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Introduction

Defining the “good” teacher

“Great teachers grow in similar ways. They experiment, they extend themselves, and they find new ways to nourish themselves; realizing that not all ideas are viable, but with many new ideas percolating, teachers can continue to develop themselves and their students in a dance of continuous learning.”

Robert E. Quinn et al, *The Best Teacher in You*

Research indicates that the single most important influence on student success is the “good” teacher—experienced, knowledgeable, caring, and dedicated. The most effective means for supporting these teachers is to offer them means of learning from teachers of excellence. But there is no single model of excellence, no one style that all must adhere to, no teaching method that every teacher should follow. We need to build on the strengths of our own personalities to discover how we can progress professionally. We can begin to and continue to develop our “teacherly identity”, adding to our construct of how we can best serve our students.

But there are distinctive characteristics of excellent teachers that we can examine and then explore and integrate into our own teaching personas. Most of all, we need to understand and care for our students in meaningful and significant ways. This doesn’t mean we have to create a new personality, or model ourselves after celebrated teachers in films and novels; it does mean that we can learn and grow as we engage in a self-discovery process, supported by the different modes that we meet every day in our practice, and in our professional growth events, locating biases and exaggerated fears and discovering whole new strengths hiding in the shadows of everyday duties. We become better incrementally, each new piece of learning opening up other areas we can explore. The most important aspect of teaching success is to accept that, as in all important endeavours, we need to practice to improve.

Professional beginnings

David Booth

Challenging our own assumptions is the first step in professional development. Teaching the way we remember we were taught, following scripted teaching plans, demanding excessive self-discipline from students, teaching for the test, blaming previous teachers, complaining that administration wouldn’t discipline

unruly students all of these failings were part of my classroom beginnings. What were the forces of change in my teaching life? It was a combination of factors: I taught in a very conventional school during my first two years. The principal and I were the only males on staff, and all the other teachers were much older, much wiser than I, and very committed to their profession. There were very few students who caused trouble, and each teacher seemed to have a specialty that brightened her classroom life — puppetry, visual arts, writing, mapmaking. (Today, I am ashamed to say that I saw these women not so much as mentors but as competitors.) New teachers were assigned to a series of workshops (art, music, drama, reading), and I attended every one of them faithfully. However, when my English supervisor came to demonstrate a lesson for me, my life changed.

William H. Moore brought such an air of integrity and cooperation to my students, engaged them in such fascinating poems and stories, listened so intently to their contributions, and honoured their presence so clearly, that I began to glimpse what teaching could be. He was British with an accent, six feet four inches tall to my five feet seven inches, and had a history as an air force commander. Given the differences between us, I would have to find my own way of being a true *teacher*, and I began the journey, strengthened and mentored by Bill for forty years.

As I remember those days, I realize that I was always partnering with other teachers, that I needed someone skilled to bounce ideas off, to argue towards understanding, to take risks in the knowledge I had a safety net, to discover new techniques, to attend courses, change schools, and grow up. My list of mentors is long — Bill Moore, Bob Barton, Barbara Howard, Chris Leibold, Bill Manson, Frank McTeague, Chuck Lundy, Ian Hundey, Howard Reynolds, Larry Swartz, Tony Goode — and it continues with Rich Coles. I can't teach alone, and if I could I'd add the thousands of names of students who created learning with me. As for your list: have you begun it yet? Better write the names down so they are in your memory bank forever. There are traces of each one of these teachers in everything I do as an educator. And so many names are missing.

I now videotape and transcribe the work of the students when I am a guest teacher in their classrooms, and I learn from their reflections and thoughts about their experiences in letters I receive from them after they have returned to their classrooms and their own school programs. These letters often reveal a teaching moment I had missed or misjudged, or demonstrate further insight by the children from the cool distance of “after the events.” I treasure them, and each time I read through a bundle that a teacher has been kind enough to send along, I am struck again by the clarifying that occurs for all of us when we take time to consider the implications of the events in which we have participated.

When I was at a conference in New York a few years ago, a teacher approached me after my talk with tears running down her cheeks. She asked me the question that became the soul of this book: “How do you get to be good?” In the heat of battle, all I could think of was: “You have to hang around good people.” But the important part of that question lay in the asking of it. Until we recognize our need to alter or rethink our teaching selves, how will we know where to look for help, or what kind of support we need? For each of us as teachers, this has to be a personal journey, over time, with others, self-assessing, wondering, observing, and exploring the myriad of resources devoted to teacher development, as we will outline later. Fortunately, I have recently had extensive time and opportunity to read about teacher growth, thanks to the amazing library at my faculty, online resources, academic articles, teacher blogs, book reviews and commentary, and

now I want to apologize to that questioning teacher and share what I have discovered about becoming “good.” If that teacher contacts me, I will send her a copy of this humble book, and hope and trust that she will find better and deeper questions to ask about her own journey, with suggestions for creating an action plan that may lead to a more fulfilling and more confident career.

