

Welcome and congratulations, all you scholars and researchers and theorists and artists and knowledge-making dynamos! It's my honor to be invited to speak to you briefly on the occasion of sharing and celebrating important, interesting work.

History  
Political science  
Hydrology  
Anatomy  
Astronomy  
Mythology  
Psychology  
Geology  
Geography  
Art History  
Popular Culture

These are some of the areas of inquiry I have researched while working on poems. Most folks don't associate research with poetry, but lots of poetry has benefited from research – in obvious and less than obvious ways. Sure, I've written love poems, and loss poems, and taking-a-journey poems, and thinking-deep-thoughts poems. But I have also written poems about the Apollo space program, the hydrology and geology of Squam lake here in New Hampshire and Summer Lake out in the Oregon outback, Medusa, volcanos, the famed hijacker D.B. Cooper, the movie "Red Dawn," and musicians ranging from Aretha Franklin to Morrissey.

And of course, the truth of it is, those poems about Medusa and the Moon Landing are also often the poems about love and loss and taking a journey.

At Plymouth State University, we are working on educational innovation through a number of approaches – one of which we refer to as the "habits of mind."

Purposeful communication  
Problem Solving  
Integrated Perspective  
Self-Regulated Learning

I'm sure that evidence of all four of these abounds in today's posters and presentations.

I want to suggest a fifth habit of mind, one that threads throughout the others, a vital way of being and thinking that we must cultivate and practice if we are to succeed in this enterprise of life-long learning: CURIOSITY.

At this very moment children all over the world are out there wondering – what'll happen if I eat this, or poke this, or climb that? We are born with curiosity; we're wired for it. It must help us survive as a species, even as we fall out of trees we bravely and/or foolishly climbed.

The cubist painters wondered – what if you could render three dimensions simultaneously in a painting?

The citizen wonders, perennially, “who should I vote for?”

Geographers and cartographers wondered: what if we more accurately represented the relative sizes of the continents – particularly Africa – on our maps?

Thomas Jefferson and Sam Adams and a host of their fellow colonists engaged in sustained, collaborative and world-changing inquiry regarding what it might be like to design a new system of government.

Soil scientists wonder what it would be like to end world hunger.

The program managers for the Apollo space program wondered – how can we make a vehicle and its payload light enough to escape Earth’s gravity, carrying three men and all they’d need for a trip to the moon and back?

Engineers wonder how they might design systems and structures to halt or mitigate climate change.

Community activists ask how they can mobilize their neighborhoods into collective action to make positive change.

Philosophers wonder – what is the meaning of love? And so do psychologists. And poets.

Across thousands of years of human history, curiosity has led humans to amazing discoveries, creations and solutions, ranging from the wheel to sliced bread, from beer to penicillin, from cave painting to refrigeration to Facebook. Certainly, some manifestations of curiosity have also led humans into conflict, into trouble, into violence. We can’t pretend it hasn’t done that.

But I am thinking today about how curiosity can lead to growth and compassion and community. Indeed, look around at this community in which we find ourselves today – this room full of humans and ideas and questions and hypotheses and problems and solutions. What a room! What bounty! Your work and your desire to share it has led you to one another: what might your meeting and collaboration lead to next?

I’m curious about that.

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