

TEACHING:
A RISKY BUSINESS

Kendall Grant—Department of English

After 20 years of learning and teaching, I have concluded that creating a charitable environment where trust reigns is the most important thing I can choose to do as a teacher and learner. Without this environment, what I do is less effective, if effective at all. The second important choice I can make is to provide foundation and opportunity for students to take action; this includes an exploration of a subject's fundamental principles, as well as exposure to possible actions and consequences. Often, it requires that I get out of a student's way, so that he or she can take honest action. The third role I can choose to fill is that of a communicator. After students have taken action, they must process the actions and consequences, whether good or bad. Someone with whom to communicate is vital, especially if that facilitator has experienced understanding. If we choose not to fill that role, or negative academic traditions keep us from filling that role, the students will find someone else. Sometimes their communication experience will work well; often it will not be effective because the person they find may not have the experience to help them wrestle with the application of key fundamentals. When the communication is effective, the facilitator often becomes a mentor or role model for the student, the fourth role that I can choose to accept. In this process, I have found that by the end of the experience, I too have become the student, with opportunity for much learning.

Over the past 20 years, I have quietly gone about my teaching duties—quietly at first because I lacked confidence in what I was doing; quietly during the middle years because I did not trust that we had an environment of charity on campus where personal and experimental ideas could be openly discussed. When President Clark first arrived on campus, he participated in the Faculty Lecture Series and spoke of creating an environment of charity where we could honestly discuss with each other. I think he expected us to be farther along spiritually than we were at the time. That environment has been slow to develop in my mind, but I trust that it has been developing. Because of this trust, I am willing to risk sharing a couple of ideas and experiences that helped form my teaching conclusions above and that spark the current questions I am wrestling with as I continue to try to be a better teacher and learner.

Some on campus feel that my biggest risk has been taking my literature students swimming on the first day of class. Even though I tried to keep this quiet and rarely said a word to anyone, swimming with my students became public quite quickly. My students enjoyed it so much that they

**Some on campus
feel that my biggest
risk has been
taking my literature
students swimming
on the first day of
class.**

wanted to talk about it. From some faculty comments that came back to me, I realized that I had become a bit infamous for taking that risk. Let me give you a bit of background.

I usually sent an e-mail or a greeting card to class members a couple of weeks before the first day. I included a poem about swimming and joked that we would be going swimming on the first day of class. Almost all of the students thought I meant it metaphorically. When they arrived for class, I would break them into groups with directions on a sheet to set a date when they could all meet and go participate in an activity together. After they exchanged contact information, the sheet directed them to the Hart Building telling them to change into swimwear and meet on the benches by the pool.

Last semester was my last swimming experience as English 250, Introduction to Literature, gave way to Foundations Humanities and I began teaching Children's Literature. Frankly, I will not miss swimming. I've never liked exposing my extra 40 pounds to others. I will miss the spiritual exercise of prayerfully checking in each semester to see if swimming was appropriate for the first day. Most semesters I swam, but twice I chose not to as directed by the Spirit. When I started the activity, I spent hours pondering what choices would create a powerful environment for my literature class. After researching, thinking, pondering, and praying, I came up with five or six ideas. I didn't like any of them. As I was pouring through the course content to get ideas, I came upon the poem "On Reading Poems to a Senior Class at South High." As I read the poem and enjoyed the swimming metaphor it presented, it clicked in my mind. I could take them swimming. I wrestled with Heavenly Father in prayer; I knew it posed many risks, especially of being misunderstood. After coming to terms spiritually, I spent much time organizing what would go on at and in the pool. We always sang "Teach Me to Walk in the Light" as the opening hymn and had a prayer. I would tell a couple of stories that would set the class up. We would take a class picture. Then we would break into groups and play some pool games. Between games, I would introduce laminated copies of the syllabus and we would read them in the pool. We also read laminated copies of the poem. We would then have a brief discussion of baptismal covenants. To finish swimming, we would have a class water polo game. Just this last semester, for the first time, we finished by singing "I Know When I am Baptized." It tied the class period together nicely.