Stacey Wagler, an Ontario teacher, reminds us in a letter after attending a conference of our dreams of becoming a teacher:

I spent many evenings in my early teaching years sipping tea with my grandfather and re-thinking my career choice. My grandfather was a teacher in the late 1920s and early '30s. He quit teaching because he simply could not afford to raise his family of 9 children on a teacher salary. But he was always a teacher! He would often come and help me in my classroom when I was having difficulty with particular students. He always came to school in a 3-piece suit, freshly shaven and a smile on his face. He had the heart of a teacher and love of learning—... I lost Grandpa 3 years ago at the age of 98. So, really, I had my fair share of time with him. It has been so long since I heard that “love” spoken about teaching. The staffroom nowadays can sometimes be negative, but we need to find someone who shares the Joy and Passion of teaching.

Moving on but not forgetting

Rich Coles

“Though the road’s been rocky it sure feels good to me.”

Bob Marley

“Five teachers remain in my heart forever.

“Each made me feel that I was an honoured part of the whole:

“Al Downs: His wit and charm helped me to stretch my creativity and to laugh at life!

“Robbie Charlsworth: She surrounded herself with exciting people and ideas and when she included me I grew much taller.

“David Booth: His mesmerizing strength of character taught me to stay true to my beliefs.

“Bob Barton: His magical demonstration lessons using drama revealed a model for teaching that I have kept all my life.

“Mr. O'Rourke: My high-school English teacher demonstrated that every student must feel respected.”

Lynda Pogue, artist/educator

The summer before my first year of teaching was a time of mixed emotions. I was grateful and happy to be hired but somewhat overwhelmed by the reality. Year one, my assignment was a grade four/five class in an urban school. My location was a portable classroom in a far corner of the playground. The diverse students' life experiences and circumstances were in stark contrast to my own. Would I survive? Would the kids thrive? A colleague in an adjacent portable left after Thanksgiving. Lots to learn! Teaching reminded me of driving. After you obtain your license is the time when you really learn to drive.

At my first school there were many good models and mentors. Careful observations and discussions revealed many reasons for my colleagues' success. Students flourished in classrooms where the teachers cared about them and the students knew that they cared. Caring is necessary in the first years of schooling right through to graduate school study. Caring teachers challenge their students and have certain expectations for their learning and membership in the class and school. They demonstrate their caring by knowing their students, listening to them, and providing a safe place to learn. For many young people being in class is the best time of their day. Caring teachers provide opportunities for young people to develop their interests. Clubs, sports activities, drama, and music productions before, during, and after school are valuable experiences for learning and often the reason for being at school.

Good teachers, I discovered, are also wonderful colleagues. In my early years I shared a large extended classroom with Val Kuhn, a cheerful, creative teacher. She knew how to make learning relevant and enjoyable. Jim Eddison, who we poached from the UK, was always willing to help with numerous activities that

were so enjoyable for the young people. Many professionally rewarding years were spent teaching with a team of middle-school teachers following the recommendations of the Association for Middle Level Education. Mariana Wenisch, an accomplished interior designer and our design and technology teacher, always kept us organized and appreciated our humour. Gina McMichael, who was fluent in several languages, was a role model for our students and invaluable in making connections with the community. Sheldon Griesdorf mentored and inspired many young adolescents as they navigated the daily flow of middle-school life. He debunked many “urban negative legends” about middle-school learners. Students in his class experienced success, joy in learning, and self-confidence, often for the first time. Many years after being in his class, numerous students would visit him to reminisce and talk about their current life stories.

