Raisins in the Dough:

Conversations on Teacher Identity and Assessment Practices

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December, 2019

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial

fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (Education)

Abstract

We learn about teaching from each other, from our students, from our own experiences as students, teachers, and parents, and from our teaching and learning moments in non-academic settings. This study explores how teachers in higher education reconcile their ideas of professional identity with their professional obligations, particularly in terms of student assessment. Teachers in Quebec's Cégep system, like their colleagues in other post-secondary academic settings, often find themselves in the classroom with a wealth of knowledge in their field but very little conscious training in pedagogy. Through a series of interactive interviews, I gathered the stories and insights of nine fellow teachers. I used these interviews as a source for a constructed narrative in which the nine participants and I gather around a dinner table to discuss our individual, personal journeys in becoming teachers, and the many shared experiences, challenges, and epiphanies that represent a teacher's development. Woven into this narrative are recollections from my personal and professional experiences. These memories, and how I remember them, serve to enrich the discussion. Ultimately, four main themes emerge: the familiar 'accidentally a teacher' career path; the tension between teachers' philosophies of formative learning and institutional demands for accountability; the importance of introspection and deliberate practice in our ongoing development; and the value of peer mentoring moments and communities of practice in supporting that development. The aim of this exploration is not to generate definitive concepts of how to teach in Cégep, nor to determine who is or is not suited to the task. Rather, the goal is to shed light on our shared journey, to see that we are not the first or only teachers to face challenges, to learn on the job, or to realize, suddenly, that we are not who we teach—and they are not us.

Resumé

Nous apprenons à enseigner de nos pairs, de nos élèves, de nos propres expériences en tant qu'élèves, enseignants et parents, et des occasions d'enseignement et d'apprentissage qui se présentent à nous dans des contextes non scolaires. Cette étude explore comment les éducateurs œuvrant en enseignement supérieur concilient leur conception de l'identité professionnelle avec leurs obligations professionnelles, notamment en matière d'évaluation des étudiants. Les enseignantes et enseignants du réseau des cégeps du Québec, comme leurs collègues d'autres établissements d'enseignement postsecondaire, arrivent souvent en classe avec une richesse de connaissances dans leur domaine, mais très peu de formation spécifique en pédagogie. Dans une série d'entrevues interactives, j'ai recueilli les récits et les idées de neuf collègues enseignants. De ces entrevues, j'ai construit un récit dans lequel les neuf participants et moi sommes réunis autour d'une table pour discuter de nos parcours individuels et personnels en tant que pédagogues, ainsi que des expériences, défis et épiphanies qui sous-tendent le développement d'un enseignant. J'ai émaillé ce récit de mes expériences personnelles et professionnelles. Ces souvenirs, et la manière dont je m'en souviens, viennent enrichir la discussion. En fin de compte, quatre thèmes principaux émergent : le parcours familier de l'enseignant « accidentel »; la tension entre les philosophies d'apprentissage formatif des enseignants et les exigences institutionnelles en matière de responsabilité ; l'importance de l'introspection et de la pratique délibérée dans notre formation continue ; et la valeur des communautés de pratique et du mentorat entre pairs pour soutenir cette formation. Le but de cette exploration n'est pas de générer des concepts définitifs de comment enseigner au cégep, ni de déterminer qui est ou n'est pas habilité à enseigner. Il s'agit plutôt de faire la lumière sur notre cheminement commun, de constater que nous ne sommes pas les premiers ou les seuls enseignants à faire face à des défis, à apprendre sur le tas, ou à réaliser, brusquement, que nous ne sommes pas ceux à qui nous enseignons - et qu'ils ne sont pas nous.

Acknowledgements

As my research suggests, one of the most important facets of any teacher's life and growth is her network of support. Engaging in doctoral studies, and writing this dissertation, was most certainly not my one-woman show.

I am so very grateful for the support of my supervisor, Dr. Lisa J. Starr. From the start, she has been enthusiastic about my research, and has provided invaluable direction and insight.

Other members of the McGill DISE faculty have played their parts as well, and I would like to thank Claudia Mitchell, Annie Savard, and Lynn Butler Kisber in particular for their support and inspiration.

Doctoral studies at DISE were not nearly as terrifying nor as isolating as I feared, thanks in large part to 'the Lovely Cohort' with whom I began my journey in 2015. Of those fellow students, I am indebted to my writing group: Sara Doody, Erin Reid, and Sarah Marshall. I cherish our afternoons in the library, and am ever grateful for the opportunity to collaborate with such warm, generous, supportive, and intelligent women.

I came into this research because I love my job. Were it not for my students, over many years, and my colleagues in the English Cégep system, I am sure I could not say that. I am grateful in particular for the cheerleading of Aurora Flewwelling-Skup and Erin McLeod at Vanier College, and of Faye Trecartin at John Abbott College.

I had the great pleasure of spending the better part of a year sitting down with friends to talk about teaching. This is as much their story as it is mine, and perhaps, yours. Some of my participants asked to remain anonymous, so I will name none here—but you know who you are, and I hope you know how grateful I am for your time, your story, and your friendship.

Within these pages, I have also shared memories from my mother and her sisters. I come from a long line of fierce women, and I continue to take inspiration from them. I thank them not only for sharing their stories, but also for their incredible example.

Doreen Stark-Meyering and Brian Llwellyn-ap-Davith, both of whom, in their own way, made my decision to embark upon this journey both easy and inevitable, are not here to share this achievement with me. I very much wish they were, and hope that they both knew how much their support, encouragement, and feedback has meant to me.

Finally, words cannot truly express my debt to my children, Colin and Becca, who amaze me daily with their very existence, and keep me well-caffeinated at all times. Above all, none of this, none of me, would be possible without the love and support of my husband. Andrew, this is for you.

Contributions

I am the sole author of this work in its entirety.

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Part One: In Which We Learn

> "I will write my story for my better self."
>
> — Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Aurora Lee"

I began teaching professionally in 2001, when I took a recent layoff as an opportunity to redirect my career. I had been working as a technical and corporate writer for an engineering company – translating, as I put it, from engineer to English – but the company was bought out and moved to another city. Part of my severance package was a day of career counselling, which amounted to a series of computerized tests, and a half-hour discussion of the results, all of which pointed rather emphatically to *teacher*.

This was not an altogether surprising result, since I have always loved learning, and have admired many of my own teachers. My sister can attest to my passion for playing school, having endured many a weekend math lesson. In fact, I'm comfortable saying that with one notably exceptional Cégep semester, I loved school (and clearly still do). So, with the support of my husband, I started looking for work as a teacher. My very first experience, substituting in an elementary school for a few months, began with a Grade 6 class the day before Halloween. The chaos almost derailed my new career path; thankfully, my next post was in an adult education centre, teaching my own class. Even though the course itself was not a subject I was particularly excited about – teaching Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint – I was thrilled. Most of the students were young adults who had interrupted their secondary school for a variety of reasons. There were a few unsettling moments with discipline, but we all survived the course, and one of my students is still a friend.

When I look back at that class, I'm almost surprised that we *did* survive. I had no idea what I was doing as a teacher. It was an evening class, which meant that my students and I were the only people in the building, so I didn't have any more experienced colleagues on hand who might act as mentors. I looked up exercises and activities related to the content, but it never even occurred to me to look up how to teach young adults. I taught as I remembered my favourite teachers teaching. More than once I found myself learning concepts and skills mere hours before I was expected to present these to my students. When I reflect on that course now, after almost two decades of teaching experience and a Master's in Education, I have to acknowledge my guilt; I feel that I probably did a disservice, or at least a could-have-been-a-lot-better service, to those students. On the other hand, I am grateful for the experience, which gave me tools for course planning and classroom management, and which validated my new career path. Above all, this initiation, and my next few semesters of learning on the job, instilled in me a desire to learn more about pedagogy, teaching, and learning, not only because I wanted to create a better experience for my students, but also because I wanted to *become* a 'real' teacher.

Chapter 1: What I wonder

At the heart of this particular enterprise is one burning question: how do I reconcile my notion of who I am as a teacher with my professional obligation to assess and evaluate students? In the pages that follow, I'm not attempting to answer that question definitively, but rather, to explore why this question persists in burning, and how pondering the question, and its myriad facets, might inform my approach to assessment. While this exploration is grounded in the personal, its raison d'être resonates beyond one teacher's story; many of us, consciously or otherwise, struggle with the apparent disconnect between what we *hope* to do as teachers and what we *have* to do as professionals in an institutional system. I encounter the same struggle expressed by my colleagues, and by the students I meet in B.Ed. and M.Ed. courses – we all seem to embrace the theory of formative assessment and constructivist learning, but at the end of the day, we have to evaluate students and report their grades. How do we maintain our pedagogical philosophy yet uphold our obligation as part of a system that relies on grades?

Particularly when it comes to assessment, the disconnect between the paradigm shift in pedagogy and how we assess student learning, as Wiliam (2011) sees it, manifests itself in various ways, and in particular, in the post-secondary classroom (Brown & Knight 2012; Brown 2015). Many post-secondary teachers find that their students and their institutions expect teachers to embrace assessment *for* learning, that is, formative, approaches, yet to produce results that privilege assessment *of* learning, i.e., summative, approaches. In fact, perhaps more than our primary and secondary teaching colleagues, we teachers in higher education face even greater pressure to ensure the validity of summative results, based on a shorter interaction with our students, of whom there are typically more, often to the point of not really interacting with individual students at all. Particularly in vocational disciplines, our evaluation of student learning

amounts to accreditation—if the nursing student passes the big exam, then we call that person a nurse, to be set loose on the public, to treat our sick and injured compatriots. The implications of evaluation are perhaps less obviously weighty for teachers in the humanities and general education, but nonetheless, we are asked by our departments, our institutions, and our society, to judge whether our students have met the standards for college and university education. At the same time, we face increasing pressure from students (and, occasionally, misguided administrations) "to pass" them, lest we obstruct their professional aspirations in fields that they see as separate from their English or Humanities course.

So, I set out to explore what it means to be a teacher in higher education, and in particular, a teacher in the Cégep system[1]. My goal was to interrogate how my philosophies of teaching and learning might be reconciled to the reality in which I teach. I wanted to explore my own development as a teacher through autoethnography, and to do so in a way that resonated with other teachers, who might see their own journeys, with their challenges and rewards, reflected in my own narrative inquiry. I engaged in interactive interviews with several other teachers, and together, we shared our stories of learning to teach, what aspects of our job were most challenging, and how we had become, and continue to become, the teachers we are. What I found was that my frustrations with evaluation do indeed resonate with my colleagues; more importantly, however, I found that the very sharing of our stories was cathartic for all of us, and the ultimate lesson learned is that we need to engage in more dialogue, to foster a sense of community of practice, to embrace peer mentoring moments. We may not radically change institutional approaches to assessment and evaluation based on these conversations, but we will

[1] For a longer discussion of the Cégep system and its history, please turn to p.177

slough off the perception that we are alone in our frustration, and find ways to cultivate our teaching practice, including our assessment practices.

