

# THE TEACHING EXCHANGE

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## *The Sheridan Center Advisory Board In Memoriam: Edward Beiser and Theodore R. Sizer*

In the autumn of 2009, the Sheridan Center and the University lost two major advocates for the crucial role of teaching at Brown and for the need to have a collegial locus for ongoing professional development in pedagogy on campus. At the time of her death in 1992, founder Dean Harriet W. Sheridan and Provost Frank Rothman determined that the fledgling Sheridan Center would serve the University most effectively with a faculty Advisory Board to advise, counsel and represent it. Dean Sheridan asked Prof. Edward Beiser and Prof. Theodore Sizer to serve in the first cohort of the Advisory Board, under the chairmanship of Prof. Martha Sharp Joukowsky.

Both Professors Beiser and Sizer accepted the challenge with alacrity and contributed mightily to the early development of the Center from a dream to a faculty resource well-rooted in the needs of individual faculty, their departments and their graduate students. The Advisory Board met monthly to hammer out a Mission Statement and advise the inexperienced part-time staff on its strategies to serve the educational mission of a University with an open curriculum. Prof. Beiser was infamous for never failing to ask the essential question at almost every meeting "why does this matter?" Prof. Sizer consistently reminded the Advisory Board and staff that ongoing student learning (whether graduate or undergraduate) was the ultimate test of effective pedagogy which met the criteria of the University charter for an education which prepared students for lives of usefulness and purpose. In addition, each was blessed with a sense of humor which sustained advisory Board colleagues and the Center staff through some challenging years.

Through the generosity of their departments, the Memorial Minutes for both Professors Beiser and Sizer, read at Faculty Meetings in October and December, are printed below.

**EDWARD BEISER, PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF POLITICAL SCIENCE**

Professor Edward Beiser was an emeritus professor of political science. Professor Beiser received his BA from the City University of New York in 1962 and his MA (64) and Ph. D. (67) from Princeton University. He served on the faculty of Williams College from 1965 to 1968.

Ed came to Brown in 1968. He taught courses on the politics of the legal system and quickly developed a reputation as an extraordinary lecturer. Professor Beiser's signature Socratic style – remembered by generations of Brown students—was to ask, politely, if someone was “present”, and then proceed to grill them on the legal case at hand. He was a challenging and much loved professor. Grateful students raised funds to name his long time office in Prospect House the Beiser Room. Professor Beiser founded a concentration in Law and Society which he ran in conjunction with the political science department.

Long before there was a Sheridan Center, Professor Beiser mentored young faculty on how to be an effective teacher. He'd invite us to one of his lectures, gently suggest that it would be polite for us to reciprocate and invite him to one of our classes; that would begin an energetic dialogue about teaching which, in many cases, continued right up to his retirement. Ed Beiser turned our department into a running seminar about the art of teaching.

Professor Beiser took a law degree at Harvard University in 1977 (he later admitted to going up to Boston to take the LSAT so as not to be surrounded by his own students). He became a highly regarded authority on the Rhode Island Supreme Court and was a court appointed special master during the high profile murder trial of Klaus Von Bulow. His eight part lecture series, *Ethics and Public Policy* became an early success from the teaching company.

Professor Beiser became increasingly interested in medical law and medical ethics. He left Political Science and became an associate dean at the medical school. Professor Beiser helped organize and run the eight year joint undergraduate/ medical school PLME program. He retired from Brown in 2003.

Prof. James Morone, *Political Science*

*This Memorial Minute was read by Prof. Morone at the Faculty Meeting on October 6, 2009.*

**Theodore R. Sizer Professor Emeritus of Education**

Ted Sizer, chair of Brown University's Education Department from 1983 to 1996 and a vital force in American school reform for over a quarter of a century, died on October 21, 2009, in Harvard, Massachusetts, after a long and valiant battle with colon cancer. He was 77.

