

A newsletter for those
who teach at
Brigham Young University

From the Faculty Center

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Teaching with the Spirit: A Broader Definition

Let's admit it: Most of us chafe a bit at the part of the BYU teacher evaluation form that asks students to assess how spiritually inspiring we are. How can we cram spiritual material into a course when there is no way we can possibly cover in 14 weeks the demanding academic material we feel morally obligated to cover? If we teach vector analysis or the pluperfect subjunctive with the Spirit, how is that better than teaching without it?

What does teaching with the Spirit mean?

Most of us know the basic story: Karl G. Maeser requested instructions from Brigham Young before leaving to direct the struggling Brigham Young Academy and was surprised by Brigham's laconic reply:

I want you to remember that you ought not to teach even the alphabet or the multiplication tables without the Spirit of God. That is all. God bless you. Good-bye. (R. Maeser 79)

The writings of Young and Maeser suggest a broader interpretation of teaching with the Spirit than is usually drawn. Their views do not include teaching private views as Church doctrine nor inserting theology into *secular* subjects inappropriately. They do include continuing scholarship; loving students, colleagues, and superiors; encouraging students' individual growth; and exemplifying ethical behavior.

This view of teaching with the Spirit parallels the most thoughtful contemporary advice given and practiced by scholar-teachers at BYU and elsewhere. One would be hard-pressed to find better advice on conducting a class *or* a university.

Scholarship

Brigham Young encouraged Maeser to teach secular subjects with the Spirit. Brother Brigham continued the doctrine taught by Joseph Smith that seeking knowledge of all truth is part of the gospel. Brigham exulted,

And inasmuch as the Lord Almighty has designed us to know all that is in the earth, both the good and the evil, and to learn not only what is in heaven, but what is in hell, you need not expect ever to get through learning. (Widtsoe 249)

Maeser's own heroic breadth of interests and teaching activities exemplify this principle. George Sutherland, a non-Mormon who attended BYA and eventually became a U.S. Supreme Court justice, claimed that he had "never known a man whose learning covered so wide a range of subjects, and was at the same time so thorough in all" (Wilkinson 204-05).

Teaching with the Spirit involves not only thoroughly knowing our subjects as they were when we graduated, but keeping up with them as they change throughout our careers.

Loving Your Students

Of course, knowing your subject is not the same as knowing how to teach it. Maeser believed that good teaching begins with simple affection for the students. “As nothing can grow without sunlight, so nothing can prosper in school or [home] without love” (K. Maeser 85). Justice Sutherland wrote that Maeser practiced what he taught:

He saw the shortcomings as well as the excellences of his pupils, and while he never hesitated to point them out . . . it was always with such an undercurrent of kindly interest that no criticism ever left a sting. (Wilkinson 205)

Maeser’s focus on affection for students is echoed in the advice of the most thoughtful writers on good educational practice, including Ernest Boyer, Page Smith, and Parker Palmer. Palmer’s writing is suffused with the quest for the “capacity for community” and teachers’ “ability to receive the personhood of students” (115).

Fostering Individual Student Growth

Maeser named development of individuality as one of the main aims of education (K. Maeser 243). He advocated sharing classroom responsibility with students (245) via methods such as reflective discussion (276), allowing students to help determine homework assignments (269), and selecting officers in each class (250).

Maeser’s ideas parallel those of most contemporary experts in higher education who advocate less lecturing and more active learning methods such as student presentations, problem solving, group projects, cooperative education, class discussion, writing assignments, journals, and peer review of student papers.

Teaching Ethics by Example

Development of character was also central to Maeser’s educational aims and understanding of teaching with the Spirit: “The educator has to impress upon the minds of his pupils the fact that . . . no one is entitled to better treatment than he is willing to extend to others” (K. Maeser 36–37). In this, Maeser again took his own

advice. Justice Sutherland called him “a man of such transparent and natural goodness that his students gained not only knowledge, but character, which is better than knowledge” (Wilkinson 204).

