



(../index.html)

▲ Home

(../index.html) ◀

Contents

(index.html)

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### Can a Seasoned Teacher Do Her Best Work on a Shifting College Landscape? An Inquiry

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#### Abstract

Grounded in self study and personal and professional reflection, this is an inquiry into how seasoned, long time and close to retirement teachers can do their best work on a shifting college landscape in a changing world. Recognizing teaching and learning as the college's core business, the author explores mentorship, community among teachers, faculty orientation, teacher as curriculum maker and the changing relationship among administrative leaders and faculty. This paper offers a perspective on supporting seasoned teachers in the sustainability of genuine learning on the college landscape.

*We live in time—it holds and moulds us—but I've never felt I understood it very well. And I'm not referring to theories about how it bends and doubles back, or may exist elsewhere in parallel versions. No, I mean ordinary, everyday time, which clocks and watches assure us passes regularly: tick-tock, click-clock.*

Julian Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending*.

#### Background

Sometime last January, I called a friend to let her know that perhaps we had missed her son's telephone call. "He didn't call," she said. The conversation went from there and flowed from one intriguing topic to another—mother/daughter relationships, God, good fiction, and on and on. In the throes of this two-and-a-half-hour telephone conversation, my friend queried about a statement I made during a quiet conversation on Christmas Eve. "Are you really going to retire?"

In light of the honest, genuine and intense conversation we were having, I candidly told her why I was thinking about retirement—or at least, leaving teaching. In hindsight, this cavalier exclamation may have been more thoughtless than serious, but ultimately, the statement pointed to something.

Teaching in different programs, I've worked at almost every campus in the college. I've spent most of my thirty-four years teaching students in traditional, non-traditional and hybrid learning formats. The committee work that I've been involved with has been broad and varied. I've administered and coordinated programs, worked as a college counsellor, and in the role of Teaching and Learning Consultant, I've mentored and advised colleagues. I've participated in three secondments, one academic leave and two sabbaticals. With these experiences, I consider my career rich and life giving.

Sometimes when I reflect on notions to retire, the feeling of boredom comes up. Bored of what? Teaching or the things that surround it? It isn't as though I think of teacher work as boring or dull. Perhaps it is more that little is new. More of the same. Yet, I always refresh my teaching. In the complexities of teaching and learning, constant re-invention begins to feel routine. Maybe that's it, routine. After all, there are rhythms and waves in teaching life. There are waves of highs and lows, intensity and calmness, chaos and serenity. These waves are intriguing, but yet there is sameness and repetition - after thirty-four years.

In my telephone conversation with my friend our shared experience of a diminished quality of education unfolded. It's tough to teach in what is beginning to feel like a corporate world.

In this discussion, change is considered in terms of modification, adjustments and amendments to the college milieu. Change is a college landscape issue. The ever shifting landscape and changing milieu is a central part of the puzzle embedded in my personal question "do I stay, or do I go?" While I consider this important question, I give myself the time needed to contemplate. After all, I'm considering leaving a place where I've done most of my life's work. Like some, I have embraced teaching as a calling. Is it a bad thing to want to exit from one's calling? As I'm living in the in-between space of deciding do I stay or do I go, how can I do my best work? Living between two worlds raises questions about identity, belongingness, and of course, the future. How can I be the best teacher I can be in the face of time that embraces an intersection of change, progress and adversity?

Anyway, my response to my friend's question was garbled and with this too, I felt self-conscious. However, all of this points to why it's good to think out loud. She asked, "Why don't you take a sabbatical?"

### **Getting Started**

I came up with a three-pronged proposal. First, contemplating my return to the classroom in one-year's time, I proposed to create a new course to teach. This is part of my personal sustainability. Second, given my rediscovery and appreciation for reflective art practice, I thought to find ways to bring this to my teaching. So essentially, I set out to think about how I would teach differently and why I would do so. Hence, another re-invention. Third is to address the question "what more can an experienced teacher do to be the best teacher he/she can be?"

This question is situated in my own mixture of feelings, reactions and responses to my work. I have been pushing away recurring feelings of disinterest, disconnectedness, disenchantment and disillusionment. At the same time, I have many moments of connectedness to my students and the unfolding curriculum. I almost always enjoy developing and delivering new courses. Autonomy, (to the extent the college permits) works for me. I still like the freshness of semester beginnings. I continue to be challenged by maintaining the balance between meaningful and forward thinking curriculum and assessment of student learning. I am careful to maintain a realistic and reasonable workload for the students, and ultimately myself. Admittedly, I usually err on the side of a little too

much rigor, and I often fall short in workload balance. But even then, trying new things (e.g., weekly on-line learning journals—which almost did me in) and then seeking an appropriate balance, is appealing. I still want to get it right.

