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# REACHING THROUGH TEACHING

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## TEACHERS AND STAND-UP COMICS

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**M**aybe you've seen Rodney Dangerfield, on failing to get the desired laugh, tug at his collar and say, "Boy! This is a tough room!" You may find it offensive to compare the professor to the comedian, but I think we have much in common. As teachers, haven't we all faced some "tough rooms" from time to time? Come on, admit it. You've had days when those students who were awake were glassy-eyed and listless; or when your usually sure-fire questions for starting a discussion were met with such profound class silence you could hear the crickets chirping. You've had days when everything you planned to do in class depended upon the students having read the assignment, and they hadn't; or when your exciting exploration of some higher level of learning

was met with nervousness and questions like, "Is this going to be on the test?" When comedians have a bad performance, they are heard to say, "I died out there tonight." Am I the only one, or have you occasionally died in the classroom?

Though a little well-placed humor doesn't hurt, I'm not suggesting that we have to tell jokes or do pratfalls to entertain our students. Certainly, our goals are different, but successful comics and teachers have many of the same qualities.

Both are flexible. Regardless of how well we have prepared our "act" (and we should rehearse it very carefully), we should always be ready to depart from the script when things are not going well. Alternate approaches often are part of the preparation.

Both are interactive with the "audience," and are alert for comments and body language which signal audience interest.

Both are creative in their ability to

look at ordinary things in extraordinary ways. By so doing, comedians draw laughs; teachers spark interest and understanding.

Both are brave. It takes courage to stand before a crowd and put one's ego at risk.

On the negative side, both are powerless to control who is admitted into the room. If we succeed, we take our audiences where they are, and find a way to move them.

Both are relentless. It is said that a comic will do anything to get a laugh. Well, there's not much a good teacher won't do to bring the light of understanding into students' eyes.

Granted, you may counter with an even longer list of differences between you and a stand-up comic. But if you ever find yourself, in the parlance of the entertainment trade, "laying an egg," remember this irreverent comparison and find the impetus to rise above every obstacle to reaching those who sit before you. 🍎