I always assessed each student's experience through anonymous question sheets or through email. I found that anonymity did not change the responses. Rarely did I find someone who did not have a good experience. Once in a while, someone would complain about makeup and hair. In the assessments I found that all of my objectives were achieved:

When I started the activity, I spent hours pondering what choices would create a powerful environment for my literature class.

1. class unity began to develop,
2. preconceived notions about literature experiences were dropped,
3. enthusiasm developed, and
4. students dropped the façade that so many of them bring on the first day of classes; genuine human beings surfaced.

My best experience ever occurred when some newly employed students were working in the women’s locker room. I always provided picture rosters of the students so that employees could check out swimwear to them. In this case, the workers were forcing the students to also have an I-Card, something not required by the administrators who helped me set up the activity. One local girl did not have her identification and came into the pool area wearing street clothes. I am always very careful not to force anything, so I remained silent; I did not yet know about the I-card requirement. As we had an exhilarating experience in the pool, I noticed her getting agitated. Finally, she told the class she really wanted to be in the pool but the workers would not let her check out a suit. As she explained this to the class, you could see it click—she just jumped in with us and swam in her clothes. That was a powerful testimony of class sacrifice and unity that carried throughout the semester. I could not have staged it better!

I always checked with the participants at the end of the semester also, and it was unanimous every time but once—take them swimming the first day. I admit that this seems to be one of the riskier decisions I have made, but I always had confidence with it because of the spiritual preparation I put into it.

Being an average, middle-aged male finally got me somewhere in life when they discontinued English 250. They needed just such a person to teach children’s literature. I accepted the request and began feverishly to prepare. I did not find what I expected. I found a vast cannon of literature that offered tremendous depth with variety. Frankly, children’s literature has offered the toughest preparation task I have ever faced, and I have taught English, humanities, communications, personal achievement, and religion. Interestingly enough, the books that pique my interest the most in children’s literature always approach risk as an important theme.

A new favorite, *Click Clack Moo: Cows that Type*, presents some bright cows who own a typewriter. They type all day. Then they realize that they can send notes to Farmer Brown. They start making demands with threats of cutting milk production. The cows want electric blankets. They enlist the hens in their cause and soon Farmer Brown is faced with no milk or eggs. Negotiations end with Farmer Brown giving in to all demands so that he can take the typewriter away. I haven’t done the book justice

**The books
that pique my
interest the most
in children’s
literature always
approach risk as an
important theme.**

in my summary. It tickles funny bones of young and old. I guess some could see it as a pro-union piece, but I see it as a piece about risk, a piece that might help my students understand perspective.

The last 20 years have offered many opportunities for risk outside of teaching, risks that have taught me much about teaching. I've learned that fishing deep often produces more fish, oh, and snags too. John Galbraith dragged me down into the narrows of the Teton River in the early nineties. We drift the narrows in float tubes. It is risky business, but quite safe when one assesses the risks carefully. The first time he took me, I noticed that he was breaking off his line about every third time. Often, it was either catch a fish or snag and break the line. We talked about it. If he doesn't get a strike near the top, he fishes deeper. He keeps going deeper until the fish are striking. Active, hungry fish will feed on top; reticent fish rest on the bottom, so no matter the fish's mood, we had a chance if we fished deeper. Since adopting John as my mentor, we have taken many people down the narrows of the Teton River. It has been interesting to watch the reactions. One guest, a former administrator at Ricks College, did not understand the principle behind floating backwards in shallow or tumultuous water. Pretty soon, his float tube came bouncing through the water; he had been dumped because he didn't respect the risk. Another guest despised bait fishing—he would only fly fish. I briefly guided fly fishing trips on the Gallatin River one summer years ago, and I tied flies professionally also, so I had enough background to explain to the guest that he could use the same principles we were using for his fly fishing—but he wouldn't listen. Together, John and I caught more than 80 fish that day; our guest caught none. His pride would not allow him access to important truths that lead to success. Another guest came down with us and paid no attention to what we were doing for the first couple of hours. He caught a couple of fish, but we had caught dozens. Finally, he could take it no more and asked how we did it. He came with reticence to the fundamental principles that we used, but then he became much more successful.

