



Northeastern University

---

Teaching Matters Newsletter

Center for Effective University Teaching

---

September 01, 2002

# Teaching Matters : Vol. 8, No. 1

Northeastern University

---

## Recommended Citation

Northeastern University, "Teaching Matters : Vol. 8, No. 1" (2002). *Teaching Matters Newsletter*. Paper 3. <http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20000456>

This work is available open access, hosted by Northeastern University.

# T E A C H I N G M A T T E R S

*The Newsletter of the Center for Effective University Teaching*

Volume 8 Number 1

NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

September 2002

## Student Voices in the Classroom

- Donna M. Qualters

Walking the quiet halls this summer I became aware of a very interesting occurrence. As I passed classroom after classroom, I noticed that the voice emanating from the room was that of the instructor. I rarely heard student voices. One particular day I passed the same room three times with three different classes and three different instructors, and yet each time I had to peek in to see if there were any students in the room.

As often happens when I get a rare minute to reflect, it made me think about my own classroom behavior. How often do I hear my student voices? Well, I do ask questions and patiently wait for answers, I encourage students to ask me their questions, and I also get feedback on my course through classroom assessment techniques, mid-term assessment tools, and final course evaluations. Through writing, I ask students to tell me about themselves at the beginning of the quarter and I try to do group work where appropriate, but if I had to be REALLY honest I probably hear MY voice in the classroom more than anything else. This makes sense - right? After all, I do "know" a lot more about the topic and I am being paid to impart my knowledge. But like the song says, "Is that all there is?" At the end of class,

quarter, year do I really "hear" my students; more importantly do I help them find *their voice*? Isn't that part of my job too?

I decided to search the web for "student voices in the classroom". I got 123,000 hits! My goodness, something is going on out there I need to find out about! As I did more serious academic research on the topic I did find references and ideas that share new and different ways to hear our students voices.

The most interesting and useful resource I found was Student Assisted Teaching by colleagues Miller, Groccia, and Miller. In their book they explore different ways that students can participate to improve the teaching/learning process and have their voice heard. There are helpful hints on everything from peer teaching to educating students as critics for the class. Each of

these activities involve the instructor really listening to students about the course, actively soliciting student voices in making teaching decisions, and then allowing them to use their voice to impart knowledge and insight to teacher and students alike.

But again I feel a need to be cautious - where does the student voice have the most usefulness and authority? I don't talk to pollsters who solicit my

### In This Issue

Student Voices in the Classroom .....	1
Quotations .....	3
Excellence in Teaching Awards .....	3
Spirituality and Academia: A Partnership to Help us Thrive .....	4
Teaching Assistant Awards Banquet.....	6
Cultivating Students' Ethical Awareness and Inquiry .....	7
Book Group - The Courage To Teach..	9
Chalk Talk .....	10

---

---

thoughts on topics I (a) don't know anything about or (b) don't care anything about. It seems to make the most sense to "hear" students on their reactions and insights to the content of a class and their authority on the process of learning in that class. By this I mean, I need to hear students discuss and critically think about the material I present in a more vocal way. Yes, tests, quizzes and papers do allow me to "hear" students but it doesn't allow students to hear each others' voices or to test the power of a newly found voice with potential peer critics. This is where the idea of peer teaching (warning - not an easy task to facilitate) seems particularly invaluable. Guiding students to the resources on a topic and then helping them formulate a lesson and "teach" their peers creates an entirely different teacher/learner dynamic in the classroom. It also allows me, as the instructor, amazing insight into how students organize information, what they choose as important to present, how they evaluate material, what they choose to talk about, and more importantly how their academic voice is developing. It helps me really HEAR their voices in an important and substantive way.

I also find that in allowing students more airtime in the class I'm able to help them begin the rigorous task of differentiating fact from opinion. While I value opinion, I am also able to point out that what one believes is true and what may actually be true can be two entirely different things. But if I didn't hear opinion stated as fact I would never know which students needed help in developing this important skill.

Student voices are also invaluable in the process of teaching. Feedback from the learners on what is going on in the classroom is really the only way for me as teacher to see and hear my class from their point of view. I'm talking about more than pace and chalkboard technique here. The most valuable student voices I've heard have to do with the affect of the class, how students perceive

the learning atmosphere as well as their relationship with their fellow students and me. I also find student voices critical in the structure of assignments. What is perfectly clear to me is often a mystery to the learner and unless they have the opportunity to voice their concern I'll never know that.

