

Inspired College Teaching

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New Faculty: Beliefs That Prevent and Promote Growth

A Career-Long Resource for
Professional Growth

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Most new college teachers start their careers full of enthusiasm for teaching. They've been successful students, love learning, and have had teachers who've affected them tremendously, as Aldrich (1999, p. 537) explains. "I remember being incredibly impressed, even enthralled, by the patience and understanding of my professors. They worked in their offices with their doors open, and almost never turned me away, no matter when I appeared." New teachers set high goals—for themselves and their students; Sandstrom (1999, p. 526) shares his. "As I started teaching, I held ambitious visions of and goals for teaching, defining it as a true vocation, that, at its best, 'calls' practitioners to be involved and dedicated, inquisitive and creative, critically reflective of themselves and their world, and willing to promote understandings that contribute to the construction of a more humane world." He aspired to prepare his students "for active and socially responsible citizenship" (p. 526), wanting to enhance their "abilities to understand and participate effectively in the decision-making processes that affects their lives" (pp. 526–527). And then Sandstrom writes, "After teaching a few courses, I became painfully aware of how difficult it was to realize these teaching goals" (p. 527).

Frequently teaching expectations collide with the realities of academic careers during those first few years. The collision can be serious for those new teachers who begin without substantive

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training and limited teaching experience. The large influx of new faculty across the past couple of decades has resulted in efforts to help, mostly with how-to-teach advice. It's offered in published materials, written by faculty with successful teaching careers (in books, Filene, 2005, and Parini, 2005; and in special journal issues, Gillespie, 2007), or based on recent experiences as a new teacher (Lang, 2008). Some of the advice is discipline based, like that Davidson and Ambrose (1994) offer new teachers in engineering and science. Beyond books and articles, the advice is offered in workshops, short courses, and other orientation activities. Mentors follow suit with still more counsel on how to handle the daily details of instruction. Most of the advice offered is based on experience (McKeachie's venerable text, now in its twelfth edition as McKeachie and Svinicki, 2006, is an exception, as is Boice, 2000).

Because not everyone experiences teaching the same way, a lot of different (sometimes contradictory) advice is offered. Even so, most authors do not offer the advice tentatively. They tell new teachers exactly what to do: what to put in their syllabi, what to do with disruptive students, how to manage the grading process, even how to win at the ratings game. The prescriptive nature of the advice creates the impression that teaching is formulaic, a set of rules to be learned and techniques to be mastered. Because most new college teachers feel a certain desperation, they welcome this detailed advice. It feels like just what they need. But is it? Yes and no. The advice does show new faculty a path through the forest, but it doesn't make clear that paths through the forest are multiple. It keeps new faculty so focused on the gritty details that they miss that they're even in a forest. This chapter posits that new faculty are better served with something other than advice. They need to acquire beliefs about teaching that position them for career-long growth and development.

First college teaching experiences and the advice that accompanies them influence what new faculty think about teaching, and those beliefs shape what happens in the classroom, early on and

subsequently. Some of those early beliefs last a career; which is why this chapter isn't just for new faculty members. For midcareer and senior faculty, some beliefs about teaching not only inhibit growth, they make tired teaching and burnout more likely. This chapter identifies a sampling of those mistaken beliefs about learning to teach, about content, and about students, and it proposes alternatives—ones that position new faculty for continued growth and ones that support student efforts to learn.

Mistaken Beliefs About Learning to Teach

Three beliefs about learning to teach hinder the early efforts of new teachers. The barriers they create continue to affect the development of midcareer and senior faculty as well.

Mistaken Belief 1: Teaching Is a Gift

Many new teachers start out assuming that teaching is a gift—an idea introduced in principle 2 of Chapter One. Teaching does involve natural ability—some teachers are gifted with more than others. But teaching also depends on a skill set that can be learned and then molded into a unique teaching style. If new faculty equate teaching effectiveness with natural ability and things don't go all that well in the classroom, they are left with the unhappy conclusion that they don't have the gift. This cannot help but change feelings about teaching—especially for academics who have already excelled with complex academic content and are unused to being anything but exceptional.