### **How I approached the inquiry**

I began my inquiry in September 2012 and used the framework in Julia Cameron's *The Artist Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity* (1992) as a guide to support my daily reflective writing. In my journal, I write:

*Since I own the questions, I need to write my own story. I'm not writing about others, but I'm listening for what I learn from them. I'm writing narratively. (Sept. 29, 2012, Journal entry).*

Five months of morning writing on a daily basis filled four journals. I wrote free hand. Through the lens of my inquiry, I combed through those hard copy journals for narrative threads, themes, stories, connections and nuance. I used coloured marker codes and categorized my journals for analysis. Once done, I transcribed the coloured coded sections into a computer document entitled “Categories and Themes.”

Through this process of reflective writing, reading, re-reading and analysis of my journal entries, new questions evolved and my inquiry question deepened and took further shape. Here I list the questions most connected to this inquiry.

1. How do you live and work in the “in between” and still do your best work?
2. What is a seasoned and long time teacher to do about mentorship?
3. What does it mean to be under the radar?
4. Does the institution value the notion of community among teachers?

This paper, grounded in a self study and embodied in personal and professional reflection is an inquiry into how a seasoned, long time and close to retirement teacher can do her best work on a shifting college landscape in a changing world.

An institutional landscape has a past, present and future. An institution is like a living organism. Over time, relationships among people, places, events, situations, and things unfold on the landscape. Thinking about this in another way, Dewey (1934) suggested that “(...)life goes on in an environment; not merely in it but because of it, through interaction with it (...)” (p. 34). With the fluidity of the college's unfolding experience, there are intersections, continuity and discontinuity, tensions, collisions, rhythms, myths and stories lived out on the landscape. As I engage in my inquiry, I build on a landscape metaphor as I did in my doctoral thesis study, *Navigating the Community College Landscape*:

*Toward Relationship and Community* (2002) because it encourages me to continue to think about the college as a moral and intellectual place (Clandinin and Connelly, 1995).

### Who else is thinking about this?

In reference to teaching as a calling, Berk (2009) offers a personal example of effective teaching, “When you do it well, it requires an incredible amount of work. When you try to turn each class into a Broadway production, as I attempted to do in my last ten years of teaching, the preparation is enormous” (para. 4). Capturing the notion that it is the whole teacher who enters the curriculum, Berk suggests teaching draws on our personality, what we do well, our cognitive and emotional intelligences, and also our quirks. The article offers suggestions to the following questions: How much of your mind, body, heart, soul are you giving to your students? How much are you receiving from them? When going to class, are you loathing the experience or are you excited?

The topic of teacher burnout and rejuvenation has a recent resurgence in teacher discourse. I turn to Weimer's Faculty Focus paper (2012) in which she writes,

Teacher burn out is a gradual process. It doesn't happen overnight, in one course or one semester. It starts with getting tired—teaching too many courses, too many students for too many semesters, and sometimes in environments not supportive of teaching or otherwise organizationally dysfunctional. (...) Some of the solutions applied to tired teaching are easy. (...) All of us need to know what keeps us fresh, what sustains and strengthens our commitments to teaching and to students. All of us need to recognize the importance of emotional rejuvenation and make emotional sustenance a priority. (...) Other solutions aren't so easy *[italics added]*(p. 1).

Aligned with my earlier mention of a landscape issue, Weimer briefly points to external factors and what is beyond the teacher's control, “We have to do what we can to work around them for the time being and start planning for change in the future” (p. 1).

Inviting engagement from the reader, Weimer closes her paper with the question, “What are some things you do when you feel your teaching may be growing tired?” Thirty-four people responded in an on-line blog. Nangia (2012) responds extensively about the application of yoga principles to her teaching. Adding to the discourse of teacher tiredness, burn out, teacher self-care and teacher renewal and effectiveness, Phelps (2013) extends the discussion with tips for rejuvenation and outlines activities to strengthen commitment.

Berk (2009), Weimer (2012), Nangia (2012) and Phelps (2013) have contemplated the problem of faculty burnout in universities and four-year college institutions, and they have presented a resolution focused discussion. This discourse is not centrally directed to my inquiry, but I have included this topic thread for a number of reasons. First, when I tell

people about my inquiry question, there is an expressed assumption that I am embarking on an inquiry into faculty burnout. It is important for me to clarify that my inquiry moves beyond the discussion about college teacher burnout. However I do anticipate that the discussion in this paper will deepen the understanding and bring further meaning to the discourse on faculty burnout. As mentioned, my paper is grounded in a self study/ narrative perspective so I think it is important for me to proclaim that I do not identify as a college teacher who is feeling burned out. Instead, I am in a place of the in-between. At first sight it may appear there is little distinction between my inquiry and the discussion about college teacher burnout. Yes, aspects of teacher burnout discourse inform and are somewhat connected to my inquiry. But, it is my view that the college teacher burnout discussion falls short. The discussion is reduced to tips and strategies inherent in the teacher's duty and devotion to teaching. Teachers are left with lists of tips and strategies to pursue in a system and administrative world that is beyond their control. The discussion, somewhat formulaic and reductionist, is devoid of considering a changing landscape from a narrative perspective.