During my tenure at BYU-Idaho, I have been like all three guests in my learning about teaching and learning. In fact, right now, I am still wondering about Foundations, if it really has enough of a literature component to it. I have the choice to speak poorly of what I see, or I can support the program and find ways to help it be successful. If I choose the former, the next 20 years of teaching may be full of spite and dead ends. If I choose the latter, I will be happier and more successful in all that I choose to do on campus. I learned this as I watched Lori Woodland react to President Hinckley's announcement that we would do away with competitive athletics. That had always been her career; she loved it. It caused some heartache for her, but she quickly fell in line and because

The last 20 years have offered many opportunities for risk outside of teaching, risks that have taught me much about teaching.

of her choice, she had a dynamic last few years of an excellent career. I find it interesting that she risked much more in the new directions she accepted, than if she had stayed in athletics; her new understandings led to much fulfillment.

As I take risks on and off campus, I make mistakes. During the early years with computers on campus, I trained in Macromedia's Authorware software. I loved the program, taking a class at Utah State and training in San Francisco with the company. Software cost thousands of dollars in those days; I convinced an administrator that we could really use this software at Ricks College. Technology directions changed on campus and the money was wasted. I took a terrible risk that used tithing dollars poorly. It is taking a lot of years of donating to Together For Greatness to make up for that risk. The mistake made me more cautious when attempting risks that could cost money.

Lately, I have been trying my hand at ceramics. This is a great risk for someone who has little artistic talent. To make a long experience short, you have to learn to throw a cylinder on the wheel before you can start shaping "cool" stuff—in my case it has been vases. Before I even got a beginner's cylinder, I attempted to center and pull the clay up 18 times. I failed 18 times in a row. I'm not going to belabor this point too much, but in athletics, fishing, hunting, art, and education, I have learned that failure can lead to success. My vases aren't much to celebrate, but they are getting better, and I am patient because I know I am going to continue failing before I get to my goal. Rich Briggs, my Beginning Ceramics teacher, has great patience with failure. As I watched how he let and encouraged us to fail, I realized that I have room in my teaching for this understanding, and I thank God that he is patient with our failures. Or better phrased, isn't the Plan of Salvation powerful in its inclusion of failures and the opportunity we gain for understanding as we fail and ask questions toward new actions.

Not long after my expensive software mistake, I sat in a question and answer period with President Bednar. The question was about taking risks. The following is my recollection of his answer: "I encourage you to take risks, and you will make mistakes, but never make the same mistake twice, and you will be fine." It was after this response that I started thinking about my first day of classes. Personally, I have never enjoyed a first day of classes where introductions and syllabus reading are the order of the day—that doesn't hold the passion I have for reading and writing. That doesn't convey my passion to the students. Recently I have had new thoughts about passion and risk because of an experience with my son. A little while ago, he taught me something powerful about risk taking.

I have learned that failure can lead to success.

We were at Disneyland; my wife had carefully read “The Unofficial Guide to Disneyland,” and together, we had concluded that our 12-year-old boy, Tanner, would enjoy the “Jedi Training Camp.” He loves fantasy and science fiction. We showed up at Terrace Plaza more than 30 minutes early and took a seat in the front row. We did some quick research and learned that he needed to enthusiastically stand up to volunteer if he wanted to be one of the 25 participants, out of 50 or more who wanted to be chosen. He was a bit older than most, so he was hesitant to stand up. With some serious prodding, he stood up and was chosen. He was self-conscious during the training but did a nice job when he fought Darth Mal. We all cheered and laughed. The risk hadn’t paid off like we expected; the passion just wasn’t there.

