



Joy Ride: More Teaching Tips for Reflection, Rejuvenation, and Renewal

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Joy Ride: More Teaching Tips for Reflection, Rejuvenation, and Renewal



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Preface

The response to my earlier work, *Journey of Joy: Teaching Tips for Reflection, Rejuvenation, and Renewal*, has been quite humbling. In *Journey of Joy* I shared stories of how I regained my enthusiasm for teaching and offered tips for others to do the same. Based upon the overwhelming interest, it seems apparent that other faculty struggle with finding or maintaining a sense of joy in teaching. Thank you for joining me in that search and for desiring more joy through your work as college teachers.

The idea for writing this second piece on joy in teaching came while taking a short road trip. My husband and I were headed to Paris, Arkansas to see the Christmas lights. I was excited about reaching our destination, where there is also a great little family restaurant, The Grapevine. As I anticipated getting to see the light display, I witnessed along the way an even more beautiful sight. Late in the afternoon as we traveled west, the sun was setting and changing the expansive rural sky from blue to pink to peach to orange to yellow and ultimately purple. It was a marvelous light show in itself.

This experience served as yet another reminder of how we can find joy along the way, not merely at the final destination. We started our trip the day after a very difficult fall 2012 semester had ended (more on that later). Yet here in nature was just the stimulus I needed to inspire me to share more strategies and ideas for achieving joy in teaching. Thanks for joining me on the “joy ride” that at times can be challenging, exhilarating, and oh-so rewarding!

Patty H. Phelps, EdD



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ON JOY

If you read my previous work, *Journey of Joy: Teaching Tips for Reflection, Rejuvenation, and Renewal*, you may recall that I suggested using an acronym for the word joy—**J**ust **O**ffer **Y**ourself. In short, when confused about where to locate joy, we can remember to give of ourselves in basic ways in order to receive the benefits that derive from each simple act. But what about those times when we feel as if we have little to offer? Let's take a look at some contributing factors and possible solutions.

When I started teaching college full time, I was thirty-two years old—not exactly young but definitely not very experienced. I was assigned to teach two undergraduate classes and two graduate classes. The graduate classes were the tricky ones. There I lacked confidence—and experience. Previously I was teaching high school students, but now most of my students were at least ten years older than me. This could have been intimidating (and some evenings it was), but I tried to learn from my students as much as I shared with them my newly acquired doctoral program knowledge. I knew that I had enthusiasm for helping these future principals become effective supervisors of instruction. I also realized that I had recently come from a different state, where education practices and regulations varied. With age or experience as a concern, I tried to focus on the strengths I brought to the situation and to be exceptionally willing to tap the wellspring of background knowledge that my students possessed. I was mindful of the words of Gilbert Highet (1950), whose classic book *The Art of Teaching* I had read many years ago. Regarding the inevitable mistakes and blunders we will make as teachers, he noted: “For the young do not demand omniscience. They know it is unattainable. They do demand sincerity.” (p. 20) I was certain that this truth also applied to those early nontraditional students of mine. Genuineness trumps arrogance every time.

On a related note, we can also feel inadequate when we are teaching outside our disciplinary area. As a beginning high school Latin teacher prior to my teaching college, I was also assigned to teach economics and speech! I had taken one course in each of these subject areas in college. Thus, I leaned strongly on colleagues for ideas and direction. My principal, who had a personal interest in finance, was extremely helpful with advice. If our content knowledge is weak, we need to be creative in filling that void. Therese Huston (2009) provides outstanding advice and practical assistance in her book *Teaching What You Don't Know*. She sees advantages in this dilemma and suggests that we focus on using big questions and big ideas, draw upon multiple outside resources beyond the textbook, and incorporate demonstrations and cases.

A third factor in our feeling that we have nothing more to give can be our own sense of exhaustion. We are just plain tired. We need to consider then some personal questions: How might we regain some energy? What needs to change? What could we give up? Whom could we talk to? What most fills our well? Answering these questions will help us refill ourselves so that we have something to give others.



Tips for the Ride:

1. Know your strengths and capitalize on them. What is most unique about you? Do others give special recognition for your sense of humor or caring attitude? Stress more the dimension of you that gives others the most pleasure. Doing so will serve to increase your sense of joy.
2. Keep in tune with your personal sense of well-being. Be alert to any signs of impending emptiness. Talk to a colleague or trusted friend about your sense of depletion. Find ways to boost your spirits. This will usually involve non-school-related activities such as reading for pleasure, going to the movies, etc.
3. Remember to engage in regular exercise to help maintain a sense of perspective. A walk in the afternoon or first thing in the morning is how I mainly achieve this balance. It is a great way to clear my mind and to think of new approaches to dilemmas.

SEPTEMBER						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

SCHOOL YEAR RESOLUTIONS

I have given up on making New Year’s resolutions. You may have done the same. Sticking with them usually lasts a week or two if I’m really determined. I have decided that instead, for me, the more significant “new year” doesn’t occur in January, but in the fall. As August turns toward September, that time seems to be a more logical and meaningful one to make what I call “school year resolutions.” These are few in number and address some nagging issues in my teaching life. This current school year I have three resolutions. Here are two of them:

- 1. Teach resilience.** I have found that students often tend to lean on us as instructors as much as we will let them. Many will seek help for the smallest things—for example, asking when the test is scheduled, even when the information is clearly listed on the syllabus. Sometimes they give up too easily. They fail to persist. Having this resolution to directly reinforce resilience reminds me to redirect their efforts (or lack thereof), sometimes by merely posing a question (e.g., “Where have you looked for that information?”).

I have decided that we can best teach resilience through modeling, encouragement, and biographical stories from our subject fields. We need to point students toward examples of others who have shown resilience and label their actions as such. Stories from Ken Bain’s (2012) *What the Best College Students Do* can be excellent sources of inspiration. I think students would particularly enjoy hearing Stephen Colbert’s tale (pp. 51–55). We can also share our own personal examples of resilience. Until I identified this particular resolution, I would have never thought of telling students that the only undergraduate course I dropped was an education one; yet I still pursued that career path. Knowing this fact alone may serve as encouragement to students and boost their resilience.