Like most important values, ethics can only be taught by example. Even those who feel uncomfortable about *loving* their students can agree that they must at least practice ethical behavior: treating students impartially, respecting students and expecting them to respect each other, keeping office hours and appointments, avoiding trick questions that destroy students’ self-confidence and deflect their thinking from central issues, and so on.

Loving Colleagues, Administrators, and the Public

Maeser did not expect infallibility from his leaders, colleagues, or the public, but neither was he threatened by them:

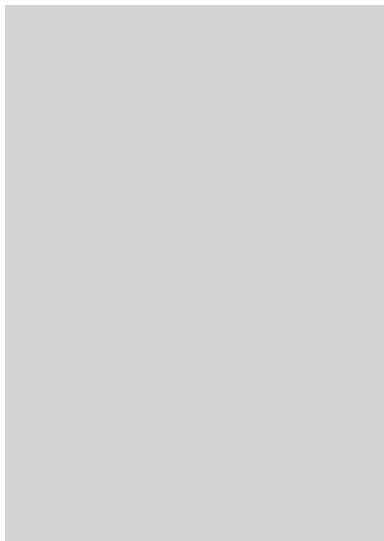
There have been “boards of education” to whom Schiller’s word would have been applicable, when he said: “With stupidity even the gods fight in vain.” . . . It should only suggest to the teacher the necessity of practicing more than ordinary discretion and diplomacy. . . . Above all, let him not show that petulance which comes of being too sensitive. A teacher . . . has to stand the cross-fire of public opinion. (K. Maeser 86)

If we are thinking creatively, others will disagree with us, sometimes disagreeably. It comes with the territory. If we want to be a community of scholars, each of us must try to disagree agreeably, even if others set a poor example. Collegiality is a precious benefit of academic life, but it takes time and effort.

Research indicates that successful professors quickly establish positive relations with peers and generally exhibit positive attitudes toward administrators and their institutions. While this may sound disgustingly positive and idealistic, there *is* something to be said for looking at the larger context, not making mountains out of molehills, and hoping for the best.

Many of my colleagues at BYU are paragons of collegiality. As a type A personality, I have lurched from one manufactured crisis to another. Yet I have been tolerated, guided, befriended, and inspired by dozens of fellow faculty members who quietly exemplify not merely

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Don Jarvis
“backed by” Karl Maeser

The Faculty Center: What's in It for Me?

What is the BYU Faculty Center? Why was it organized? The Center's mission is to help establish a positive environment that promotes teaching, scholarship, service, and collegiality within the BYU faculty. To help accomplish these goals, the Center provides a number of services and resources, including:

- **Professional Development Seminar (New Faculty)**

This fall semester luncheon/seminar serves as an orientation for the new professoriate. This series is designed to help new faculty members meet their responsibilities at BYU and reach their potential as teachers.

I was able to get to know other new faculty members and become aware of the facilities and support BYU has to offer. I felt those who gave the seminars really wanted me to succeed.—Roy Silcox, Animal Science

- **TA Training**

All teaching assistants, student instructors, and interested faculty members are invited to a fall conference. Sessions focus on topics such as grading, generating discussion, and maintaining professional relationships with students.

I liked meeting other TAs and enjoyed hearing their questions and comments. The conference made me rethink the way I do things. The lunch was great, too.—Honors TA

- **IDEA Course Evaluation System**

This system is a confidential, in-depth, end-of-course diagnostic that determines whether students learned what the instructor set out to teach in a particular course.

I like the flexibility of the IDEA evaluation. Also, its diagnosis of teaching with suggestions on how to improve are better than any other system I've used.—Lynn Henrichsen, Linguistics

- **Classroom Student Observer Program**

Trained student observers from this program are invited by professors to observe their class(es) and share their observations and feedback.

I received insightful input and concrete suggestions, many of which I immediately incorporated into my class.—Larry Wimmer, Economics

- **Faculty Lunchroom**

Room 360 ELWC has been set aside as a faculty lunchroom so that faculty members can eat and socialize together.