While it is often through silence and quiet reflection that we are able to provide students with the space to do their most important thinking and learning, it is only through helping students find their voice in a safe environment that we give them one of the most valuable tools for life long learning.

**How do you hear your student voices?** If you have a special technique, exercise, or philosophy to help your students find, express and share their voice with you and classmates, please contact us at the CEUT and we'll publish your piece on hearing your students' voices. ❁



\*\*\*\*\*

Source:

J.E. Miller, J.E. Groccia and M.S. Miller (2001). Student Assisted Teaching. Anker Publications, Bolton, MA.

*Donna Qualters is Director of the Center for Effective University Teaching and Associate Professor in Education.*



## Quotations

*In the fall, we begin again. It is a time of renewal. We recall the reasons we chose a career that encompasses teaching, as well as our own experiences as students starting anew.*

“We teach what we like to learn and the reason many people go into teaching is vicariously to re-experience the primary joy experienced the first time they learned something they loved.”

- Stephen Brookfield

“Each time I walk into a classroom, I can choose the place within myself from which my teaching will come, just as I can choose the place within my students toward which my teaching will be aimed. I need not teach from a fearful place: I can teach from curiosity or hope or empathy or honesty, places that are as real within me as are my fears.”

- Parker Palmer

“Teaching is an instinctual art, mindful of potential, craving of realizations, a pausing, seamless process, where one rehearses constantly while acting, sits as a spectator at a play one directs, engages every part in order to keep the choices open and the shape alive for the student, so that the student may enter in and begin to do what the teacher has done: make choices.”

- A. Bartlett Giamatti

## Excellence in Teaching 2002 Awards

This year three exceptional faculty members were chosen by a faculty senate committee and representatives of the undergraduate and graduate student government to receive the 2002 Excellence in Teaching Awards. Professor Mario Maletta from Accounting, Professor Dennis Cokely from American Sign Language and Professor Frank Dibella from Engineering Technology were honored at the 2002 Commencement Ceremony.



The Excellence in Teaching Award is a highly competitive award with 13 outstanding teachers nominated for this year's award. Winners are not only recognized at Commencement but receive an honorarium to support their work. Nominees submit an extensive teaching portfolio which includes a philosophy statement, syllabi with learning outcomes, students evaluations, assessment tools, support letters from colleagues and students, evidence of professional teaching improvement activities and scholarly dissemination. Rigorous review by peers, many of whom are former winners, is conducted over the course of the spring semester.

Congratulations to both nominees and winners for leading the way in scholarly teaching at Northeastern! ❁

---

---

## Spirituality and Academia: A Partnership to Help us Thrive

*Address given by Provost David Hall at Building Campus Community: Nurturing the Spirit conference, May, 2002*

I would like to talk to you today about “spirit”. In academic circles we tend not to embrace this concept too openly. In an environment where so much depends on proving the existence of reality in a scientifically controlled manner, we get nervous about basing our conclusions and actions on something that seems beyond our ability to see, feel and analyze. Yet spirit and spirituality must have a place in academic institutions. I deeply believe that so much of what we do in any setting is determined and affected by those things that we can’t easily and visibly detect. Though we must be careful not to shape a non-sectarian institution directly around religious tenets, we must not deny the spiritual dimensions of who we are as individuals and the collective spirit of the institution. Though we may not agree on what spirit is, and spirituality means different things to many of us in this room, that does not deny its existence or its impact.

I believe we build community instinctively through the spirit realm. So much of how we feel about a place depends on how we are treated, respected and understood. We are better able to provide these things for each other when we are able to go beyond our intellectual limits and human vulnerabilities and enhance a spirit that is greater than us.

We build authentic communities by being authentic individuals. Authenticity to me is a spiritual quest. The ability to not get trapped by titles and positions. The ability to have compassion for others, even when they are wrong. The capacity to see beyond circumstances, and to have faith in the possibility of the impossible require that we rise above artificial and temporary meanings of self and institution. We build community not through inaction but through the actions of our heart and soul. We build community on the twin towers of faith and love.