- 2. Keep the focus on learning.** Added distractions make this goal more difficult than it should be. As we work within an educational context that has increased demands from technological shifts and accreditation standards as well as the need to make adjustments to meet changing student demographics, it is easy to lose our focus on the number one priority: promoting learning.

“Gain” and “earn” are two words found within the letters of the word “learning,” and these words help me remember what it means to learn. First, we want students to gain something from our course. Thus, we might constantly consider how we want students to be different because of their taking our class. To stay in touch with our students’ perspective of the gains they have made, we can ask them to identify significant insights or understandings they have had as a result of a particular class session or unit of study. Thomas Angelo and Patricia Cross (1993) offer a cornucopia of assessment strategies ideal for obtaining this kind of feedback. Additionally, with “earn” being an essential aspect of learning, we can remind our students that it is their ultimate responsibility. I think they actually know this even while making excuses or placing blame elsewhere. As a special reminder, we could display or share this quote by Abigail Adams: “Learning is not attained by chance; it must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence.”



Tips for the Ride:

Take some time to generate a short list of school year resolutions. You could even make a list before each semester begins. Write these goals down and keep them visible on your desk, calendar, computer, or plan book—wherever you will see your list regularly as a targeted reminder. My “teach resilience” resolution posted near my computer has come in handy when answering student emails. Those two words help me frame a better response.

In your list of resolutions be sure to identify specific actions to improve your teaching practice and students’ learning. Decide whether these outcomes are within your control. Neither “get better prepared students” nor “become a super teacher” would be a good resolution to formulate.

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Find a few colleagues with whom to have a school year's eve party. At this very informal celebration each person might express anticipations for the coming academic year. Aim to stay positive and perhaps allow everyone to share a school year resolution or two. Doing so will likely increase your sense of joy for teaching by providing a meaningful springboard for the school year.



ROAD CONDITIONS

While traveling, we have all experienced a delay due to some factor outside our control, such as weather. Regardless of where you live, you know how much road conditions can impact travel. Various environmental hazards such as traffic, weather, and construction can make our driving more treacherous. However, our ability to handle these situations can keep us safe. The more prepared we are for all types of road conditions, the better we can adjust and stay safe. Over the years our teaching will encounter many different “road conditions.”

Prior to 2011, I would have easily identified my first year of teaching as the most difficult in terms of “road conditions.” Hands down, that first year was a challenging obstacle course as I attempted to figure out what I was doing. I began my teaching career at an all-boys high school where I changed classrooms every class period. At the age of twenty-two, I was only five years older than some of my students. They loved getting the best of me, which ended up being my worst on most days. Little did I know that many years later, my thirty-fifth year of teaching would replace this first year with the distinction of my most difficult one in terms of hard road conditions.

Without going into too many details, between 2011 and 2012 I had four eye surgeries in the span of ten months. Two of the surgeries required the insertion of a gas bubble in my eye; this meant that I had to keep my head down with my chin to my chest for two to three weeks each time. The opportunity to reflect definitely increases as one gazes at the floor. This unexpected turn of events made for a rocky road as I continued to teach. I was fortunate enough to be assigned courses I had taught before and to be given help from a graduate assistant. I also had outstanding colleagues who drove me to school and read aloud committee documents.

Through my stubborn determination I remained as hands-on as possible during this time. Because of these changed road conditions, I had to seek many accommodations. Always an avid reader, I started to listen to audiobooks. My graduate assistant would read student papers to me, and I'd tell her the comments to make and scores to give. Once some vision returned, I asked students to submit papers in a larger font. In the classroom I gave students more responsibility—sometimes for simple tasks such as handing out papers (because my mobility was limited). I continue to make improvements and to adjust to what has become my new normal in terms of sight. I could have never predicted this changed condition that I encountered as a teacher. I trust that I have become stronger and better because of it. I know I am more sensitive to students' special needs than I was in the past. (NOTE: As of this writing, I have regained about 80 percent of the vision in my right eye.)



Tips for the Ride:

As teaching conditions change, here are three things we can do:

- 1. Slow down.** The best advice for handling almost any unusual road condition is to take it easy. Don't try to rush. Don't try to take on too much. When I returned to school after the most recent surgery, I had to make a conscious decision to slow the pace. Taking care of what was most essential forced me to think carefully

about what indeed was most important. That goes for our teaching too. While the amount of new material pertaining to our disciplines continues to grow, we still have only about fifteen weeks with our students. What are the most important things they must know and be able to do?

- 2. When possible, gather information ahead of time.** My first surgery was an emergency, so my husband and I had no time to prepare. However, when we do know that an upcoming situation is likely to be challenging, and when we have more information, the better we can handle it. For instance, if we are anticipating a certain type of student in our classes, we can seek information ahead of time from the office of disability support.
- 3. Find another way.** As we drive, alternate routes are always good to have in mind. It's also helpful to realize that we teach by our response to various situations. What are students learning from how we react to changing conditions? For example, if the projector bulb burns out during our presentation, do we dismiss class? Would we not rather model for students that we can be flexible and pursue another approach? (Even though students would probably like to leave class when the unexpected happens, we can demonstrate our resilience.)



JOYFUL TREASURES

Recall some recent joyous occasion or experience. It could be totally unrelated to teaching. For me one occurred during last fall break. My husband and I took a short road trip to Eureka Springs, Arkansas—a very unique, small town with a European flavor. The most joyful time came late one afternoon when we walked up the street to the public library. We went inside to browse and just to sit awhile. The place was built in 1912 with funds from Andrew Carnegie. Imagine a small yet stately building with

extensive wood paneling inside. At the time I was still experiencing double vision from my most recent eye surgery, so I wasn't able to really look at books. However, my joy came from merely experiencing the environment, where I was surrounded by floor-to-ceiling books, young people coming in after school, and the cozy comfort of the space itself. I still savor the memory of this commonplace event.