My nine-year-old boy, Kendall, has Down Syndrome. As we prepared to leave the plaza area, Kendall said, “My turn.” Surprised, my wife and I said okay. We would have to wait for an hour for the next, and last, opportunity for training. Kendall had shied away from what the guidebook deemed “Disney characters as big as forklifts.” He had despised almost every ride because of the noise and darkness associated with the stories. We wondered if he would really go through with the training. He would have to leave us and walk 30 yards away, with a bunch of strangers. He would spend 10 minutes training for a five-move laser fight with Darth Vader. This was no small Darth Vader. He made the forklift look small—it was a very large person decked out in an amazing outfit and his voice projected over the loud speaker in a menacing way. Long wait short, we practiced for the next session.

We understood the gig now. Kenny knew to stand up when they asked for volunteers, but this time, the crowd was much larger, with many more children vying for the honor. Surprisingly, Kenny stood up and raised his hand, but the other children were screaming so loudly that he started plugging his ears. This was a bad sign. We coaxed him to not plug his ears; the reward must have been terribly important to him because he raised both hands and waited. The “Jedi Trainer” who chose the participants skipped over Kendall four times. He didn’t even look at him. In a rash reaction, I thought, “They are going to pretend not to see him—they are going to discriminate.” That is the first time I have ever had that thought with my son. I braced for his reaction and what we would choose to do as parents. The “Jedi Trainer” had chosen 29 kids this time. He was looking for one more. “The boy in the red and white striped, button-up shirt; you look like a good candidate.” Kenny was in; we breathed a sigh of relief. He walked out to the stage with a strut that would put any rooster to shame. With that confidence, I figured we might make it through this all the way.

He walked out to the stage with a strut that would put any rooster to shame.

The kind assistants wisely helped Kenny into his cloak and gave him his light saber. He couldn't figure out how to open it, so one of them helped; after that, he followed relatively closely the commands. He finished the training without incident. They, thankfully, put him in the line to fight Darth Vader. Those who fought Darth Mal did it in front of the stage. He was in the right line to go up on stage. We wondered if he could wait the 15 minutes it would take for him to get to the front of the line. Patiently he waited. We held our breath knowing how many times he had refused to participate in a school program, and always at the last moment. The assistant pointed that it was his turn. He didn't hesitate and marched up to the towering figure that stood above seven feet tall. He performed the five-part sequence adding several extra moves. He finally struck the blow to the head and the crowd cheered, as they traditionally do, now, for those with Down Syndrome. How nice to live in an accepting culture. Not too many years ago, this wouldn't have taken place.

He retracted his weapon as instructed and then put his hands to his side and faced the crowd with a serious but slight bow and then marched back to his place. He finished the graduation ceremony without a hitch and returned to his family as the happiest kid in Disneyland. I would have paid double what the trip cost just for those 20 minutes.

I've spent much time pondering why Kenny would take such a huge risk when he hadn't been willing to take smaller risks in a dozen other circumstances. I don't know if there is something spiritually built into him and he felt that he was truly overcoming evil. I do know that his brother's risk that had not paid off created an environment where Kenny became willing, where he trusted enough to take action. Just the other day, I asked him if he fought Darth Vader. "Yes," he quickly replied in his hard-to-understand English. And then he continued in perfectly enunciated language: "And I would do it again too." As I have thought about Kenny since our trip, I have also thought about my teaching and the risks I have taken over the years.

My first day choices are not a panacea for what ails classrooms. I always have several students who do not feel the trust like I want on that first day. Usually, through a series of activities it develops. Sometimes it never develops. In my last Introduction to Literature class, I had a young woman who hated every minute of the class. Whenever we did an anonymous assessment, I could pick hers out. On my class evaluations, it is easy to pick out her response. Before I evolved to my current philosophy, I would not have been able to pick her out as someone who loathed the class, but one of the key successes of the philosophy is that I can quickly identify someone who is not thriving in the class. She and I tried multiple times to get on the same page. We could not.

**As I have thought
about Kenny since
our trip, I have also
thought about my
teaching and the
risks I have taken
over the years.**

When I saw her name next, for the 30-minute required accountability meeting where I meet with each student one-on-one so that each can account for his or her learning and we can determine a final grade, I shuddered. The 30 minutes went on forever. At the end, she asked if she had to go swimming on the last day of class. This particular section had chosen to go swimming as a part of their final. I let them determine what we do on the last day of class. I understood her not wanting to go—good grief, I didn't want to go. I told her that I had just entered her final grade into the system. She could make a choice without consequence. I knew she wouldn't show. She didn't.