So in the campus community, we must make space for spiritual reflection and ethical development. We must not see a major divide between what we think and how we care. Though

one must be careful not to impose one’s personal spiritual beliefs upon others, the opposite extreme is also dangerous. To deny the existence of our spiritual values, and to fail to realize

the direct and indirect ways they nurture our lives and our work, is to deny a source of our strength and creativity as human beings.

Part of our task as organizational leaders and individuals is to ensure that we renew ourselves and the community. It is through this renewal that we transform what is into something greater. We renew our minds not just through more intellectual stimulation, but also by finding ways to put our minds at peace. This ancient warning to not conform to this world is suggesting that we cannot reach our full potential if we stay within the box of that which is acceptable. We must be courageous enough to tap into this flowing wellspring of emotional and spiritual power that gives us “new life”. We must create that renewal space in our own lives, and we must create that renewal space within the life of the institution. There must be a place that draws the best out of us so that we can give that to the world. That place might differ for each of us, but we must seek that private place of reflection and rejuvenation. Without it, we never come to understand or perceive our true calling as individuals and as an institution. It was said at one time, that we are so busy that we don’t have time to think. Institutional life can also keep us so busy that we don’t have time to love ourselves and those around us.

We nurture the spirit by first being willing to own and embrace that part of our reality. We nurture it by trying to daily live authentic lives and we nurture the spirit by living a life of faith. It is written that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen”. There are two levels of faith that we must focus upon in this community. At the very general level we must understand that various individuals in this community have a faith



---

---

connections that guides their lives. We must continue to create the space where students and those who work here can find those connections. But on a very personal level, faith is an internalized power that feeds our authenticity, propels us to overcome life barriers and encourages us to strive for our full potential. Our belief in the unseen realities for ourselves and this institution gives us the power to move forward against all odds without a deep faith in the righteousness of the institutional aspiration, then we will not make it, but just as we believe in creating a great university that no one has been able to create so far, we must have the same level of belief in the goodness and humanity of those who dwell in this environment. When we live a genuine life of faith, we not only nurture ourselves, but we help nurture the communities in which we exist.

I have long advocated for a holistic approach to legal education and more recently to education in general. Holism suggests that buried within each part is the whole and yet we cannot understand the whole by just focusing and analyzing the part. When I apply that principal to our educational mission I conclude that we will never understand scientific or humanistic phenomenon by isolating our inquiry to traditionally narrow boundaries. Emotions and spirit are essential to our understanding of human beings and thus to life, so part of our intellectual inquiry is to embrace the spiritual dimension of who we are.

Furthermore, if we are to produce the leaders of the future then we must produce leaders who are ethical, who have a deep level of integrity, who have good judgment and human sensitivity. Those traits of leadership are not developed in an intellectual vacuum. I believe these are deeply developed when there is a spiritual dimension to ones education and life. So much of our frustration and disappointment with political leaders is not based on their intellectual shortcomings, but those intangible attributes of integrity, authenticity and compassion.

So in a university that strives to cross boundaries that other academic institutions are afraid to fully cross, we must be willing to cross the boundary of the intellectual plan and enter more boldly into the spiritual realm. We must do it through our research, through our teaching and through our living.

Aretha Franklin once recorded a song called Spirit in the Dark. She asked the question are you getting the spirit. She was pushing us to go into that

secret place and discover the power that is available to us all to reach another level of our existence. She was imploring us to get the spirit, to embrace the power that we have as human beings. We build community when we give to that community all of what we have. That does not mean we work ourselves to death. The all I speak of is those precious parts of who we are. We don't hold back our spirits of decency, care and love. That the faith we embrace to get us through difficult personal moments, is the same faith we embrace to get us through difficult institutional moments.

Being a spiritual seeker as the source of nurturing community does not make one perfect. It does not place us above others who deny that part of reality. What it does is give us access to a part of reality that others choose not to enter. What it does is give us a power to overcome some of the stresses of life. What it should give us is the ability to make hard decisions, but to treat those whom we deal with with respect and care. As a popular gospel song reminds us, "a saint is just a sinner who fell down and got up." So we all need to not worry if in building this community will we fail? Yes we will. But the test of our spirit is when we get up. Do we get up with an even greater determination to be better that we were before we fell?

