Dr. Paul Vermette’s Inspiring Quotes for 2014

A couple of years ago I gave a (short speech) to a group of college kids being inducted into an Honor society; I was asked to be inspirational, intelligent, pithy, humble, insightful, funny…and short.

I talked…It didn’t work.

When I got a second chance at this task, I did it differently. I let smarter men and women than me do it for me…and let folks interpret my “wisdom” as they wish…which is what they’re going to do anyway. So I want to use this forum to say 4 really good things for you to think about—one for each month left in the semester! (And because I have the chance to do so, throw out two more to help you through the summer.)

#1 90% of life is showing up!
If we professors and our students lived to this maxim, we’d all be better off. When my favorite Jewish philosopher, Woody Allen said this, I believe he added…”and 5% more is staying awake while you are there”. Show up…contribute…and intentionally take away what was offered and what you made of the experience.

#2 Do or do not, there is no try!
When Yoda said something like this, he meant that we should get whatever task we face, done correctly and as expected…and that is not easy in this bizarre world we have fashioned. Now don’t forget that that DO-ing is also in the try-ing, but waiting, avoiding, half-baked attempting, plagiarizing, and neglecting are NOT Do-ing. [Note that Nike also told us to “to just do it” but we have no clue what they mean by that.]

#3 Sorry, I cannot think for you!
When Cindy Kline told her middle schools students this a few years ago, they were confused: it suggested that thinking causes learning and they would have to do think for themselves…with their own brains! Learning would no longer be spitting back other people’s ideas, words “rented” from books and worksheets instead of ideas “owned” by their own difficult cognitive work. So much for multi-tasking and coasting: one would have to focus, concentrate and deliberatively practice to be successful in school AND life. UGH!!!!

#4 Be the change you wish to see in others
Now here is good idea that got Gandhi killed, but he was consistent and it did make others around him think. It is much easier to curse the darkness than it is to light a candle (HEY…another pithy one!). But it really seems to be a good idea to actually be what you think people ought to be…and do it as often as possible.

Two others seem to be wise words to live with, both from (un) popular movies but useful for summer months:

(a) Batman says “it is not what I am inside that matters…it is what I do for others that counts”: Boy, is that a shocking thing to hear in today’s “get mine” world.

(b) Spiderman’s uncle says that “with great power comes great responsibility”. What could be more powerful than teaching…affecting young minds and spirits all the time. It is a most powerful assignment: changing lives is our job and maybe we should do it as intentionally, carefully, thoughtfully and lovingly as we can.

Volunteers Needed for Faculty Peer Training Videos

Faulty peer training videos feature NU faculty members discussing various strategies and techniques that can be utilized in the classroom. Instructional Support is looking for volunteers who are willing to share what they do in their class, what the impact is on student learning, and how it can be applied to other classrooms of different disciplines. Current videos are available to be viewed on MyNU by clicking on Instructional Support and clicking on Faculty Peer Training Videos. If interested in sharing your teaching strategies and/or techniques, please email is@niagara.edu.

Our Revamped Website

Instructional Support has revamped and improved its website! The site now features easy, accessible links to CASTL’s social media pages; an interactive events calendar (which can be subscribed to for reminders of all the workshops and activities being held); many more helpful resources such as Blackboard tutorials and Dr. Nancy Chick’s SoTL guide; and a new page featuring CASTL. Check out the changes and new additions; you will not be disappointed!

CASTL Contact & Social Media

• Follow us on Twitter: @CASTL_NU
• Like us on Facebook: CASTL_NU
• Visit our website: www.niagara.edu/is
• Contact us at: is@niagara.edu

Check our website for upcoming events and workshops: http://www.niagara.edu/instructional-support-workshops/
So….Did They Teach You That In “Teacher College?”
By: Cindy Kline

It struck me strangely the first time I heard the phrase “teacher college,” because none of us that went through it ever referred to it that way…But from the lips of a seventh grader, the conceptualization was understood…Señora (I taught Spanish)…how did you DO that?

