



“The map is not the territory.”

This statement comes from the Polish-American scholar Alfred Korzybski, who studied and developed the field of general semantics, which is a branch of linguistics concerned with meaning. Korzybski’s point was that while similar, the definitions of a map and a territory are very different. This week — Teacher Appreciation Week — it reminds me of the purpose and goal of a good educator.

Teachers use curricular maps to guide their students through the course sequences and learning goals of any given discipline. The best teachers take it a step further. They equip students with the fundamental tools necessary to explore the territory; they introduce them to the terrain; show them how to explore a new land; aid them as they search for meaning and truth.

This occurred for me during my undergraduate years. I was all set to transfer from a Christian liberal arts college to a major R1 university for my junior year, but then a chemistry professor introduced me to the new animal ecologist on the faculty. Randy Van Dragt had just started his career in higher education, and he had all the time in the world for this 18 year old farm kid who was fascinated with animals.

Randy met me in conversation. He gauged my interests and passions. And then he introduced me to the protected forest habitat right across the street from the college. My life long journey of discovery began with that initial walk into the woods, where I heard different species of frogs calling out from the wetlands and scurrying along the leaf littered forest floor. Randy taught me that a biologist was called to discover new truths about God's creation. He showed a student that researching a woodland was both exciting and noble.

By going beyond the map and introducing the territory, teachers open doors for the passions and talents of their students. In my case, the door presented to me was a small central Michigan forest that later would become the Santa Monica Mountains, the rainforests of Costa Rica, and the northern Iberá wetlands of Argentina.

At Pepperdine, there is no limit to where our students might go or what they might accomplish. It is our job as stewards of this educational institution to unlock the next door and walk alongside them over new and exciting terrain.

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