As a part of our swimming activity, the students wanted to prove to me that everyone not only knew everyone else's name but that they knew much about each individual because they had all become friends as they gained understanding of literature. As their class-designed activity proceeded, they realized that this particular student was missing—I thought that quite an accomplishment as we had more than 40 people in the class. Several of them became quite indignant about her absence. They felt cheated that we were not finishing with everyone's influence. Again, I felt quite satisfied as this was only the second time in 20 years where I felt that we had truly approached Zion. The whole truly cared about an individual who did not care about the whole; that impressed me. Those present quickly became of one heart and mind. One of the students present had another final with this girl the next day. She gave us the time and place. The class put together a gift package for the girl and made signs wishing her good luck on her last final. They arrived well before the final started and held an impromptu rally for the student. I was concerned that she might not react well to the attention; it was a risk that I probably would never take; it seemed silly to me (this is why it is important that we remove ourselves so that the students can take honest action). I was nervous. I was wrong. For the first time during the semester, she was touched, touched that the class had missed her and touched that they were willing to sacrifice to make sure that she knew that they loved her.

This is the general outcome I achieve with my current philosophy, perspectives, and model of teaching. It isn't always positive at first, but the failures usually produce the successes at the end, and I can usually trust that by the end of the semester much good will come. Risk seems to be such an important part of it all. Students can only take wise risk in an environment of trust where charity reigns. Their risk is much better placed when a foundation of principles has been carefully set. Communication is vital not only after they act, but before and sometimes during. I cherish the opportunity to become a facilitator, mentor, or role

**The whole truly
cared about an
individual who did
not care about the
whole.**

**I learn much
more from these
students who
embrace risk.**

model, but what usually happens is that I learn much more from these students who embrace risk; I become their student.

Last week, I assigned what I assign every semester to my writing students: write lyrics to a song and be prepared to sing your original lyrics to the class the next time we meet. I'm not proselyting this assignment, but I do want to share the results in hope that they provoke in all of us a desire to understand the power of offering students an opportunity to take advantage of risk. I have three classes of FD-ENG 101 this semester. The 7:45 a.m. class did an okay job with the assignment. The time passed quickly and a couple of students had some real talent—to our enjoyment. The rest of us risked little (me included) as we simply wrote something silly to get quickly through the assignment and perceived embarrassment. It was a little worse in the 10:15 class—they have been such a powerful class that I expected more, but the risk of this assignment often brings unexpected results.

My 12:45 class has driven me nuts this semester. They have reacted with boredom to almost every challenge I have thrown their way. They have not understood the power that can come in working together. They prefer to take no risk and to do little preparation, to just do everything by relying on the egocentric self—not seeing the power of the learning model at all. They had all attended President Clark's "Learning Model Forum," but with little response (the other two classes had loved the forum). I had low expectations.

Three of the students had collaborated, linking their songs together in subject and commentary. The trilogy was a fun spoof on the assignments I had given thus far in the semester. Two provided rap backup while the other sang; then they switched roles as they went through all three songs. I'm not much into rap, but these students were willing to risk safe social roles in order to entertain the class and enjoy the assignment. Again, because I was willing to share the power and let them choose, they chose something that I disliked, but it worked wonderfully well. Their energy passed to the rest of the class. All of a sudden, my perspective had changed. This class now seems to have the most potential of all my classes. That is exactly why I risk by giving this assignment. Let me give some details about two students from last semester.

They responded negatively. Both students told me they would not sing in front of the class. I told them that it was their choice (with every risk I offer, I also give opportunity to avoid the risk without losing face). They then both emailed, telling me that they were choosing not to sing or come to class that day.

hey brother grant,

i'm not sure how to say this but i'm not really getting your angle. i understand how writing a song can help us turn our feelings to account but i will say i know i am not comfortable singing in front of our class. i also know that we have a lot of shy kids who i'm sure feel the same. but again i would sing it if i knew why we are doing it! sorry i'm just trying to understand a little better. thanks for your time.