It should be understood that I wasn’t mid-demonstration, or explanation, he delivered his query after one of those rare, but meaningful “ah ha” moments…when something “clicked” between last class and today’s class…when he realized that there was actually something I did OUTSIDE of the classroom in order to do help him learn INSIDE the classroom.

I found through the years, the question took different forms at different times, but it arose repeatedly, sincerely, sometimes with great awe…my students wanted to know how I got them to learn!

So as one of the 1000 decisions I would make that day…I thought quickly…what pithy response can I marshal to motivate, inspire and electrify his young mind today?

Having spent nearly 20 years in business, I wasn’t the traditional Niagara University graduate education student… I had a mortgage, family, nearly twice the years of others in my cohort, and history. My experiences were many; personal, professional and academic, combining uniquely to create my teaching philosophy. With my inner dialogue ignited, I formulated potential responses. Well, Roberto…here is what I know...

**You come first.** I learned that if I concentrate on what YOU are doing in the class, on what YOU create, on how YOU behave, etc., rather than focusing on what I do, that I will be attuned to your developing needs and I can address them as they surface. Sometimes this means that I change my plan for class based on how you and your classmates are reacting, or modify an assignment on the fly, but always based on your needs, not mine. (Student-centered learning)

**You also come last.** I know that your mastery of the content is my endgame. Until you have achieved all that you are possible of achieving, I am not done. I have to give you repeated opportunities to practice with the material, each time assessing how close you are to the goal. As I give you specific feedback, you will learn from the errors. In this way, when I test you at the end…you will not be surprised that you have done well. (Formative and Summative assessment and Feedback)

On the Road Again – Destination: Music City
By: Cindy Kline

Vanderbilt, a private, major research university sits just blocks away from the top recording studios in Nashville. With 6000 graduate and professional students (another 6000 undergrads) and 1000+ full-time faculty, Vanderbilt is known in academe for the reputation of their research and their Center for Teaching.

Danyelle Moore, Paul Vermette, and I toured the Center for Teaching (CFT) facility, discussed programs, attended workshops and met with renowned faculty, finding there is great alignment between our respective practices.

Vanderbilt’s focus is different than that of Niagara due only to its size and prominence as a major research institution. With a large doctoral population (of which a vast number are engaged in teaching research), Vanderbilt has a sizable pool of developing talent around which their major CFT programs are based.

Another Successful (and Very Chilly) CCTL Conference

On Jan. 6-7, 2014, the Committee for College Teaching and Learning (CCTL) hosted the 15th annual International Conference on Teaching and Learning in St. Vincent’s Hall.

NU welcomed attendees from 17 different schools from institutions of higher education throughout Western New York and the Finger Lakes Region. The conference was focused on enhancing active, integrative learning through evidence-based teaching and cooperative classrooms.

Dr. Barbara Millis, the director of the Teaching and Learning Center at the University of Texas at San Antonio, delivered the keynote address, which focused on teaching for the 21st century. The plenary sessions shed light into using group activities wisely and utilizing the affective domain.

In addition to Dr. Millis’ keynote and plenary sessions, there were a total of 30 presentations in the concurrent sessions on a wide array of topics, including engagement, technology, collaboration, and assessment. PowerPoint and handouts from various presentations can be viewed at http://www.niagara.edu/conference-proceedings/. We thank all of those that braved the weather to attend the annual CCTL Conference and helped to make it another successful and productive conference. Information about next year’s conference will be coming soon. Check our website for the latest news.

Call for Articles
If you have published an article(s) on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, please send an electronic copy to Instructional Support at is@niagara.edu. We are in the process of creating a digital archive of all faculty work on this subject.

Our Door is always open!
Please stop by anytime and say hello. There is so much to explore in CASTL with endless resources & many friendly faces. We hope to see you very soon!