To use such experiences as an avenue to increase our joy in teaching, we might aim to incorporate aspects of our personal joy experiences as appropriate and possible. To capitalize on the value of these joyful treasures, we need to be keenly aware as they occur by turning our senses on full force. From this library experience I was reminded that sharing books (beyond the textbook) with my students is one way to incorporate more joy in my teaching. Thus, I regularly try to take into class a favorite or recommended book related to the topic we are studying. Doing so allows me to integrate a joy-producing element (in this case, books) into my classroom. In addition, I pay close attention to the physical space of the classroom where I teach. Although I share this space with multiple instructors, I like to bring in homelike elements to make it more comfortable for my students and me. This can be something so simple as a calendar with photographs of animals or nature scenes as a way to attend to the aesthetics of the space, if only in a limited way.



Tips for the Ride:

- Immerse yourself into a memory that has produced a sense of joy or wonder. Capture or re-create whatever aspects of it that you can. Then try to bring into the classroom any elements of this joyful association. It could even be a particular color.
- Decide what would make the environment where you teach more enjoyable. If you teach online, do you also pay attention to your own surroundings? Perhaps placing a flower in a vase or putting a painting within view would make you feel more joyful.
- Determine those things that make you happiest. Perhaps music? Physical activity? Travel? Puzzles? No matter what those things might be, extend your joy by thinking about how you could incorporate some dimension of them into your teaching.



THE LADDER MATTERS

I have never cared for going up into the attic. It's not the height or the darkness that unnerves me. It's the means of getting there that causes me difficulty. It seems like every attic in houses where we have lived has had a ladder with rickety steps. The foldout ladder is the worst kind. My attic trepidation must be similar to what students feel when facing a new learning encounter. Sometimes they are shaky, hesitant, or uncertain. Students need a stable ladder to make forward progress. In instructional language, we need to provide them with adequate scaffolding. It is so easy to overlook this aspect of effective teaching. For instance, when my classes simulated a school board meeting, I assumed that most college students knew basic parliamentary procedures but quickly learned that they do not. Thus, I had to conduct a mini-lesson on how to run a meeting. I plan on creating a simple handout for future classes that includes how to make a motion and take a vote.

Remember learning to ride a bicycle? More than likely, you leaned against a wall, used training wheels, or were supported by someone else's hands. This type of support is what we often fail to provide our students. Having not taught Latin in twenty years, I decided to clean out several boxed files. I was overcome by the sheer volume of handouts and worksheets I had created to guide students' learning. While certainly not advocating a return to worksheets, I can do a better job now of providing props to students as they learn what I currently teach. For example, giving a list of key vocabulary words before assigning a chapter to read would offer useful scaffolding. And letting students talk with peers about their understanding of particular concepts is another possible scaffolding technique.



Tips for the Ride:

1. Whenever assigning a chapter for students to read, think about what they need to know first. Do they possess enough background knowledge? How could you break down the reading and provide some structure? Would a list of key questions be helpful? Might students complete a graphic organizer before class?
2. Double check any written assignment instructions for clarity and completeness. Have you sequenced the task into specific steps to follow? Would a checklist be useful? Where have previous students had difficulty? What hints or cues would assist current students?
3. Let students lean as they learn. Always keep in mind the first time you encountered certain concepts in your field, even the ones that seemed easy. Fear or hesitation on the part of students (or teacher) will not engender much joy. So, anything we can do to reduce students' sense of fear will serve to raise the joy of our ride!



A SISTERLY REMINDER

My older sister Pam and I are such complete opposites. She is an extrovert; I'm an introvert. She is athletic, artistic, and adventuresome. I am characterized by none of these qualities. The list of our differences could go on endlessly. Two years apart, Pam and I were raised in the same home environment, yet we developed some different traits. However, the main ones are relatively the same—a strong work ethic, empathy for others, and attention to detail. Anyone with siblings probably has noted a similar pattern.

Career-wise, Pam designs closets—the customized, expensive kind. She's very good at her job. When I have visited her in Florida, on occasion I have gone with Pam on consultations or to job sites. During these times I am always impressed with her skills, including her professionalism, timeliness, and follow-through. However, if Pam were a student in my classes, I would probably not notice such positive qualities. She might even be one of those “unmotivated” students whose disinterest and lack of preparation would easily frustrate me. Observing her current work, though, it becomes so evident how she integrates knowledge and skills from several disciplinary fields, such as math, economics, art, psychology, and business. Spending time with Pam takes me out of my narrow disciplinary focus and shows me a wider spectrum of possibility. Pam teaches me what a non-major's approach to my classes might be. It is easy to write off those students who do not share our particular passion. Instead we need to recognize that helping them find their passion is a large part of our role as teachers.

When my daughter graduated from college and moved with her husband to Colorado without any jobs lined up, a helpful book that I read was Peter Buffett's (2011) *Life Is What You Make It*. I could apply his insights not only to my immediate family situation but also to my view of students. Buffett talks about the personal nature of success that leads to fulfillment. I can reassure my students that the path to a career is as he characterizes: “Life vocations are mysterious, and people seldom move toward them in a straight line, or without doubts and false starts and crises and blunders.” (p. 82) Likewise, in his fascinating study *What the Best College Students Do*, Ken Bain (2012) describes creative individuals who, as deep learners, became successful. My sister Pam has found her passion and it is not the same as mine. That's more than okay.



Tips for the Ride:

Get to know your students. Talk with them before and after class. Ask them where they work—most students do work at least part time. Knowing this information can help form a bond between you and the students and may come in handy for making course connections. In addition, give a learning style assessment and use the results to plan class activities. Students also gain much self-knowledge that can aid their study efforts. I like to use the self-test at the VARK (visual, aural, read/write, and kinesthetic) website. Visit <http://www.vark-learn.com/english/index.asp>.