When each of us comes to the end of our journey in life, we want to be remembered for something special. As much as I have pushed the colleges to develop integrated learning modes that embrace the connections between co-op and classroom work, that is not what I want to appear on my tombstone. As important as those things are, there has to be something greater. There has to be a connection we make to the lives of people that lets them know that we are loved, and that what we see is not all that is, and what we limit ourselves to is not all that we can do. As we travel along this way, if we can help someone especially those in need, then our living is not in vain.

So we can build a community of great men and women who historians will write about. We will build it not just on our intellectual power, but on our spiritual power as well. We will build it through respect, love and faith. We will build it one person, one moment, and one experience at a time. This is how we nurture the spirit. Not in the abstract, but in the concrete. Not in theory, but also in practice.✿

# Teaching Assistant Awards Banquet

## - Kuheli Dutt

The first Teaching Assistant Awards Banquet went off with a bang! Organized by the Center for Effective University Teaching, the awards night can be considered a landmark, as the first university-wide event aimed at giving formal recognition to Teaching Assistants. Held at the Curry Student Center Ballroom on the 9th of May, 2002, the event was marked by the presence of a distinguished assembly of speakers including Provost Dr. David Hall, Vice Provost Dr. Gilda Barabino, and Professor Jack Levin (Teaching Excellence winner and Director of the Northeastern's Brudnick Center on Conflict and Violence).

In his keynote address, Professor Jack Levin spoke about the difficulty of the role of a Teaching Assistant. He spoke about the need to give Teaching Assistants recognition, drawing wide applause from the audience. He stated that the teaching assistant is usually never given as much importance as the Professor, and in most cases, is only slightly older than the students. This can often undermine the crucial role played by Teaching Assistants as the link between the students and the faculty. Professor Levin spoke at length about 'late bloomers', i.e. those students who bloom later than when people expect them to. He reminisced about his college days, citing himself as an example of a late bloomer, going from a 1.6 GPA to 3.8 GPA in a year. He recounted an experience where a professor who had given him a very mediocre reference in college later asked Levin to give a lecture to his students, and then asked his students to follow a book written by Levin! On a more serious note, Professor Levin spoke about students who may be very talented, but might not be able to afford tuition and don't do very well in school or college either. This is especially true for most developing countries; however in the US, there are many opportunities for late bloomers, and a Teaching Assistant may be instrumental in precipitating



*Prof. Jack Levin gives keynote*

the change in the life of the student, thereby being responsible for the change from a non-serious student to a keen and dedicated student.

Dr. David Hall, Provost and Senior Vice-President presented awards to the best Teaching Assistants. In his remarks, he stated that these awards stood for a symbol of the excellence in



*Provost Hall congratulates Maral Bal*

teaching that the university strives towards, and the award winners were symbolic of this "present and striving excellence". The awards were given for 4 categories: Tutor, Recitation Leader, Laboratory Instructor, and Instructor of Record. The winners were Amit Arora (Engineering) for Outstanding Tutor, Iris Ben-David (Legal Practice) for Outstanding Recitation Leader, Maral Bal (Civil Engineering) for Outstanding Laboratory TA, and Stephen Lovett (Mathematics) for Outstanding Instructor of Record.

In addition to the winners, all nominees were recognized, as were the Expert-Level credentialed Teaching Assistants. Dr. Miriam Diamond, Director of the Teaching Assistant Program at the Center for Effective University Teaching and a key person behind the organization of this event, gave certificates and prizes in recognition of all the nominees, while Dr. Donna Qualters (Director, Center for Effective University Teaching) honored the Teaching Assistants who had earned credentials, recognizing a year of documented continuing education and development as a TA.



*Dr. Qualters and Kristen Jacquard recognize Dan Klotz of Sociology*

The evening was marked by a combination of moods. The formal setting in the Ballroom complemented the solemnity of the occasion; while at the same time, the atmosphere was enlivened by the cheerful strains of jazz playing in the background. In addition, all those Teaching Assistants who had worked throughout the year as members of the Leadership Committee and collaborated to make the evening a success were

acknowledged and recognized. All in all, it was an evening to remember. ❁

*Kuheli Dutt is a graduate student in the Department of Economics.*

Photos by Carree Michel

Nominations for the TA Leadership Board are being accepted now. Please contact the CEUT if you know a TA who would like to participate.