Unfortunately, the equation of teaching excellence with natural abilities is reinforced by the way even some excellent teachers talk about their own teaching. They have not thought deeply about what they do and why it works. I remember a conversation I had with one of the most skilled discussion facilitators I have ever observed. "How do I get so many students discussing? Gosh, I just ask them questions." "How do I keep track of all their comments?"

I do that? Gosh, I haven't really thought about it before. I guess, I just listen." "The way I diagram discussions on the board is unique? How did I come up with that? Gosh, I guess I started doing that because I needed to keep track of where we'd been and where it looks like were headed. I'm a pretty visual learner." It was as if everything that this teacher did was simple and derived by happenstance. He put on his teaching much like he dressed in the morning, by rote and habit.

Mistaken Belief 2: Mastering the Techniques of Teaching Will Be Easy

The idea of effortless teaching or just doing what comes naturally leads directly to a related mistake. Gifted teachers, those with lots of natural ability, learn from experience automatically, almost inevitably. They do what needs to be done easily, flawlessly—two tries and they've got it down pat. They can't even say how they learned it.

Giving new teachers simple answers to complex problems reinforces this idea that teaching techniques are easily mastered. The advice makes it sound so easy. You have trouble with students not doing the reading? Give them a quiz. You have the same students answering every question? Call on those who don't volunteer. You don't have class time to waste on announcements? Post them online. How difficult can teaching be with solutions this straightforward?

Now what happens in the classroom regularly challenges the idea that teaching is easy. New teachers discover the simple answers don't always take care of the problem, or in taking care of one problem, they create others. New faculty learn the hard way that acquiring techniques and using them to promote learning are not the same thing. When beliefs and experiences are at odds, new teachers start to doubt themselves and wonder about their aptitude for the profession. "If this is so easy, why can't I make it work?"

First experiences in the classroom can be unnerving. I remember telling myself at the end of my first year teaching that if the second year wasn't any better, I was definitely going to change careers.

Some new teachers avoid the uncomfortable question of competence by looking for other reasons that might explain less than impressive performance in the classroom. They start to play the blame game; some turn pro, making a career of blaming everything that happens in the classroom on someone or something else. Students are an easy target. They don't listen. They show no respect. They won't study. They aren't well prepared. They won't ask questions. They don't come for help. They aren't interested in learning. Today's college students (especially the 18–23-year-olds) are definitely not easy to teach. But as frustrating (some days, exasperating) and disappointing as they may be, students don't deserve to be blamed for everything that goes wrong in the classroom. Sometimes the blame does belong on their shoulders—but sometimes it deserves to be shouldered by their teachers.

Assuming that teaching is a gift or a set of easily mastered techniques creates a wrong impression of teaching. It generates thinking that simplifies and trivializes teaching, robbing it of complexity and intellectual robustness. Out of it have come those beliefs that devalue teaching: "If you know, you can teach it," and "Those who can do, those who can't teach."

New faculty start from a stronger position when they believe that regardless of natural ability, much about teaching still needs to be learned. Some instructional knowledge is straightforward, but just beyond those first easy answers are a slew of complicated algorithms mastered with practice and a commitment to pursue excellence. For the vast majority of teachers, learning to teach and continuing to teach well requires concerted effort and plenty of good, old-fashioned work. And like most other kinds of learning, there is always more to learn. It is impossible to know everything about doing well in the classroom and with students.

Mistaken Belief 3: Teach Like Your Best Teacher or Teach the Class You Would Like to Take

Often good teachers we've had have influenced our decisions to study particular fields. I've heard many new faculty graciously attribute their presence in the field to a previous teacher. That is wonderful—it's a powerful reason to teach. But is it valid to assume that through emulation of others new faculty can find their way to teaching styles that works for them?

I have written previously (Weimer, 1993) of my first attempts to teach like one of my favorite teachers. He was the only teacher I've ever seen who had truly mastered the Socratic method. With one or two follow-up questions he could help a student transform a first feeble answer into something way more intelligent and insightful. His classroom presence loomed large and powerful. He was Italian and simply gorgeous. I aspired to teach just like he did. Of course, my efforts were a dismal failure. On my feet, in front of the class, I couldn't think of follow-up questions to poorly framed answers. I didn't have a commanding teaching presence. I was neither Italian or gorgeous. But even these obvious differences didn't save me from major disappointment. I didn't have it in me. I would never be as good as my favorite teacher was. It was years later before it came to me that wonderful as he was, he was not a good teaching model for me.

