

FOUNDATIONS, FOUNDERS, AND FUTURES

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Pondering the request that I write this article, my mind drifted to a dream I had several years ago, which, unlike most dreams, failed to evaporate from memory. I was standing in front of Independence Hall in Philadelphia. I am from Philadelphia and have been to that famous landmark on many occasions. However, this time it was different.

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All the surroundings were changed. I realized with great surprise that I was in the colonial time period. With awe, I surveyed the old buildings and watched an occasional carriage go by. It seemed to be fall; there was a little nip in the air and leaves were slowly rolling down the street. I noticed an older man, dressed in colonial garb, moving in my direction. He had his head down, watching the ground as he walked. He did not look at me as he passed, but in his face I saw that he appeared to be greatly weighed down. I thought, how can this be? Doesn't this man know the time period in which he is living and the significance of this place? Doesn't he know that this is the Age of Reason; the Enlightenment? Doesn't he understand that at this very moment, ideas concerning the rights of individuals, justice, government, and science are being formed that will change the course of human history? How can someone be depressed living in this exciting time and place? I watched as he slowly disappeared down the cobblestone street.

Those must have been challenging times, yet good times, times like the ones we are experiencing in our own little world that has received quite a stirring of late. Like many in the Hart Building last June 21, I experienced a significant degree of selfish excitement: I would finally have the personal fulfillment of teaching upper division courses. I had been teaching at Ricks for 11 years, and 100 and 200 level courses no longer supplied the spring in my step that was there some years back. I and many others that day were like idealistic beginning freshman honor students, eagerly making the August drive toward our new college experience with perfect faith we would repeat our previous performance. Now some months later, we have passed that stage. We are now like students after the first or second day of class; wondering how in the world are we going to be able to do all this stuff. However, just as things slowly seem doable as the semester moves on, so will our academic stewardships eventually take on the form of reasonably accomplishable tasks.

In some ways we are like Plato's shackled cave dwellers. For many years we have been in our comfortable little world, attending to shadows of contentment, grounded in the knowledge that we are masters of our individual domains. However, others have come and forced change in

our lives. They have taken us into a brighter light, and our eyes are pained and unadjusted. My first intellectual eye ache occurred a few seconds after I confidently opened a textbook I had happily ordered for a future 300-level class. I immediately realized I was in trouble. Language acquisition theory has changed some since I finished my doctorate over ten years ago. Even things that had not changed were a little fuzzy. My enthusiasm also dimmed a little as Vygotsky's Zones of Proximal Development and Oller's hypothesis concerning episodic organization thrust upon me the realization that I wasn't in Kansas anymore. This was going to be a little more complicated than teaching verb conjugation and how to count to a hundred in Spanish. However, as with Plato's cave dwellers, things will eventually come into focus. As with them, the day will come when a return to our former existence will seem more than we can bear.

As members of the BYU-Idaho family, we must never forget that 17-year-old students are going to choose this institution based on an unquestioned trust, a trust that their futures will be in good hands and their education will in no way be compromised. They probably will never question this; but we as teachers should question it all the time. Self examination, especially in the early days when it might be tempting to cut intellectual corners, must never be found wanting. We must deliver.

The poignant knowledge that we must deliver has been a catalyst for reform-minded thinking. In Spanish we have made some changes to our lower division courses that might not even have been considered without the urgency of our current challenge. We have been forced to seriously evaluate our future offerings so as to best cover the critical needs of the future high school teacher, balanced with issues such as credit hour limitations and the curricular expectations of graduate schools. A course that only I have taught for the last seven years or so is being eliminated. Also, my favorite course is being significantly changed to better reflect the realities of the world rather than tradition. Because of the changes, it will probably be my favorite course no longer. What I liked most about it is that which must go. But it will bless more lives. My life is the one least in need of blessing at this point.

We will need to reflect a little on the teaching methodologies that have worked so well for us in the past. Lower division foreign language classes tend to focus mostly on language acquisition and therefore are driven by a mathematical, objective paradigm. Upper division classes in foreign language focus to some degree on advanced grammar but much more on composition, literature, culture, and pedagogy. This shift in emphasis to more subjectivity and abstraction will necessitate a similar shift in pedagogical techniques, giving more emphasis to personal reflection and independent thinking—not that it shouldn't have been there before, but that circumstances will compel more of it. There

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is only one correct way to conjugate a certain verb in the present tense; there are many ways to interpret culture and literary works. In methods classes, we also must reflect on the future teachers' pedagogical techniques. Which ones would be most consistent with their personalities and talents, or with the personalities and talents of the particular mix of high school students eventually seated in front of them? Most subject areas will not face such an abrupt shift in focus as will foreign language. However, pedagogical shifts will be needed, and we must begin thinking them through.

The transition itself has taught me some important pedagogical lessons. I have learned the importance of re-explanation. There were times when differences in opposing viewpoints concerning the essentials of our Spanish major and minor, although very polite and civil, seemed to be utterly irreconcilable. Some of this was due to lack of understanding, on everyone's part, of all the parameters involved. In times such as these, everyone is out of his or her element. We struggle to dig up an old, already understood paradigm to somehow allow us to interpret the new paradigms we need to quickly grasp. Sometimes this does not work, and our minds begin the slow process of constructing new ones. Patience with others' paradigm construction is often wanting in those lucky enough to get there first. I have found the need to re-explain many concepts several times, and embarrassingly I have had many concepts re-explained to me over and over again. Experts on teaching have claimed that we can never do enough reviewing. The process of review allows students to add extra support to shaky mental models. A sputtering and hesitating paradigm is tuned up through review and as a result runs more smoothly. As a teacher I will try to retain and heed this very relevant principle.

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Humans naturally resist change. We are experts at making hells out of incoming heavens. Like the old fellow in my dream, are we making history while letting time and opportunities pass by unappreciated? The Founding Fathers of our country, in their attempt to stay afloat in a sea of stress and responsibility, most likely found at least a few moments to bask in the vision of what they were creating.

For me, one of several hundred founders of BYU-Idaho, such a moment occurred in November of last year in Boston, Massachusetts. I and my colleagues were attending a conference there. One evening we gathered together in a hotel room with our division dean to discuss the new BYU-Idaho and the future of foreign languages here. During the informal discussion I was seated in a place that afforded an excellent view out the window and of the city lights beyond. The magic and metaphors of the Boston setting were not lost on me.

We met and chatted in the shadows of some of the world's greatest universities. The most famous of them all, whose sidewalks I had walked the night before, was once a small, church-sponsored institution, serving people in what was a cold, isolated, and sparsely populated place. In 1636, the founders did not know what would become of their creation 365 years later. In 1638, a very promising and learned minister by the name of John Harvard lay dying at the young age of thirty-one. Just before his death he willed his entire personal library of some three hundred books to the fledgling college that would later bear his name, in the hopes of giving the school a good start. As John Harvard did, we must do our best to give this new university a good start. Perhaps we will take some time out, as well, to enjoy the vision of what it may become. ∞