Trial by hire:
Seven Stages of Learning to Teach In Higher Education

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  • 2001 Centennial Symposium on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
Introduction

• Who: 12 professors
• Where: 4 Maritime Canadian universities
• What: Learning to teach stories
• Why: Better understanding of process of on-the-job training and development of skills
• How: Phenomenological study
Who?

- 13 self-selected professors from 3 Maritime universities
- 6 females and 7 males
- Spread over nine different faculties
  - Arts, Science, Business, Education, Nursing, Engineering, Computer Science, Forestry and Kinesiology
What?

• How I learned to teach stories
• Narrative form

• When? 2003 - 2004
• With some follow-up interviews in 2009
How?

- Phenomenology
- Study or description of phenomena
- Nothing strange or spectacular
- Identifying the essence of human experience
Method

• Looking for the essence of “how”

• Collecting the reflections of self-directed adult learners as they shared the stories of how they taught themselves to teach

• My job to take this material and share the “essence”
Why?

• Convinced that a better understanding of the developmental process of learning to teach
• 1. would enable us to better support/mentor each other
• 2. Teaching and Learning Centres can design programs for different stages
• 3. Administrators making teaching-related decisions
Based on Four Assumptions

• All volunteers were adult learners
• Hired for their expertise and competence in a certain discipline rather than their ability to teach
• Capable and motivated to improve their teaching
• University teaching is a self-directed, life-long learning project
Adult Learning Principles

- Years of past experience
- Values, beliefs formed their self-esteem
- Learn by relating new knowledge to old
- Manage their own learning
- Motivated to change/learn on the basis of problem solving
Literature Review

• Hesitant to discuss teaching due to unwritten rule that too much time spent on teaching detracts from real reason to be an academic – research
• Still some negative perceptions of professors as arrogant, pompous, silly individuals
• Big Bang Theory!
Myth of Spontaneous Generation

- Romans, Middle Ages
- Generally accepted that life forms arose spontaneously from non-living matter
  - (Louis Pasteur discovered airborne organisms – 1859)
Abiogenesis

• For instance, take ONE “practically has no-Life form graduate student”
Given sufficient time, to read and write themselves into a corner, drink, swear, pray, cry, divorce, go bankrupt, lead the monkish existence long enough.. And viola
Viola!
Stage 1: Warming
Warming

• Begins in the cradle... Some argue genes
• You are about twelve

• Hark back to simpler time...

• Good grades, encouraged by teachers
• To continue
Stage 2: Forming
Forming

• First year of graduate school

• Stolen moments between course work and research, you begin harbouring thoughts about becoming a.... Heaven help you...

• Professor...
Stage 3: Informing
Informing

- Teaching as fast as you can
- Wish you had paid more attention to how it's done
- Evaluations keep you awake at night
- You mumble, talk too quickly, misinform, told them everything in two classes
Stage 4: Storming
Storming

- Publish or perish
- Shift attention to getting grants/research
- Three kinds of students: good, not so good, and the horrible
Stage 5: Reforming
Reforming

- Tenure within your grasp
- Back to your original reason
- Sea of faces now populated with individuals
- You pick one aspect to modify
Stage 6: Performing
Performing

• Discover more energy and interest in
• Actual teaching and pedagogical theory
• Start teaching less and enjoying it more
Stage 7: Transforming
Transforming

- More of a coach and mentor
- Less of a sage on the stage (or comedienne)
- Developing patience and empathy
- No longer feel like an imposter
- More attention to learning styles
- Learn to listen more and talk less
Whether you are a novice,
a veteran,
or somewhere in the middle,
• Your experience may be very different from the participants in this study
• “Experience” tells us all that learning to teach takes time…
• Slippery slope
• For some of us…
• Learning to teach well, may very well take a lifetime!
Your turn to take the Stage...

Thank you.

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