My response:

I'm certainly not going to force you to sing—there are usually so many nice things that happen during the class when we sing, that I would hate for you to miss out. Remember, college girls don't move pipe either—and you learned much from that [this is an allusion to something she had written in a prior assignment].

One of the main things that happens is that two or three people, who are not feeling accepted in the class, do such a great job that they feel like they belong (so it is much more about them than about the rest of you who already feel comfortable in the class). These same people realize that those of you who are so confident in other ways, are not as sure of yourself in this setting. So it rescues some of the kids who feel like they want to quit because they don't possess your confidence.

It also brings a powerful spirit to the class when some of the students apply the first rites in powerful ways. For the rest of us, we might sing a silly song, or a short one, just to get it over with. Some of the others will bring a powerful preparation and spirit into the class.

You watch, someone who really struggles will bring the class closer together. Everyone will lean forward in their seats knowing that the person is hating every minute of it. The class will comfort them and really reach out to them and then cheer for them. It can be a pretty special time, especially as the student responds by becoming an important part of the class through future effort and leadership.

It also helps me see into people's minds and hearts to know if they are ready for the next assignments.

Finally, it lets people release some of the tension of the semester—which is starting to build as midterms start pressing in.

Does any of that help?

Brother Grant

**You watch,
someone who really
struggles will bring
the class closer
together.**

Her response:

i understand exactly what you mean! i am so sorry i was being so selfish! i realize that maybe this isn't just for me! thank you so much for writing back. that helps it make more sense! i think that i can kinda see what you are getting at!

**I count this honest
interchange as a
huge positive with
this young lady.**

I count this honest interchange as a huge positive with this young lady. She needed to understand that reaching out to others could be a powerful opportunity for increased understanding. She came to class and sang a fun song that went over quite well.

The email from the next student did not resolve as quickly:

Brother Grant,

I hope you do not find the following email rude or disrespectful of me. I just want to explain my feelings about the song project and why I will not be in class on Wed.

First off, I DO NOT sing in public, and asking me to do so would be more than just asking me to just step out of my comfort zone. When speaking about spiritual gifts we're taught that to some is given one and to some another. Heavenly Father has blessed me with many gifts and talents, some of them even musical, but singing is not one of them.

Secondly, once again unclear expectations. Is this not a required English class? I am more than happy to learn and grow in terms of writing and hopefully learn some life lessons along the way but I do not feel that it's appropriate to ask me to sing in an English class. I respect that you want us to write a song because it is a writing class, but I don't understand how me singing that song in a public setting is going to help me as a writer. Maybe I should ask you why you want us to do this? Which I am hoping you will explain in response to this email.

Thirdly, comfort zones. I understand and agree with pushing people outside of their comfort zones to help them grow and change who they are. However I have a theory on this. Everyone's comfort zone is a different size. For some people singing is so far outside of it they can't even see it, for others it's just on the outskirts and a little uncomfortable, and for others it's in their comfort zone. You have set a mark and you want everyone to get there, despite the distance they must travel, and in two days nonetheless. In the end, if we all get to the same mark and can do the same things then we are losing a sense of our individuality. Writing is outside of my comfort zone, writing a song is outside of my comfort zone, and sharing personal experiences at all is a display of trust that is outside of my comfort zone, so you see Brother Grant, you have pushed me already.

Fourth, the first rights state that we need to pick something that means something to us and turn our feelings to account. Writing a song that we can

actually say we are passionate about the topic and that means something to us is very personal. I chose to write about some family experiences and how the Savior's atonement healed my heart. Those are memories and feelings that are so personal that I can't imagine standing up in front of everyone and singing about them. Putting my emotions into words is hard enough and I would not do them justice if I tried to put them to music.