The Water Cooler as Research: Transformative and Transactional Discourse

One of the reasons that autoethnography appeals to me as a teacher and researcher is that I know, from my personal experience and interactions with colleagues, that my ideas and practices are my own, and inevitably, necessarily, different from other teachers. Each teacher's distinctive experience is at once a combination of individual interpretation and unique personal experience, both in and outside of the classroom. Furthermore, as a female professional who asks students to engage in feminist thought, while mindful of conflicting intersectional perspectives, I found it counterintuitive to propose a universally applicable narrative; my story is mine, and it cannot and should not be yours. In the words of Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis (2015), "as a researcher, I am confident about my right (and privilege!) to speak for myself, but I am less confident about my right to speak on behalf of others" (p. 12). Yet, rather than keep each of our individual lived experiences within our own classroom, I used narrative autoethnographic methods to engage with other teachers, finding resonance in our shared lived experiences, in order to benefit collectively from the individual narratives.

Autoethnography goes beyond individualistic autobiography because its aim is to create discourse between, as Starr (2010) highlights, the researcher and her practice, and between the researcher and her reader As a researcher, I have used autoethnography to better understand myself and my practice, and the relationship between the two; beyond that level, however, is the larger capacity for transformative discourse between teachers in a community of practice (Starr, 2010). Our human nature makes us relational creatures, perpetually interacting with others and our environment (Mayo, 2004); in pedagogical contexts, these interactions – between teacher and

student, teacher and subject, student and subject, and so on – become the site of transformational learning. Between colleagues, this kind of interaction allows creative and mutually transformative solidarity.

As Feldman (2009) suggests, this autoethnographic study of myself as a teacher, and how the development of my teacher identity influences my practice in general, and my approaches to assessment in particular, is grounded in my own experience. At the same time, if my research is to contribute to the larger community, I needed to incorporate and interact with other narratives from within the community (Feldman, 2009; Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Bradbury and Lichtenstein (2000) argued that meaning is constructed in the space between researcher and researched, since our interactions happen within this space. Thus, meaning does not come from a single entity, but rather, from the relationship between that self and the other, both of which are "coevolving" (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000, p. 551) through the interaction. Bradbury and Lichtenstein defined this relationship between self/researcher and the other as interdependent and intersubjective. We are *interdependent* in that I affected my participants, and they affected me, through our interaction; we are *intersubjective* in that the interaction created meaning, or rather, multiple meanings, from multiple perspectives. Thus, by engaging in discussion with other teachers as part of my autoethnography, I not only examined my own understanding of the development of teacher identity and its influence on assessment practices, but also demonstrated how this process adds to the collective community of practice.

Developing Methodology

They say that hindsight is 20/20. While I now see clearly the profound value of the autoethnographic model, methodology was initially one of the most confounding aspects of my research. I come from a family of doctors, engineers, physicists, economists, and accountants;

data, in this environment, is objective, numerical, and factual. The idea that research might consist of self-reflection, conversations among colleagues, and weaving together a narrative is, to say the least, novel. Like Wall (2006), I have "grown up believing that positivism is science ... Without knowing about the alternatives, I have been socialized to believe that 'real' science is quantitative, experimental, and understood by only a select and elite few" (p. 2).

In reading, writing, learning, and practicing teaching in the academic context and elsewhere, however, I've developed a different notion of what it means to do research, and, in fact, of what constitutes learning, and knowledge. As Elizabeth Murphy (1997) suggested, our concept of knowledge, how it is created, and how it affects us, is an important consideration, perhaps especially for the teacher researcher. In terms of explorations of teacher identity, objectivism allows us to deem one person suited to teaching, and another unsuited, working from a static and rigid definition of what makes a good teacher, as opposed to who can *become* a good teacher, and how – or even what each of us understands *good* means in terms of teaching practice. A more constructivist perspective, however, suggests that knowledge and identity are fluid, being built and rebuilt through our interactions with the world; social constructivist thought in particular rests in the belief that this building happens in our daily social interactions. Both Dweck's concept of the Growth Mindset (2017) and Ericsson's notion of Deliberate Practice (2016) is grounded in this notion that we are not born with innate talents, but rather, we all share a talent to develop, if we are given the opportunity to engage in "the right sort of practice" (p. xxiii) over time, with guidance and reflection. It has become clear to me in my practice that students – in fact, all of us – learn by doing, and that 'doing' may mean literally performing actions, but 'doing' also means more generally interacting, with other people, with the physical world, and with one's own inner world. In short, both knowledge and identity are ongoing

constructions, being built and rebuilt through interaction, intimately connected to who we are as individuals, and how we connect to the rest of the world.

Of course, it is interesting and occasionally confusing to consider what it means to *learn* from the perspective of a *teacher* engaged in reflexive or deliberate practice. I must consider not only how I understand my own learning, but what the implications of this understanding are in my performance as a teacher. The two sides of this coin represent the essential conundrum for my exploration of learning and assessment. Ideally, I would adopt Dweck's "not-yet" grading system (2017) and allow my students all the time in the world to practice new skills (Bruno, 2015). However, my colleagues and I don't operate in an ideal world; we must adapt and adopt, and work with and within the system we have.

Making Meaning: Process is Product

As a teacher, I create and interpret meaning, and my students do the same. In my role as teacher, I need to be aware that both parties are creating and interpreting meaning, and that our own individual understanding of each other's meaning is not necessarily – even inevitably not – the way it's read and interpreted by the other (Baxter-Magolda 2009, 2014). Meaning is multifaceted, and permeates our teaching from theoretical stance to everyday practice. At the most basic level, I want to be aware and mindful of the potential discrepancy in my intended meaning and how I am understood by my students. In other words, if, as Hattie and Timperley (2007) have argued, feedback is essential to assessment, and assessment is essential to learning, then *what* I say matters, and *how it's understood* matters. I create feedback, but my student creates meaning, and acts accordingly. Part of my role, then, is to engage in meaning-making with my students, both within and around my feedback. It is this ontological premise that connects assessment practice with teacher identity: how I express my identity to my students,

and how my identity continues to become through this interaction, hinges on our mutual engagement with assessment and feedback. The meaning and knowledge being constructed through pedagogical interactions is multifaceted. My exploration looks not only at how we make and interpret meaning through feedback, but also how our constructed sense of self influences our assessment practices, and, more fundamentally, how we think about the form and function of feedback.

This exploration of how teachers develop their sense of professional identity aims to add to our collective understanding of what it means to be and become a teacher in higher education. Particularly in the context of higher education, which, as I have observed, frequently means teaching without pedagogical training, we must continue to question what it means to be a teacher, or, more accurately, what it means to *each of us* to be a teacher, and how we see ourselves in that role.

Design and Structure

In the chapters that follow, I have woven a narrative from the shared stories I encountered through my interactive interviews. Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007) proposed eight components of narrative inquiry, which I have incorporated into my structure. I address several of these components in these opening chapters: I describe my methods, my analytical and interpretive process, and my position(s) as a researcher. I also address ethical concerns, and begin to touch on representation. I also address justification and naming the phenomenon (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007).

This thesis is divided into three main parts. Here in Part 1, “In Which We Learn,” I present some of the concepts and questions that form the basis of my inquiry (Chapter 1) and explore how I came to ground this inquiry in narrative autoethnography (Chapter 2). Part 2 is a

fictional narrative created from the interactive interviews I conducted; this section corresponds to Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr's (2007) narrative component of uniqueness and multiplicity of the research. Our unique lived experiences have revealed patterns and themes, which I have represented here as shared stories of becoming, and continuing to become, a teacher. In these chapters, I engage in reflections, sparked by the conversation, of what I remember from my journey as a teacher as launch points for reflection, analysis, and the construction of our shared narrative. As Weber and Mitchell (2004) explain, memory work uses recollection not as an implied perfect representation of past events, but, like most forms of narrative inquiry, examines how we remember these events, questioning what we might have omitted or reimagined, and exploring why these events in particular have become significant—even if they did not seem so in their first occurrence—in our personal narrative. Each chapter in Part 2 includes at least one such reflection; the conversations and memories together evoke the theme for each chapter.

In the final section, Part 3, I discuss the experience of conducting this research. I begin with a discussion of higher education, in particular the Quebec Cégep system, and the realities of teaching in higher education, including the various facets of assessment in higher education; I then explore different ideas about how we have developed a sense of professional identity, and connect approaches to assessment to different ways of thinking about teaching and learning, both in the academic setting and elsewhere. In the final narrative, I explore some of the implications for myself, my fellow teachers, and our institutions.

Chapter 2: Down the Rabbit Hole

Methodology, Methods, and Me

> "For me, becoming isn't about arriving somewhere or achieving a certain aim. I see it instead as forward motion, a means of evolving, a way to reach continuously toward a better self. The journey doesn't end."
>
> — ― Michelle Obama, *Becoming*

Finding Myself in Methodology: An Autoethnographic Narrative[2]

My dad is an engineer. A now-retired metallurgical engineer, to be precise, who wrote a thesis in 1967 on non-destructive testing techniques. My mother is a physicist, who spent a great deal of her last decade before retirement developing hydrogen fuel cells. I am an English teacher, a part-time fitness and yoga instructor, and a doctoral candidate in education, using autoethnography and narrative inquiry. You can imagine our family reunions.

I have to admit there is a small voice inside my head asking if autoethnographic narrative research 'counts.' Of course, it does; good autoethnography is founded in scholarship. So, objectively, this approach 'counts.' I guess it's the word 'objectively' that fuels that small voice, which, I think, sounds a little like my dad. Not long ago, my dad triumphantly thrust a copy of *The Globe and Mail* under my nose, and proclaimed that everything I thought was true wasn't.

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2 This section is modified from an article previously published in the *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education*, Winter 2018.

He was referring to a column by Margaret Wente (2016), in which the author crowed about the "doubts and scandals that have plagued the field" of psychology, because recent research calls into question the reliability of research from previous decades. Wente's column, however, revealed the author's lack of understanding of how research – not just knowledge in the disciplines – has changed in the interim; it is not that the research is now unreliable, it is that times, methods, and subjects have changed such that the results cannot be 'reliably' reproduced.

Context: Shifting Tides in Pedagogical Research

Despite my father's cynicism, I know that times and methods have changed, and I am convinced that while traditional, quantitative approaches continue have an important place in research, they are often incongruous with certain lines of inquiry. This is, arguably, very much the case for in-depth exploration of modern pedagogy. A glance back at the history of pedagogical research reveals much progress in how we think about education and learning, from Dewey's early 20th-century socio-political view of education (1938) and the behaviourist models of Vives and Watson (1913) and Skinner (1953), through the constructivist models of Piaget (1954) and Vygotskiĭ (1978), to the critical pedagogies of Freire (1972) and Giroux (1997). Research on how and why teachers come to the practice tends, however, to take a back seat to more conventional focus on instructional strategies and student learning. For the better part of the 20th century, research into educational practices focused on producing quantitative data, aimed at improving effectiveness and accountability (LeCompte, 2009). Until the latter half of the 20th century, despite trends in other areas of social science research, educational researchers typically were behavioural scientists, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists (LeCompte, 2009); and if they taught, it was at the university level. Naturally, their bias toward deductive reasoning, experimentation, and objective, observational research was

self-perpetuating, and was manifested in surveys, case studies, and observations of everything from curriculum to parent groups (LeCompte, 2009). In short, research into teaching and learning was done by everyone but teachers. If anything, expert associations such as the American Educational Research Association actively discouraged as "ill-conceived [and] messy" (LeCompte, 2009, p. 27) any research model that did not adhere to a standardized, positivist framework. Eventually, however, "it became obvious that input-output studies of innovations would not provide answers to [pragmatic] questions," (p. 30) so "designs and methods from the social sciences" (p. 30) were needed. As LeCompte (2009) reported, educational research became increasingly interactionist and constructivist, with ground-breaking work from Vygotskiĭ (1978), Wertsch (1988), Lave and Wenger (1991), Dohrer (1991), and Sadler (1989). More recently, an even more radical shift, from what LeCompte described as "post-post-positivistic objectivism" (p. 38), to constructivist and post-constructivist methodologies reflects a larger paradigm shift from research-centred to subjective research that seeks openly to challenge the positivist 'neutrality' of traditional theoretical constructs.