## Cultivating Students' Ethical Awareness and Inquiry

Perrin Cohen, NUCASE Director

NUCASE (Northeastern University Center for the Advancement of Science Education) is Northeastern's interdisciplinary, ethics education community for students and colleagues. Marty Block (Psychology) and I established NUCASE in 1990 to help students in the sciences and allied fields to be more confident and competent to address ethical concerns and issues that they experience both on campus (e.g., classes, labs) and off campus (e.g., co-op, internships). Recently, we have expanded the scope of NUCASE beyond science to include business ethics and criminal justice ethics. We will be adding other content areas (e.g., Law, Humanities) as well.

Through the integration of practical experience and study, NUCASE's ethics education model (Awareness, Investigation & Response or AIR) encourages students to identify and acknowledge ethical concerns and issues. As part of the approach, NUCASE offers tools and resources (<http://www.casdn.neu.edu/~nucase>) as well as workshops for teachers who want to better help their students to clarify and refine ethical awareness, thinking, and decision making. These offerings support Northeastern's ACE ethics objectives and its practice-oriented educational goals.

At a recent NUCASE board meeting, Donna Qualters, CEUT Director, endorsed Steve Nathanson's (Philosophy) suggestion to include a new column in "Teaching Matters" on "ethics and teaching". The Board agreed that a column of that



nature would be a useful addition for reflection and thoughts about the "teaching of ethics" and the "ethics of teaching". As NUCASE Director, I agreed to contribute to the column, to serve as column editor, and to invite colleagues to submit reflective and informative pieces that focus on practical ways of enhancing students' and teachers' ethical awareness, investigation, and responsibility. If you would like to submit a column for consideration, please send it to [p.cohen@neu.edu](mailto:p.cohen@neu.edu).

To serve teachers, NUCASE offers three types of workshops, one for co-op faculty who teach the one-credit, interdisciplinary NUCASE courses "Ethical Awareness on Co-op", one for academic faculty, and a third for teaching assistants. All teachers are welcome to participate. (Please note the NUCASE and CEUT WebPages for details about when these workshops will be offered.) All workshops are designed to help teachers to be more confident and competent to support students' as well as their own ethical awareness and inquiry. Workshops address a wide range of questions, issues and skills. For example, how does one create conditions for students to identify and reflect upon ethical concerns and issues (e.g., privacy, fairness, and honesty) derived from one's experience and

---

interests? What are basic research tools, skills, and resources that students need to clarify and refine ethical thinking and decision making? What options are available to students for responding with greater wisdom and creativity (e.g., alternatives) to real life situations?

Workshops also address an array of questions and concerns that teachers often raise such as: Am I competent or skilled enough to help students deal with ethical issues in my field? Supporting students' ethical inquiry takes valuable time away from course content. What resources (e.g., courses, professional guidelines, and case studies) are available for me to help students and to refer students to others who might have more knowledge or experience? How do I avoid getting into ethical discussions that "get out of hand" (e.g., students who are very emotional and unfocused or students who try to impose their views upon others)? How do I deal with situations in which students express concerns/views that make me feel uncomfortable? How can I help students speak and listen respectfully to one another about ethical issues? How am I sure that discussions are confidential and that students do not feel compelled to talk about issues that make them feel uncomfortable? How do I preserve my multiple roles as educator, advisor, researcher, ethical being, and, in the case of TA's, student? What do I do to discourage cheating and plagiarism? How do I deal with students who cheat or plagiarize? The list goes on!

In addition to these teacher workshops, NUCASE supports other services for teachers and students as well. The NUCASE Faculty Forum, for example, meets quarterly to reflect on ethical concerns/issues that we experience in our varied roles as teachers, researcher, scholars, mentors, advisors, administrators, etc. All are welcome to attend. An announcement of the Fall Quarter and subsequent meetings will be post on the NUCASE calendar webpages. In other projects, NUCASE is developing a new "ethics unit" for the First Year Experience Course and will be involved in helping colleagues prepare to teach that unit. It is also involved in developing a new, NUCASE undergraduate student club that provides a forum for reflective discussion and for sharing experiences and ideas. Discussions will be the basis for possible research activities and

projects (e.g., surveys, speakers, debates, curricular innovations). Please let us know if you know of students who you think would like to participate.