One way to get a sense of a class's personality and orientation is to provide a set of quotations and ask each student to pick the one with which he or she most identifies. Then tally the “votes” for the class. I recently had the majority of one class select Einstein's quote: “Imagination is more important than knowledge.” Another class section chose a more serious quote by Benjamin Franklin: “An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.” These two quotes represented well the two groups of students. I was able to understand their response to situations and activities in the two varied ways.

Take advantage of learning from your non-educator family members or friends. By observing and listening closely, we can see how they might inform our practice . . . mainly by helping us focus on those who are not the same as us. We might note that all students are motivated but perhaps not to learn what we teach. Our ride will become more joyful when we have a different, more open view of students; this involves taking risks. Maryellen Weimer (2010) cautions us to suspend judgments about students and to examine our mistaken beliefs about them. She advises us to believe in students and not to always see ourselves as smarter.

SOUVENIRS OF TEACHING

Public education systems are organized similarly across different states. 640B

How to make school funding equitable continues to be an important issue in education

Potential sources of funding for schools include state, local, and federal governments with relative proportions contributed in that order.

You may like to bring back a souvenir from trips. It could be a T-shirt or coffee mug—just something to remind you of the travel experience or destination. Photographs or postcards can serve as great memory joggers upon returning from a journey. When possible, my husband likes to pick up a rock to place in our yard. This is a way to bring back a small piece of the place that we visited. Might we also gather souvenirs from our teaching life? Are there any artifacts we could keep for the future? And if so, for what purposes?

At the end of each semester I clean out my teaching “basket” that I have totes to class and save a few scraps of paper. These particular souvenirs may be written on index cards or sticky notes. I put these items with my materials for the next time I will teach the class. Typically, I do not teach the same classes each semester, so having these written reminders can be especially useful. Usually I save some of my students’ responses to lessons (e.g., name one new insight you gained today). Keeping these slips reminds me of how students perceive a specific learning experience, including some of their misguided notions, and having them for reference helps me teach the content better next time.

Then there are the positive notes and emails from students. While these may be few in number, they are worth keeping—at least for a little while. When I first started teaching at the college level, my department chair showed me a large manila envelope where he kept just such memorabilia. He explained that the contents were perfect for viewing when one of the bad days came along. He was exactly right; having teaching souvenirs can lift your spirits on a down day. Recently I received an email from a student thanking me for assigning a particular reading even though she had stayed up all night to finish it! That message is a keeper for when I encounter complaints from other students about the value of the assignment.

Some of the best souvenirs related to teaching can come from the conferences that we attend. It is always rewarding to bring back something to apply to your teaching. At *The Teaching Professor Conference* in May 2012, I gained some strategies for getting students to read. These came from a session by the mother-son team Linda and Paul Neiman. One idea in particular that I implemented during the fall semester was having students write three sentences summarizing what they had come to understand from the assigned chapter reading. But here’s the rub: the first letter of each sentence had to correspond with the student’s initials. So if, in my above example, a student’s initials are P.H.P, she would have to write a sentence that begins with each of those initials. To make it even more personalized, I had students write their sentences on paint chip samples, available at any home improvement store. This was a challenging, fun, and successful strategy. In class I had each student share his or her sentences in small groups, and then each group selected one sentence to display on the classroom walls. The colorful display served as a visible reminder of something I gained from the conference and something my students gained from the learning experience.



Tips for the Ride:

Think about what to save as you teach. When you are on a trip, you probably actively search for a special souvenir. You can do the same in teaching. One suggestion is to take a picture at least once during the semester. I like to capture my students when they are working on a small group activity. Looking at this photograph can bring a sense of joy even after the semester ends.

Find a systematic way to organize ideas gleaned from teaching conferences to ensure that you will implement them. I have found that writing each new idea on a sticky note is better than keeping all the information together in my conference notebook or program. This way I can place the note in the textbook or in my lesson

planner for the course in which I want to use the strategy or idea. Sometimes months can pass between acquiring an idea and actually finding the opportunity to apply it. The closer you place the information to the context where you want to use it, the better the chances you will actually do so.

Look through your teaching souvenir collection during times when you are feeling defeated. Something is certain to make you feel better about devoting time to teach and increase your joy along the ride.



AVOIDABLE POTHOLE

No driver likes to hit a pothole. When it does happen, the experience is jarring, messes up your alignment, and certainly diminishes any pleasure of a ride. Some potholes we have learned to anticipate because we have been on those roads before. There is a large one in my neighborhood on the way to the public library. I have learned to go around it. To maintain a sense of joy we might also do the same in our teaching.

Over the years I have observed hundreds of lessons ranging from middle school to high school to the college level. As a result of these observations, I have seen three common potholes that teachers often encounter. With a little forewarning and planning, all three can be avoided:

1. Failure to use students' names. Impersonal lessons do little to build rapport, which is an essential ingredient in promoting learning (Danielson, 2007). To avoid this pothole, we should make learning students' names a top priority within the first few weeks of the semester. Regular use of their names will then help us remember them. We can use students' names in illustrative examples. We can ask questions and then call on students by name. Incorporating more names of students in our class sessions is a great way to personalize learning and to connect more directly with them.

2. You're talking too much. John Goodlad (1984) verified this common tendency in his research on high school instruction. The practice is no doubt widespread in higher education as well. When a class period consists of only your voice being heard, the chance of there being any interaction is slim. To counteract the negative effects of this pothole, divide a class period into time segments lasting ten to fifteen minutes. Then change gears at those intervals and do something different. You might ask a question or show a video clip or have students talk with a partner or write down a response. Frequently look for ways to silence yourself throughout a class period in order to steer clear of this pothole.