Finding Myself in Narrative Autoethnography

I want to stress that I don't disparage empirical methods out of hand. My question is this: if one were to explore teacher identity, in 2019, from an exclusively positivist stance, what meaningful results would be produced? At the same time, writing about teacher identity from a more holistic and humanistic perspective can be fraught with tension, if one attempts to write 'objectively' about other people's lives as teachers, from a supposedly impartial distance. The safest, and arguably, most honest approach may well be autoethnography – as my own research subject, I can rely on my interpretation of the data and avoid any risk of appropriation of voice or culture. But then – and here we come to the crux of the problem, moving forward – of what

value is my research to anyone else? I was excited about the idea of reflexive practitioner research, and about research through and of narrative, but that small voice asked why anyone would be interested in, or benefit from, one person's 'story' of her own practice. And if I couldn't quell that voice, it was only going to get more insistent – how could one person's discussion of her teacher identity and how it affected her approach to assessment be of value to anyone else? How do I engage in this reflection without it all ending with yet another over-simplified and generic 'top tips for teachers' article?

Pedagogical researchers have contributed much to our collective understanding of learning and instructional methods, but as Samaras and Freese (2009) point out, it is only within the past thirty years that real life teaching experiences – and the in-practice teachers who experience them – have been taken seriously in research contexts. The late 20th century paradigm shift to action research infused pedagogical research with a renewed interest in the "complex and dynamic interactions between the teacher and the students" (p. 5) taking place in actual classrooms (Samaras & Freese, 2009). Researcher-practitioners have since become increasingly regarded as ideally positioned to contribute to the ongoing discussion of teaching and learning, and in particular, to use personal experience to explore and explain their practice, pedagogy, and professional development (Samaras & Freese, 2009).

There is now a growing body of autoethnographic writing from teachers in higher education, building on Bolton's (2007) suggestion that hearing other teachers' stories provides us with access to "the great well" (p. 1056) of experience, thought, knowledge and beliefs of those who are active in the profession. Particularly for new teachers, or those of us deliberately engaged in ongoing reflection, stories from our practicing peers "in flesh and blood," as Rolfstam and Stenger put it (2011, p.6), have an authority derived from personal experience

rather than antiseptic theory. For new teachers, hearing the painful initiation stories of our more seasoned colleagues soothes our fears; even if we are not good teachers straight out of the date, we begin to recognize the value of lived experience, our own and others, as we learn the "universe of things" (Baker 2016, p. 718) that hit us in our transition shock from novice to teacher. In post-secondary teaching, where we so often have not been asked to consider our pedagogical identity at any great length, it behooves us to ask, as Danielewicz (2001) says, how the best teachers "have become themselves" (p. 3). Rowland (2000) that autoethnographic inquiry is called for in research in higher education because of the "unpredictable and exploratory nature of learning (and learning about teaching)" (p. 1) in post-secondary institutions. The stories of these teachers resonate precisely because they are lived experiences, told in the "words and worlds of others" (Danielewicz, p. 5); as a developing teacher, new or seasoned, I lend far more credence to the revelations of my peers than to objective theories of pedagogy.

As a practicing teacher, then, I not only have an opportunity to reflect on my practice personally and immediately, but to engage in critical self-study that reflects my interest in developing my own practice while contributing to the teaching community (Laboskey, 2004). Samaras and Freese (2009) further suggested that the disposition of the self-study researcher includes openness to collaboration and dialogue; naturally, this collaboration and dialogue not only reveal resonance between members of a community of practice, but demonstrate the validity of our individual and collective narratives.

Griffin, Ciuffetelli Parker, and Kitchen (2010) suggested that approaching experience through narrative inquiry means understanding how our individual story is connected to our specific context. Clandinin (2013) argued that narrative inquiry, as a methodology and as a "way

of understanding experience" (p. 9), allows teachers to think of their lived experience as a source of knowledge. Essentially, each experience can be (re)experienced myriad times and in multifaceted ways; first, as the lived experience, then as an experience to reflect upon, then to share with others, then to reflect on anew with insight from the shared story. From my position as a teacher of English Literature, I interpreted this notion of experience as "storied phenomenon" (Griffin, Ciuffetelli Parker, & Kitchen, 2010, p. 18) in relation to Greenblatt's (in Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2007) ruminations on New Historicism. Greenblatt described New Historicism as methodology as a practice, as opposed to a doctrine (Felluga, 2002) – a distinction that, I believe, is echoed in Clandinin and Huber's (2010) assertion that narrative inquiry is both methodology and method. The New Historicist approach to literature, and indeed to history, challenges the dominant narrative and actively seeks to discover alternative narratives, using these alternatives to complement and challenge the dominant version. From this background in New Historicism, I imagine narrative inquiry from the understanding that our stories – personal and professional – are ever in flux, layered, temporal, and interrelated (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Each instance of sharing of a story affects its meaning, and the act of sharing affects the participants in the exchange. When we share lived experience with others who have undergone comparable experiences, our stories resonate with each other, and it is this resonance that builds a transactional (Clandinin, 2013), narrative epistemology.

Stories and the Spaces in between: Narrative Inquiry and Autoethnography

Narrative inquiry and autoethnography begin with turning one's critical eye inward, but then using this exploration of the self to delve into a deeper exploration of not only our own practice, but how we understand *practice* on a more collective scale (Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008). Autoethnography focuses not exclusively on the self, but rather on the

relationship between the self and the other, and, in the case of autoethnographic educational research, between the self and practice (Starr, 2010). At the heart of autoethnography, then, is the idea that the intimacy of the personal relates to, reflects, and is reflected in, the context in which the self is situated. Autoethnography brings me, as the individual researcher, further into myself, and leads me to a wider understanding of my practice, while at the same time, sharing that understanding with colleagues, who in turn may take that reflection back to their own practice. Hamilton, Smith, and Worthington (2008) argued that autoethnography requires "an easily identifiable cultural component" (p. 22), which reflects a shared way of interacting with and interpreting the world. In this research, I believe my participants and I share not only common experiences as teaching professionals, but also a collective sense of what it means to become a teacher, and in particular, a teacher in higher education.

Researcher as Subject: Positionality

As I grappled with the concepts of autoethnography and narrative inquiry, I realized that I needed to situate myself within the miasma swirling around me, to find myself on solid ground. I needed to find a way to articulate where I was coming from, and how that position manifested itself in my understanding of the methodologies, and in turn, directed me toward my research methods. Most discussions of the forms of autoethnographic production describe a spectrum or continuum, such as Pace's (2012) evocative-to-analytic range or Butz and Besio's (2009) continuum of autoethnographic practices. Personally, I found both Pace's spectrum and Butz and Besio's continuum limiting and potentially problematic. For instance, in Pace, *evocative* is set in opposition to *realist*, suggesting that autoethnographic writing can be *either* narrative/evocative *or* realistic. Likewise, Butz and Besio focused on the self as the *exclusive subject* at one end of their continuum, and the self *in relation to the transcultural* at the other. For Butz and Besio,

researchers are morally bound to examine themselves in relation to the intersection of cultures, and certainly, in their field of geography, their proposed continuum may be useful. What I took from both Pace and Butz and Besio was a visualization of my positionality, not along a single spectrum, but within a two-dimensional, dynamic representation:

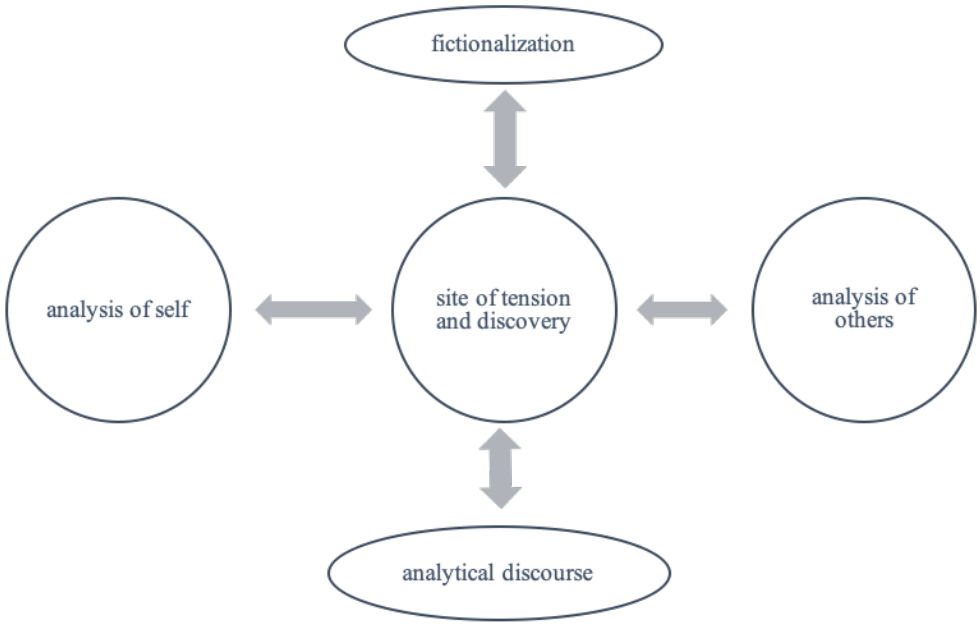

Figure 1 Positionality of the educational researcher engaged in narrative autoethnography.

As represented in Figure 1, my approach began from a position of tension between my analysis of self and my interactions with others' stories. From this position, I engaged in a cycle of self-study and interaction, allowing each locus to inform the other. At the same time, I wrote through the analysis and interaction, discovering a shared narrative emanating from our individual stories. While I did not originally aim to make this narrative resemble fiction, I did wish to make the discourse accessible and evocative. Like Clandinin and Connelly (2000), I

"understand the world narratively" (p. 17), and I would be disingenuous to write otherwise. From this evocative shared narrative came not conclusions, but rather my development.