The NUCASE website provides an information base for all of the NUCASE programs and projects. It currently focuses on three general content areas: Science and Allied Fields (e.g., engineering, bioethics, genetics, research ethics, medical ethics), Criminal Justice Ethics and Business Ethics. Information is constantly being updated and new content areas added. We encourage colleagues to send us citations, texts, websites, etc. that teachers and students find useful. Students find "Stepforward" and "Getting Started" pages particularly useful. StepForward is an edited, broad-based clearinghouse of web information (about 200 sites and growing) and is organized by topics (e.g., Animal Use, Christian Ethics, Computer Ethics, Human Patients/Participants, Moral Philosophy, Women/Minorities). "Getting Started" helps students ease into a new content area.

In addition to the NUCASE calendar (upcoming and past events) and the Ethics Related Funding Opportunities (e.g., grants, fellowships), there is a NUCASE Community Page. This page acknowledges the many colleagues and students who lead and participate in NUCASE programs as well as those who have not been directly involved but whose work and expertise support the NUCASE mission. Of particular interest on that page is a list of ethics-related courses that are currently being offered at Northeastern. With colleagues' input, we will add course syllabi and information about curricular innovations. The NUCASE Ethics Library includes scholarly contributions and citations about ethics and ethics education (e.g., articles, books, speeches) contributed by Northeastern faculty and students. The StepBack page is an area that electronically supports ethical reflection and discussion (e.g., Blackboard discussions for specific courses). We welcome contributions and suggestions for all areas of the NUCASE WebPages and encourage teachers to use it as an educational tool. The effectiveness of these pages as well as of the NUCASE programs, in general, depend upon ongoing contributions of teachers and their mutual interest in sharing ideas and information. We look forward to your participation. ❁

---

---

# Parker J. Palmer's *The Courage to Teach*: A Book Discussion Group



Priscilla L. Kelso, Program Director  
Department of International Cooperative Education

"Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life" is the subtitle of an important book that has been the focus of discussion for several teachers of various disciplines at Northeastern University. Started in the fall of 2002 and led by Miriam Diamond, Assistant Director for the Center of Effective University Teaching, the group included a group of faculty members from the departments of Pharmacy, Engineering, English, Theatre, Education, and Sign Language.

The introductory section of *The Courage to Teach* includes the following assumptions:

1. Teaching involves an inner journey that reconnects teachers with their vocation and their students.
2. Good teaching cannot be reduced to techniques but comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher.
3. Communities of learning need to be created within institutions to support teachers in their work.

Participants in this book discussion group met informally every two weeks for a period of time during their lunch hour and freely shared their experiences as teachers — positive and otherwise. When asked why they responded to the invitation to be part of the group, several offered the following answers: "To use the language of the heart when speaking about teaching," "To know what it is like for other faculty outside of my department," "To fill the need for dialogue regarding teaching this generation of students," "To share successes and failures in the classroom after a long teaching career."