With the baby boom generation-educators delaying retirement, seasoned faculty are staying in the workplace (Chronicle, 2012; Fishman, 2012). At Cornell University, the percentage of older professors (over 70 years old) doubled since 2000, making up 6% of the 1,500 faculty group (Chronicle, 2012). One administrator notes, "At research universities, where long time professors enjoy freedom and resources, many don't see the need to retire" (p. A8).

Flaherty (2013) begins by identifying her age as a problem and she reveals feeling perplexed with her students' reading and texting habits. "I am, therefore, despite more than 20 years of postsecondary teaching, sometimes completely confounded by the way my students think—and not always certain that the fault for this confusion is theirs" (p. 1). The teacher didn't get any younger, but by identifying the gap not as a problem, but as a way to approach the learning journey from a learner-centered perspective, she found a way to blend the teacher perspective with the perspective of the learners. In the literature, there is little evidence that older faculty become less productive.

In light of academic freedom and some of the perks afforded to older professors in a university learning culture where experience is honoured and valued, from a professor's perspective, to remain in the workplace may not be a challenge. On the other hand, from an administrator's perspective, a particular challenge is highlighted, "As people don't retire, they are still full-time members of the department, you just can't have more and more of the work falling to fewer and fewer people" (Chronicle, 2012, p. A4). An excerpt from my journal may illustrate how my chair and I approached workload balance when I took a pro-active approach to teacher self care.

*When assigned overtime, I declined. My chair said she would reduce the number of students in each section. I delicately pointed out that she was suggesting to “play” with the numbers. My administrator offered an alternative. My teaching workload was reduced by one section and in its place; I took on the role of mentoring younger colleagues in curriculum planning. (Nov. 8, 2012, Journal entry).*

With the emphasis of this discourse on the university sector, the experience of the community college is overlooked in the post-secondary literature. As pointed out by Townsend and Twombly (2007), and also evident in my review of the literature, college faculty are often examined through a lens more aligned with the experience of a four-year teaching faculty. Among many distinctions between the college sector and the university, are the understandings and practices of autonomy and academic freedom.

I was deliberate about limiting my search to post-secondary education research and it would have been my preference to focus on college-situated literature. However, I came across Cochran-Smith's (2006) school-based article where she explores factors influencing retention of new and effective teachers' decision to remain in urban school settings. Though this exploration focuses on new teachers and schools, rather than long standing college faculty, the diversity among the teachers in the urban school is not unlike the teaching faculty population in the college system where I work. Both institutional sectors share in a mix of new generation teachers working alongside beginning and mid-career teachers. In both sectors, teachers and faculty alike enter with different expectations and experiences so that their teaching opportunities vary. Often times, our teaching histories hold contrasting experiences. For example, longer standing teaching faculty have had the experience of working with fewer students in a classroom, ease in taking students on field trips and memories of shared academic discourse in meeting rooms that no longer exist. The varied experience among college educators is broadened further with the mix of contract and full time teachers.

### **Professional Practical Knowledge and Teacher Identity**

Professional experience deepens and becomes richer with time. Much of what we as teachers do becomes second nature. Intuitive knowing is part of this. Experienced teachers hold a tool box of skills, attributes, information, and wisdom. Earlier, I alluded to drawing on my favourite teaching ideas that work time-after-time. In such situations, my experience shapes my decisions from moment to moment inside and outside the classroom. Connelly and Clandinin (1988), point to such professional practical knowledge as “a moral, effective, and aesthetic way of knowing life's educational situations” (p.59). My teacher identity is embodied in this professional knowledge, intuitive knowing and practical experience that has been shaped—and continues to be shaped—over a teaching lifetime.

Without informed knowledge of the teacher's working narrative, the administrator will not be in a position to support effective and meaningful learning on the changing college landscape. Colleges are in constant flux. In times of educational turmoil and change, professional practical knowledge and intuitive knowing grounded in teacher identity shaped over a teaching lifetime is a college asset. Meaningful student learning is shaped by teacher knowing. Should I be deterred from applying what I know, the impact will leave me with nowhere to stand on shifting ground. When professional practical knowledge and intuitive knowing are denied or left unacknowledged, teacher identity is questioned and meaningful teaching and learning is undermined. As the ground of the college shifts, professional practical knowledge and teacher intuitive knowing are essential and must be acknowledged and honoured and the support and encouragement of the administrator is imperative.

### **The Value of a Mentor**

In discussing “mentoring” below, I am referring to any one-to-one professional relationship that has the learning of professional skills as its principal objective.

I have always considered mentoring—formal or informal—as a good thing. Perhaps because I have been afforded its meaningful outcome. In my experience, mentorship—being mentored or mentoring someone else—offers gifts of connection, conversation, direction, encouragement, creativity, feedback, guidance, shared ideas, recognition and support.