3. Stifling one's own passion or enthusiasm for the subject. In one-on-one conversations with teachers, I always get a sense of how much they enjoy their discipline yet often fail to show that love in front of a class. Sharing one's passion can positively influence and significantly stimulate student interest. To overcome this pothole, grant yourself permission to let your passion for learning show. This extends to your research as well. Talk briefly in class about projects that you are pursuing professionally. In this way you will model for students how such passion can be a driving force.



Tips for the Ride:

Patch potholes as they come to your attention. A good place to start is with your student evaluations. What comments do students make frequently? How might you respond or make adjustments? Ask a colleague to observe you. Give your guest a special focus for the observation. You might ask him or her to examine your questioning or determine how many times you use individual students' names. For an even more complete view of

your teaching, consider video recording yourself. This can be very revealing and offer much insight.

Anticipate possible snags and detours. Arrive early to set up a lesson, and check for anything that is likely to throw you or your students off balance. As an example, be aware that a reimaged classroom computer might slow down the start of a lesson or the ability to locate favorite websites during the lesson. Do not lose sight of the need to incorporate flexibility and responsiveness into your teaching. Charlotte Danielson (2007) identified this vital quality in her framework for teaching. When we exhibit flexibility, we can more easily navigate around potholes. We will also experience more joy in our teaching.



ANTICIPATION

As we get closer to an upcoming experience, the anticipation itself can be the best or the worst part. It all depends upon what the experience is—surgery or a vacation? Both my dad and daughter love to ride roller coasters. They anticipate the thrill of the ride. How could we apply this notion to our teaching? Let's begin by asking ourselves: do we favorably anticipate teaching, and do we help our students have a similar orientation to learning? I believe that doing so will increase our sense of joy in teaching.

As I write this section, the buildup to season three of the popular PBS series *Downton Abbey* has become intense . . . and I can hardly wait! The media likes to capitalize on our enjoyment of anticipation. Note the sneak previews before movies or after weekly television shows. The producers try to hook us as future viewers with “what’s next” on the show. We might incorporate this same technique into our teaching as a way to engage students.

One way that I like to encourage students to anticipate during a class period is by writing a “Word of the Day” on the board. Students are to listen for this word and, if they don’t already know what it means, learn the definition. For instance, in a recent lecture on religion in public schools, I had written on the board the word “proselytize.” When I got to that segment of the lesson, I was amazed by how few already knew the word, especially living in the Bible Belt region of the country. However, at the next class period when I asked students to write on an index card the most significant learning gained from the previous class period, more than a few mentioned that word!

I also like to write on the board “What’s Next” with a list of what we will be doing in upcoming sessions. This is a way to help students organize and plan ahead and to anticipate learning experiences. For example, if we have a guest speaker coming to class, I provide advance notice of this information. In this same space on the board, I write the reading assignment for the next class period. It is also listed on the syllabus calendar, but having it displayed up front is a good reminder of what students are to do in preparation.

As far as my own sense of anticipation, I derive much joy from the planning aspect of teaching. To illustrate course concepts, I continually search for effective ways to make such ideas more concrete and relevant to college students. I often take delight in thinking of the most absurd, far-fetched examples to explain content, in an effort to make it memorable. Engaging in this thought process makes teaching more fulfilling because of the anticipation that accompanies it. It’s fun to collect newspaper clippings and cartoons to illustrate ideas. I wonder: Will students respond positively to this new example? Will this be a better way to present the lesson than in the past? Will things make more sense now?



Tips for the Ride:

At the end of each class, give students something to look forward to next time. Whet their appetites for

learning by telling them one thing they will understand better or be able to amaze their friends with the ability to do following the next class session.

Let students know when you are looking forward to some aspect of a course. Your anticipation can be contagious. Hearing the instructor say “This is my favorite part of the course” may inspire students to pay closer attention and decide if it might be their favorite aspect too.

Display an agenda on the board for the class period. Use intriguing labels for segments of the class (e.g., “Team Time” for small group work or “Commercial Break” for a video clip). Students can anticipate different parts of the class period via this means of gaining a heads-up. As long as we can look forward, there is hope. I certainly learned this during my eye surgery recoveries. Each day brought me one step closer to the day when I could lift my head. Students need small goals for motivational focus as well.



RIDING IN A BOOKMOBILE

I graduated college at midyear 1976, which means I had eight months before I actually began teaching. During the summers throughout college, I had worked at a neighborhood branch of the public library. Upon graduation, they needed someone to serve as bookmobile librarian. Guess who got the job? Fortunately, I did not have to be the driver. The work experience on that quirky bookmobile taught me much about what would become my lifelong career—teaching.

The bookmobile had a two-week timetable schedule of locations where we would park and serve patrons. We would repeat the same schedule every two weeks. At each stop we frequently had some of the same patrons. I quickly learned that Mrs. Smith liked mysteries and her husband preferred Westerns. Mrs. Jones enjoyed romance novels. It didn't take long before I realized that they expected me to stock the shelves accordingly! Every morning I would scramble around our home library in search of books for that day's clientele. It was the ultimate lesson in serving individual needs. I learned to keep index cards listing specific reading interests of various patrons.

Rain or shine, the bookmobile would show up to park in its designated spot. Occasionally on some stops along our route, we had few, if any, patrons visit us, but we stayed the whole time. Just as we must do as teachers, the driver and I kept showing up—even when interest and attendance dwindled. For some patrons, our arrival was the highlight of their week. They would often bring us homemade goodies. And I recall many times when it was almost time to pull away and someone would come running to the bookmobile, thrilled to check out a book to read. We offered learning goodies and, like teachers, hoped there would be plenty of takers. We could not become discouraged on those slow days.



Tips for the Ride:

Expect the unexpected. Whenever my driver stopped suddenly or hit a bump in the road, all the books tumbled down off the back shelf. The first few times this happened, I was more than a little upset. However, I learned just to go pick up the books. I also started to warn him of dangers up ahead in the road. We can never control all aspects of teaching, and in fact, that is what keeps it interesting. Enjoy those unexpected events (e.g., the Internet is down) and be creative in how you patiently respond.

