

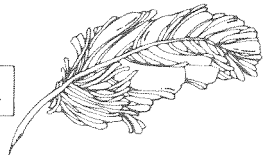
REAC ING THROUGH TEACHING

A NEWSLETTER HIGHLIGHTING CLASSROOM PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE AMONG KENNESAW'S FACULTY

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THE EDITOR CONSIDERS...



PROFESSOR VISITS SOCRATES...

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... the tabloid headline shouted, *And Lives to Tell About It*, the subtitle concluded. There half-a-dozen of us stood in the grocery store checkout line, feigning disinterest in the seamy, sordid, at best improbable claims of some of the country's prime examples of the language arts run amuck.

"Bird cage liners," I sneered half over my shoulder to the lady behind me. She nodded agreement, and we both let our eyes wander to some pretended distraction on the ceiling. But that headline kept nagging at me, until, impetuously, quickly, and, I hoped, inconspicuously, I tossed the literary "rag" onto the moving conveyor belt behind my groceries.

"You a bird owner?" asked the lady.

"Parakeets," I replied nervously, fully aware of how silently I was being called a liar.

Later, and quite alone, I read the following account, which I will summarize for you:

A college professor was driving home after an evening class, not only sleepy but speeding. He drove off the highway into a 200-year-old oak tree, and was hurled with such force that he

sailed over the pearly gates and landed in some remote back corner of the Great Hereafter. Shaking himself into consciousness, he realized he was in the presence of a studious-looking man in a simple white robe.



PROFESSOR: Who . . . who are you? Where am I?

SOCRATES: Socrates is my name; I'm surprised you don't recognize me, considering you always claim to use my teaching method. As to *where* you are, that's a question with too many philosophical and theological angles to discuss right now. Suffice it to say, you're having what you would call a *near death experience*. You won't be here long.

PROF: Socrates! What a great opportunity to meet you! I've always wished I could find out more about your classroom style than your pupils Plato and Xenophon tell us.

SOC: At least you haven't taken Aristophanes' play, *Clouds*, seriously. He did me no favors depicting me as a bumbling old fool—what your students would call a “space case.” But I must say that you, too, do me an injustice by referring to my *classroom* style. I wasn't exclusively a classroom teacher. I taught in the markets, in the streets, and, yes, in the gymnasiums — wherever my students gathered to dialogue. By not following my example, you miss many irretrievable opportunities to touch your students' lives.

PROF: I'll surely remember that. And please, Socrates, in the short time we have together, share more of your techniques with me. I'm committed to good teaching; I'm just not sure I always take the right approach.

SOC: What is good teaching?

PROF: (Pondering) Why, the sharing of . . . No, the *expert* sharing of knowledge by one who knows with those who do not know.

SOC: *Knowledge*, you say! Is imparting knowledge all there is to teaching?

PROF: Apparently not, judging from your reaction. What more would you add?

SOC: Where do the thinkers of your century place *knowledge* on the learning continuum?

PROF: Oh, of course, Dr. Bloom lists knowledge as the lowest learning level.

SOC: Quite so; and followed by . . .

PROF: Comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and . . . evaluation. I'm surprised I remember that.

SOC: And if you see to all of that, is your mission accomplished?

PROF: Well, I should hope so! But I don't mind telling you that I don't have time to deal with all those levels, considering the amount of material I have to cover in my 201 class.

SOC: (Impatiently) Material? Are you referring to that voluminous collection of facts you've been requiring your students to memorize? All that unillustrated, unapplied, unevaluated information you require them to cram into their heads, without having manipulated it with their hands, or, in any meaningful way, processed it with their minds, or considered its ethical implications?

PROF: (Chagrined) Oh . . . I see your point. I'm really hung up on this idea of imparting information. But I'm sure that if I planned more carefully and provided all of these higher level learning opportunities for my classes, yes, I would accomplish my mission as a teacher?

SOC: Do your students love your discipline?

PROF: *Love* it? Well, I suppose a few of them love it the way I do, but, regrettably, most are just fulfilling a requirement.

SOC: You have spoken well by professing your love for your subject. But what do you do to encourage *them* to love it?

PROF: I've never considered that my job; after all, love of the subject is not something one can test.

SOC: You have just opened the door to a very important philosophical question, and as much as I am tempted to pursue it, you haven't that much time. Let me leave you with a rhetorical question. How often has your own life been transformed by subject matter for which you felt no emotion, no interest . . . no love? Ponder this. Maybe we can discuss it someday.

PROF: But, Socrates, I had so many questions to ask you. Instead, *you've* asked all the questions.

SOC: I am sorry. It's what I do. I have always maintained my own ignorance, but when I ask questions, I learn and my students learn. The moment I start giving answers, their sense of inquiry goes to sleep and the lesson is over. Have you not learned something today?

PROF: So I have! Why, *Maestro*, you've done your number on me and I wasn't even aware . . .

SOC: That is sneaky, isn't it? And, I must say, a lot of fun. Remember, though, this method won't work in every teaching situation. Don't forget the demonstration, the lecture, small discussion groups, role playing, and all those wonderful modern visual aids you have available. Choose the method which fits the requirements of the subject matter.

PROF: *Maestro*, I sense that I am slipping away, but I cannot go without telling you what a change this experience has made in my life. I feel that I am leaving this place somehow *better* than I was.

SOC: That was my mission. Remember, it is your mission too. Goodbye. ●