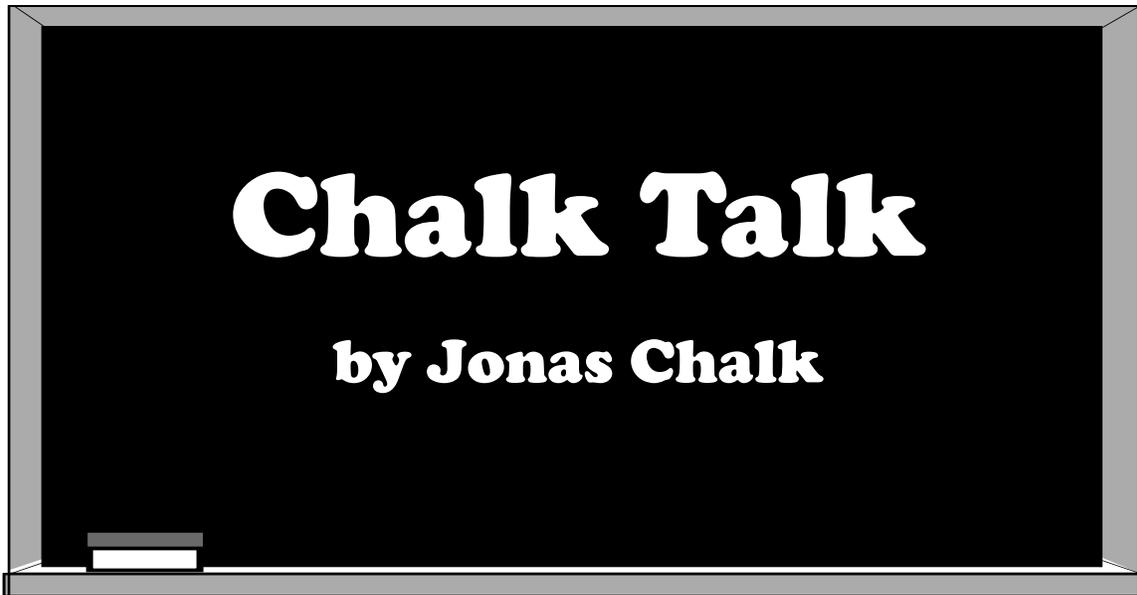
*The Courage to Teach* is basically an inspirational book written by Parker J. Palmer who dedicates his book "to teachers who have good days and bad...and who refuse to harden their hearts because they love learners, learning, and the teaching life." Palmer himself is a college professor with a Ph.D. from the University of California in Berkeley, who has written another widely-acclaimed

book on teaching — *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*. Recognizing that the demands of teaching cause too many educators to lose heart, he consequently advocates for the convergence of the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual paths to learning: What shall we teach? How shall we teach? For what purpose and to what ends do we teach? And more importantly, Who is the self that teaches?

Of the several chapters in *The Courage to Teach* that generated varied responses from the group, the most spirited conversation took place when discussing the section on the paradoxes of teaching and learning. Parker observes that the Western tendency to think in polarities requires a rebalancing of the scales from *either-or* thinking to *both-and*, a more expansive habit of mind that can embrace ambiguities. An example is the creative tension that exists between pedagogy and personal style, such as the handling of "open and bounded space" in the classroom. To what extent should the syllabus be the sole determiner of classroom discussion? How far should a teacher allow students to wander from the subject? How much of a teacher's personal life (e.g. doubts, ambivalence, personal data) should figure in classroom discourse?

All in all, the book evoked both subjective as well as objective responses from faculty participants who have taught at Northeastern University from a range of two to twenty years. An attempt at creating a support community for teachers of disparate disciplines, it succeeded in starting a much-needed dialogue on the art of teaching —and the courage to teach. ❁

*A second book group will begin in mid-Fall. We will read The Heart of Learning (Stephen Glazer, editor) , a collection of readings on Spirituality in Education. Please e-mail [M.Diamond@neu.edu](mailto:M.Diamond@neu.edu) if you are interested in participating.*



Dear Jonas,

As another term is beginning I'm suffering the usual anticipation anxiety. I will be teaching a section of freshman engineering students (although my anxiety is not confined to teaching freshman classes) none of whom I have known previously and none of whom know me - except by hearsay from other students. While typically everything works out fine after I gain the students' trust and the class becomes responsive and interactive after a couple of weeks, the start is usually tentative and a bit uncomfortable. Any suggestions on how to accelerate the process?

Anxious

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Anxious,

I also suffer from the anxiety of anticipation with every new class of students, but that's not a bad thing. I expect that because you are thinking about getting a positive momentum going, you're probably going to achieve it as you always do. The question is, "How can an instructor speed up the development of that relationship with the new class?" The key here is to understand that while we begin any term by interacting with students, they will invest more effort and have greater expectations for themselves as these interactions mature into a mutually respectful and trusting relationship. That's just human behavior. This respect and trust, however, must be earned by your actions (and theirs); it is not simply a result of credentials or titles.

So, how do we speed up the development of this relationship? A few years ago my wife, Dusty, and I signed up for the AFS (American Field Service) program and decided to host a young woman from Denmark as she did her senior year at our local high school. Even though we had received a copy of her application materials for the program, as we were about to meet this young woman who would live with us for a year, we were excited but also anxious. The AFS program had some very good suggestions for us. For one thing, they suggested that as soon as we got back to our house, we sit down and talk about expectations (hers and ours). What should Tanja

---

---

(pronounced Tenya) call us? We decided it would be her choice. Tanja suggested “mom” and “dad,” a bit to our surprise. Other questions and expectations were discussed. What would we pay for, and what should she? Was she responsible for doing her own laundry? Was she expected to help with the dishes after dinner and do other chores? Is it our custom to leave the bathroom door open or closed? While talking, we realized that some of both our and her notions and expectations were unanticipated, and we were all more comfortable having clarified them up front.

