Introduction

Teaching at the college or university level requires expertise and planning. Great teachers add energy, excitement, and sensitivity to the mix. Most teachers work in isolation, developing their skills through periodic feedback from students, both formal and informal, as well as their own intuitive feel and desire to improve. A few instructors actively seek feedback and direction from peers and other sources. Yes, great teachers are born and, yes, great teachers are made, but it's rather pointless to try to untangle the exact contribution of each. Every great teacher combines natural talents with skills developed along the way, attentiveness to student learning and an eagerness to improve.

And so it is with great actors. Training, direction, and regular feedback combine with natural gifts, alertness to audience reactions, and personal motivation to make performances memorable. Having worked with these ideas since the late 1970s, we believe that the performing arts contain methods and concepts that can help any teacher grow and help good teachers become great ones. Whatever discipline you represent, whether you teach regularly or only occasionally, lessons from the stage can help you increase your own self-awareness, sharpen your delivery, engage your students and audiences more effectively, and, ultimately, create deeper learning and promote critical and creative thinking.

Expertise and preparation are essential starting points for teaching in higher education, but an energetic delivery and the creative use of classroom time and resources can help you inspire your students. Indeed, even the best of lecture notes cannot guarantee learning when you're uninspired or you come to class prepared only to read your notes. In *What Students Really Think of Professors*, an analysis of class evaluation forms,

Linda Jackson and Michael Murray (1997, 80) include a chapter on the teacher as performer, observing that students applaud instructor enthusiasm as a motivator of learning, and chide professors whose lectures lack "umph." Drawing from our own training and experiences and that of the many teachers with whom we've worked on various campuses, we hope to offer you fresh insights into the art and science of effective instruction, as well as new designs for more engaging learning experiences.

Parallels Between the Classroom and the Stage

Teaching and performing are live public performances in which delivery, engagement, and feedback matter. Both require prior preparation. Indeed, effective teaching can be measured by some of the same basic criteria used to evaluate performers: Could the teacher be heard? seen? Was the material well organized? Did it hold together and make sense? Did the teacher's timing increase student engagement? Did the teacher make good use of the classroom space and other available resources? How did the teacher respond to the audience? Developing a sustained analogy between teacher and performer in *Teaching as a Performing Art*, Seymour Sarason (1999, 9) observes that we make certain assumptions about the performer:

- That "the artist wants to perform."
- That the performer "has rehearsed for the occasion."
- "That the artist will give his or her 'all' to the performance and will not leave us with the impression that he or she has gone through the motions, relatively devoid of personal feeling or involvement."

Can students make the same assumptions about their professors?

Good teaching is more than giving information. In this day of desktop publishing and Internet resources, class notes are easily updated, reproduced, and made available to students to copy; put on reserve at the library; or included on a course web site. Why not use class time for interactions, debates, discussions, questions, role plays, activities, opportunities to practice new skills — all meaningful ways to develop students' talents? Few members of the general public would attend performances during which scripts are merely read. They want more, and so do students. Great teachers use many of the skills of great performers to bring their lecture notes — their "scripts" — to life.

Instruction and Entertainment

Resistance to the notion that performers have anything substantial to offer teachers is understandable. "I'm not an entertainer," a professor might protest. Arthur Frank (1995, 29) mocks, justifiably, "the recent remarks of Alberta's former Education Minister, who wanted lectures given by professors to be replaced by videos scripted by academics but delivered by professional actors." Trained and rewarded as subject area experts, many professors bristle when judged on delivery. Except, perhaps, for a public speaking course, few have had formal training in presentation skills. Some even dismiss teaching popularity as pandering to students, and as valuing form over substance and entertainment over instruction.

Student learning, however, should top any list on teaching effectiveness. To succeed in stimulating student growth, we contend, requires more than subject matter expertise. It requires some mastery of delivery — more so in large classes — as well as skill in engaging the minds and hearts of students, in challenging them to consider new possibilities and rethink old ideas, in helping them learn better how to learn your subject.

While instructors who want to remain narrowly defined solely as subject matter experts may find such ideas threatening, others will embrace lessons from the stage that can help them develop new ways to engage students — or any other audience. With training, practice, and a commitment to ongoing feedback, you'll make rapid progress, we can confidently assure you. As a student and now as an instructor, you already have a wealth of classroom experience upon which to draw. Reflecting on his own experiences and observations of teaching, Sarason (1999, 4) points out:

> Resistance to changing one's style of performing the role is the constant enemy of deepening understanding of the role. The burned out teacher tends to be one whose performance has been routinized, like an actor in a long-running play who once "lived" the role but now goes through the motions.