Methodology in Practice: Interactive Interviewing

Muncey (2010) wrote that her "most influential ideas were invoked not by generalized studies but individual perspectives and chance acquaintances" (p. 4); when I read that, I had a profound moment of recognition. As my doctoral journey unfolded, I naturally found myself explaining my research over and over again, to family, friends, and colleagues. Even before this most recent leg of my professional and personal journey, I had often found myself discussing my teaching practice with colleagues, and it seemed only natural to continue that discussion as I moved forward. The autoethnographic approach in and of itself felt like a natural fit for my research and philosophy, and as described above, autoethnography focuses not exclusively on the self, but rather, the self *in relation and interaction* with the other. I could not imagine conducting the kind of research that interested me in isolation, since my explorations are already firmly rooted in, and influenced by, my everyday interactions with fellow teachers, students, friends and family. Approaching these interactions from within the context of narrative inquiry – which, as Clandinin (2013) stated, "begins and ends with a respect for ordinary lived experience" (p. 18) – shifted the focus somewhat from the self alone to the collaborative relationship. It was with this understanding of narrative inquiry and autoethnography that I decided to use interactive interviewing as my principal research method for my doctoral research.

Shortly after my research proposal was approved, I put out a call on Facebook for teachers interested in participating in my interactive interviews. I was, frankly, overwhelmed with the number and enthusiasm of the responses. Initially, I intended to work with three or four other teachers, but ultimately ended up with a group of nine teachers, which gave me a good

variety of disciplines and experiences. A tenth person participated in my first round of interviews, but as she was no longer teaching, I felt her story would be a better fit in another, later, narrative, exploring why people choose to leave their practice behind.

My participants were almost exclusively Cégep teachers, with one exception, a Chemistry professor at the university level. The Cégep teachers were from a variety of disciplines: three were English teachers, one History, and three from the Sciences, namely, Chemistry, Physics, and Biology. Finally, a former English teacher who now works as a pedagogical counsellor, working directly with teachers and departments, rounded out the group.

Over about ten months, I met with each of my participants four times for an hour-long one-on-one interactive interview. I was very explicit with my participants that there was no script for our interviews; I did not arrive at each meeting with a set of questions, but rather with one theme. Based on that theme, we talked—and talked a lot! In our first meeting, we shared stories about how we came to our practice; in the second, we talked about mentorship, and about how we understand teaching and learning in metaphorical language. In the third round we focused on the heart of the inquiry, assessment, and we wrapped up the cycle with a fourth interview in which we reflected on the research process, and shared what resonated with each of us.

Carolyn Ellis (1998) looked at autoethnographic interactive interviewing as a way of exploring lived experience through everyday conversations. Unlike more traditional, supposedly objective, interview techniques that ignore the emotional facet of the interview relationship itself (Ezzy, 2010), interactive interviewing uses active participation of the researcher to recognize and reconstruct or redefine the relationship between researcher and participant. Ellis (1999) described her own experiences with interactive interviewing as an opportunity to engage in immediate responses to a participant's story with her own lived experience. As the stories, experiences, and

attitudes of the interviewer and interviewee flow into and through each other, the traditional boundaries and distances between the two participants are blurred or even erased (Fontana, 2002).

As the researcher, I found it liberating to be able to share my thoughts, reactions, and experience with my participants; likewise, my participants reported feeling like we were engaged in real dialogue, rather than a one-sided account of their practice. Fontana (2002), Ezzy (2010), and Ellis (1998, 1999) have also used interactive interviewing as an interactional event based on "reciprocal stocks of knowledge" (Fontana, 2002, p. 163), but beyond that, as a way to acknowledge and reflect upon the role of the interviewer, and how her own story influences the interview before, during, and after the event. Interactive interviews go beyond the conventional researcher-participant construct to establish a collaborative relationship between the researcher and her participant (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Chase (2010) suggests that interviews in which the interviewee is perceived as a narrator, rather than simply a respondent, shifts power to the interviewee, and allows them to tell their own story, and proposed that the interactive approach to interview narrative reflects the imperative that the researcher must understand herself in order to understand her interpretation of the stories told, and that the researcher's story must be included, so that readers understand the perspective from which her analysis emanates (Chase, 2010). Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) likewise believe that consideration of the researcher's personal stake in the research – what motivates her, what she thinks about the topic, how she feels about the participant, and how her own thoughts and practice may be influenced as a result of the discussion – add "context and layers" to the narrative (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 278). Although each interview session focused on the individual participant's story, I

acknowledged my own thoughts and feelings, before, during, and after our discussion, and often referred to elements of the parallel discussion I had had with other participants.

Through the interactive interviews, I learned, as I expected to, that while each teacher's personal sense of professional identity is unique, we shared many of the same struggles, strategies, and epiphanies. In particular, I focused on our sense of professional identity, how each of us developed that identity, and finally, how that development influenced our approaches to assessment. Assessment is a crucial, multifaceted fact of my teacher-life. How I see my identity, and my role, as a teacher directly influences how I approach assessment. Furthermore, my own experiences with assessment, as a student and as a teacher, as well as in other aspects of my life, influence my professional identity. Reflecting on these experiences and influences formed a significant part of my research.

It is important to reiterate that I did not set out to, nor did I, propose definitive solutions to a perceived problem inherent in assessment practices. There are myriad explorations in this regard (Hildebrand, 1973; Dohrer, 1991; Smith & Gorard, 2005; Covic & Jones, 2008; Shute, 2008; Brookhart, 2009; Natriello, 2009; Boud & Molloy, 2013): teachers struggle with assessment, here's one facet of that struggle, and here's a new method to overcome that facet. Certainly, some of these studies and their recommendations are useful, and I have adopted strategies such as Bardine, Bardine, and Deegan's (2000) one-on-one student-teacher conference, or various other strategies (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Daniels, Zemelman, & Steineke, 2007; Popham, 2010; Jonsson, 2012; Bélec, 2016; Rottman & Rabidoux, 2017) to make assessment less onerous. Even with these strategies in my toolbox, though, I still find myself championing the benefits of good assessment while dreading the weekends of sitting in front of my computer, grading essays. After almost two decades of teaching, and more pertinently in this context, of

learning from, commiserating with, and observing teacher colleagues, I feel that our discussions about assessment and evaluation, and teaching practice in general, are less about *how* to make the tasks more palatable or efficient, and more about exploring the *why* of these tasks. As with any profession, there will always be aspects of teaching that are more or less enjoyable than others. If we can share not only our tips for creating rubrics and grading more quickly, but also why we believe assessment – and the literal and figurative headaches, the neck pain, the tired eyes – is worth it, for our practice, and for our students learning.

Becoming Teachers

Clearly, situating a discussion of *identity* within the context of a post-constructivist meaning-making frame means that even our manipulation of the term constructs meaning. Identity, in our contemporary context, has become a heavy term, with political affiliations and issues of intersectionality reshaping our understanding of the concept. Fearon (1999) argued that dictionary definitions of *identity* typically reflect more conventional or traditional understandings of the term, and don't truly reflect the nuanced meaning we have constructed around the term *identity* in the contemporary context. Definitions of identity are as context-driven as identity itself; some definitions focus on personal sense of self (Abrams & Hogg, 2008; Taylor, 1989), others on the self in relation to specific social groups (Bloom, 1993; Deng, 1995; Herrigel, 1993; Kowert 1998), and still others on the self in relation to social interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Clifford, 1988; Hall, 1994; Jenkins, 1996; Katzenstein, 1996; Wendt, 1992; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995).

As Fearon noted, despite the several definitions and the varying complexity therein, there is "a common underlying concept. Almost every one evokes a sense of recognition, so that none seems obviously wrong, despite the diversity" (p. 6). So even if we might not have defined

identity as determined by a tripartite moral framework (Taylor, 1989) or by social networks (Abbott & White, 1994), we can see how and why others have defined it that way. Furthermore, identity is at least two-dimensional (Fearon, 1999), in that we can use *identity* as a social designation, that is, a group to which we belong, due to a specific, yet typically tacit, set of characteristics (teacher, parent, Montrealer); and as a personal set of attributes that distinguishes the individual (Maggie). In both cases, we feel a profound, personal, if often unconscious, attachment to our identity, which influences our interactions within and outside of different social contexts. So, as a parent, I deal with my children's teachers from that specific sense of identity; as a teacher, I might deal with the same people quite differently. As an individual, I feel I have a strong sense of who I am, and as a result, take it personally when I am confused for another Maggie McDonnell, whether that's the Maggie MacDonnell who is world-renowned for her teaching methods ("Maggie McDonnell," 2018) or the Maggie Mcdonnell who tweeted racist remarks about a popular film (Loss, 2018). How can the rest of the world not know, *that's not me*?

So, while there isn't necessarily a link between the social and the personal, our sense of self in the personal dimension is inextricably bound in our interactions with the social dimension (Fearon, 1999). Some may argue that identity is simply how you answer the question "who are you?" (Fearon, p. 11); however, this belies any context, subtlety, or nuance. As a very basic example, I may reply to that simple question in myriad ways, depending on who is asking, where we are, and what I perceive their intention to be. 'I am' Maggie, your student; 'I am' Ms McDonnell, your client; 'I am' Margaret, your daughter; 'I am' Maggie, your favourite yoga teacher, and 'I am' *Miss*, your college English teacher. Our identity changes, evolves, and develops, not simply over time, but in context (Fearon, 1999). In other words, my identity as a

student, citizen, relative, and teacher are not necessarily the same—or perhaps more accurately are *necessarily not* the same—even if they are bound to reflect certain "ineffable" (Fearon, p. 4) aspects of some *core* identity. Given that our individual contexts are changeable, whether daily or over a lifetime, it is natural to assume that our identity, or at least certain aspects of it, are equally changeable. At the same time, these facets of our identity overlap and influence each other; as a parent dealing with my children's education, my identity as a teacher naturally and necessarily influences how I interpret and address situations. Likewise, as a teacher interacting with Cégep students, my identity as a parent of two children who have lived through the same context naturally and inevitably influences how I read and respond to my students' needs.

Those aspects of our identity that change over time or with context can often be categorized as related to a particular role (parent, president, professor, student) we are expected to perform, which imposes certain "actions, behaviors, routines, or functions" (Fearon, 1999, p. 17). Other aspects that are perhaps more indelibly part of our selves, such as behaviours, beliefs, opinions, values, skills, experience, and family history (Fearon, 1999), are assumed to be carried with us, regardless of context. As Fearon pointed out, however, some of these aspects may well change over time, as individually we grow out of age-related characteristics or acquire new knowledge or skill. This notion of the individual evolution of identity can also be seen in collective paradigm shifts between generations and cultural contexts; certain values espoused by our parents' generation, for instance, may strike us as antiquated or even abhorrent, despite shared cultural and familial history. We may even deliberately challenge ourselves to evolve in these aspects. The more complex the context, the more complex the relationship with our identity. Certain roles, such as *parent*, are clearly related to specific circumstances, and involve expectations regarding actions and routines, yet also imply "beliefs, attitudes, values,

preferences, moral virtues" (Fearon, p. 17) society associates with that role. Fearon summarized his exploration:

> … in ordinary speech and most academic writing, "identity" means either (a) a social category, defined by membership rules and allegedly characteristic attributes or expected behaviors, or (b) a socially distinguishing feature that a person takes a special pride in or views as unchangeable but socially consequential (or, of course, both (a) and (b) at once). (p. 36)

Fearon's description suggests that *teacher* is one of these complex roles that calls on more ineffable aspects of our individual identity. While the notion that one is born a teacher is exclusionary and limited, I believe that successful and fulfilled teachers are at least aware of the expectations, from themselves, their colleagues, their students, their institutions, and society, respecting their actions *and* attitudes. I do not mean to suggest that all teachers share a set list of attributes and attitudes; however, we are, consciously or not, influenced by these expectations, and I believe we may all benefit from reflecting on, discussing, and sharing our thoughts and practices.