“A seasoned jockey uses a trick when working with a green horse. He/she places the green horse in the slipstream of an older, steadier horse” (Cameron, 1992, p.158). Cameron's mentoring metaphor resonates with a memory of my first teaching position. The following excerpt reveals that I was most like the green horse in the slipstream of my more experienced colleague.

When I think of Brenda [my mentor], I picture a tall slender woman entering the classroom space that is set up in a circle of lounge and sofa chairs. As Brenda walks across the room to take the seat that has been left empty for her beside the flip chart, she gregariously engages the students into the lesson plan. There is an energy and air of assurance about her. The rapport between Brenda and her students intrigues me. I recall how she shared anecdotes from her own life and the happenings of the morning. Brenda invited life experience into the classroom (Brewer, *unpublished manuscript*, p. 7).

The following excerpt captures the nuances of my second teaching position:

This position presented me with many challenges. One challenge was working alongside a colleague who I perceived as having a rigid value system grounded in religious dogma.(...) Each Bible reading, psalm and proverb was interpreted to the students, during, before and after class with great certainty. I recall the difficult days of working with her, the sense I had of the power behind her position as head coach, and how at first, I kept silent. As a young and new teacher to the rural college, I shared my concerns over long-distance telephone conversations with [my mentors] Brenda and Catherine. I wanted to import the pragmatics of my earlier teaching experience into my new teaching situation. Brenda and Catherine both listened to my frustration, and over the telephone supported me in working with the students in the class who did not seem to be under my new colleague's influence. (...). (Brewer, *unpublished manuscript*, p. 10).

Achinstein and Athanases (2006) underscore the importance of high quality teaching to student retention. The researchers add mentoring to the equation and argue that high quality mentoring is central to achieving student retention and developing the quality of new professionals. As a new and beginning teacher, I was fortunate that the professional practical knowledge of my first mentors eased my transition from my life skills coach training program to the actual classroom. Achinstein and Athanases caution that mentoring must move beyond socio-emotional support, guidance in local policies or technical suggestions, to include quality based teaching and critical reflection on practice. When I reflect back on that prickly ethical predicament and how my mentors coached me through it, I'm thankful that they embraced a holistic and relational perspective of mentoring.

In the first eight years of my teaching life I team taught. I think it is safe to say that team teaching shaped my teaching life. I experienced team teaching as holistic and relational mentoring entailing co-planning, co-evaluation and teaching together in the classroom at the same time. Team teaching with a more experienced teacher, or with someone who holds different experience from me, provided a platform for day-to-day co-learning and teacher development. There is room for on-going feedback that is sometimes solicited, sometimes not. Team teaching provides an opportunity to move the focus and teacher conversation beyond teaching strategies and course content. Team teaching is at ease with teaching as a dialectic, that is, content and process is considered.

As outlined in my sabbatical proposal, I set out to find mentors. People with whom I could engage with about my inquiry. Someone to provide me with input and feedback. Someone to "think with." At one time I could turn to a number of my respected colleagues for such mentorship. However, many of my colleagues, older and wiser than myself, have retired. So what's a seasoned teacher to do about mentorship?



At first I took the road of least resistance and sought out mentors in text. I returned to educational researchers like John Dewey, Parker Palmer, Dee Fink and Ken Bain. When I revisited dictionary definitions of mentor and mentoring, I am reminded that the words “guide,” “adviser” and “assist” imply interaction. A good visit, but not a substitute for holistic and relational mentorship.

*As a vocationally focused teacher, someone for whom teaching was integral to my professional identity, to be mentored, or to mentor someone else, was a gift and a honour. This happened because we wanted to do our best and be our best. (Oct. 23, 2012, Journal entry).*

So I kept looking. I used the work of Julia Cameron, author of *The Artist Way* to assist me in re-discovering my inner creativity. Staying with the definition of mentorship, Cameron is better embraced as a pseudo-mentor.

I happened upon the workshop offerings of a local artist. So far I've participated in twenty-two sessions where it feels quite wonderful to engage in reflective and exploratory learning with a gifted and skilful teacher. The work that I am doing in these sessions has certainly diminished my isolation. Fortunate for me, my relationship with this gifted teacher has moved beyond the boundaries of the workshops. We walk and talk together, and often times find ourselves working together on volunteer projects. Within this shared time, our conversation takes on some of qualities of a mentorship - guidance, advisement, assistance and care. I see our evolving relationship, is more reflective of a budding friendship than it is a mentorship.

Still seeking a mentor, I sought a connection with a previous student in my Life Skills Coach Training program for professionals. We figured that it has been 12 years of almost no contact. Our long overdue visit was insightful, intense and full of wonderful moments. Now I'm quite purposeful about talking to her about my work. Her coaching does hold some of the qualities of mentorship and is closer to resembling the holistic and relational mentorships embedded in my past.

When I connected with another long time colleague I found that I didn't have to look far for that special feeling of inspiration.