Change things up often. There was limited space in the bookmobile, so I constantly had to rotate the collection. This was especially true for children's books. Kids would usually come on Fridays, so that's when I loaded up on

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titles they would like. Likewise, changing things up in the classroom—giving students new choices and new opportunities—will help keep your teaching fresh.

Remember that students are unique individuals. It's easier to focus on the class as a whole, but each one is made up of individuals who have different strengths, likes, and dislikes. This adds such richness to a classroom. Embrace these differences and make an effort to address the individuals in your classes.

Show up even when you may not feel like it, and be open to teaching as an exciting encounter with learning. Your dedication to students will not go unnoticed. They will learn that you are dependable. Some bookmobile stops were boring. I read a lot of books and talked about life with my driver. Moreover, working on the bookmobile taught me the rural routes of my Louisiana parish—something I would have never learned outside that job.



THE CASE OF JOYLESS JANE

Jane Jacobson (aka Joyless Jane) slams her hand on the table of the break room, where she is finishing lunch. She exclaims, “I can’t believe what I have to endure at this place.” To those still eating, Jane proceeds to complain about shoddy technology, unprepared students, departmental deadline demands, and constant curriculum revisions. Your head starts to hurt just listening to her barrage. It’s getting close to 1 PM, and Jane lets out a big sigh as she slowly gets up to leave and says, “What a hassle going to this class is—they don’t listen or even care! I’ll see you guys later.” You are glad to see Jane depart.

Meanwhile, students Nicole and James are walking toward the building, trying to convince each other to attend Dr. Jacobson’s class. James blurts out, “I can’t stand this class. It’s so boring.” Nicole tries to be more positive, saying, “Maybe it will be different today. We’re starting a new chapter.” James decides to ditch class, saying he’ll just read the text. Nicole hesitates outside the classroom before entering. She sees Dr. Jacobson coming down the hall, and she doesn’t look very happy. Nicole is not certain she made the best choice by attending class today. She envies James’s decision.

Jane is a fictional character, but we’ve all had colleagues like her. And everyone has an “off” day. But colleagues who persistently act like Jane are no fun to be around due to their negativity. Not only is their joy level low, but their mere presence also can zap our joy too. When possible, we should try to steer clear of the Joyless Janes. If you find yourself in the company of someone like her, try to make the conversation positive. Say something good about teaching and your students. You might pose this: “Guess what happened in class today?” Be ready with your own example that puts teaching and students in a positive light.



Tips for the Ride:

1. Think about how faculty like Jane got in this pit of despair. Did one discouraging semester lead to more? Did Jane learn this pattern of behavior from another colleague? Are you being a positive influence on your colleagues? If not, what changes can you make?
2. On days when you are dragging to class, what would help change that stance? I will often play music or show a slideshow of nature scenes before class starts to get us all in a better mood.

3. Consider how students might view your class. Put yourself in their shoes and think about how things appear to them. Is the behavior you attribute to students (e.g., laziness) also evident in you? Students pick up cues from us. If there has been an increase in tardiness, are we starting class late?



PRICELESS WORDS

“You’re a great teacher.”
“I learned a lot in your class.”
“Thank you for helping me grow.”

What specific words from students are like music to your ears? If you could write your own student evaluation comments, what would you say? As we mature as teachers, we change according to the words we find most fulfilling. As beginning teachers, we crave acceptance from students. Reminiscent of the actress Sally Field’s famous Academy

Awards speech, we are happy when they “like us.” It is a nice feeling. However, with experience we start to see it’s the impact we have that really matters. Determining whether we’ve made an impact is never easy and often never known.

In recent years I have been getting emails and written comments that thank me for assigning certain work. I don’t recall receiving these in my earlier days as a teacher. Maybe I know better how to design assignments now than in the past. Or perhaps I do a better job of “selling” students on the value of the work. Regardless, I think it’s important that I examine why this trend has occurred. Obviously, students made a connection between the assigned book or paper and their understanding of course content and also developed new self-insights. But how did this happen? I continue to reflect on this question. And that’s the main point. As teachers we must be engaged continually in thinking about our practice, honing our skills, and becoming better. Our individual journey of development as teachers serves to enhance our joy.



Tips for the Ride:

After identifying possible words you would like to hear from students, check whether your actions are worthy of that assessment. In short, match your behaviors with your desired outcomes. Of course, that’s easier said than done.

Cherish the positive comments you receive from students. Don’t ignore the negative ones, but try not to dwell on them. You are certain to get some over the years. The key is to take those comments in a constructive vein. Sometimes it is helpful to put aside a fairly negative evaluation until we can distance ourselves from the situation.

Look for patterns over time in student comments. The isolated ones may be nice or mean, but try to focus more on the repeated themes. These can reinforce a general sense of how students perceive your teaching; they are the ones worth a response on your part.

Move from embracing self-focused comments to those that are learning-focused. It’s not those words about you that are so meaningful as it is those words that focus on the students’ development and the role you might have played in that process. If you are a parent, you know that being praised for your child being like you is not as wonderful as your child being recognized for being an even better version of you. That’s when you know you’ve done your job as a parent well.



TOUCH THE THERMOSTAT

I grew up hearing my dad frequently say, “Don’t touch that thermostat.” To this day he maintains strong control over the sacred instrument. One of the greatest freedoms when I moved out on my own was the delight of being able to touch the thermostat without serious, if any, repercussions. When it comes to teaching, we should be keenly aware of the need to keep our hand on the thermostat and adjust it frequently. We need to touch the thermostat often to regulate the climate of a productive learning environment. In fact, the classroom climate is one of the major dimensions impacting learning (see Susan Ambrose and others, *How Learning Works*, 2010).