An examination of how teachers develop a sense of identity – in other words, how we transition from student to teacher, or from professional to teacher, is really a matter of contemplating our *becoming* teachers. Inevitably, of course, this contemplation invokes Deleuze and Guattari's work on the flow of becoming (Colebrook, 2008), as well as its predecessor, Nietzsche's notion of becoming *what you are* (Richardson, Gemes & Small, 2013). Nietzsche's *become what you are* may seem, at first glance, worthy of a saccharine motivational poster on a gray office wall; however, given his rejection of *being* (Richardson, Gemes & Small, 2013), it is the perpetual process of development, *becoming*, that matters, not the end result, as there simply

isn't one. Deleuze and Guattari's work is, arguably deliberately, dense and difficult to parse, but I have tried to find an analogy that makes sense of their notion of becoming: sour-dough starter. Sour-dough starter is always in a state of potential—not-yet bread, not-yet pancakes—and its purpose, in a sense, is never to be, but to continue to not-yet be. In a given instance, we take some—never all—of the starter to transform into one iteration. We must add to what remains. Each instance of adding changes and feeds the starter, yet some part of its essence will always be its own origin. It remains connected to its past, its beginning, just as it remains connected to its future iterations. New ingredients are affected by and affect the current state of the starter, changing the starter as they themselves are changed and become part of the starter. Sometimes we add more, sometimes less, but to maintain the starter, we are always adding, always feeding, always transforming.

If I consider becoming-teacher, then, it is not about an end-goal of being a teacher—I am always becoming, just as the starter is always growing, transforming. In a given instance, I am teaching, but those instances are informed by what I have lived, what I have read, heard, seen. At the same time, that instance of teaching is connected to a not-yet future, to myriad possible outcomes, influences, and iterations. As I continue becoming, that instance shifts into my past, informing the present, and the future. My reflections on my teacher identity, then, might be seen as moments of feeding my practice, of adding, extracting, transforming, in order to maintain and grow.

As with many other disciplines, we refer to teaching as our practice; *practice* implies that we are actively doing something, rather than simply knowing how or what to do (Lampert, 2009). Imagine a newly-minted teacher, with B.Ed. in hand, finds a job at a school, settles in, and retires forty years later. Even without conscious reflection and professional development,

chances are that this teacher teaches differently four decades later; naturally, experiences both in the classroom and outside the institution will transform this teacher. Perhaps she has had her own children, and piloted them through primary and secondary school. Perhaps he has mentored younger teachers over the years. Perhaps she has dealt with more than one temperamental colleague. Perhaps he has received guidance from more than one principal. Perhaps she has encountered students that challenge her approaches. Perhaps he has encountered students that motivate him to learn new technologies. Our hypothetical teacher, at retirement, is different from who she was forty years earlier because she has learned, through doing and interacting, to *be* a teacher, and she is accepted *as* a teacher (Lampert, 2009); she does what teachers do. Of course, *practice* also implies working toward improvement, whether consciously or not. Our practice is a space in which we take risks, make and learn from mistakes, and learn (Huston, 2015). In performance and sports contexts, we tend to think of *practice* as somehow separate from *performance*, but this is an artificial dichotomy—when we practice our recital piece, we are performing it. When we practice our tennis serve, over and over again, we are *doing* tennis. At more elite levels of a practice, practitioners review performance to explore their technique, to consider what affected their performance, negatively or positively, and think about what to focus on going forward.

I don't teach in a vacuum, and my identity as a teacher is constructed and reconstructed in a social context. Interactions with students, with colleagues, with teacher educators, influence my sense of professional identity, and in turn, my practice. My understanding of how my professional identity is defined and developed can be refined and enriched (Starr, 2010) through dialogue with other teachers, and reflection on their own narratives. Starr (2010) claimed that "constructive inquiry relies on a more cyclical exchange" (p. 6).

Based on this discursive, social perception of identity construction, I conducted my research cyclically, as represented in Figure 2:

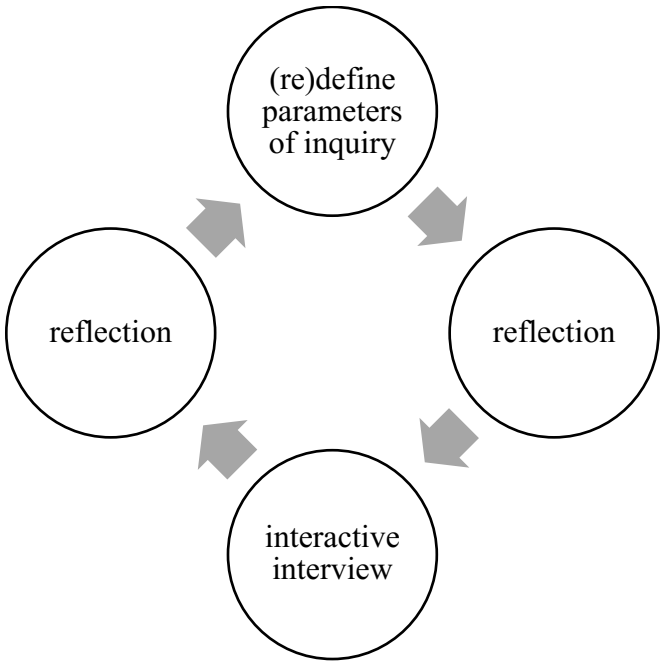

Figure 2 Cyclical research pattern in autoethnographic inquiry

My research cycle began with defining the parameters of my inquiry, followed by a reflexive memo. Throughout the cycle, I used memos and other forms of reflection, including informal discussion, to explore not only the parameters of my inquiry, but also my assumptions about myself and my fellow teachers. Daley (2010) used memos to reflect on her process, her assumptions, her observations, and her reactions. Butler-Kisber (2010) described reflexive memos as a way of interacting with oneself; thus, through these memos and continued conversations, I have reflected on and challenged my own assumptions and attitudes. In the interviews, I discussed teacher identity, development, and approaches to assessment, with other teachers. The second, third, and final interviews included mutual reflection on the influence of our previous dialogue on our current practice and perceptions.

Because interactive interviews, particularly in the autoethnographic context, rely upon what Adams called "emerging and well-established" relationships (cited in Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 279), I met with my participants four times over the course of my research process. Multiple sessions meant not only that we were able to deepen our interpersonal relationship, but also that we could revisit emerging themes and explore together how our previous encounters may be manifest in our current practice. As expected, given the intimate nature of interactive interviewing, my relationships with my participants, who were recruited from my established network of friends and colleagues, were strengthened. In fact, this was one of the most rewarding aspects of this form of research – I genuinely looked forward to each interview cycle, because I came to treasure what felt like intimate moments of connection. Tillmann-Healy (2003) suggested that friendship is a viable and valid method of inquiry, because it offers a site of authentic engagement. In fact, Tillmann-Healy said that interactive interviewing is a form of "friendship as method" (p. 733), since it requires the researcher to share her own personal and professional experience. She argued that open, heteroglossic, rich inquiry necessitates the complex relationship between researcher and participant most akin to friendship. In Tillmann-Healy's model of friendship as method, the researcher uses not only the conventional methods of gathering data, in this case, interviewing, but also the compassion and vulnerability of everyday, conversational friendship. In this model, the researcher does not seek to control the interaction, but instead, to use to deepen mutual understanding:

> Perhaps the most important aspect of this methodology is that we research with an ethic of friendship, a stance of hope, caring, justice, even love. Friendship as method is neither a program nor a guise strategically aimed at gaining further access. It is a level of investment in participants' lives that puts fieldwork relationships on par with the project.

> … For researchers, this means that we use our speaking and writing skills and our positions as scholars and critics in ways that transform and uplift our research, local, and global communities. (Tillmann-Healy, 2003, p. 735)

Friendship also dilutes any notion of hierarchy based on perception of the researcher as 'in charge' of the interaction. Since my interview participants and I were already acquainted, in some cases well-acquainted, I did not have to work to establish trust with my participants, and it was very easy to get beyond the conventional scripted interview expectations and settle in to a comfortable dialogue about the themes we wanted to explore. Simply put, putting aside the pretense of objectivity has allowed me to embrace the subjective, to acknowledge my own reactions, emotions, and lived experience, as I shared these with my participants, and they shared theirs with me. The end result may not provide statistics, but will, I believe, resonate with other teachers in higher education, and inform their practice, as well as providing fodder for institutional discussion of providing support and mentorship for teachers. Thus the goal is not solutions or conventionally scientific reporting, but reflections that, in the words of Lortie, "stimulate thought, provoke fresh ideas, and produce lively debate" (2005, p. vii).

From Tape to Table

So it was that after a year, I found myself with hours and hours of recorded interviews. Over the research period, I had listened to these; I made it my practice to listen to one round of interviews in preparation for the next round. I chose to use a variation on Brown and Gilligan's (1991) voice-centred analysis to explore how dialogue with fellow teachers intersected with and challenged my own narrative. This method provided an analysis that was at once deeper, thanks to the insights and provocations of individual teachers, and broader, once the major themes of personal professional development began to emerge. Brown and Gilligan (1991) argued that

when we start to question the dominant voice in traditional research approaches, we find that otherwise unacknowledged voice begins to sound detached and distant. Clearly, this voice does not sit well within the context of an autoethnographic interactive sharing of stories. Brown and Gilligan proposed instead an approach that responds to different voices, relationships, and contexts revealed and concealed in the text of the interview. The voice-centred approach asks the researcher to listen to the stories several times, listening and reading each time for different voices and narratives: the story itself, the teller of the story, the underlying messages, and the story of the exchange, the hearing and telling of each other's narrative. Brown and Gilligan employed this method in their own ethnographic work in psychology; other researchers have used the method, or hybrids of it, in various other disciplines, including sociology (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003); nursing (Paliadelis & Cruickshank, 2008); and pedagogical psychology (Kiegelmann, 2010).

Like so many facets of autoethnographic research, voice-centred analysis uses researcher reflexivity to challenge traditional researcher-participant relationships, and to acknowledge and embrace the position of the researcher in the interaction and interpretation. While certain advocates of the approach apply methods of coding to analyse data further, I used the approach to reveal and reflect on the themes that emerged from our conversations with my participants. Chase (2010) proposed three narrative strategies in interviewing, focusing on the characteristic of the researcher's voice. Chase defined these three strategies as authoritative voice, supportive voice, and interactive voice. In my research, I employed the interactive strategy, which Chase explained reflects the complexity of the researcher-participant relationship, and positions the researcher as intersubjective, rather than objective or purely subjective. As well as listening to the taped interviews in order to inspire my reflective memos and support my writing, I listened to

each round before embarking on the next round. This allowed me to remind myself of themes and patterns that emerged, as well as questions or clarifications that I wanted to address with participants. I also brought those listening notes with me to each new interview, so I could share these thoughts with my participants. My research sequence is illustrated in Figure 3.