*The longer standing loyal employee gives a lot in terms of upholding a moral code. Someone like X is a positive influence on others. I know this because she inspires me. Last night's conversation was like a shot in the arm. She talks about students with dignity. She plays a role in the positive collegiality around her. Perhaps this comes with ease because there is friendship in her department. She knows the institution's reality. She understands the landscape. Many don't. (Dec. 2, 2012, Journal entry).*

For the most part, classrooms are private places. Teachers seldom have the opportunity to be in one another's classrooms, unless of course team teaching is supported. If the main protagonist of Stephen King's

(2012) novel *11/22/63* was not a fictional character, I might seek him out as a potential mentor. What follows is the voice of Jake in Stephen King's novel *11/22/63*:

It was good to be back. I enjoyed the students (...) what I loved was teaching. It filled me up in some way I can't explain. Or want to. Explanations are such cheap poetry (p. 285).

My best day as a sub came at West Sarasota High, after I'd told an American Lit class the basic story of *The Catcher in the Rye* (a book which was not, of course, allowed in the school library and would have been confiscated if brought into those sacred halls by a student) and then encouraged them to talk about Holden Caulfield's chief complaint: that school, grown-ups, and American life in general were all phony. The kids started slow, but by the time the bell rang, everyone was trying to talk at once, and half a dozen risked tardiness at their next classes to offer some final opinion on what was wrong with the society they saw around them. Their eyes were bright, their faces flushed with excitement (p. 285).

Want to know the best thing about teaching? Seeing that moment when a kid discovers his or her gift. There's no feeling on earth like it (p. 322).

The lens into Jake's classroom and teacher thinking helps me know him in a way I seldom get to know my teaching colleagues. What is a seasoned and long time teacher to do with and about mentorship? I encourage anyone to take the time and the effort that is required to find a suitable mentor. As in my case, it may involve a great deal of experimentation.

### **Mentoring Others**

Earlier I pointed to a recent experience in mentoring others. In lieu of a workload that would have taken me into overtime, one section was dropped. This took me to a weekly workload of forty-two hours with room for two hours of curriculum development support and planning with colleagues. In other words, mentoring others became part of my work assignment. As part of this arrangement, I did two things. I developed and delivered learning outcome workshops and I worked with individual colleagues.

Some of the teachers who took part in one particular workshop were directed to attend because they had not completed the college's required Foundations of Teaching and Learning course [FTL], or its equivalent.

Another part of my mentoring arrangement took shape working with individual colleagues who were developing or revising curriculum. I worked with four teachers—three contract faculty and one long time teacher. I did not get to the point of meeting with my more seasoned colleague. Rather, I was provided curriculum documents and we casually agreed to move forward from there. From these documents, I could tell that my colleague's ideas were rich and forward thinking. I could imagine

a nuanced classroom with intrigued learners. As well, I quickly discerned that my colleague's subject outline was not in synch with the college's academic policies and guidelines (i.e., learning outcomes). I provided written feedback (carefully and delicately) about using outcome based statements alongside learning objectives. We passed each other in the hallway, and I found our exchange to be hurried, but friendly. We didn't get to pursue the work. I had hoped to embrace this arrangement as an opportunity to connect with a seasoned colleague, someone who I didn't know well, but held in high regard. I had anticipated the possibility of co-mentorship.

My work with younger and newer teachers took shape in quite a different way. One teacher wanted the students to explore and experience the notion of neighborhood first hand. As part of this curricular puzzle, we spoke about the practicalities of making a course like this happen. We talked about working within the policies and also the principles of teaching and learning. We didn't get to finish our work together. With the semester's completion, the assignment of the contract faculty also came to an end, and so did our formal mentorship arrangement. The work was left unfinished and I have no idea of the outcome. I suspect that this teacher's ideas are still percolating. A good reminder that a teacher, especially a person who embraces the notion of teacher-as-curriculum-maker (Clandinin and Connelly, 1992), is engaged in a vocation that requires concentrated time and diligence.

Mentoring often happens in informal ways. Just one year ago, I experienced the split semester for the first time. I was teaching in the first half (May/June) and my new colleague was assigned to teach in July and August, the second half. The course was something that I had not taught for several years, so re-familiarity with the subject matter and the development of the curriculum happened in a very short and intense turn-around time. (Not recommended, especially for new teachers). The teacher who was assigned the second half of the semester was someone who had practical work experience in the subject content, was new to teaching, and someone who had never developed curriculum. As the lead teacher, I developed the subject outcomes, topic outline and assessment of student learning. Embedded in my philosophy that teachers are curriculum makers, I provided the new and inexperienced teacher an opportunity to give input. This teacher accepted my invitation and consequently, I mentored the teacher in some aspects of curriculum development.