Emulating favorite teachers works only so long as the new teacher's style is at least somewhat like the favorite. Chapter Two addresses the development of the teaching style, defined there as those behaviors used separately or in combination with other behaviors to convey the aspects of teaching excellence, things like organization and clarity, for example. Behaviors can be borrowed from favorite teachers, but what usually makes those teachers memorable is their teaching persona—how teaching reveals their personhood, their integrity, and uniqueness as human beings.

Parini (2005) describes the development of the teaching persona as the creation of masks—not to conceal identity but to represent uniqueness. These masks are fashioned from bits and pieces of how previous teachers presented themselves to students as well as from individual identity. “Just be yourself”—that's the advice frequently given new teachers. “Do what comes naturally.” Like other simplistic advice, it contains kernels of truth but ignores complicating factors like what it means to be professional in the classroom with students. Teachers should not act in the classroom like they do at home in their PJs.

On the other hand, teachers can be too professional. They get so into acting like professors, they no longer come across as persons. Students need to be able to connect with teachers as people. The “Be yourself” advice is correct in the sense that teachers don't want to be someone they aren't. But it's not always helpful advice because most new teachers don't start out with an already developed teaching style or persona. It must be created and tried out, and first attempts are not always successful.

Parini (2005) describes his early teaching experiences. “Sometimes I played the pipe-smoking, genial man-of-letters who just happened to wander into the classroom, almost by accident. I would sit on the edge of the desk, my tweed jacket frayed at the collar, my elbows covered in leather patches. I offered jocular (though learned) remarks instead of organized lecture notes and I replied wittily to student questions” (pp. 60–61). But this persona didn't fit. “I needed a bit more fire, a bit of madness,” and so he started whispering, then shouting, pacing “like a caged animal,” even throwing chalk at blackboard. “Each time I acted in these extreme disguises, I came away from class feeling empty and false, something of a fool” (p. 61).

Parini's experience illustrates the trial-and-error process of developing a teaching persona. It takes time to learn how to combine expressions of personhood with appropriate professional behavior. It takes a certain level of maturity to accept strengths

and weaknesses, to understand that we simply cannot do well what some teachers do even if we may want to do it.

When I started teaching I assumed that all good teachers lectured from notes. All mine had. Right from the beginning I had a terrible time managing the notes. I've always moved around a lot. I would take my notes with me only to find myself someplace without them. I carried on. Then I'd find them, only now I was covering topics in a different order and couldn't locate what I needed in my notes. But good teachers lectured from notes. Students expected it. It was a good ten years into my teaching career before I was able to accept that lecturing from notes didn't work for me. Maybe my credibility with students suffered, but I know I did a much better job teaching without notes. I should have abandoned them years earlier.

Emulating great teachers may honor those teachers, and certainly much can be learned by seeing a master (as well as those not as masterful) at work in the classroom teach. Techniques, approaches, even expressions of personal style can be borrowed, but the best teaching is always teaching that genuinely and authentically represents the person involved. New teachers must find their way to those teaching styles that work for them and those teaching personae that best convey their personal identity. Copying favorite teachers without reckoning differences makes discovering individual connections to teaching more difficult. Emulation makes it less likely that teachers will come to understand that even though creating a style and teaching persona seems like it's about the teacher, it really isn't. Truly great styles and personae are those that connect with students, those that motivate, inspire, guide, and help students to learn. And that involves a whole more than just doing what comes naturally.

As for teaching the classes teachers would like to take, this belief rests on the premise that what helped the teacher learn will help all other students. Unfortunately, students learn in a myriad of different ways. Some may learn as their teachers do, but it is

more likely that today's college students will favor learning modes quite different from those of the teacher. Previous learning experiences are a well from which ideas can be drawn, but good teachers discover early on that student experiences and approaches to learning are more like a river than a well. Nets work better than buckets.

