

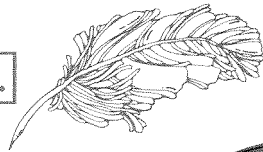
# REACIING THROUGH TEACHING

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

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## THE EDITOR CONSIDERS...

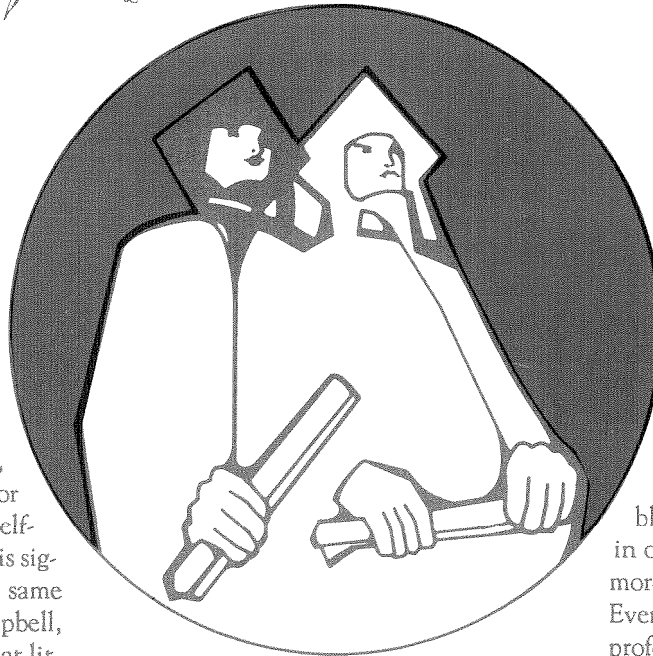


**Don Forrester**  
Director of CETL

According to Joseph Campbell, in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, all heroines and heroes share three common experiences. There is a *separation* from one's kindred, tribe or society, an *initiation*, involving a difficult or dangerous task of self-discovery or self-development, and a *return*, which is significant and life-enhancing. The same theme is found, according to Campbell, throughout our mythology and great literature. Consider Prometheus, who, recognizing the vulnerability of newly created humankind, separated himself, ascended to the sun, lit a torch, and returned the protective gift of fire to mankind.

Do not teachers qualify? After all, as young students we *separate* ourselves from the pack, certainly by interest in our studies if not by some sense of calling to our future profession. We are *initiated* through years of rigorous and difficult graduate study, often involving financial privation, in order to discover ourselves and to begin to become the best we can be. And, finally, we *return* to share the *fire* with the world we serve.

When I look back at the heroines and heroes of my youth, it is remarkable how many of them were teachers. That



## HEROES WITH TEACHERS' FACES

should not be surprising, given the fact that such a large percentage of my life has been spent in the classroom under the tutelage of teachers of one kind or another. If I count the teachers I had in grade school, high school, college, and graduate school, the number exceeds 100. Something of each one lives in me.

What should be surprising is that teachers receive so little recognition. We are seldom awarded medals of honor as good soldiers are, though teaching is more vital to the nation's welfare than military endeavors. Nothing even resembling the Academy Awards is planned in our honor, though what we do is far more important than making movies. Even the most successful ones in the profession are not awarded multimillion dollar contracts like athletes with comparable skills. Teachers, themselves, (generally a self-effacing lot) are as much responsible for this neglect as anyone. Oh, at a party, in response to the "What do you do?" question, we may reply, "I'm a professor." ("Professor" sounds more important than "teacher.") But as a group, we don't do much to promote ourselves. We certainly don't tout our individual successes, and even our failures go unheeded, unless some moral lapse makes them newsworthy.

You may be asking, "What's the matter with that?" And the question is appropriate. There is something about teaching that focuses the attention away from the teacher and toward something larger. Most teachers seem to consider the profession a high calling — an almost sacred

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Review (continued from page 5)

For an institution obsessed with public relations it was a nightmare nonpareil. What was most striking about the controversy was Dartmouth's aggressive moral agnosticism, which reduced human sexuality to an intricate series of physical and hydraulic maneuvers about which its sole concern was errant microbes and unrestrained fluids. (267)

And if we deconstruct Sykes's language, what exactly has he reduced human sexuality to?

To conclude, I think Sykes's book addresses a crucial issue in our profession right now, and that is the delicate balance upon which academic freedom and free speech rest. To legislate "politically correct" thinking in institutions is to repress free thought and speech. However, to create a climate of intellectual awareness and critical thinking is to create a climate

that allows for the questioning of the status quo and that encourages scholars and thinkers to assess and reassess the established "canon." It's no secret, as one of my colleagues said the other day, that, "Right now, Western Civilization is out." But that is, I hope, only because we turn our attention to look at what we have neglected to see: those influences, cultures, and ideas that have shaped us as surely as Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, and Woody Allen.

What Sykes's book does teach us is that change is inevitable, that every culture periodically dies to be reborn, and in doing so goes through a period of hollowness. The metaphor of the abyss that informs *The Hollow Men* reflects Charles Sykes's own disillusionment about the changes wrought by time and thought that have occurred in his world, and he, not the academy, is "wandering between two worlds, one dead, / the other powerless to be born."

Heroes (continued from page 1)

trust. To become self-serving would be to defile the profession. As Campbell says, "The hero of yesterday becomes the tyrant of tomorrow, unless he crucifies himself today."

Still, we are human and we need affirmation. While we privately celebrate our teaching successes, and occasionally our students, through word or deed, may affirm us, we require some public ritual, some counterpart to the mass or sacred service to undergird our faith in education and our commitment to teaching. This public outpouring is the commencement. Once an annual ritual, this graduation ceremony now occurs on our campus several times a year. I hear surprisingly little complaint about attending; through the years I have come to understand why. Commencement is education's high mass. We gather to honor not just the students, not just the faculty, not just the institution, and not just learning, but all of that together, and more. We celebrate knowledge and reason and wisdom and art and the spirit of inquiry and the human potential to become more than we thought we could become.

We don strange robes that date back many centuries, and which remind us of what we owe to those faceless, nameless heroes who have gone before us, pushing back the darkness. These robes symbolically cover our individual differences and meld us into one great professoriate, past, present, and future.

At the same time our hoods proclaim our diversity. Their colors signal not only our disciplines, but also the theatres of conflict where we waged our own personal battles to overcome ignorance.

So the next time you "pass in review" with great pomp and circumstance to bestow degrees upon those who have been your students, remember that the ceremony is also for you. Look into the faces of your colleagues. No, really look. And for just a few moments before returning to the daily demands of your profession, remember that these are heroes' faces.

Editor's Note: All materials reviewed in this publication are available from the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Room 472-473 in the library.

# REACHING THROUGH TEACHING

Please share with us your ideas about teaching and the exciting strategies you use for making your classroom successful. Our next deadline for submission is September 1, 1991. Please send all articles, typed double-spaced, to Don Forrester in THE CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING (CETL).

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