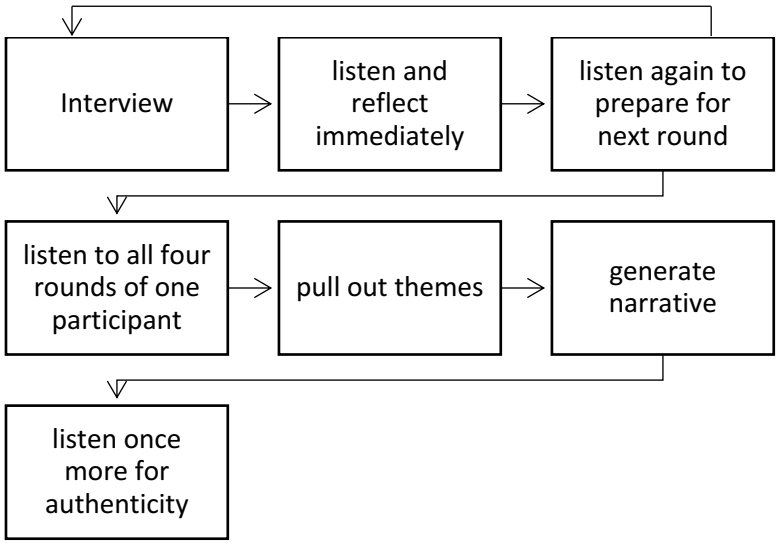

Figure 3 Interactive interview research sequence using voice-centred analysis

In the later stages, when I was listening and relistening, making notes, writing, and reflecting, I found myself paradoxically feeling isolated yet surrounded by voices. Even when the recording was paused, I heard our commingled voices echoing around me. Often, even though each interview was with only one person, it seemed as if my participants were talking to each other, responding to something another had said, reflecting on someone else's point.

We talked, I listened, I listened again… but then, how to transform that process into something at once readable and useful? I could have done transcription and coding, of course,

but it felt counterintuitive to take these warm, genuine human interactions and turn them into conventional data.

In retrospect, it seems strange to me that it took as long as it did for me to conceive of a way to represent the ebb and flow of all of these conversations. In fact, it took a few months of pondering, experimenting, writing then deleting. How was I going to take over fifty hours of audio, ten voices, ten stories, and countless epiphanies, recollections, and emotions, and shape it into anything that did the experience justice while fulfilling the actual requirements of a dissertation?

In a moment of despair, I pulled out my copy of Ellis' (2004) novel, *The Ethnographic I*, for inspiration. In her novel, Ellis explores methodology in the context of a fictional semester, peopled with characters based on her real-life students. Unlike other methodology texts, the novel makes space for dialogue and dissent. Characters argue, students drop out, and Ellis, as her self-within-the-narrative, reflects, responds, and reconsiders her own thinking. I started to think that maybe I could use Ellis' novel as a model – could I find way to recreate my one-on-one conversations in some fictional context? The more I thought about it, the more the idea appealed to me. With this still somewhat nebulous idea in mind, I went back to my bookcase, and reached for Plato's *Symposium*. In this centuries-old text, Socrates and six other men all soliloquize on the topic of *eros*, debating their individual definitions of love and virtue. Over the course of an increasingly drunken evening, the seven speakers talk, argue, poke fun, and philosophize; the text is as renowned for its literary form as it is for its pronouncements on the universal concern, erotic love. Fundamental to the Symposium is its unusual format, even within the Platonic cannon. The guests at the banquet speak on a common theme, but have very different ideas; Warner (1979) concluded that these differences reflect the "diverse intellectual, imaginative, and

emotional capacities" (p. 329) of the different speakers. Ellis' fictional classroom is the perfect setting for a carefully considered discussion of academic methodology; Plato's fictional banquet is just as perfect for a rancorous and rowdy debate on the nature of love. Could I model my discussion on these exemplars?

This was my *Eureka!* moment. Suddenly, everything fell into place. I began weaving together the nine individual conversations into a fictional dinner party. The dinner party conversation would be (re)created from the interviews I conducted; although these nine people did not have this conversation with each other, the words they shared with me, one-on-one, could become part of a multifaceted dialogue. This structure made space for recollections from my own journey as a teacher. There was space, too, for me to explore the avenues of inquiry that opened up when I reflected on the individual interviews.

With the narrative endgame in sight, I returned to the recorded interviews, this time listening for the distinctive voices. In previous auditions of the recordings, my focus was on emergent themes, looking for patterns and shared experiences and transformational moments. This time, I deliberately sought out the nuances in how each person spoke, the characteristic vocal tics, the chosen metaphors and analogies. The fact that my participants were friends and colleagues whose voices I have heard in so many other settings—social gatherings, department meetings, union assemblies—gave me added insight into how each individual person speaks, and informed my descriptions of their movements and non-verbal cues. I even reached out to my participants to ask what each would contribute to a hypothetical dinner party, so I could incorporate details authentic to each individual. Perhaps the most difficult voice to reproduce was my own—we often cringe when we hear our own voice on a recording, because it sounds so different in our heads. Here, I was asking myself not only to hear my own voice, but listen to and

reflect on my own words, my reactions, and recollections of the emotions provoked during the interviews themselves. I used the discomfort of this aspect of the process as a catalyst for some of the longer reflections, as well as the incidental descriptions of my fictional self's reactions during the dinner party.

Using this reconstructed discussion as a starting point, I wove in reflections on my own development, as a teacher and as an always-becoming teacher. The dinner party represents my participants as people, with individual perspectives, unique experiences, and distinct voices. Allowing them to speak for themselves in this way creates an account of my research that is true, that represents these perspectives, experiences, and voices authentically. At the same time, this fictional scenario resonates epistemologically; we learn in our interactions. If, as I have said, meaning is constructed in the space between researcher and researched, in the relationship between my self and the other, then recreating that relationship in an authentic form, namely, a dialogue, preserves the constructive space. Rather than distilling these disparate voices into a single, artificially unanimous pronouncement, I am allowing each voice, each thinker, to be heard.

Ethical considerations

Since all participants were adult, and no institutional resources were required, ethics approval was relatively straightforward. My REB application addressed matters of confidentiality and data storage; I offered my participants the opportunity to create a pseudonym, to have one assigned to them, or to be identifiable. I used audio recording for all interviews, in order to conduct the voice-centered analysis and to be more informal as an interview participant myself; these recordings will be kept securely for seven years, as required by the REB.

Beyond the practical ethical considerations, I remained mindful of the deeper ethical concerns when engaging in interactive interviews with colleagues and friends. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argued that ethical concerns must be considered throughout the research process, not just as a starting point or green light to conduct research. The nature of narrative inquiry, and, I would argue, autoethnography through dialogue, means that ethical concerns "shift and change" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 170). Guillemin and Gillam (2004) differentiated between "procedural" ethics and "ethics in practice" (p. 262), which they defined as "the everyday ethical issues that arise in the doing of research" (p. 263). Among the potentially "ethically important moments" (p. 265) identified by Guillemin and Gillam are instances in which the participant may not be comfortable with a question or answer; expose themselves as vulnerable in some way; or implicate someone else in their response. Although my research was autoethnographic, I was relying on collaboration from my interview participants, and as such, the distinction between research and practice may have been blurred (Haney & Brinton Lykes, 2000). As with other aspects of my research, my ethics in practice relied on reflexivity, which, as Guillemin and Gillam (2004) argued, is "closely connected with the ethical practice of research and comes into play in the field, where research ethics committees are not accessible" (pp. 273-4). Particularly in the context of a research project that involves interactive interviews, I tried to be mindful of ethical reflexivity, and how power may have shifted within our discussions. Finally, using the friendship model generated profound and deeply personal interactions with more than one participant, in more than one round; I was always mindful of my participants' vulnerability, and in at least one instance, stopped recording during a section of a conversation to allow my friend a sense of boundary between research and our personal relationship.

At the same time, the very nature of narrative inquiry, which requires a certain vulnerability of the researcher in parallel with participants, means that we are sharing our values and world views as well as our lived experience; Bolton (2007) suggested that this openness allows the researcher and her participants to explore and challenge ideas about professional identity in a non-confrontational space. In the course of my interactive interviews, my participants and I shared thoughts, reactions, and experiences that, in other contexts, would have remained unexpressed, or unaddressed. In different professional contexts, someone like Katie might have felt she could not safely talk about her frustration, as a new teacher, with more experienced colleagues who resisted change yet refused to share material. At the same time, in a different personal context, an otherwise sympathetic friend or partner cannot empathize without the lived experience of a fellow teacher. Providing space for conversations with other teachers, without the perceived weight of an official, institutional mandate, proves to be a cathartic and generative approach to personal and professional development.

Part 2: It's in the Air We Breathe

> "The shared meal elevates eating from a mechanical process of fueling the body to a ritual of family and community, from the mere animal biology to an act of culture."
>
> — **Michael Pollan,** *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*

Every interview, without exception, involved food. I met my participants in cafés, restaurants, and bars. We ate and drank while we talked. It seems to me that in setting our encounters in these places, we tacitly removed another layer of formality from the interaction. Interviews happen in studios or offices. Conversations happen over coffee.

Chapter 3: The Dinner Party

> Whenever two or three are gathered together… they shall perform the parrot sketch.
>
> — Not the Nine O'Clock News, *General Synod's Life of Christ*

Teaching in Cégep means you can be a bit of a hermit, if you're so inclined. Even within departments, especially big ones, it's pretty easy to lay low, fly under the radar, and never cross paths—or swords—with colleagues. We are supposed to attend department meetings, and there's an expectation of service, but given that there's nothing like tenure review, involvement in those things comes down to personal engagement. In my own experience, I have joined committees, I have done college-based research, I've done program review and attended and presented pedagogical development workshops. I've also felt like I got burned, more than once. I have also, however, developed deep and lasting friendships with colleagues, within and outside of my department. One of the foundations of these relationships is our shared passion for our profession, and while we often talk about partners and hobbies and children, we *always* end up talking about teaching.

I take a moment, step back, and survey the table. It's a large wooden table, and right now it's set for ten: me, and my nine guests, who will be arriving any minute now. The wood gleams under the light of the stained-glass chandelier. Soft music plays, and the fireplace dances in time to the beat.

From the kitchen, warm smells emanate, and a sense of anticipation mixed with peacefulness fills me. I smile. I'm looking forward to tonight's dinner; I know that at times, the discussion might get heated, but I can't wait to share food and drink and thoughts and stories with these friends of mine.

The doorbell rings, and the evening begins.

The first to arrive is my guest of honour, Katie. Her partner, Frank, is an old friend of my husband's, and there's a good chance that Katie and I would be friends even without our shared profession: Cégep teacher. Katie teaches Biology at a different college, and she's only just begun her teaching career at this level. Tonight, she gets to pick the brains of my friends and me—we've all been teaching a lot longer, and like many teachers, are always keen to share our war stories with our younger colleagues.

Katie looks like a younger colleague, or even a student. Her soft brown hair is tucked behind her ears, and I think it's the bangs that really create that illusion—for it is an illusion—of extreme youth. In fact, she's only a few years younger than I am. She's in her mid-thirties, and as well as navigating the waters of college teaching, she's rather suddenly a part-time parent of Frank's two children from his first marriage. I wonder fleetingly if that hair colour is entirely natural, or if she too is masking the grey hairs that age, stress, and fatigue inevitably produce.