Performance Anxiety and Fun

One common fear for most of us involves public speaking, an unavoidable hazard for teachers. Members of the general public often find the prospect of being up in front of any group, especially a large one, intim-

idating or even terrifying. Similar anxieties arise for performers. In a recent article in the journal *Pedagogy*, Princeton University English professor Elaine Showalter (2001) describes reading a book on stage fright to enhance her confidence. For performers — and teachers — a key strategy is to learn how to channel energy and feelings in a constructive direction, a process that can turn debilitating anxiety into useful motivation.

The flip side to stage fright, as Showalter observes, is the joy of performing: "Appearing before an audience is in some sense being nurtured and fed by them" (2001, 450). Excitement can come from the interaction between performer and audience, whether you're working through complex material or probing understanding, connecting different viewpoints or citing relevant sources, telling stories of discovery and dead ends or noting shifting paradigms, correcting misconceptions or answering questions, reminding people of old truths or inspiring those people with new insights. The energy exchange can be thrilling for you and your students alike.

The Making of Teachers and Actors

Because instructors are "born" *and* "made," each of us has the potential to improve. Some of us may come blessed with more "natural" talents — for example, a resonant voice, clear diction, ease with physical movements, or the ability to think easily on our feet. The great ones among us, however, also have a will to improve and perfect their craft — an openness to feedback, additional professional training, practice. And so it is with great actors. As Sarason (1999, 136-137) observes:

> Among the major attractions of the career is that there will always be challenges and self-testing, diversity of roles, new learning....[The] performer has to take lifelong learning seriously. Self-improvement is the name of the game.

In one regard, however, the traditions of the classroom and the stage differ remarkably. Unlike performers, instructors typically work in isolation from each other. By contrast, actors, dancers, and musicians routinely rehearse under the watchful eye of a director, choreographer, or conductor. Feedback is immediate and frequent. New ideas are rehearsed over and over again. As this book unfolds, you will read repeated nudges from us about the benefits of feedback, support, and assistance from your peers. Borrowing a phrase from the theatre, we hope you can "suspend your own disbelief" and experiment with some of the ideas we offer.

Cross-Fertilization and Creativity

We believe that viewing your teaching through the eyes of the performer will give you fresh insights as well as ideas for improvement. The study of creativity, for instance, demonstrates the benefits of cross-fertilization and incubation. Breakthroughs often result when the mind's focus is elsewhere: Jean Piaget developed his notions of a developmental hierarchy in learning and cognition after formal studies in biology and philosophy; James Watson came to his groundbreaking work in behavioral psychology from a career in business; and Albert Einstein wrote some of his most important papers in mathematics while working at the patent office in Vienna.

Plan of the Book

We begin your journey by comparing the requirements for planning and performance that instructors and actors face. Each must do substantial amounts of "homework," and this process demands one set of skills — among them research, study, organization, and preparation. Yet, in class and on stage, other skills become crucial as well. We want to help you see the parallels. We then revisit the lecture and the discussion as mainstays of instruction. In these teaching modes, we propose that lessons from the stage can guide you toward fresh ideas for better engaging students, and for challenging them to think, consider new possibilities, and develop new skills.

In Chapter Five, we explore energy, creativity, and spontaneity, all qualities that are central to the vitality of instruction. Since performers also need these attributes, performance training offers methods that you too can use to develop them. While volumes have been written about the value of behavioral objectives for teachers, for example, few resources exist to guide teachers toward essential subjective qualities. We agree with Sarason's (1999, 105) argument that:

> The teacher is more than a mechanical conduit of information, but rather is a stage setter who seeks to get the actors to use themselves and their experience to make the substance of the script a part of their psychological bloodstream; the script has to become propelling, believable, personal, not a routinized, impersonal experience the consequences of which enter the file-and-forget category of experience.

In the following two chapters, we argue for the place of "drama" in both the development of thinking and discovery learning. Finally, we end the book by identifying and describing a range of exercises and scenes for study — material for ongoing practice.

Come along, then. The bell has rung. The curtain is rising. The lights come up. We know you'll find this adventure challenging and rewarding, much like the experience we seek for students. Enjoy!

References

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