Learning more about teaching is an option at every juncture in an academic career. However, what faculty believe about learning to teach will influence their attempts to learn. If they think teaching excellence is mostly a function of natural ability or the mastery of a few techniques, or if they believe development is best approached by emulating others, those beliefs stymie the kind of growth that sustains teachers and makes their teaching inspired. For career-long growth, teachers need to see learning to teach as an ongoing process with more challenging than easy answers and with authenticity better grown from within than from emulation.

Mistaken Beliefs About Content

Many new teachers develop beliefs about content that implicate present and future growth as well. Unfortunately, too often colleagues and institutional cultures reinforce these initial beliefs, making them especially resistant to change.

Mistaken Belief 1: The Importance and Relevance of Content Will Be Obvious to Students

The discovery that students don't love the new teacher's content area is one of those school of hard knocks lessons. Graduate education reinforces the centrality of discipline-based content knowledge. Having immersed themselves in its study for years and having been surrounded with colleagues equally enamored of the area, new faculty arrive at those first teaching jobs no longer objective about how the rest of the world views their content domain.

Moreover, beginning teachers usually don't get to teach courses devoted to the details of their specialties. In most first jobs, they teach introductory courses, or if really lucky, they get to teach early courses in a major. More often they are assigned the required general education survey courses—arguably the most challenging courses in the curriculum to teach. Even so, new teachers approach these first teaching assignments with enthusiasm, wearing their love of the field on their sleeves.

Most students do not verbally express disdain for the subject matter, but their nonverbal behaviors say it eloquently. As beginning teachers cover bedrock basics, the veritable building blocks of a discipline, students check the clock, yawn, or look comatose. I once observed a new teacher laying out three approaches to a particular kind of literary criticism. After putting each on the board, he proceeded to expose their strengths and weaknesses. "On the one hand, this theory allows . . . , but this theory ignores . . . and this one integrates, but not as well as the first one separates." Everything he did betrayed a deep-seated passion for literary criticism. As he finished, faced flushed and eyes bright, a student hand went up. You could tell the teacher expected a good question. "Which theory do we have to use in the next paper?" Not only did that student fall from grace, but the instructor plunged from a pinnacle of hope to the depths of despair.

New faculty (and those not new) forget how content looks when first encountered. After having been intimate with it for years, they cannot imagine missing its obvious importance and relevance. But the content looks different to students. Sometimes they miss the obvious, giving teachers so inclined the opportunity to criticize the students rather than question their assumption that the content's relevance is readily apparent to everyone.

What makes content relevant and meaningful to the teacher doesn't always make its importance obvious to students. Gregory (2005), who teaches (and loves) British lit, explains by using one of his favorite poems, Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country

Churchyard." "I used to try to motivate students to enjoy and value Gray's poem by taking them carefully through a descriptive analysis of the poem's artistry and intellectual content, and its historical position as a poem that sits on the fence between neoclassical restraint and Romantic expressiveness. This was all good because I'm reasonably smart and highly trained, and I really love this poem. But the truth is that it never worked very well" (p. 96). Why? "I was giving my students a reason to understand why some people—namely other strange persons like me—might find Gray's poem *interesting*, but I was giving them no reasons of their own for finding Gray's poem *important*" (p. 96).

To help students understand the importance and relevance of the content they are learning, teachers must encourage students to connect with the content, letting them make connections meaningful to them. This doesn't excuse students from learning the basics of a discipline, but it does mean that teachers will help students learn by working to understand (possibly remember) how the content looks to a novice and by being open to other ways of connecting with the material—ways that make it meaningful to the learner.

Mistaken Belief 2: Content Is More Important Than Anything Else Taught

The troublesome word here is *more*. The kind and amount of content in a course or a degree program does matter. If students do not graduate with a solid knowledge base, they have not received a quality education. But the belief should be challenged when faculty use it to make learning course content the only classroom experience of consequence. It should also be challenged when content becomes the most important measure of a course's standards and rigor.

The process of mastering material teaches lessons quite apart from the acquisition of content knowledge. "Mostly students do not get educated because they study our beloved content. They get

educated because they learn how to study our beloved content, and they carry the how of that learning with them . . . as cognitive and intellectual skills that stick long after the content is forgotten” (Gregory, 2005, p. 97). Gregory’s insight should challenge teachers to see content as the means as well as the end of education. From encounters with content students learn how to frame questions, what counts as evidence, how to think critically and logically, how to analyze answers and draw conclusions, and how to communicate effectively. Given the growth of information in every field, given how much students today will be expected to learn across a career, given how much democracies (could we say civilizations?) depend on an educated citizenry, is the content learned in courses more important than learning these skills? Which is more likely to be used across a lifetime?