"Hey Maggie! Thanks so much for inviting me tonight!" She hands me a bottle of red wine, and a large covered dish. "I made some devilled eggs. I thought maybe we could put them out for starters."

The doorbell rings again, and Paul, stooping to get through the doorframe, steps in. He leans in for the traditional Montreal two-cheek kiss, and his impressive beard scratches.

"I made sushi!" he exclaims, handing me a beautiful, black lacquered tray, which I assume is the handiwork of his wife, a prolific potter and painter. Paul and his wife are part of what we Montrealers like to think of as the tiny circle of Anglos; it's hard to meet someone who doesn't turn out to be friends with someone else you've known for years. Paul and Jeannine are a couple that we saw once a year, at a mutual friend's annual holiday party; we thought they were great—but my husband and I have a terrible habit of assuming the other one took note of new names, and for years, we just had our annual chat with this man and his wife, having a great time, but never quite sure who they were. Then social media became a thing, and each of them sent me a friend request, and we were finally able to put names to the familiar faces.

If I'm honest with myself, I find Paul a little intimidating. He's quite a physical presence—well over six feet tall, with a mane of dark hair and that incredible beard. But it's something else. It's like Paul is the manifestation of my impostor syndrome. Not that he would ever actually voice anything of the sort, but there's something about him that seems so legitimate: he's recently made full professor, and in previous conversations, he's always sounded just a little exasperated and bemused by my ideas about teaching. I am a little surprised that he's agreed to come tonight, but here he is, and if anything, more enthusiastic and open than I could have hoped.

"I'm really glad you're here, Paul. It means a lot to me. I was afraid you'd politely decline."

"Why would I decline?" he asks, genuinely puzzled.

"It's just, well, I thought you thought my approach to research and teaching was maybe a little too fluffy for you," I admit, with a grin. "You seem skeptical."

"God no!" he says, shocked, and I rush to apologize.

"Honestly, Maggie, it's not that. I'm just self-conscious, and if I seemed at all hesitant, it's because sometimes it takes me a while to psych myself into the whole dinner party scene. Believe me, I'm looking forward to talking with you, and everyone else," he smiles, "now, where's the beer?"

As it turns out, the beer is walking in the door at that very moment, as Rhys arrives with a case of microbrewery bottles. He hands me his dessert as he walks in, and I introduce him to Paul, suggesting they get started on the beer.

I got to know Rhys when we were both chaperones on a student trip to New York. Later, we travelled with three other teachers and a great group of students to eastern Europe—our colleague, Garo, was teaching a humanities course on the rise of totalitarianism, and part of the course was a week-long research trip to Berlin, Warsaw, Krakow, and Prague. Both trips were amazing, not least because travelling that way allows you to get to know your colleagues in a different context. You're together pretty much 24/7, at times being the grown-ups for an enthusiastic group of students who haven't travelled like this before, and at other times being five now-friends hanging out, having fun, and exploring amazing places together. Rhys and I went up the Great South Tower of the castle in Prague; that was when I realized that although I'm not afraid of heights, I am really not comfortable with tiny, narrow, spiral staircases in stone towers. I was glad to have had him there to talk me down, literally and figuratively, from that tower.

Rhys always has a pen with him, in case he needs to think. He thinks by sketching; more than once in conversations over coffee, he's grabbed the nearest napkin and drawn as he talked, letting the ink structure his ideas.

Mauro, who has arrived with Rhys, was on one of those New York trips, too, and that's how we crossed paths. Mauro is a single dad with two amazing daughters, and he's an unapologetically geeky gamer, the host of regular gaming days, and a fixture at local Comic Cons. He is also deeply committed to his students, no matter how jaded he sometimes sounds when talking about his departmental colleagues—it's an interesting contrast with Rhys, who seems to get along very well with most of his department, and to be part of a department that actively strives for pedagogical innovation. The physicists are moving forward, but the chemists are pretty mired down and resistant to change.

The doorbell rings again, and it's the English department contingent, Dana, Lily, Jason, and Patti. They've shared a cab from the metro, and they're already in good spirits as they crowd through the door. Dana looks apologetic as she hands me a small bag, with some dark chocolate and an assortment of fruit. "I know I didn't make it myself," she says, "but I always love just a little something sweet after dinner, and I thought this would be nice."

"Same here," says Jason, handing me two bottles of wine. "I wish I could say I stomped these grapes myself, but probably better that I didn't," he smiles. I assure them both that their contributions to the table are very welcome, and hand Jason a corkscrew for the wine. Lily finds space on the table for her salad, and pours herself a glass of Jason's wine.

Patti sidles up to me. "So, we're all here to talk teaching, I gather?" I have a feeling I know where this question is leading. Patti, a local girl who loved school, and, as she says, lived in her profs' offices through her Liberal Arts diploma and Literature degrees, has recently left teaching, to take up the role of pedagogical counsellor. I know that it broke her heart to leave teaching, but I also know it was breaking her soul to stay. Patti wanted to give every student the *Dead Poets' Society* experience, to have them fall in love with literature and their own learning,

and I think she found it near-impossible to give anything less than every last ounce of herself. Inevitably, perhaps, she got to that last ounce, and had to stop.

"Yeah," I say, "my friend Katie is just starting out at Cartier[3], and we were talking a couple of weeks ago about the whole learning-on-the-job thing. Then I had this brilliant idea of getting a bunch of us together to share our experience with her."

"Maggie, I think that's an awesome idea." Patti gazes at me, her blue eyes seeming to penetrate into my brain. Talking with Patti can be an intense interaction—she has a way of making you feel like she wants to delve into your thoughts, to know everything about you. "But why me? I feel like I'm the odd man out. Do you really want this quitter taking part in this?"

"Oh, Patti," I say, "First of all, you are one of the most amazing teachers I know, whether you are in the classroom or not. And I think your story is really important for a new teacher—and for us not-so-new teachers, for that matter."

Patti looks uncertain. "Are you sure? I don't want to fill anyone's head with ideas of burnout or how stressful teaching can be."

"I think most of us know pretty intimately how stressful it can be. In fact, that's what makes your story so valuable. You gave so much of yourself to the students that you needed to step back."

"So, I'm the cautionary tale?" Patti laughs.

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3 Although all of the colleges referred to in this narrative are real, their names have been changed within this section. Actual college names are used in other sections, where history and facts are presented, rather than my participants' or my personal observations.

"More like the Bilbo," I joke. Patti has a deep and abiding love of Tolkien, so I appeal to her love of allusion. "Katie is part of the new band of hobbits leaving the Shire, while you get to relax with the Elves for a while!" Patti laughs, and looks a little more relaxed.

Just then, the doorbell rings again, and our last guest arrives. Cam is a History teacher at my college, with a fierce feminist streak and a love of ballroom dancing. A Francophone born and raised in Quebec, Cam cannot abide the English pronunciation of her name, Camille, so Cam it is. She comes in, shaking her long, honey blonde hair out of her face, and kisses my cheeks.

"Thank you for this, Maggie," she exclaims. "I'm excited. I hope we can do more events like this."

"We haven't even done this one, yet," I laugh, "let's see how tonight goes before we commit to another!"

Everyone has arrived, and we're gathered, more or less, around the coffee table. Dana and Jason are sitting together on one loveseat, Rhys and Mauro on the other. Paul is sprawled in the armchair, and Lily and Patti are perched on the chaise longue, with my Standard Poodle, Edgar, at their feet, gazing up just in case a stray canape hits the floor. Cam and Katie share the large ottoman. I lean against the arm of Paul's chair, and raise my glass.

"Welcome, everyone! Cheers," I say. After we've all had a sip, I gesture to Katie. "Everyone, this is Katie, who teaches Biology at Cartier. I've known Katie for a few years, because our partners used to do improv together. She and I have been talking about Cégep teaching, and as some of you know, I've been thinking about ways to engage in more community of practice stuff—so that's why we're here. I'm hoping that we can all share some of our stories with Katie. We don't need to come up with a 'top ten ways to succeed as a college teacher' or

anything, just tell our own stories and hope that our experiences can help her find her feet—or at least reassure her that's she's not alone!"

Katie laughs. "I've already been teaching a couple of years, but, you know, a year in my life at this stage in my career, so much changes. I think I came in to teaching thinking, not that I knew *everything*, but you know, after a year or two, I am starting to appreciate how much I have to learn."

"So, where do you want us to start?" Jason asks me, leaning forward, elbows on knees.

"Well, I don't want this to feel to scripted or formal, but I guess it makes sense to at least introduce ourselves, maybe give Katie an idea of who we are, what we teach, maybe how we got here?" I suggest. "Do you want to start, Jason?" But Jason has just popped another mushroom cap into his mouth, so shakes his head balefully.

"I'll start," says Lily. She shifts on the chaise, tucking her legs up and stroking Edgar's head. "I've been teaching English for a few years now, but I didn't go to Cégep as a student, and I was completely unfamiliar with it before I started teaching. Outside of Quebec, people just don't know what Cégep is, even in academic settings. When I was at Yale, the general perception was that Quebec BAs were suspect because the degree is only three years, instead of four. When I got here, I thought Cégep was essentially Grade 13." I see a few heads nodding; Lily isn't the only one who didn't study in the system where she now teaches. "But now, I have completely changed my stance. Cégep is the perfect transition between high school and higher ed, to foster their critical analytical skills. Now that I've experienced it as a teacher, I feel that the Cégep model makes much stronger students."

"I did grow up here," says Rhys, "Well, more accurately, I grew up in Quebec, out in the sticks. I went to a regional college. There was a pretty limited pool for teachers—my Physics

prof was a pretty old school, chalk-and-talk, memorize the formulas, kind of teacher. And she was married to the Chemistry teacher—note, *the* Chemistry teacher—so she didn't bother doing any Physics labs with us, 'cause as she said, 'since you do lab experiments with my husband, you don't need to do them with me.'"

"Yet here you are, a Physics teacher," I laugh." How did *that* happen?"

Rhys laughs. "Yeah, not a strong start!" He takes a sip of his beer. "Well, it's all thanks to Arlo, my Cal I & II teacher. He saved me. He made Cégep teacher life look cool—I saw how he taught and how he lived; he planted the seed. *That* was the life I wanted." He pauses. "But it wasn't just that he led this great life. He was a good teacher. He knew how to make things relevant. He used real life examples and scenarios to explore math concepts. Math can feel really abstract, and abstract can be scary."

"He sounds a bit like my high school Physics teacher," I say. "Mr. Tannahill. He was this big, gruff-looking guy. Grizzly Adams in a leather-buttoned cardigan with elbow patches. But I loved him—he had this great way of making his examples realistic. I remember one—this was back when everything was on overhead projectors—he sketched this…" I quickly doodle a mountain, a tree, and a lake on my napkin, taking a moment to make eye contact with Rhys, the avid doodler.