The faculty lunchroom is a great place to become acquainted with colleagues from across campus.
—Beverly Cutler, Education

- **Faculty Center Library**

The Center has a lending library of books, periodicals, and films on instructional and faculty development.

While I was preparing material for advancement in rank, I came to the Center's library and found it very helpful. I checked out Peter Seldin's The Teaching Portfolio, which is a valuable handbook.

—Sharon Lee Swenson, Theatre and Film

The Faculty Center provides a number of other services, including faculty discussion groups and workshops, the *Faculty Resource Guide*, and individual, departmental, and college consultation. A Faculty Center brochure will be mailed in February 1993 detailing these resources.

For more information call 378-7419. ■

Teaching with the Spirit: A Broader Definition

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decency and fairness, but a genuine delight at sharing news, feelings, problems, methods, editing, and spiritual insights. No doubt there is room for improvement all around, but I cannot imagine a group I would rather call colleagues.

To conclude: Brigham's injunction to teach with the Spirit not only sets a fine precedent for administrative brevity, but is relevant, intriguing, and powerful. ■

This is an edited version of a paper presented at the BYU Revelation and Reason Seminar, 12 November 1992, by Donald K. Jarvis, professor of Russian and director of the Faculty Center. A copy of the entire paper may be obtained by calling 8-7419 or by writing to 167 HGB.

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To Open Eyes

BY NORMA DAVIS

Associate Professor of Humanities

I show my classes a film about the artist and master teacher Josef Albers. Albers came to America during World War II from the Bauhaus school of design, fleeing Nazi Germany. At first, when he could speak very little English, a student asked him about his goals for a course. Albers had to simplify his answer to meet his abilities in the language and finally could only say, "To open eyes." If I were to name the one aspect of my teaching that means the most to me, it would be this process of awareness, the opening of eyes, that is so much a part of the university community.

I remember an introductory humanities class I taught in which all students were required to attend cultural events and write short papers about them. One semester the students were to attend Zeffirelli's film version of *Romeo and Juliet*. A lanky young man came to me the next week and said, "That was really wonderful! Did Shakespeare write any more plays?" I said yes. "Do you think they have them in the library?" I assured him they did. He spent the rest of the semester reading Shakespeare on his own and enthusiastically sharing his ideas. His eyes were opened, but so were mine. I was reminded of Shakespeare's power to touch the human soul; I also learned to be sensitive to the individual student's intellectual maturity and potential.

Students often open my eyes. Once, after playing Grofé's *Grand Canyon Suite*, a Native American woman said her grandfather used to take her into the Arizona desert before dawn and challenge her to race the rising sun. She felt the cool morning air and the excitement of a new dawn in Grofé's music. I will never forget her story.



We can succeed as faculty if we remember that our purpose is to open eyes. Furthermore, if we recognize that our students are capable of opening our eyes, our own satisfaction and joy increase. ■

Some of us "seasoned professors" at BYU remember *To Improve the University* in newsletters years ago. It was one of my favorite features. I looked forward to reading my colleagues' pithy insights; from time to time I even sent in responses and contributions myself. **FOCUS ON FACULTY** is reinstating this feature column with Norma Davis' "To Open Eyes." We invite your written responses to her ideas or short pieces on any other topic of interest that will "improve the university."

—Bonner Ritchie, *Associate Director, Faculty Center*

Submissions (up to 500 words) for *To Improve the University* should be sent no later than Friday, February 19, 1993, to:

Lynn Sorenson-Pierce, *Editor*

FOCUS ON FACULTY

Faculty Center, 167 HGB

FOCUS ON FACULTY is an occasional newsletter published by the Faculty Center for the teachers of Brigham Young University (full- and part-time faculty, student instructors, and teaching assistants). Its purpose is to serve as a medium for exchanging ideas about teaching and scholarship and for sharing information about faculty development activities. The editor welcomes your ideas, contributions, and comments.

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