The superordinate importance of content is also challenged by the life lessons students learn in their courses. By watching their teachers, students see examples of how educated people think and pursue intellectual passions. Relationships with students individually and collectively provide real-time examples of how professionals act. It would be wonderful if students only learned positive life lessons from teachers, but they learn other kinds of lessons just as easily. What do students learn when a teacher demands rigid compliance with deadlines and then delays or defers on feedback to students? What do students learn when teachers enforce strict attendance policies, but “skip” class to present at a conference? What do students learn when the teacher announces openness to opposing views but then demeans and discredits a student who holds those views?

Most teachers, but especially new ones, are uncomfortable role models. It’s one thing to be a content expert, quite another to be an exemplary human being. But students learn from teachers whether or not the teachers feel comfortable about being role models. Teaching these lessons well doesn’t require being a super-human or doing all things perfectly. It’s more about setting stan-

dards and making a concerted effort to meet them. Could the importance of these lessons be confirmed by asking you about your experiences in college? What were the most important lessons you learned? Were they content lessons or lessons about life?

Believing that content is more important than anything else taught will likely make efforts in the classroom far less rewarding. True enough, having a student do well with content, say on the MCAT or LSAT, does feel good, but I don’t think it sustains the soul of teaching the way a testimony like this one does: “I’m graduating today because of Dr. Standmire. He showed me the way and in the process changed my life.”

If fidelity to content remains unchallenged, it grows into a barrier that impedes subsequent development. It leads to a belief discussed in Chapter Eight, that more content is always better and results in courses so overflowing with information that teachers have no time for anything but covering content. They can’t use instructional approaches proved to lead to better learning outcomes because those approaches might decrease the amount of content covered.

Mistaken Belief 3: Students Learn Content by Listening

I don’t think new faculty hold this belief explicitly. It’s just when the instructional method of choice is lecture (and it still is for 76 percent of new faculty, according to Finkelstein, Seal, and Schuster, 1998, p. 73), that method assumes that students learn by listening. Some do; most faculty did, which is one of the reasons the method prevails. The method also appeals because it lets new faculty focus on something they know—the content.

But do the majority of today’s college students learn well by listening to lectures? No—and that’s not a conclusion that will surprise most college teachers. Research on learning styles finds that students tend to be more visual or kinesthetic learners—they learn better by doing. Various factors affect how well they attend during a lecture and how many notes they take. For a good summary

of these, see Bligh (2000, Chapter Three). Still other research documents abysmally poor rates of retention for course content. In an analysis of how fast students forgot what they learned in a business consumer behavior course, one for marketing majors, researchers found that “most of the knowledge gained in the course is lost within 2 years” (Bacon and Stewart, 2006, p. 181).

Even more troubling is the kind of learning that lectures produce. A sizeable group of studies documents that when teachers lecture and keep the focus on covering the content, limiting the amount of time for questions or relegating them to the last few minutes of the period, students opt for surface learning approaches (Gow and Kember, 1993; Kember and Gow, 1994). They memorize material, often with only a cursory understanding of it, and quickly forget what they have learned (as documented by McIntyre and Munson, 2008, whose study of cramming assessed its effects on long-term retention). Those strategies that engage and involve students, ones that allow them to explore the material and make it their own, result in deep learning. When student understanding is at this deeper level, what has been learned is retained longer and can be applied elsewhere. Chapter Four references an instrument developed by Biggs (2001) that can identify whether individual students rely on surface or deep learning strategies.

Lecturing is like every other instructional method. It has assets and liabilities. I have always admired how honestly Bligh (2000) addresses both in his classic work on lectures. With some content, some students, and in certain situations, telling (as in lecturing) makes perfect sense. What causes problems, especially for new faculty, is using lecture to cover massive amounts of material and then equating coverage with learning. Lecturing also grows the dependence on lecturing and builds resistance to other approaches. It makes the teacher and content a more central focus than the students and learning.