In another college context, I experienced mentorship that was reciprocal. This contract teacher, now fulltime, held many years of practical work experience in the field. Recognizing that we both had something to teach one another, we worked together as co-learners. I enjoyed delving into my new colleague's professional knowledge and making sense of it in the context of a 12-week learning program. Since my colleague had a great deal to teach me—and therefore the students—I cautiously reigned in his enthusiasm. I subtly introduced the Principles of Curriculum Development (sequencing, continuity and breadth and depth). As well, we spoke a great deal about the college world. I introduced my new colleague to the college's narrative-policies, rules (spoken and unspoken), history,

resources and changing expectations. What was in it for me? Stories from the work world breathed life into my teaching and brought meaning to my curriculum.

It is my hope that the mentor-mentee relationship made a meaningful difference in at least some small way to each of the teachers who came to see me. Each of the cases described above made a difference to me. I enjoyed working with fresh ideas that were still in the abstract. The creativity inspired me.

### **What Value Does the New Faculty Orientation Hold for the Seasoned Teacher?**

Recently, higher education discourse has turned its focus to the college sector and the New Faculty Orientation [NFO] (Gregory and Cusson, 2013). While working in the Centre for Faculty and Staff Development in the role of Teaching and Learning Consultant, I organized and coordinated a number of two-day New Faculty Orientations. These events were both extensive and intensive, and we received rave reviews. Day One began at 8:15 am with a light breakfast, and the NFO completed on Day Two at 5pm with a wine and cheese celebratory wrap-up and evaluation. Throughout both days, we were on and off of buses as we moved from campus to campus where we engaged in informative campus tours. The NFO curriculum embraced learning-centered, faculty-centered, student-centered, and college-focused information. New employees left the NFO with a three-ring binder or USB brimming full of informational pamphlets, resource sheets and contact information. Seasoned employees from administrative, support and academic sectors of the college, as experts in their area, were involved as facilitators and information givers. Presenters prepared and presented interactive or experientially-based modules. Presenters were supported in the preparation of sessions that embraced, and therefore illustrated, active learning and principles of inclusivity. Each session was evaluated so that facilitators and information givers received feedback on their presentation.

Not surprising since there isn't much that stands still on a college landscape, I found myself learning from my colleagues. If not new learning, refreshed connections. I particularly found value in the breadth of new information offered in the Library Information sessions. As well, the NFO (New Faculty Orientation) agenda provided time to talk about the changing student population:

Colleges have also increasingly sought to increase enrolment among underrepresented populations in order to increase the educational attainment of the population. As a result, colleges have undergone a fundamental shift as the profile of students entering college today is very different compared to five to ten years ago. Students increasingly require not only more types of support services, but also more intensive and personalized assistance to ensure that they remain in the system until they graduate (Deloitte, 2012, p.11).

The interactive application of College Policy to case situations was an opportunity to explore diversity among our student population. Identifying that this workshop session also informs the work of seasoned teachers, the session became a workshop template for program coordinators. I suggest this is an excellent indication that the role of NFO (New Faculty Orientation) extends beyond the needs of new faculty into peer learning, shared mentorship and community building. It is not surprising that the focus is on the preparedness of new faculty, but there is a need to broaden this discussion to think about what the teaching community will gain by embracing the professional practical knowledge of the longer standing employee. As a seasoned faculty member, I experience more ease teaching alongside colleagues who have an informed understanding of the college landscape, including the resources that support student learning and their own teaching. What better way to rekindle previous or forgotten knowledge but to attend a NFO (New Faculty Orientation) either as a participant for the purpose of renewal and rejuvenation or as a contributor to the larger college community.

### **Teacher Work Outside the Classroom Creates Space for Mentorship and Community**

If the same faculty members are invited to take on committee work time and time again, an opportunity of new learning and mentorship may have been overlooked. Teacher work outside the classroom—co-ordination, curriculum review, committees, including hiring teachers, etc.—provide teachers an opportunity to build relationships beyond their immediate colleagues, enhance a working knowledge of the college, and develop skills and knowledge beyond teaching. Mentorship has the potential to unfold when a seasoned peer supports and guides from the sidelines. This form of mentorship offers an opportunity to learn from the seasoned teacher's experience, and may also be the source of a budding professional community among new and longer standing teachers.

As discussed, mentorship can take shape in formal and informal ways. Often times creativity, planning and organization on the part of just a few people is the backdrop of a meaningful mentorship program. With varying success, Teaching Squares, Teaching for Alliance and Courage to Teach are among some of the programs that have taken form at my college. A program that demanded much thought and organization was the Great Teaching Seminar (GTS). The GTS (Great Teaching Seminar) was a two-day faculty retreat focusing on teaching practice. The physical environment, small group format and time frame effectively supported teacher conversation and teacher thinking. Each participant contributed two one-page practice oriented papers describing a personal teaching challenge and a teaching innovation. Built on the notion of collaboration among teaching colleagues, GTS provided an opportunity to first attend as a participant, then return to the retreat as a group facilitator and planning committee member. The GTS (Great Teaching Seminar) was incremental in creating space for friendship among teachers and community among educators.

