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Final Thoughts

One thing powerful and effective teachers have in common is that they sweep away obstacles and remove barriers that can all too often serve as excuses for not getting the job done. They move inexorably forward and take no prisoners. My most effective teachers and professors over the years were those who were consistent, positive, fair, relentless, and loved being with us every day. They were willing to admit mistakes and had a sense of humor that underlined both their humanity and their sense of being human.

I often talk about my favorite teachers. In every case, when I recall those teachers, they were the ones who told stories, and they had us tell *our* stories; when I tell *their* stories, I remember every detail of the rooms in which they taught. I remember where I sat. I have total recall of the myriad ways in which they demonstrated their mastery of the profession. There was, in the final analysis, *something in them* that saw *something in us*, and this intangible but very real trait is one that characterizes great teachers through the ages.

The interactive classroom is a place and state of mind where students are engaged fully in their own learning, with teachers as learning partners. The new reality of the 21st century is that many of the jobs these students will hold require teamwork, interaction, conversation, and collaboration. Students who spend a good deal of time watching a screen of one size or another need also to be involved in structured conversations in our classrooms. This means they need to become proficient at the kinds of academic conversations that make them confident communicators. It is necessary for them to learn how to speak and write with confidence and *listen* with respect, empathy, and understanding.

To any outside observer, the energy is contagious and the learning visible in genuinely dynamic, interactive classrooms. In a safe and supportive environment, students can regularly pair, share, laugh, and learn while working on projects and other collaborative tasks. Teachers who approach groups in feedback-rich classrooms don't bring the proceedings to a halt; they listen, ask probing questions, gauge whether or not students know where they are in relation to where they are going, and look for an answer to the question, "Where to next?"

That question can be asked of teachers as doers, risk takers, experimenters, and tinkerers. Teachers can regularly pair, share, laugh, and learn while traveling together on the continuous-improvement highway. "Where to next?" can be a constant, benchmarking refrain for teachers willing to open their doors and engage in collegial efforts aimed at shifting all the learning partners in the school community toward a clear, shared vision. Working together can be far more rewarding than going it alone.

And it's more fun.

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