Whether it’s a belief about the importance of content or the use of lectures to cover large amounts of it, what new (and old)

faculty believe about the role of content in learning makes a difference. Content can take teachers and students to fascinating kinds of learning, or content can be a barrier that compromises learning. What new teachers believe about content can position them for career-spanning growth, or it can stifle their development at the beginning, middle, and end of their careers.

Mistaken Beliefs About Students

Too often, beginning (as well as other) teachers hold mistaken beliefs about students. These beliefs compromise what students are able to accomplish in the classroom, and they prevent faculty from realizing their potential as teachers.

Mistaken Belief 1: Students’ Abilities and What They Can Accomplish Will Be Apparent to Teachers

Too often teachers believe that some students cannot learn some kinds of content, and they think they can tell who these students are. It is true that some students come to courses with more natural ability than others. Some find certain kinds of content easier to master than others. Whether students with normal intelligence can’t learn some kinds of content can be debated. Having a sibling of limited mental ability and having been told repeatedly that he cannot learn to do certain things only to see him determinedly master those tasks makes this difficult for me to debate on logical terms. But far more important and much less arguable is whether teachers are in a position to make these determinations about students and what consequences accrue when they do.

Teachers see students, especially those not doing particularly well in a course, for very limited amounts of time; they are privy to small amounts of work that may or may not represent what a student is capable of doing. It is true that some students fail dismally even though they report that they are trying hard to succeed and teachers see evidence of expended effort. But does that justify

a teacher telling a student that he or she cannot learn certain material and is not suited to studying in a particular area? Certainly the teacher can raise questions and offer advice based on observed strengths and weaknesses. But students decide what they will and won't learn, and the reliability of teachers' predictions about who will and won't make it ranks right up there with palm reading and tea leaf analysis.

It is natural for teachers to make judgments about students—if not in assigning grades or writing letters of recommendation, then mentally as they watch students make their way through a course. With experience it does become easier to recognize the paths to success and failure. Even so, most of us have a litany of stories about how badly we missed it. One for my former students graduated this semester. I would have bet several months' salary he would never make it. He was a disaster that found a place to happen in my class. He wrote poorly, answered questions superficially, and had hardly anything that resembled study skills. He missed assignments and fell asleep in class. He broke up with his high school sweetheart near the end of the course and descended further into chaos. The one place I never expected to see him was graduation.

I am way too old to be naïve here. For every success story, there are many more that do not end happily. Two students I spent hours with last semester—students with such great promise but so much baggage—are no longer in school. Their absence is deeply depressing. But the question is whether teachers should make their predictions public and what happens to students and teachers when they do.

Students, especially those in jeopardy, need teachers who believe in them. I was dismayed to read recently that 44 percent of students in one survey reported that they had a teacher who gave up on them and their learning (Hawk and Lyons, 2008). I'm not suggesting that teachers shield students from the truth. We have a professional responsibility to tell students what's required

and to point out where and to what extent students fall short of those requirements. But when teachers tell students that they cannot succeed in a course, curriculum, or college, that disrespects the right students have to determine their own destiny.

Beyond how these assessments hurt students, detrimental consequences accrue to teachers who make these kinds of judgments. Assessments of what and individual student can accomplish are precursors to judgments about groups of students. Out of them grow beliefs that only certain kinds of students can learn the content they teach—smart ones, male ones, white ones, ones who are good in math, ones who can already draw. This sets teachers up for less than successful teaching experiences, especially when they must teach those courses that enroll a wide range of students.

Part of what sustains teaching across the career is the willingness to face what makes it challenging. At midcareer, it came to me that teaching upper-division majors and graduate students may well be the easiest kind of college teaching. Those students will succeed with or without a good teacher. But beginning students, those at risk, those not well prepared, those who don't know where they're headed, those who won't do more than the minimum—those students are tough teach. If one of those kids gets it together and succeeds, all of a sudden teaching is intensely satisfying and personally rewarding.

