

Dare to Wonder: The legacy of Tom Sergiovanni (Oct 1, 2010)

By Carl Glickman

When I discovered COPIS was recognizing Tom Sergiovanni this fall, I thought what a pleasure it would be to take an interlude from my new phase of life and have a chance to talk about Tom. And, it is an extra bonus to be back here in central Texas with my many friends from Texas State University and, of course, all my colleagues past and present of COPIS. When the COPIS program committee reviewed my proposed session, they asked if I might combine a talk about my last book in education with a tribute to Tom. Combining the two was easy for me to do conceptually, whether it translates as well to an audience is up to you to decide.

As some of you know, last year I left the academic world of education to become a full time student of creative writing. I've been sitting in classes with people from the ages of seventeen to eighty five and have done no professional travel, teaching, writing, or presenting on education until this morning. Later tonight, for those around after dinner, there will be an open and informal reading of my current short

story writing followed by a brief discussion. For those brave enough to stay, I promise the session won't last long.

Prior to my departure from professional work, there was one book I wanted to complete. The book entitled *Those who dared; Five Visionaries who changed American education* has been out now for over a year, My role as editor was to push, nudge, and cajole five elder giants of progressive education to write from their heart the personal stories behind their accomplishments.

When the book was published, I shamelessly promoted it through book talks and signings and radio interviews across the country. And all royalties were, and continue to be, donated to non profit organizations supporting programs for youth. There are copies available on the side table at the author discounted price. If you wish to purchase one, please use the honor system of rural America by putting your money, or check, in the basket, take an already signed receipt.

This book was important to me because the five people I selected are well known in education but very few people know about their motivations, their hurts, and their struggles. I wanted this side to be told

by them, in their own words because it reveals so much about what makes us all human: the doubts, insecurities and dilemmas of maintaining a balanced personal and professional life. To give you a flavor of the book, let me run through each person

(Show Power Point Slides with these explanation)

Debbie Meier was the founder of the current small school movement beginning with her own school in East Harlem in New York City in the early 1970's. Debbie began her career as a part time kindergarten teacher in downtown Chicago while in graduate school at the University of Chicago She became incensed by what one of her professors told her when he learned she was a public school teacher. He pulled her over and said, "You're too smart to be a teacher". If you know Debby, after that comment, she was to spend her career demonstrate the intellectual rigor of teaching young students well.

Henry Levin was prepared as an economist but quickly turned to education and founded the school network called the Accelerated Schools. He was a Professor at Stanford and now at Teachers' College in Columbia. He was greatly influenced, in his early career years, by spending time living with the Basque Workers Social Cooperative in

Spain and then he worked with Joan Baez as part of the Peace Center in San Francisco. Through these experiences, he saw how central education was to not only to the economy but to peaceful coexistence

James Comer has, and still is, a medical doctor and psychiatrist at Yale and founder of the Child Development Project which later became the launching pad for his network of urban schools commonly known as the Comer Schools. Jim wrote about one memory which has haunted him throughout his life. It was the memory of saying goodbye to his two closest friends, on the front stoop of his home, the night before he left for college. All three were African American males, urban raised, equally bright and talented. Jim went on to a medical degree and notable success; they went on to prison and drug and alcohol addiction. The reasons behind his friends' tragic lives became central to his ideas, and programs, about child, family, and community welfare as integral to each other.

John Goodlad was former Dean at UCLA and since then, head of the Institute for Educational Inquiry at the University of Washington. He described his beginnings as a young teacher in a reform school for delinquent boys and the punishments brought upon him and the boys when he took them on, an unheard of at the time, field trip. His next job

was as a teacher in a one room school house in rural Northern Vancouver, Canada where he saw, first hand, how mixed age students could help each other to learn in better ways than if they were separated into a graded single age classroom. These experiences shaped his life long interest in school renewal, teaming teaching, and non-gradedness. His first book was co authored with our own, late Bob Anderson, the classic book on non graded education which is still in print today.

Next, Ted Sizer was former Dean at Harvard and author of the classic book on secondary school reform, titled Horace's Compromise which I became the basis of the national network of High Schools called the Coalition of Essential Schools and later the half billion dollar national effort initiative to impact entire urban and rural school systems, The Annenberg Challenge. Sizer wrote about his early life as the son of a Yale Art Historian. As a teenager, Ted found out, by accident, that his beloved Nanny, who had helped to raise him, had been married to a Nazi officer before she had come to America. This conflict raised questions in Ted about the strange and mixed encounters of human life.

He later served as a U.S. sergeant in the ninth infantry assigned to teaching recruits basic war survival skills. He was struck by how close

people of vastly different socio economic classes, races, and religions can become with one another when learning together for a common purpose. L

I chose these five educators because they held a set of common beliefs about what school wide teaching and learning should look like throughout a school and they acted upon those beliefs in the hundreds of schools they helped to create and maintain.

Let me dwell on Ted Sizer for a moment as I make a transition here. Ted was a friend and what he discussed with me in the last year of his life remains vivid .And it relates to paying tribute to Tom Sergiovanni as well as to our recently passed colleague Bob Anderson.

First, Ted spoke with great appreciation of Bob Anderson. Bob was a senior faculty member at Harvard when Sizer, at the age of thirty three and only an Assistant Professor at Harvard at the time, was appointed Dean of the school of education. Many senior faculty resented Ted's appointment at such a young age and they gave him a hard time. But

Bob Anderson, a highly respected senior faculty member, reached out to Ted and counseled and supported him during those difficult first years. Ted was eternally grateful for the kindness and guidance shown by Bob.

