

## THE MAKING OF

# Lecturer Victor Pereira

Although he once had dreams of playing in the NFL, Lecturer Victor Pereira isn't surprised he became a teacher. Even though he sometimes felt overwhelmed with the nonstop nature of school — new assignments! more homework! — he liked learning. He especially liked science and, eventually, working with young adults. Now, as a master teacher in residence in science with the Harvard Teacher Fellows Program (HTF), Pereira talked to *Ed.* about his profession, seeing with your brain, and lessons in humility.



## Where did you grow up?

I was born and grew up in Seekonk, Massachusetts, a small town most people know for the Seekonk Speedway or as the small town that wants to be part of Providence, Rhode Island.

## Memory from your childhood that has had a lasting impact?

When I was in second grade, I played on a town soccer team. After our last game, our coach was talking to the team and parents about the season. He was going through every player, highlighting the things that they did well. In an attempt to be funny, I blurted out something along the lines of “Ok, Coach, now tell me how awesome I was!” His response: “Well, Victor, you need to work on your left foot.” Boom, totally shut down. But the most significant part about that day was when my dad laid into me at home about being humble and the importance of showing people, not telling them. I remember the conversation and sitting on our old tan coach in the living room like it was yesterday. As bad as I felt for embarrassing myself and my father, that conversation was one of, if not the most important conversations I remember.

## Any others?

Another memory is one of great appreciation. Growing up in a bilingual family, I struggled with literacy in my elementary years. In a school that tracked students according to reading groups, I was in the lowest. It was my fourth-grade teacher, Mrs. Leary, who pushed me to participate in the higher reading group. I remember the book being thicker, the questions much harder, and not understanding anything in the stories. She helped, encouraged, and pushed me. She even gave me the coolest responsibility of being in charge of removing the money from the Coke machine in the teachers' lounge!

By the end of year, I moved into the higher reading group, a move that shifted my entire academic career.

## How did your passion for science first start?

I was the kid that grew up with the woods behind his house. My explorations quickly changed from hoping to find buried treasure to bugs under rocks. Science was a lens through which I could better understand the world around me. Science was an opportunity to see with your brain, not just your eyes. We, as humans, are conditioned to ignore so many things that directly impact our lives, and science is really the best way to appreciate the beauty of the world.

## What led to your interest in becoming a teacher?

While working at the New England Aquarium my junior year at Boston College, I realized I wanted to be a teacher. I was completing an internship in the lobsters and jellies research lab when an opportunity to work as an instructor for their summer camp, Harbor Discoveries, piqued my interest. It was a time when I learned as much as I taught. Walking along the beach or through the woods, there was something new to discover and learn. At that point, I realized that being a science teacher combines the two things I enjoy most in life: working with young adults and science. Students who are armed with a little bit of interest and knowledge are insatiable vessels.

## What was your first teaching gig?

Excel High School in South Boston. Starting in 2001, the larger high school was split into three smaller academies. I got the job about two weeks before school started — no certification or teacher preparation. In the spring of my senior year, I applied to Boston Public Schools (BPS) after my experience with the New England Aquarium

only to quickly be told that I didn't have any of the qualifications. I was working at Mellon Financial the summer after I graduated when I got a phone call to see if I was still interested in teaching because my name was still floating in a pool of BPS applicants. I went to the job interview, and there was nobody there. I went back for a second time and had a horrible interview. When I got the phone call, the vice principal started with, “Well, you know the interview went —” I interrupted him by acknowledging that it didn't go well and thanking him for his time. He then said, “We are still willing to take a chance on you. Can you start in three days for new teacher orientation?” What?! OK, sure!

## As a teacher, what did you say to students who claimed they weren't “science types”?

Challenge accepted! We are all science types. By nature, we are all curious, inventive, and inquiring. I would always react to that claim with a pseudo anger and ask, “Who the heck told you that? Well, I plan on changing that, and you can let me know at the end of the year if I have succeeded.”

## Best advice you give to new students in the HTF Program?

Appreciate teaching for what it is: challenging and exciting. It is less about hitting a target of perfection but rather more a commitment to growth and improvement, each lesson, day, year, for each student, class, school.

## Finish this sentence: I love what I do because...

...it is something new every day! Teaching presents new challenges every time you are working with students and colleagues.  
...I can see the impact I have on my students and see how they grow as students, as citizens, and as professionals.