It is important teacher conversations move beyond teaching practice. Though it was not embraced whole heartedly at my college, an initiative called TIPPS - Teacher Thinking in Progress was intended to provide time and space for critical theory discourse. In a different way, participation on the editorial board of the *College Quarterly* or the Research Ethical Board provides space for such intellectual discourse among colleagues.

The discussion here about mentorship is grounded in my own experience. Though there is little room for certainty in this discussion, I've known first-hand, the strengths and short-comings of the various forms of mentorship. Mentoring seems to reside in different forms, for different reasons. No one size fits all. Critics of any of the above mentioned forms of mentorship mostly consider cost over value. This aspect of the narrative of mentorship lives out at my college. To shift this narrative, I encourage discerning dialogue about mentorship's value to the craft of teaching, genuine curriculum and communal professionalism among educators. It is my hope that the decision makers situate an evaluative conversation on a curriculum based template that embraces principles of teaching and learning and community among educators.

### **Leaders in our Midst?**

*The people around me and the support system was incredible. This writing makes me want to write previous dean XX and tell him how his leadership and trust in people - in me -shaped the beginning years of my career in such positive ways. (Dec. 7, 2012, Journal entry).*

Who is this dean I write about in my journal excerpt above? An educator. Someone who was a college teacher for a number of years, then became a department chair, before becoming a dean. But more than formal titles, this dean was someone who genuinely understood, and took action to support the craft of good teaching. In this dean's eyes, students were students—not clients, consumers or customers. Teachers were charged and trusted to shape the learning experience following Fedderson's (2008) assertion that “[T]he educational work of the colleges needs to be put in the hands of those who have expertise about teaching and learning” (p. 12).

*There were other leaders too. Some of them were more inspirational and motivational than others. (Dec. 7, 2012, Journal entry).*

On the continuum of my thirty-four-year teaching lifetime at three different colleges, it is in my early and middle years when I have encountered leaders who shaped my teaching in educative ways. I wonder, are there still leaders in our midst? The college's changing organization and physical structure has made it difficult for me to know. Today, I am uncertain if there are fewer education-centered and transformative leaders in our midst.

A conversation with a long-time colleague provides insight and brings me to think about three important college milieu features—space, place and time—that help me think about my question.

*We lamented the long ago conversations with our previous chair. She described the lounge in the department and the informal conversations with the departmental chair and others. We recalled the conversation about what nurtured teaching? (Oct. 23, 2012, Journal entry).*

Early in our shared teaching life, these conversations were often and spontaneously informal. I recall strong undertones of mentoring, support and guidance. We shared intellectual knowledge and entered into teacher discourse and sometimes visceral debate. I believe that it was through this discourse that we as longer standing teachers deepened our relationships with both our colleagues and our leaders. The lounge I write about, no longer exists. There are no common teacher gathering spaces for such sustenance. There is no place for leaders to engage with teachers in informal conversation. There is no space for the collaborative conversations about the craft of teaching and other curricular matters. There is no space for reciprocity.

The complex organizational structure of time on the college landscape is not always aligned with what is best for learning. With classes scheduled back to back, there is a rushed, robust and energized atmosphere. How does this atmosphere nurture teaching and learning? How does any teacher do their best work in a race-for-time context? A race-for-time and a rush for quick answers fly in the face of deep learning and feeds superficiality. Superficiality does not stimulate shared conversation, teacher discourse and peer learning among seasoned teachers and their colleagues.

### **Breathing Life into the Curriculum**

Before continuing, I pause to discuss the term curriculum and the notion of curriculum across the institution.

In the beginning session of the Foundations of Teaching and Learning course, after acknowledging teaching as complex and messy, I invite my colleagues to unpack the term curriculum. With my question, "What does the word curriculum mean to you?" the white board fills to capacity. I invite my new colleagues to think metaphorically and finish the sentence, "Curriculum is like ..." and from there we share in discussion about concepts inherent in the term *curriculum*. We acknowledge the breadth and scope of our shared understanding. Then we turn to the literature, and we recognize another welter of possibilities. Curriculum means different things to different people and it's important to work it out. (There is not a one-size-fit-all definition.) In my thinking about teaching and learning in the college, I embrace curriculum in Dewey's (1938) terms that there is "an organic connection between education and personal experience," (p.25) and I also draw on Connelly and Clandinin's broad sense of curriculum "as a person's life experience" (1988, p.1). I lean on Schwab's assertion about curriculum commonplaces—teacher, student, subject-matter and milieu—and the idea that each common place must be honoured and coordinated in decision making relevant to teaching and learning. Though all the common places don't necessarily need to be equal, Schwab (1983) suggests that in curriculum planning all common

places have to be taken into account to make a curricular argument. To explain more fully, I borrow a colleague's lesson plan about looking at curriculum like I would look at a tree. To get a full perspective of the tree, I have to walk around it. To illustrate, I draw a tree on the white board and mark four directions—north, east, south and west. I invite my colleagues to imagine walking around the tree. The tree looks different from each perspective. Moss is growing on one side, the bark is darker on the other, and the leaves appear more lush from the south. I encourage my colleagues to embrace the notion of curriculum common places in this way: When you look at a lesson plan from the subject matter specialists' perspective (i.e., engineer technologist) you will see one thing, however, what will you see from the teacher's perspective? From the learners' perspective? From the point of view of the milieu? (Ross, 2002). I've just described Session Two of a twelve week Foundations of Teaching and Learning program and we're only getting started in the complex conversation about the world of teaching and learning for college educators who are preparing to take curriculum to the learning situation.