There was also a desire for me to develop my expertise as an educator. Working as a language arts teacher ignited an interest in literacy and reading. At the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) of the University of Toronto, classes with Frank Smith and John McInnes introduced me to the research and writings of many literacy scholars. The numerous scholarly writings of Ken and Yetta Goodman resonated with my experiences working with multicultural urban youth. John McInnes was a thoughtful mentor who encouraged me to pursue doctoral studies with Ken and Yetta Goodman at the University of Arizona. This was a life-changing decision. At the University of Arizona, many grad students and professors shared their knowledge, research, and questions about literacy and deep learning. Visiting scholars enhanced the stimulating environment. Ken and Yetta have always been incredibly caring and generous in sharing their knowledge and thinking. Many memorable social gatherings took place at their home. After a meal of delicious southwest cuisine Ken and Yetta would recall many stories of their experiences travelling the world. We have continued our friendship and my time with Ken and Yetta at conferences or during my visits to Arizona enhances my professional growth and remains special to me. There were also many occasions to enjoy the beauty of the Sonoran Desert. With Fred and Inta Gollasch, the “Australian Connection,” we enthusiastically cheered for many Wildcat sports teams.

Carol Dweck’s book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* represents her significant work on teaching a growth mindset for building success in your life’s work.

International or regional conferences provide opportunities to network and interact with researchers and practitioners who are engaged in many aspects of education. Many years ago at a conference, I first met Frank Serafini, a true Renaissance man. He is a scholar, guitar player, photographer, humorist, wine connoisseur, and gracious host. Our “grand conversations” and sharing of ideas and resources have greatly refined my thinking about literacy, learning, and life. David Booth’s notions about teaching and learning are visible in classrooms around the world. We talked at a conference and have met for the last few years to discuss many facets of education. His writings and master presentations have inspired many teachers to focus on the important aspects of learning in their classrooms.

There are still many questions about literacy, learning, and teaching I want to investigate in the coming years. These are very exciting times in education. There is a solid foundation of research and classroom practices from multiple perspectives to electrify learning. There are also numerous knowledgeable teachers who ensure the best learning experience for each child or youth.

Starting out

In this book, we have chosen to start with the positive energy that surrounds good teaching, with examples of teachers recognizing other teachers for their contributions. It is surprising how one new and different approach can affect other aspects of teaching and promote new ways of thinking about change. We can move forward when we recognize effective teaching, when we discover insights about effective teaching from our own observations — as students, as coworkers, as classroom visitors, as in-service colleagues, as members of a professional book club, as parents, as administrators. We recognize good teaching, we learn from it, and we absorb it into our own ways of working.

This book is not a teaching manual; our profession is too complex and significant to think that everything we need is in one text. We hope you will consider the thoughts in this book as an invitation towards examining your own life's goals as a teacher. In reading the experiences of other teachers, in reflecting on the prompts we offer as starting points, in thinking about the characteristics we have gathered from stories and research, you can recognize your own gifts and talents as an educator, and then enrich those qualities and extend your reach while you teach, thinking deeply and relinquishing the fear of change, and, over the years of teaching, morph into the best you can be for the students in your care.

Like the moon, we pass through distinct phases, sometimes unnoticed because of the clouds, but still happening. We take courses, we volunteer, we work with special classes, and sometimes we wear out, temporarily we hope. Then we need to regroup, step back, lie on the couch, bake muffins, breathe again. And in time, the newly-hired teacher in the room next door begins a new project, a different way of being among school children, and we jump back into the whirlwind called school, holding her hand, mentor and mentee all at once, and the moon is suddenly full. Allow these phases and stages, and don't hold on to guilt or despair; look for the clues when you need to change again.

We hone our professional skills through practice and supported reflection, remembering to strengthen our inner qualities through mindfulness and processes that focus our senses, as well as living “outside the game” in a full life. It certainly helps to have expert equipment in the classroom and school, and an environment that adds to our “game”. But when we were working with teachers in Mexico City, who teach children in the rural, mountainous regions of their country, without the usual classroom resources, their passion and excitement for their work removed from my mind the barriers of needing fine buildings to bring about a literacy mandate. We need dedicated, committed teachers to help children grow.

We hope this book will act as a framework for your own journey as a developing professional, so that you can become fully engaged in exploring your capacities, talents, skills and relationships, building satisfaction and commitment for being the best you can be in the context of your classroom and school. By reading about teachers like yourself, you may find inspiration and support from how they construct their teaching personalities, seeing what works for them and which aspects you can adapt and adopt for your own teaching success. Sharing the ideas of others can help us all to maintain and sustain our teaching strengths. But most of all, we hope to support your passion for teaching, for being among schoolchildren. We have also included poems and excerpts from children's literature about us teachers; sometimes the insights of poets and authors can strike a special chord.

My role as a teacher is complex and changing:
I need to lead but I need to respond.
I need to inform but I need to listen.
I need to instruct but I need to collaborate.
I need to evaluate but I need to teach.
I need to demonstrate but I need to participate.
I need to organize but I need to become involved.
I need to manage but I need to support.
I need to model but I need to assist.
I need to confer but I need to observe.
I need to criticize but I need to appreciate.