I have colleague, a rather stodgy fellow, not a guy with a charismatic personality. He just happens to believe that all students can learn to write, even those for whom English is a second language. At graduation a couple of years ago, I witnessed an amazing sight—a first-generation Hispanic student was graduating with a degree in creative writing. Everyone in his extended, extended family was present. The student grabbed his professor's arm and pulled him over to this very large family group. As the professor approached, everyone in that family first clapped, then cheered, and finally hugged my embarrassed but grinning colleague. There's

a framed snapshot recording the event that sits prominently on his desk. For beginning teachers, it is best to suspend judgments and proceed believing that all students can learn and have the potential to succeed. Not all will, but enough do to justify a faith in all of them, and it is those who succeed against great odds that give teachers pause and claims to fame.

Mistaken Belief 2: Teachers Are Always Smarter Than Students

Teachers are definitely smarter than most students and even smarter than smart students most of the time. But the assumption is not always true, and it leads to other troublesome beliefs. When I started teaching, it never crossed my mind that I might have a student who was smarter than I was. I don't think this was because I felt especially brilliant. It was more a reality of professional life: teachers are there because they know more than students. And so when that first bright-beyond-belief student showed up in one of my classes I was shocked. He asked such good questions. And then he asked more good questions about my answers. And then he asked questions I couldn't answer. And then he asked new questions about old answers. And then he offered answers and asked questions about those. I loved and hated him at the same time. I lived in fear that he would "out" my feeble mind. But then I did it anyway. It was the end of the course and once again after class he waited patiently to speak with me.

"What's your question today?" I asked.

"I was wondering what you're teaching next semester? I'd like to take another class with you."

"Oh no," I blurted out, "I have nothing left to teach you. You've already learned everything I know."

I especially admire a colleague who teaches expecting to learn from students. "I try to go to class every day open to the possibility that I'm going to learn something from one of my students. It doesn't happen every day—to be honest it doesn't happen most days, but I like to teach expecting the possibility." This same

colleague tells a wonderful story of one day in class when he told students that nobody had a really good explanation for the title *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* He shared some of the possibilities and then a student offered an idea. "It was a totally new explanation. I'd never read or heard it before and I couldn't believe how good it was. And this great answer didn't come from the brightest kid in the class. He was a student who tended not to say much. His answer taught me that good answers can sometimes be heard in unexpected places."

The knowledge gap between teacher and students in a typical college course is deep and wide. Teachers know so much more than most students, and in most cases are much more intellectually able. When daily confronted with students who know so much less, it's easy to become filled with that sense of knowledge power—to have it grow into a kind of superiority that extends beyond just knowing more. An intellectual elitism emerges that makes it easier to be condescending and demeaning to those who know less and appear less able. Students are hurt by teachers who display these attitudes. Less obvious but no less telling are the ways these beliefs about students affect teachers.

Teachers teach because they have a commitment to share what they have learned with those who know less. Once they start seeing themselves as intellectually superior, always the brightest intellect in the room, that compromises their abilities to teach. They are less patient, less willing to explain it again. They stop considering the possibility that they may not have explained something clearly or answered a question correctly. Teachers want to be open to the possibility of learning from and with students. Then classrooms become places where learning can happen any time and to anyone.

Mistaken Belief 3: Behavior Problems Must Be Prevented

This belief is an easy sell to new teachers. Not being confident, empowered teachers, fears that students will take advantage of inexperience and ineptitude readily take root. Surveys of new

faculty document their concern with classroom management and student incivility (Boice, 1996). Interestingly, a more recent analysis of classroom conflict found no statistically significant correlations between reports of conflict and years of teaching experience (Meyers, Bender, Hill, and Thomas, 2006).

Most faculty can list a large number of student behaviors that should be prevented. Some of them are serious, like cheating and plagiarism. Others may be less egregious, but still annoying and potentially compromising to the climate for learning in a class. Cell phones ring, students come late, walk out in the middle, and leave early. They talk in class; they sleep in class. They text and use their laptops to surf the Web. They turn papers in late. They want extra credit and make-ups. They won't participate. They expect a doctor's note to excuse them from course requirements. They miss class for a myriad of real and fabricated reasons. They cut corners on everything from the length of their papers to the number of practice problems to the amount of time spent on a group project.

Most faculty tackle these offenses with resolute prohibitions and threats of punishment. Nowadays the average syllabus devotes way more space to what students won't be doing as opposed to what they will be learning. I raised questions about this approach in a discussion of teacher power in Chapter Two. Of concern here is how this approach to classroom management affects new teachers and their subsequent development.