I believe that this open and honest discussion (actually there were a few) greatly accelerated the formation of a strong relationship that still perseveres today. This same notion is directly transferable to the beginning of a new class. I always begin by introducing myself and include some personal, but not private, information. Students are often surprised to learn that a faculty member actually has a life outside of his subject material. I also ask my students to turn in a copy of their resumes at the next class, adding something personal but not private. Even freshman engineering students will have resumes by now. Instead of collecting resumes, some faculty create a “Student Information Form” and ask about completion of prerequisites, best way to contact students, email addresses, why they chose to take this course, etc.

Then we discuss my expectations, both of them and of myself and most importantly WHY I have these expectations for this class. Many are listed on the syllabus but not all. For example, students can ask and are encouraged to ask questions at any time. I expect a hand to be raised, but it’s OK to say something to get my attention if I don’t see it. I encourage students to work in groups on homework (and what that means), but each has to submit a separate solution. Late homework will not be accepted as I will distribute copies of my solutions (or put them on a website) on the due date. I explain my grading policy (grade on the final exam will be the grade for the course if better than the previous record) and why I have designed it that way. I let my students know that it’s OK to be wrong in trying to answer a question in class and that I have not had a student yet who has gotten all the answers. I make it clear that I will always try to be on time for class, and if not I apologize. I expect them to do the same. I promise them that I will always be prepared for class and I expect the same from them. I expect them to review the assigned reading material (but not necessarily understand) prior to class because they will at least be familiar with terms, symbols and what I am trying to accomplish that day. I warn them that they will quickly learn that I enjoy kidding around and that some good-natured repartee is welcomed - nothing too personal though. I want them to understand that while I must set the standards of success in my course, I’ll be there to help if they do their parts. If a student is not sure where she stands at any point in my course, It’s OK to ask. If a student misses a class, it is his responsibility to get the notes from a classmate (arrange in advance if possible), go over them and then come to me with questions. I also ask about their expectations, and we discuss them.

You are obviously someone who does form a good relationship with your students. I hope my suggestions help you do this a little more quickly.

Jonas

Quick Tip: Try collecting student resumes or information forms at the beginning of a course and mention appropriate information at appropriate times. If a student worked as a rigger, equilibrium concepts in a physics course would apply. When a student visits your office mentioning that he comes from Naugatuck, CT (or wherever) or that he ran the Boston Marathon does a lot to break the ice.

**HAVE YOU DEVELOPED INTERESTING TEACHING TECHNIQUES THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH OTHER FACULTY? YOU CAN HELP RUN A WORKSHOP OR WRITE A TEACHING MATTERS ARTICLE. CONTACT US AT X8583 AND LET US KNOW WHAT YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE!!**

**THE CENTER FOR EFFECTIVE UNIVERSITY TEACHING  
225 HAYDEN HALL  
NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY  
PHONE: (617) 373-8583  
FAX: (617) 373-7531**

**CHECK OUT THE NEW, INFORMATION-PACKED  
CEUT WEBPAGE AT:  
[WWW.NORTHEASTERN.EDU/CEUT](http://WWW.NORTHEASTERN.EDU/CEUT)**

Published by  
The Center for Effective University Teaching  
225 Hayden Hall  
Northeastern University  
Boston, MA 02115

*Director, Donna M. Qualters - Editor-in-Chief  
Assistant Director, Miriam R. Diamond - Editor  
Evaluation Coordinator, Audrey Aduama - Contributor  
Administrative Assistant, Kristen Jacquard - Contributor  
Graduate Assistant, Vanna Lee - Contributor  
Carree Michel - Photographer*

Phone: 617.373.8583

Fax: 617.373.7531

[WWW.NORTHEASTERN.EDU/CEUT](http://WWW.NORTHEASTERN.EDU/CEUT)



**Northeastern**  
U N I V E R S I T Y