The thermostat of the classroom controls mainly what Madeline Hunter (1982) so creatively called the FAT level—**F**rustration, **A**nxiety, and **T**ension. With a high FAT level among students, the learning climate suffers. As teachers we need to be sensitive to monitoring this level on a daily basis. There are factors within our control to regulate levels of FAT. One is clarity on our part. Sometimes students experience a high FAT level because we have been unclear with our expectations. As students’ confusion increases, so too does their degree of frustration, anxiety, and tension, which interferes with a learning focus. When major due dates are approaching, the FAT level will move higher. We should remember to allot some time to ask what questions students have as they complete their assigned projects. This will serve to lower the FAT level among students and allow more productive teaching time.

However, just as some amount of fat is needed in our diets, so too our classroom environments must have a certain degree of FAT in order to motivate students. Hunter (1982) called this a “moderate level of concern” on the part of students. One way that I inject a little FAT is through cold calling. Yes, I call on students who do not have their hands raised. At first they are a little taken aback by my doing this, but they soon learn that it is standard operating procedure in our class. However, it’s important to do so in the right spirit—that is, using a “gotcha” approach will only backfire. As long as there is a supportive climate to accompany the practice, cold calling should not adversely affect student comfort (Souza, Dallimore, Aoki, and Pilling, 2010). It can keep students on their toes and increase student preparation for class. For example, I will often give students a set of study questions for the assigned chapter and then use these for cold calling. In a sense, I have provided a “warm-up” for the cold-call session.



Tips for the Ride:

- Assess the climate in your classroom regularly. Listen to students before class begins. What are they excited about? What is bothering them? Gauge the level of tension in the room and seek to understand what might be causing any elevated FAT level.
- Note how tensions within your own professional (and personal) life can carry over into the classroom. Be aware of your own pressures and deadlines; these can make you more impatient with students. Recognize how these events can diminish your sense of joy in teaching, and work toward a balanced perspective.
- Build a classroom where students are comfortable with each other—they know each other’s names, they have had chances to interact in small groups with a variety of classmates, and they realize that embarrassment or ridicule is not the point of your engaging them in discussion. The more students trust that you have their best interests in mind, the more willing they are to participate and the lower the FAT level will be.



MOTIVATION MAGIC

Imagine having a magic wand that could cause your biggest challenges to disappear. What aspect of your current teaching situation would you want to change with a wave of the wand? If you are like most *Faculty Focus* readers, unmotivated/unprepared students would be a likely choice. In a 2012 survey, *Faculty Focus* readers ranked “unprepared students” and “student motivation” as their two biggest day-to-day teaching challenges. Poof! Those unmotivated students are gone and you now have highly motivated, focused learners. Although there is no magic wand, we know that such students do exist on college campuses of all types. Ken Bain (2012) found them, as documented in *What the Best College Students Do*. His case history interviews profile individuals who are intrinsically motivated and deep learners. Their orientation to learning is from the perspective of an adventure (p. 9).

There’s really nothing magic about motivation as long as you understand a few basic tenets. First, the only person you will ever be able to motivate is yourself. Everyone else is outside your control. While you can influence the conditions that make motivation more likely, you can never directly change another person’s level of motivation (without his or her permission). True motivation resides within the power of each individual.

Second, the fundamental source of fueling motivation is curiosity or interest. If we can figure out a way to tap into students’ natural sense of curiosity, then their level of motivation will increase. For example, we might ask them what questions they want to pursue as part of a course or unit.

Third, people are more motivated by choice than by coercion. As Daniel Pink (2009) identified in *Drive*, autonomy, or self-direction, is a critical element of motivation. To illustrate, I’ve probably read *Pride and Prejudice* nine or ten times. I don’t do it because I have to write a report or want to receive a pay raise. I engage in this activity for the pure pleasure of experiencing Jane Austen’s superb storytelling ability. My purpose is driven by a sense of personal fulfillment.

I have not yet reached the full implementation phase of having a “flipped classroom,” but I have started flipping lessons. I have found that students’ motivation for being prepared increases if, instead of going over the terminology and presenting content first, I begin with application. I used to do so at the end of lessons. For example, when studying the functions of school boards, I previously would review first what the textbook stated. Now I give students a copy of a newspaper article about a recent local board meeting and ask them to find the functions portrayed. I will see them looking in their notes or textbooks to find out what these functions are. They seem more motivated to learn when I flip the order of a typical lesson—thus, by presenting them with the application first, I have intentionally raised the level of expected involvement and preparation.



Tips for the Ride:

Share with students your views on motivation. As appropriate, talk about what motivates you to learn. Find out what motivates them. Realize that each student is motivated by something. Connecting that “something” to your course is the primary challenge. The ultimate responsibility to do so rests with each individual student. Accepting this fact frees you to focus more on your role as a facilitator. Stimulate: yes. Force: no.

Self-assess on a regular basis your teaching and your courses. In the last chapter of *What the Best College Students Do*, Bain (2012) offers advice to other students (e.g., delay gratification). In one section, “What Teachers to Choose,” he presents a series of questions that you can use for self-assessment. Here is one of those questions: “Do students in the class generally feel in control of their own education, or manipulated by requirements?” (p. 230) Ouch! We can also use Pink’s (2009) elements of autonomy, mastery, and purpose to determine whether our

course promotes or inhibits these essential motivational elements.

Give students as much control as possible. Maryellen Weimer (2002) presents just such an approach of shared power in *Learner-Centered Teaching*. She outlines instructional changes that promote more student autonomy and support greater student mastery. One aspect of this approach is preparing a syllabus with only one required component, with the rest negotiable with students.



