

I chose an artifact to illustrate my reflection on the process for developing excellent teachers. In this artifact, I commented on James Marcia's four identity statuses of adolescents: Foreclosure, which is based on an authority figure; Diffusion, first contact with an identity crisis; Moratorium, a desire not to proceed to commitment; and Identity Achievement, where decisions reflect the adolescent's true nature and deep inner commitment¹. My concern then, and is now, is that adolescence is a convenient way to identify people of a certain age, but like most artificial labels, downplays the complexity of their lives and experiences.

Pigeonholing, whether it is kindergarten students or rocket scientists, is destined to fail, because people have a wonderful way of proving the 'experts' wrong. Freud tried the one-size-fits-all with the concepts of ego, superego, and the id. Jung's dimensions, popularized by Katherine Briggs and Isabel Briggs-Myers, are entertaining, but not particularly informative. That is because most people are *exceptional*.

The way to appreciate the uniqueness of people is to be out among them. One High School teacher loaned me a book on psychological tricks to manipulate students. Some of the methods were effective for a while, but if the lessons had been challenging, individualized, and thought provoking, the tricks would have been unnecessary.

One of my favorite Professors at National had a better approach. It was to walk around, come in close proximity with all of her students, and try to get to know them. Instead of hiding behind artificial barriers, knowing and respecting your students will lead to professional success. When I was running research programs at Johnson &

¹Marcia, James. "Identity and Self-Development." In Richard Lerner, Anne Peterson, and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn eds., *Encyclopedia of Adolescence* (Vol. 1). New York: Garland, 1991.

Johnson or Apovia, my management style was always “Management by Walking Around”. Managing without reaching people is doomed to fail.

Perhaps the most valuable lessons I have received at National U. were about “Differentiated Instruction” and “Overlapping Curricula”. It is more than a teaching method, it is a philosophy. Students are individuals and deserve to be treated in that way. Students with limited English skills should not be destined for ‘outsider’ status. Their needs should be understood and their learning groups should reflect a mutual agreement as to what is in all the students’ best interest.

Why do I feel like I can create a community of learners in a sea of diversity? It has to do with my age and experience. For me, this past year of Substitute Teaching at all grade levels and in schools with socioeconomic challenges has been rewarding. As an older teacher (with children older than them) I do have some advantages. First, the students quickly learn that I am there because I genuinely like young people. Then, by my command of their lesson, that I can actually help them, if they want the help. Third, by spending time and encouraging the most challenging students, they know that I am comfortable around all of them.

Those ‘real life’ experiences, my years of informal and formal teaching, supported by the education I received at National University leave me well prepared for a career in education.