.
2. Be observant. Look for signs of student distress. A few years ago I suspected that one of my students was involved in an abusive relationship. Not equipped to handle this situation, I had to tread lightly with a referral to the counseling center on campus.
3. Say something special to students who miss more than one or two consecutive classes. Let them know that you noticed and that they were missed.
4. I give hugs but only when the student initiates. The longer I teach, the more I give and receive this kind of gesture. Recognize that everyone has a different tolerance level for such physical expression.



## TOUR GUIDES FOR TEACHERS

Whenever we travel, I enjoy touring historic homes. The experience is typically better with a guide. If the person is dressed in period costume, it's even better. Usually the guide adds more information and insight than I would have gained from merely walking through the house. While there are many helpful tour guides for college teachers, three have been most critical in my journey.

First, find a mentor. If you are not assigned a mentor, seek out one; a possible source is through faculty development programs on campus. Make sure the person is a suitable choice. The right mentor can steer you correctly and even save you time. Consider carefully whose “mini-me” you would want to be. I have observed some new faculty being mentored by someone who will make the journey less joyful, not more. Sometimes it is evident that the intentions of the “mentor” may not be in your best interests when he or she latches on first. It is usually best to wait a short period if you are seeking your own mentor to know who is respected and why.

Second, look for a tour guide among library staff. Knowing by name at least one library staff person can make your journey in college teaching much more enjoyable. This individual can provide a wealth of information to enrich your teaching. And, when you need help with library resources or need to refer students for assistance, it is nice to know someone personally.

The third recommended tour guide is someone in student services. I happen to be married to one in this field. Over the years Hank has given me significant insights into the extracurricular side of college students. Too often faculty and student services personnel are disconnected. It is good to know at least one individual who works in this area on campus. Because of my direct connection to someone in student services, I have a greater appreciation for the obstacles that students face. This has made me more understanding, less intolerant, and more aware of campus events that might impact student attendance and performance.



### Travel Tips for Teachers

Identify personal tour guides on your campus, keeping in mind they may not be the same ones I have suggested. It is easy to become bogged down in the busyness of teaching and overlook the need to cultivate these important relationships throughout your career.

Ask for direction when you have lost your way. A department chair can be an invaluable resource. The campus teaching improvement center is another great possibility for assistance.

Be willing to serve as a tour guide when someone new joins the faculty. This will help not only the new person but also be a growth experience for you.



## FUEL SOURCES

Regardless of our mode of transportation, we would not get very far without fuel. No matter how many times we fill up the tank with gas, getting close to “empty” again is inevitable. If you have ever almost run out of gas, you know that desperate feeling of the need to find fuel. In our teaching lives we must also have continuous fuel to move forward and to sustain the possibility of seizing joy. Teaching on empty is never good.

Using data from an Andrew Mellon Foundation faculty enhancement program, Chang and Baldwin (2008) identified three R’s to keep faculty fueled: reflection, risk-taking, and renewal. Engaging in activities that align with these outcomes will help us remain energized about our roles as faculty. Before departing for a trip, I have always found useful a checklist of things to pack. The checklist below, based upon Chang and Baldwin’s findings along with my own work in faculty development, can serve as a reminder of possible fuel sources—thus, avoiding depletion.

### Renewal Activities Checklist:

- Talk with a teaching colleague. Brainstorm ideas.
- Ask to be assigned a new course preparation.
- Change textbooks or select current articles for a course.
- Write an instructional mini-grant to support an innovative idea.
- Attend a workshop or conference on teaching. (*The Teaching Professor* is one of the best conferences you’ll find.)
- Read a book about teaching.
- Form or join a book discussion group.
- Blog about teaching matters.
- Go on a retreat for reflection.
- Seek a new role in the department or college.
- Ask a colleague to observe your teaching.
- Observe others’ teaching.
- Get to know your students better.
- Learn more about motivation.
- Enroll in a class of some kind.



### Travel Tips for Teachers

Plan ahead to engage in renewal activities rather than wait until your tank is almost empty. Order a book to have handy, sign up for teaching workshops—in short, actively look for growth/renewal opportunities.

Vary the fuel sources you seek. If the same renewal strategy is always used, it will lose its effectiveness and might start to feel more like a requirement than an enhancement. In addition, if you only read books on teaching, for example, you are missing the enrichment that a book discussion group might also provide.

View professional development activities as regular oil changes. Keeping your vehicle running well and extending its road life mainly requires this simple maintenance. To maintain our capacity to run effectively as teachers, our filter needs to be changed periodically. We become clogged with old ideas, techniques, and views. Selecting an activity that promotes change will renew our perspective and endurance.

Perceive the process of being a teacher as a growth journey itself. Commit to continue learning--about your content, about teaching it, and about yourself. Engaging in learning is the greatest fuel source for teachers.

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# CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In his work on faculty renewal, Edwin Simpson (1990) identified four episodic periods: romance, disillusionment, resolution, and joy. These phases are repeated throughout one's career and can even all be experienced during the span of a week. Note that joy is not only a state to be achieved in one's later years. It is regularly possible. As Simpson (1990, p. 61) stated, "Joy in a career is not the result of a perfectly planned journey, but of how one deals with bumps and detours in a career path." I have certainly found this to be true.

To stay on the joy journey, here are several points to keep in mind.

1. Decide to seek joy in the midst of the challenges that college teaching presents.
2. Know that joy remains possible as long as we believe that we have something to offer and as long as we continue to learn how to become better teachers.
3. Balance the duty aspects of teaching with the devotion side. Joy comes from what we love about the endeavor.
4. Celebrate something daily. Look for small rewards such as when a student smiles, starts participating, voluntarily stays after class, or nods slightly as we share our passion for learning.
5. **Just Offer Yourself.** It's the best chance of gaining what you most desire.

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## Joyful Quotes

Joy can be real only if people look upon their life as a service, and have a definite object in life outside themselves and their personal happiness.

- Leo Tolstoy

Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day.

- Henri Nouwen

The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.

--Gandhi

Good teaching is an act of hospitality toward the young, and hospitality is always an act that benefits the host even more than the guest.

--Parker Palmer

If there is more important work than teaching, I hope to learn about it before I die.

--Pat Conroy

This is the true joy in life, being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one.

--George Bernard Shaw

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## Other Inspirational Books

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