We hope this book will be helpful for:

- future teachers who want to know the teaching goals that matter;
- inquiring teachers who have questions about their own work lives;
- teachers who want validation that their practice is theoretically sound;
- principals who have a vision for their schools and want support to help their teachers to revise their teaching;
- curriculum specialists in school districts with questions about teacher goals, concerned whether today's educational strategies will meet the needs of the students;
- teachers who are in mixed grades or changing divisions, or with an unusual grade sampling;
- teachers who want to hear voices of other teachers in the field;
- teachers who are distressed or overwhelmed, who want to find comfort and reassurance in knowing they are part of a teaching/learning community;
- teachers who want to be revitalized, pumped up, excited again about working with young people;
- teachers returning from school leaves, nervous about their understanding of new methods and strategies; and
- teachers who come into teaching mid-career and want to know how to continue to work towards professionalism.

"If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow."

John Dewey

Frameworks for examining excellence in teaching

In our quest for excellence in teaching, we must construct some evaluative procedures. This has proved to be a complex process. School districts have come under scrutiny as the accountability of teachers and administrators has expanded. The move toward standardized testing, the comparison of test scores for different schools, principals, and teachers, the observation by assessment teams of teachers as they are conducting a lesson — along with the hiring of professional companies outside the school system to evaluate teacher performance, submitting a final score of success — have all made evaluation a more elaborate and difficult process. We consider a teaching portfolio that includes a variety of assessment modes to be a more useful tool for exploring a teacher's professional effectiveness. But we want the teacher's own understanding of progress and success to be the most significant component of our measurement of worth, and this adds value to the characteristics we are sharing in our model as touchstones for understanding professional growth and building teaching capacity.

Today, provinces, states, and school districts offer guidelines for assessing teachers' competencies. The following schemas for determining teacher excellence lead to our present variation of these frameworks, based on the characteristics of excellence in teaching as drawn from the research found in relevant books and journal articles, supported by the voices of teachers and educators and parents who describe teachers they have observed doing superb teaching in a variety of contexts.

1. THE ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TEACHERS OFFERS ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR THE TEACHING PROFESSION, AND THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FRAMEWORK FOR THE TEACHING PROFESSION

A. Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession

- Care (compassion, acceptance, empathy, interest, and insight for developing students' potential and well-being and learning through positive influence, professional judgment, and empathic practice),
- Trust (professional relationships based on fairness, openness, and honesty),
- Respect (honour human dignity, emotional wellness, and cognitive development, modelling respect for spiritual and cultural values, social justice, confidentiality, freedom, democracy, and the environment).

B. Professional Learning Framework for the Teaching Profession

- Ongoing professional learning
- Commitment to students and student learning
- Professional knowledge
- Professional practice
- Leadership in learning communities

2. EDUCATOR DR. HELEN ZHAOYUN YANG OUTLINES TEACHER KNOWLEDGE

Over the last few decades, scholars have reached the consensus that teachers play a central role in enhancing students' achievement. Since Lee Shulman's (1986, 1987) seminal work on teacher knowledge, scholars in various fields have refined his model to meet the needs in their specific fields.

Subject matter knowledge (SMK) goes beyond knowledge of a set of facts. It requires an understanding of the substantive and syntactic structures of the subject matter. Substantive structures are ways in which the concepts and principles of a discipline are organized to incorporate facts; and syntactic structures are the bases on which truth or falsehood, validity or invalidity are established.

Curriculum knowledge. "The curriculum is represented by the full range of programs designed for the teaching of particular subjects and topics at a given level, the variety of instructional materials available in relation to those programs..."

Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) refers to the "special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers." PCK includes two subcategories: knowledge of students' understanding, and topic-specific strategies of instruction.

Each kind of knowledge has its subcategories and sometimes overlapping properties... Research findings also indicate that teachers' knowledge is not static but dynamic. It is altered by changes in school curriculum and teachers' choices of approaches and learning directions for their professional development. Subject matter knowledge may be changed by the requirements of an official curriculum, as well as the expectations of schools, students, and parents. Pedagogical content knowledge is developed over many years of teaching. It depends on the approaches and directions of teachers' professional development, what they teach, and who they teach.

On Excellence in Teaching, a compilation of writing by fifteen contributors edited by Robert J. Marzano, focuses on three different areas of teaching excellence: theory, systems, and classroom.