Born in New Haven, CT, on June 23, 1932, Theodore Ryland Sizer received a bachelors degree in English from Yale in 1953, served as an Army artillery officer and a high school teacher, then earned a Master of Arts in Teaching degree and a doctorate in education and American history at Harvard. He joined the faculty of Harvard's Graduate School of Education and in 1964 became its

dean, then left in 1972 to assume leadership of Phillips Academy, Andover. His first book, *Secondary Schools at the Turn of the Century*, was published in 1964.

In 1981 Ted led a small group that began to study contemporary American high schools, a project that led him to write probably his most famous book, *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School* (1984). By then he was settling in at Brown, where he had arrived in 1983 to chair the Education Department. When he left Brown a dozen years later, he had written two more books about his prototypical teacher, Horace Smith: *Horace's School: Redesigning the American High School* (1992) and *Horace's Hope: What Works for the American High School* (1996) and started a movement to improve American schools, one school at a time.

Like another Horace—Horace Mann, Brown University Class of 1819—Ted had high hopes for American education, despite the alarms that had recently been sounded by the “Nation at Risk” report. He called upon teachers, students, administrators, parents, and citizens to seize the initiative to improve their schools and spelled out the principles that he believed should guide them, including memorable mantras such as “the student as worker,” “the teacher as coach,” and “less is more.” The institutional embodiment of Ted’s principles was The Coalition of Essential Schools, founded at Brown in 1984, which started with a dozen schools and today has several hundred affiliates around the country.

Ted made many contributions to Brown’s Education Department. He revitalized the Master of Arts (MAT) program by placing it in the hands of instructors he termed “clinical professors,” master teachers grounded in both theory and practice who mentored small groups of teacher candidates and provided the individual attention needed to ensure their professional growth. He was a dynamic, popular teacher, and his undergraduate course on “The American High School” was always packed to the rafters; when he and a co-teacher put on a debate between “Ted Sizer” and “E.D. Hirsch,” Ted took the role of Hirsch—and gave it his all. In 1993 he was instrumental in bringing the Annenberg Institute for School Reform to Brown, and he served as Founding Director.

Ted’s impact and influence at Brown and beyond came not only from the power of his ideas but also from the force of his personality. No more charismatic professor ever walked this campus. Energetic, articulate, outgoing, and witty, delighting in debate but always respecting his opponent, turning new acquaintances into old friends with apparently effortless grace, he could “walk with kings, nor lose the common touch.” Students flocked to him and then took up careers as educators; many have described the effect of talking to him and reading his books as the equivalent of a religious conversion experience.

Ted achieved all this by appealing to what Lincoln called “the better angels of our nature.” Who but Ted would think to call schools, as he did in a 1973 book title, *Places for Learning, Places for Joy?* In an ideological age, he appealed not to authority—not even to John Dewey—but to common sense, observation, and experience. As “accountability” increasingly came to mean statewide standards and standardized, multiple-choice tests imposed from the top down, Ted insisted that “assessment” should take many forms, including “exhibitions” and portfolios.” His faith in the fundamental importance of the teacher-student connection never wavered: one of his

later books, written with his wife, Nancy Faust Sizer, was called *The Students Are Watching: Schools and the Moral Contract* (2000).

After leaving Brown, Ted continued to lead the Coalition of Essential Schools and founded the Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School in Devens, MA, where he and Nancy were co-principals. Besides *The Students Are Watching*, he wrote *The Red Pencil: Convictions from Experience in Education* (2004) and (with Nancy Faust Sizer and Deborah Meier) *Keeping School: Letters to Families from Principals of Two Small Schools* (2004).

Over the years Ted received many honors, including two of Brown's biggest: in 1996 he received the President's Medal, the highest award the University president can give, and in 1998 he was awarded an honorary doctorate of humane letters. But he would undoubtedly consider his greatest accolade to be the fact that the impassioned conversations about educating America's children that he participated in and inspired still go on, and that our faith in education's possibilities is undimmed, although a leading standard-bearer of that faith is gone.

Prof. Luther Spoehr, *Education and History*

*An abbreviated version was read by Prof. John Tyler at the Faculty Meeting on Dec. 1, 2009*