Now to the connection of Ted with Tom. I was sitting with Ted and his wife Nancy in their home a month before Ted left this earth. We were catching up with each other when I brought to his attention a surprise encounter I had with Tom and Ann in an elevator at AERA. When I mentioned Tom Sergiovanni's name, Ted's grin widened. Ted told me, how important Tom's work was to efforts to create new forms of high schools based on engagement, personalization, and internally driven standards and assessments. Ted told me Tom's approach to leadership was essential to creating good schools. In Ted's words, Tom gets it! And what did he mean by "it"?

Let me show you a clip of Ted being interviewed by John Mellow in a documentary made about excellent schools.

(Show DVD Clip here)

This sense of "I don't know" is the "it" to learning. Aristotle defined a philosopher as one who wonders. And to wonder, one must accept ignorance as the essential to learning. If one refuses to acknowledge

ignorance, one can't learn. Christopher Lash's book the Rise of Professionalism and the Demise of democracy states that most academics believe they are the sole possessors of higher knowledge and from their elevated status of doctoral degree and professional rank, they come to see their job as teaching what they know to the unenlightened, i.e. students and the public.

Tom ,as an academician and a scholar, throughout his career has done the opposite, what you find throughout his many books, presentations, and essays is a keen sense of wonder.

For example, if you told Tom that the red winged Bobo bird flies from the exact same departure point in the North Pole and ends at the exact same location at the tip of South America every year, even though the bird never flies the same route twice and no one knows why. Tom would react with sparkling, glee; an opportunity to speculate on the both how and why of journey. Out of wonder, would come insights derived with others as to how such life can be applied to the human condition. A set beginning and end point pushes us on, yet so many unexpected twists and turns,

Another example, rooted in our field of teaching and learning and supervision is about the original great ancient teacher in western

culture, Socrates. The Socratic Method as we use it today in classrooms isn't any thing like how Socrates actually taught.

“(the Socratic Method)...is usually described as a way of teaching that consists ...of asking questions...

(but in Plato's descriptions of Socrates working with his students, Socrates is hardly a discussion facilitator)... he does ask questions but he also harangues, jests, orates, speculates, cites the gods, questions the gods, chafes at the power of ... personal demons, ...mocks, contradicts himself, flatters, sneers, wanders from his subject or ignores the subject he claims to be discussing” Carse (p.69)

Socrates wouldn't do well on most of our teacher evaluation forms, so what is it that made him such a great teacher?

James Carse explains that it was not how Socrates asked questions or how he taught but rather “his engaged receptivity, an active listening...a method to raise insights in his students of which he himself was incapable”

(show picture of Tom with the educators at a conference)

Tom does the same. Ever since I came across him in my first graduate course in supervision in 1974, he has been a tremendous

influence on me. He helped me see that lack of agreed definition of supervision should be embraced rather than fought. He was an advocate of my own crossing into fields outside of supervision; such as philosophy, constitutional law, political science, social foundations, and literature to grasp my own discovered truths. Let me read to you what I wrote in the foreword to his book titled Rethinking Leadership, published in 2006, thirty two years after I had read my first Sergiovanni book.

While finishing Tom Sergiovanni's Rethinking Leadership...I found my eyes slowly canvassing the walls, the halls, and the reinforced structure of the building where I work. I thought of how great builders construct sustainable buildings that support people working together for generations to come.

Tom ...is a great education builder who constructs enduring mental space that challenges and welcomes educators to conceptualize and practice new possibilities.

His ideas are certainly not mainstream. I have witnessed firsthand the great unrest his ideas create among many school, district, state, and federal reformers. Tom's writing turn conventional management and

organizational thinking topsy-turvy. His words enable readers to imagine a new world of schools, he substitutes moral community for leadership, he dismantles system theory, and he shows how hierarchical control is the antithesis of what is needed in schools for today and tomorrow. Tom writes that schools do not need heroes, charismatic, and take – charge leaders. Rather schools to be consistent with their purpose, need to be led by those who prefer not to lead, but instead wish to stimulate, support, and bring thoughtful actions among the young and old membership of the school.....

If I were to edit another book, it would be about leadership and Tom’s story would be the lead one. I would push, cajole, and nudge to find out how did this small boy from New York City come to inspire and influence us all?

(Power point here of Tom)

In our small cottage in Northern Vermont, our five year old granddaughter Quinn, the youngest of our four grand children, wakes early every summer morning. I am awake, about an hour before. I have my cup of coffee and read the newspaper while waiting to hear her

bunkroom door creak open. Before I get to the sports page, a little, smiling, tousled hair urchin trails her blanket behind and heads for my lap. We usually have thirty minutes together, just the two of us, before the next family member awakens. Quinn snuggles in and we create stories and make up games to wile the quiet time away. One morning this summer, for no obvious reason, Quinn gets thinking about two words that make a bigger word and invites me into her word game. She begins with the name of the local soft ice cream which is called a creamee in Vermont. She says, “Cream and me,” she spreads her hands apart and looks to see if I get it. I laugh and then her hands come up to her side again and she says Butter and Fly, and on it goes.

Later that day while taking my walk along the lake, I think about her game and then invert it in my mind, what is the effect when a conventional word is broken into two. Often the two words take on a larger meaning than the one big word. i.e. understand, under-stand Steve Gordon, Jovita Ross Gordon and I took the word supervision apart in our fourth or fifth edition of our text book which had been called the one word supervision and we renamed the book the two smaller words Super Vision which meant something bigger than the larger one word. . And then I thought of other words, Beautiful is more

**expressive when it is broken into beauty full, full of beauty wonderful
into wonder full, full of wonder**

**Tom, you've enriched us all. Thank you, our friend, for spreading
the fullness of wonder wherever you have gone. You're awesome man;
awe and some magical more!!**