Meyers, Bender, Hill, and Thomas (2006) found that hostile conflict, as in challenging, open resistance, was related to "whether faculty expressed care towards students, communicated respect, behaved sensitively, and remained warm and engaged" (p. 184). Teachers who behaved this way had less classroom conflict. I don't think this prevents teachers from establishing policies or setting rules that establish how the class will operate. But at some point a rule-bound classroom environment starts making teacher students relationships adversarial, and nothing

saps the joy of teaching quicker than regular altercations with students.

Believing that students will behave badly empowers faculty to treat students diffidently, to engage with them cautiously, and to regard their behavior suspiciously. When teachers disengage from students, when their professional demeanor conveys that they don't care, don't trust, don't especially like students, then students respond in kind. In other words, rather than solving the problem, this belief tends to make it worse. And then when students do treat teachers badly and behave poorly, these teachers have all the justification they need to solidify their power. They put up barricades, start carrying night sticks, and patrol in armed vehicles. Learning is no longer the central objective in those classrooms.

But classroom management is not a bogus issue. Some students do behave badly in class; others challenge a teacher's authority; a lot just don't act with much maturity. Are these realities to be ignored? Not at all. Climates for learning have distinct characteristics, and teachers have a responsibility to work to establish them. I even think teachers deserve to have bottom lines. If you consider packing up before the period ends the epitome of rudeness, let there be a rule that prevents it. What needs to be abandoned is the belief that students will behave badly unless you prevent them from doing so. Abandoning that belief opens the door to thoughtful consideration of how many policies and rules are needed to create a climate conducive for learning and which ones are the most important. It also becomes possible to believe that a lot of potential problems won't emerge in any given class and if one does, it can be successfully dealt with at that time.

Classrooms can be places where teachers and students both play on the same side. At the beginning of courses I ask my students to give examples (anonymous, of course) of what the teacher and the students did in the best and worst class they've ever taken. Regularly students report being annoyed and having their efforts to learn compromised by the same things that concern me: side

conversations while the teacher or other students are talking, not being listened to or having contributions disrespected, people in class who never participate, teachers who don't stop at the end of period, classmates who always come late, and so on. From a short discussion like this, it becomes possible to create a list of classroom characteristics that we can all commit to uphold. Now students become part of the solution instead of the problem.

Whether it's assumptions about student abilities and intellectual endowments or conclusions drawn about their predispositions to disrupt class, here is yet another area where what new teachers believe matters. It matters to students. Having a teacher who doesn't think you have what it takes or one that assumes any excuse for missing class is fabricated makes the motivation to study and learn all that more difficult to muster. But these beliefs are just as harmful to teachers, especially in terms of growth and vitality across the career. Students are so intimately a part of teaching—they are the reason why we do it course after course, year after year. If they no longer matter, or matter less, or only a select few matter, the motivation to teach loses a vital source of nourishment. When teachers focus on all that students can become and believe their efforts contribute to what students accomplish, those beliefs can inspire teaching from the beginning to the end of a career.

The beginning of the teaching career is such a time of hope and promise. Most new teachers are enthusiastic and motivated. They expect so much of themselves and their students. But without much preparation to teach and mistaken beliefs guiding their instructional decision making, those first experiences in the classroom can significantly dampen the passion for teaching.

I opened the chapter with several quotes from Sandstrom (1999), who writes with insight about his first teaching experiences. He offers great thoughts for the conclusion as well. "The most vexing issue I faced as a beginning teacher was how to sustain a sense of hope" (p. 526). This chapter proposes that hope can grow out of a set of beliefs about teaching—a collection that truth-

fully reflect how teachers learn to teach, the role of content in education, and what helps students to learn. Sandstrom describes his reorientation to teaching this way. "I become more aware and appreciative of the 'small accomplishments' I experienced as a teacher—those moments of joy, grace and wonder when my students fell in love with an idea, gained an interesting insight, asked a provocative questions, felt excited about learning, or looked at themselves and their world in new ways" (p. 527). Are these accomplishments small? I'm not sure I use that designation, but I do know they are what sustain teachers across the years.