It is imperative that all teachers explore the term “curriculum” in terms of their subject design, delivery of content, understanding of students and how their progress will be assessed. But not everyone signs up. If they did, think of the synchronicity that is likely to follow.

What do I mean by curriculum across the institution? For the college narrative to shift to a more genuine and holistic learning place, it is important that all employees apply Schwab's curriculum commonplaces to their daily deliberations about the core business of the college—teaching and learning. Just as a teacher is invited to walk around the tree when planning a learning unit, I invite all employees to walk around the tree in their daily deliberations about the college's core business. Imagine the synchronicity that is likely to follow.

### **WANTED: A Passion for Teaching and Learning**

Hiring genuine-vocationally-focused teachers is a student-centred practice. Fedderson (2008) asserts that “[T]he first step in becoming student-centred is to become faculty-centred” (p.12). Effective hiring practices are important to the seasoned teachers imply because teachers live on the educational landscape together. Each teacher's curriculum intersects with the students' lives. What happens in one classroom for students, impacts the next. And for this reason, it does matter to the seasoned teacher that principles of teaching, curriculum development - including knowledge and appreciation for student-teacher engagement, are embraced across the institution. It matters that each student's experience is grounded in curriculum that has integrity to the learning process supported by the college.

### **Finding the Best: A Team Approach**



On the teaching front, there is a generational transformation that's about to take place. College and university faculties are composed of significant numbers of people who are on the verge of retiring. It is estimated that by the end of the decade there will be a need for 7,000 new college faculty and 11,000 new university faculty (2005, Rae, p. 10).

Hiring new teachers needs to be done with integrity. Too many times the interview questions are created in a skinny hour. Furthermore, not all teachers and chairs are effective at interviewing, nor are they necessarily knowledgeable about the application of hiring policies and protocol. People who have specialized in Human Resources [HR] are not usually teacher or curriculum experts, nor could they possibly know the nuanced and specific needs of a teaching team and their students. HR (Human Resources) specialists, teachers and their chairs need each other and must find effective ways to work together so that collective and complementary skills and knowledge are applied appropriately. Deep listening and dwelling in the stories of teachers and school administrators will provide a departmental narrative. A departmental narrative or departmental self study will highlight the needs of the teaching team, learners and the subject matter. Only people with the best communication skills need be invited to participate in the process. Finding and hiring the right teacher for the classroom, the team and the subject matter is integral to shaping the college's commitment to the core business of teaching. Relationships on the college landscape matter. Working alongside new teachers who are genuine about learning and vocationally-focused—perhaps someone who has “the calling”—is aligned with the expectation that the institutional landscape will support teachers to do their best work.

### **Under the Radar Equals Under Performance**

I spoke about the focus of my sabbatical time with people who do not work on the educational landscape. On one occasion with friends over Sunday brunch, a muddle of visceral responses erupted in response to my question. From some, I heard deep tones of frustration and misery about their work. From two women in healthcare, I heard about liking the patients and disdain for the administration. There were stories about keeping my head down, and keeping my mouth shut. From people working in the public sector I heard stories chalked full of emotion about seemingly hopeless situations embedded late in long time careers. These particular long time workers did not share stories about doing their best work in the later days, months and years of their careers. Instead, their stories pointed to not being supported in doing their best work. I heard themes of feeling unheard and undervalued. Some of their stories pointed to missed opportunities in passing forward professional practical knowledge that has a place in a healthy continuum toward the future.

### **A Call to Action**

In his report, *Ontario: A Leader in Learning*, Rae asserts that “We should also look at taking advantage of the talents and experience of recent retirees to help bridge the gap”(2005, p. 10). College teaching and learning is sometimes messy and seasoned teachers know that

uncertainty and ambiguity live in classrooms that are responsive and interactive learning spaces. Handling ambiguity is part of the job and intuitive knowing of the seasoned teacher plays a vital role. Given this asset, rather than wait for teachers to become retirees and for the college to passively foster life under the radar, I suggest a call to action: As the college continues to prepare for the future, let's practically and actively embrace professional practical knowledge and intuitive knowing of the seasoned teacher—someone who is living in the in-between—and apply it to a college wide initiative embedded in deep learning, friendship, relationship, mentorship and community among colleagues.

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◀ **Contents** (index.html)

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