WEAR PURPLE SHOES

What we choose to wear is an expression of ourselves. Some may give little attention to what they don each day. Others recognize that clothing has the power to influence how you behave and how others perceive you. I'd like to suggest that your style of dress can be a source of joy in your teaching. Returning to the basic meaning of joy for our purposes (i.e., "Just Offer Yourself"), the way in which you dress can be a part of what you give to students. Let me illustrate. My favorite color is purple. Along with gray, purple is one of the school colors where I teach, the University of Central Arkansas. (Perhaps you have seen our "famous" purple-and-gray-striped football field.) However, I was a fan of purple long before I came here to teach. I own a pair of purple shoes. I wear these on days when I have something particularly engaging planned for class. It may be a hands-on activity or a role

play; it's usually something that involves movement on my part, because these shoes are flats. Wearing my purple shoes signals "fun" and reminds me that today will be markedly different. On other days, I dress more seriously. For example, when I discuss legal issues in education, I will often wear a suit. Frequently I consider what I wear to class and the message it sends.

In *The Art of Teaching*, English professor Jay Parini (2005) devotes a section to the topic of academic dress and how instructors can make purposeful use of their clothing to communicate learning. He points out ways that one's style of dress can reinforce the instructional method. In addition, Parini (2005, p. 80) contends that students find clues to our attitudes toward our subject through what we wear. This is worth considering.



Tips for the Ride:

Let your personality shine through your teaching self. Be your best self when in the classroom. Consciously think about how you dress and what this says to students. I want my students to know that I give attention to what I wear because they matter.

Correlate your chosen clothing with your strategy. Will today's class be structured formally or informally? How might your dress (e.g., casual) reinforce your selected approach? Dress the part appropriately.

If you have ever watched "What Not to Wear" on TLC, you know that a pop of color is often recommended to brighten an outfit. Little things can have the same effect on your teaching. Interject a little color into your dress to lift your mood and increase your sense of joy. Similarly, think about using an element of surprise periodically in your teaching. Hold students in suspense until the end of the class session for this unexpected twist. Be creative in how you weave such surprises into your lessons. As an example, the first time I let students use cell phones in class served as a surprise when they voted in an online poll. Overall, consider what Peter Buffett (2010, p. 88) states: "Good teachers, in any field, do far more than convey information; they pass along something of themselves." I believe this quote truly embodies the essence of joy in teaching.



A LOVE LETTER TO STUDENTS

December 15, 2012

Dear Students:

As this semester comes to a close, I just want to let you know how much I enjoyed having you in class and getting to know you. Although I didn't choose you, and some of you were placed in my class without any choice, I feel like we were intended to be together in this learning experience. Throughout the semester you impressed me with your commitment, participation, and zest for life. I see in all of you such great potential. With students like you, I am not worried about the future of our country.

Thank you for supporting my teaching efforts this semester. You have humored me when I have tried something different. You have endured my attempts at pop culture references. And you have honored me with your presence. In this class we had four students with perfect attendance and several who missed only one class period. That is amazing, especially for an 8 AM class! I appreciate your dedication to your own education.

I always loved seeing that look you would get when something made sense or gave you pause to ponder. You might nod your head or get a gleam in your eye. But regardless of each individual's personal response style, these are some of the best facial expressions that a teacher can witness. Whenever I would tell you that I had heard a particular educator speak at a conference, it was neat to observe your awe (not at me but at the fact that you too would like to meet people whom you admire someday).

It was fun watching you come to class. Some of you would drag in, but most of you seemed happy to be here. That made me happy. I always enjoyed seeing what the current fashions were, and some of you even revived fashions from the past!

Thanks for picking up those extra handouts (or the leftover nameplates) and bringing them to me at the end of each class period. You didn't have to take the time, but many of you often did so. Thanks also for making me proud on the two occasions when we had guest speakers. Your special attentiveness was noticeable. In particular, I was pleased when more than a few of you stayed after class to thank Mr. S. for his presentation and to shake his hand.

I will miss you as a class and truly hope that each of you will drop by my office just to say hi or to let me know you are doing well. It seems that just when we become familiar with each other, the semester comes to an end. Continue to learn and stay interested in things. You were my reason for getting up at 5:30 on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Until I find something comparable, I will not consider retirement.

Your Devoted Teacher,

Dr. P.



Tips for the Ride:

1. Think about composing such a letter even if you never share it with anyone. The experience of creating this written expression can be a joyful one. If you are really brave, read it aloud to your students at the final exam period. (I cried just reading my letter silently.)

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2. When frustration mounts during the semester, jot down two or three attributes of your students that you especially admire or appreciate. This will keep your focus on the positive and extend your sense of joy.
3. Think of how students have an impact on you. We tend to emphasize the impact that teachers have on students, but the flip side is just as important when it comes to maintaining joy in teaching. Hopefully, we are changed by the students whom we encounter over the years.
4. Don't be afraid to let your love of students show . . . in a professionally appropriate way, of course. Enjoy being with students and sharing your love of learning with them. It can be a thrilling ride!



CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I still enjoy riding my old bicycle . . . the one with coaster brakes that I've had for thirty years. To get the thrill of the ride, it's important always to put both feet firmly on the pedals, pushing forward, not back. The same is true in gaining joy from teaching. You have to put yourself into the effort. No coasting.

I believe that joy is available to us daily in teaching. Two critical questions to pose in order to enhance your chances of reaching such an outcome are these:

- 1. What can I offer today?** If the essence of joy derives from remembering to “Just Offer Yourself,” then what do I need to be willing to give? Could it be my attention to listen to a student's concerns? My interest in helping a student achieve his or her goals? My understanding of a particular student's situation? My perspective on a problem or dilemma presented in my course? My experience in my subject field and in working with many different students? My willingness to hear what a student wants to share? Or my time to provide one-on-one assistance? The list is limitless. However, the key is to remain open to giving of yourself to reach a deeper level of joy.
- 2. What opportunities to serve students might arise today?** Some possibilities might include: to answer a question (perhaps one I have answered before), to give some extra assistance or encouragement, to provide feedback, to recognize a student's special effort, to enhance a student's growth and development, or just to be available. Actively look for opportunities to be of service each day. The longer you teach, the easier they are to overlook.

Keeping your focus on responding to these questions will likely ensure a more joyous ride. Now just hang on, maintain balance, keep pedaling, and enjoy the ride!

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