CRAZY CAMPBELL

Patty Stoddard

[Assignment: Considering the essays we have read and the issues we have discussed, respond to these readings and issues by writing a short essay that makes a point about education. Construct your paper as a description.]

"Would that I had known you sooner to see the fine young woman that you are, bloom and grow." (An inscription in my yearbook, from my high school physics teacher).

(1) Throughout their high school careers, students will encounter many different types of teachers. Some they will see as mean, others as uncaring. They might later remember a few teachers as having made a positive difference in their lives. Once in awhile, a teacher may even be remembered with a great deal of affection and admiration. That is how I remember my high school physics teacher, Mr. Campbell.

(2) It is frightening to think that I almost missed out on the most valuable class I had in high school because I received poor advice. When I was signing up for classes in the spring of my junior year, my friends advised me not to take physics; Mr. Campbell was the only teacher teaching the class, and they said he was old and grouchy.

(3) I had often heard them complain about difficult tests and tedious homework assignments from him; therefore, I decided not to take the class. However, my guidance counselor talked me into signing up for it. I was terribly apprehensive about what I had gotten myself into, and I promised myself that I would drop the class if I did not like it.

(4) But on the first day of school I was both relieved and surprised: the man my friends said should be feared was actually a man whom I found I could admire. Certainly Mr. Campbell did not look like an interesting man; he dressed in all grays and browns, and he brushed his messy hair forward and to the side, like most balding men who try to hide the fact that they are aging. Because drab clothes and balding heads are usually signals of a boring teacher, Mr. Campbell screamed "monotone" from the moment he entered the classroom. However, once I got to know him, his looks were an asset to his character--his ordinary, conventional appearance provided a perfect frame for his extraordinary teaching.

(5) What made Mr. Campbell special was his ability to be different. He was never satisfied with running an ordinary class. Instead, he made sure his student always had fun--often by inventing and using his own vocabulary. "A little bit" was a "scoshe", a "calculator" was a "crunching machine," and "divided by" was "goes-in-ta." Through the course of the year, these words and others became known as "the old man's lingo." My classmates and I thought having a special vocabulary was wonderful, and we started using his "lingo" outside of the classroom. Mr. Campbell also made class fun with his crazy methods of teaching. His students rarely had to listen to a long, tedious lecture. Whether we were measuring the velocity of Mr. Campbell, riding a skateboard down the hall, or launching
plastic rockets in the parking lot, we always had fun learning physics. And just watching a bald old man ride a skateboard screaming out measurements was enough to make me fall in love with Mr. Campbell.

(6) Besides being fun and silly, Mr. Campbell possessed a quality that most teachers do not - the ability to trust all students and treat them as equals. He did this by giving each student a chance to participate in class discussions. He made us feel special and included by calling us his "pets." He started out the year trusting his students and chose to believe that all of them were honest and important. Out of respect for him we did not abuse that trust. As a result, very few students skipped class, and if they did, they did not use a phony excuse because they felt that it would be a betrayal of his trust.

(7) I will always consider the time I spent with Mr. Campbell the most valuable I have spent in a high school classroom. It takes a special person to believe in strangers and assume the best of people. Mr. Campbell will never know what a tremendous impact he had on me. His memory lives on within me and within all those other students he touched.