I hope that I am conveying my feelings and beliefs without being too confrontational about yours. I believe in doing things because they are socially acceptable, but I also believe in doing things your own way and standing up for what you think and only "conforming" if it's what you WANT to do. Once again, I hope this does not offend you, based off what little I know about you I don't think it will, however I would love a response and would be more than willing to meet with you. Thanks again for letting me express my opinion and for being the kind of professor who listens. Attached are the lyrics for my song.

After much thought and wrestling with the Spirit, I chose not to respond to her email. We had already enjoyed several other confrontations about grades. I knew where the interaction would end, so I simply mentioned to her, after class a few days later, that I would love to talk to her someday about what happened in class the day she missed. A couple of weeks later, during another class activity, I spoke to her quite frankly. I asked her if she had communicated with anybody about what had happened during the assignment. She had not. I gave her the reasons for the assignment. She listened but was not too impressed. During our communication, I explained to her that it was not about her, but it was about several students who had been marginalized during the first part of the semester. This didn't strike a chord, but we did start to develop a relationship.

Back to what happened to this class. Two of those who had done wonderfully well became class leaders. They had been on the verge of failing, but because they risked, the class saw them differently and accepted them into leadership roles. The young lady who had chosen not to come that day had been our most vocal leader. After the assignment, she fell into a following role—a role which I felt much better about because she, in my perception, had become a negative leader. Because of our communications about the assignment, and because she did not feel the pressure of leading the class, we became quite good friends by the end. We disagreed often, but we communicated well and left the class appreciative of the other. She risked in disagreeing with the assignment which led to communication that helped us change toward each other. I count it a pleasant success even though it appears that we failed.

Anyway, back to the 12:45 p.m. FD-ENG 101 class I had loathed. Before the singing assignment, I dreaded going to this class; now, I can't wait for the afternoon to come. We'll have other setbacks, but as we risk

She risked in disagreeing with the assignment which led to communication that helped us change toward each other.

together, we will build a communication that will lead us to, at the worst, a great respect for each other, and at the best, a small taste of Zion.

I'm not asking anyone to agree with my teaching decisions. I do request that you take the time to assess risk in teaching and learning. If I don't take risks as a teacher, I don't feel good about my teaching. If I don't provide a safe environment where my students can take risks, I don't feel good about my teaching. I have a long way to go in my role as an educator. I do realize that after taking risks, it is important to discuss accountability, to reflect on what has taken place and on the implications to future risk taking. I do know that it raises questions for students and me—those questions provide some of the most satisfying moments of understanding—especially when the Spirit is invited. Here are the questions I am asking after having written this paper. Is risk necessary to deeper understanding and learning? Is the classroom the best place for students to take risks? When does risk become a detriment? How does risk fit in with choice, consequence, and accountability? Does my teaching perspective demand risk? Would other perspectives use less risk?

I don't know if you have drawn or will draw the same conclusions that I have detailed about teaching and learning. In my 20 years of teaching, I have also learned that we approach education, teaching, and learning from a variety of perspectives. I happen to lean toward the nurturer/developer perspectives as described in Daniel Pratt's 1998 *Five Perspectives on Teaching in Adult and Higher Education*. These perspectives tend toward holistically helping students through life while focusing on the content of a subject. In addition, I often choose a heuristic teaching model, an organic approach that demands much flexibility as it grows toward a variety of potential outcomes. As I combine my perspectives and model with my personality, my experiences in life, and my spiritual understanding, I come up with a unique approach to teaching that probably should never be replicated, although it works well for me and many of my students. Other teachers choose different perspectives and models with wonderful results. But an exploration of some of the risks that I have taken, risks that have influenced my teaching philosophy outlined above, hopefully give some insight into the fundamentals of teaching. My objective has been to give impetus for you to risk action. If you do take action, I would love to talk to you about what you learn. If we begin conversations, I believe that what I have outlined in the first paragraph will occur. The reason I would value that interaction is because I will be just as much a learner as a teacher, one of the great benefits I have enjoyed as I have implemented my understanding of the last 20 years. ☺

**My objective
has been to give
impetus for you to
risk action.**