"The idea was that a driver was speeding up this mountain road, lost control and went off the road, you know, going at a certain speed, at a specific angle, and would he clear the tree and the lake? But we made him decorate the tree for Christmas." I smile. "If it hadn't been for my truly terrible Cégep Physics teacher, maybe I would have stayed in science."

Dana chuckles. "I had never even considered teaching until I was started university, but then I did a certificate in ESL, taught in Asia, then came back to Canada and somehow ended up

teaching in a Quebec high school. Then I taught for a while with this really great guy, who sort of taught me to teach without overtly teaching me, if you see what I mean. He would give me a group of students to work with, then see that I was a little over my head, and scale things back. Then when it looked like I was on top of things, he'd give me a bit more. I think that's really when I knew I loved teaching, at least at that level."

What I Remember… Teacher, Teacher, … Teacher?

I loved teaching during my M.A. I felt I was fortunate because at the university where I was studying, English department TAs were given their own courses to teach, rather than working for a professor. In retrospect, after talking with colleagues like Rhys and Dana, I might have gained a lot from a mentoring relationship with another teacher. At the time, I was excited to teach my own course, to develop a relationship with my own group of students. No matter how much I enjoyed teaching, I didn't entertain ambitions to become a teacher at that point. I had no desire to do doctoral work in Literature, and although my Master's degree meant I could teach college, there did not seem to be much hope of finding a job at that level—there is not a lot of turnover in college teaching, which suggests that college teaching is a job that people hang on to once they get it, but means those trying to break into the field may work for years on contract, often at more than one college, before finally securing a permanent position with guaranteed full-time teaching.

So, I taught my composition courses, and worked in bars and restaurants for money, and worked in local theatre for fulfilment. My work in amateur theatre led to a contract for a local comedy festival, which in turn led to a job in Communications for a local arts center. This last job was the end of my work in the arts, because the artistic director made me miserable. I used my pregnancy as an excuse to take a break from the center, and during my maternity leave, I

found a job as a writer for an engineering company—comfortably far away from theatre and artistic temperaments. I was happy in this new job, and over time even negotiated an expansion of my role, so I was writing technical documents as well as client proposals, and moving into project management. But my success paralleled the company's, and the company caught the eye of a larger competitor, which ultimately bought the company and moved it out of Montreal. Those of us who were laid off in this transaction were given a severance package that included a day of career counselling.

Although the company was located on the West Island, the career counselling service was downtown. I remember very little about my day there; the offices were pretty standard downtown high-rise décor, lots of charcoal and chrome with red accents; and the 'counselling' consisted of a barrage of computer tests. At the end of the day, the 'counsellor' invited me into her office. She said we would look at each test in turn, then discuss the overall results. Test One: Teacher. Test Two: Teacher. And again: Teacher, teacher, teacher.

"Dinner is served!"

Everyone makes their way to the table. I haven't done anything as formal as place cards, so for a moment, everyone just stands near the table, as if waiting for someone else to assign seats.

"Sit anywhere, please—this is a little like getting students into groups!" I laugh.

Paul makes the first move, settling into a chair halfway down one long side of the table. One by one, everyone else sits. We all take a moment to take in the table: my lasagne, the golden cheese still bubbling, is surrounded by salads, bread, and wine bottles.

"Dig in, everyone." Somehow, we find a natural rhythm; plates are passed and filled, glasses topped up, and people settle in to eat.

"How's your semester so far, Katie?" asks Rhys. "Are you on top of everything?"

Katie laughs. "I wish! Two weeks before the term started, I thought I only had one course. By the time classes started, I had a full load—and I've agreed to replace someone who's going on parental leave in the last month of the semester. I'm going a little bonkers, honestly."

We are *all* nodding.

"Yup, welcome to the 'paying your dues' part," says Maura, sympathetically. "We've all been there. When I started, I practically lived in my car—I had one class each at three different places, and all of them pretty much last minute."

Rhys nods. "Yeah, that sounds familiar. 'Oh, hey, you have a course that starts Monday. Good luck!'"

Indeed, I think to myself, we have all been there. I started my college teaching career with a full load, but at a college two hours from home—and *home* meant two small children, and, thankfully, a supportive husband. It took me two years to get my foot in the door at a local school, by which time my husband was literally in therapy. It took another four years before my job was secure, and I could stop wondering if I would be making a living from one semester to the next.

What I remember… Cherry Blossoms

Leda lunged across the conference table at me, grabbing for my lesson plan and rubrics. "These are great!" she exclaimed. "Can I use these?"

This was not what I expected from a job interview—but it was certainly a pleasant surprise.

I was at a table with Leda and David, who were both teachers in the English Department at Laurier; Betty, the dean of Continuing Education; and Marina, the faculty dean. It was a warm spring afternoon, and the interview was going well.

I had already interviewed at this college, the year before. That interview had gone well, too; the department coordinator, John, had actually called me afterward to apologize, because the hiring committee had hired the only other candidate they liked, because of her background in ESL (as it turns out, that other teacher was Dana). John encouraged me to reapply, because there was a good chance I'd get it next time.

I had interviewed at other colleges, too. One had hired me, and I had been teaching there for two years, but it was a remote college, two hours' drive from home, and I really wanted—needed—to live and work in the same place.

One other interview, my very first one, had not gone well at all—I arrived in a good mood, because I had spent a comfortable hour on the phone with the department chair the night before, leading me to believe I knew what I needed to know for this meeting. I left the interview crushed. I had not been prepared at all. The chair had not told me to prepare a lesson or bring any sample assignments, and I was put on the spot, stammering and sputtering and looking completely unprofessional. I followed up with an e-mail to the chair, asking for feedback: what should I consider for next time? What might I prepare to demonstrate my abilities? She never replied.

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I arrived for the Laurier interview early, and took a moment on the grass, soaking up the April sun, and reveling in the cherry blossoms bursting forth all over the front lawn of the campus. Something felt right about this one. It felt like I was home.

More than a decade later, looking back on this moment, I confess to conflicting emotions. On the one hand, this is a genuinely happy moment, and I have had many more of those in this place. On the other hand, I'm reminded of an exchange with the department chair of another college—she had hired me, and was giving me the usual orientation talk: where to find course outlines, how to order books, where and when the department meetings were, and so on. She suddenly leaned forward in her chair, looking at me earnestly. "I know we're a big department. We have more than seventy teachers. But there's no office politics here." Which struck me as an odd thing to say, out of the blue. If there were no office politics, why mention it?

Of course, there were office politics. I even got a taste of them, when the same department chair told me that if I turned down the course she was offering me for the summer semester, she would take me off the hiring list. As it turns out, legally she could not do that; as a new teacher, though, I didn't know that, and she was counting on that ignorance. It didn't really matter, since my gut reaction was that there was no way I wanted to work in a department that threatened its new teachers if they appeared the least bit noncompliant.

Office politics are, in my experience, inevitable. In our conversations, it became clear to me that my colleagues in other departments and colleges felt the same way. Katie felt that as a new teacher in a well-established, smaller department, she had no credible voice, and no way to develop a clique that might support her desire to shift the paradigm of the department. Mauro felt

that endless bickering within his department had worn him down, and it was easier to just teach his own classes, his own way—with, of course, the caveat that ultimately his students would have to write the common summative exam. Cam felt that her department and administration consistently let her down when it came to classroom management problems; rather than support her methods of dealing with students who challenged her authority in the classroom, she felt she has become perceived as a complainer or too strict.

In my own experience, for the first few years at my college, life was pretty great. I had good colleagues, a supportive administration, good student evaluations, and thanks to the coincidental timing of my hiring and the spate of retirements that came forty years after the implementation of the Cégep system, I had permanence within a few years. The Dark Ages of my career at this college began about five or six years in. I had been recruited by Betty, who had been moved from her role as Dean of Continuing Education to head a new initiative, the Pedagogical Development Office (PDO). I knew Betty even before that cherry-blossom job interview; she taught the very first course I took as part of the Performa Master Teacher program. She asked me, along with two other teachers, to help her create the PDO. The goal was to develop in-house resources for our fellow teachers: workshops, newsletter articles, one-on-one mentoring, and so on. Each teacher in the PDO was released from one course each semester to work on these resources, and to be available for drop-in consultation. It was like a greenhouse for organic community of practice. We had a newly-renovated office, and high hopes. We also had a new Academic Dean.

The new Academic Dean, Jeannette, was from a regional college in the West of Canada. She did not, it seemed to us, understand the Cégep system, nor did she seem to have any appreciation for how we did things at our college—and she showed no inclination to learn. She

used the mantle of the PDO to implement changes that were too sweeping, not well-considered, and met with great resistance. She fomented dissent among the faculty, antagonized the union, and created an atmosphere of distrust and skepticism that persisted long after she left the college. Unfortunately, Betty is a peacemaker, so it was her instinct to accept Jeannette's ideas without challenging them, and try to convince the rest of us that these ideas were feasible and well-intentioned.

In the end, the course release was like our tax evasion downfall: the professional union objected, because the work we were doing should have been done by pedagogical counsellors. The PDO was dismantled, and rebuilt as a team of pedagogical counsellors with no teaching staff. Within our department and throughout the faculty, however, the damage was done. We were traumatized by Jeannette's management blunders, and came to distrust any initiative taken by the administration, no matter how objectively innocuous it might be. So when our faculty dean asked me to work with Betty and with Brenda, a fellow teacher from the Psychology department, I was wary. He wanted us to work on a literacy-across-disciplines project, something that many of us teachers had been demanding for some time. Brenda and I were both keen to work on this project; we had both been involved with the PDO and knew there was work to be done to better support students through a college-wide language and literacy practice. Course release for us both would be funded through the student support budget, rather than directly from our respective departmental budgets. In my mind, this meant that I would be freeing up a section each semester for a less-senior departmental colleague without depriving the department of its limited project budget. Yet because the department perceived any administrative project with suspicion, and anyone associated with the PDO—still seen as connected to Jeannette—as untrustworthy, my involvement with the Literacy and Communication Across Disciplines

(LCAD) project was subject to scrutiny, and I was asked to present (defend) the project to our department. David, who had been part of my hiring committee and was a former chair of the department, actually called me in to his office to chastise me for stealing another department member's idea! This other teacher, Francesca, had worked with him to develop a cross-curricular literacy program, work of which I was not aware. I told David I was happy to let Francesca take on the LCAD project in my place, but this suggestion was dismissed—essentially because the department did not want to support LCAD, because of the Jeannette problem.

Ultimately the LCAD project happened, with me and Brenda at the helm, and resulted in a college-wide assessment of language policy, designed to support the college's emphasis on communication as an important facet of education in all programs. During the four years of the project, and even afterward, however, I felt like a pariah within my department. The biggest irony in the whole matter is that Francesca, the teacher who genuinely believed I had stolen her ideas and work, was my first office partner at the college, and I had regarded her as a mentor—she gave me rubrics and lesson ideas, shared resources, and shared stories of her own first semesters, helping me get acquainted with the college, the department, and our students. The thought that someone for whom I had high regard thought of me as someone who would take credit for someone else's work, or as someone who would undermine the department, was deflating and disillusioning. I came away from the experience feeling sad at the thought that I would never feel that cherry blossom high again, no matter how much I enjoy my job or get along with (most of) my colleagues.

Chapter 4: Teach Well but Toe the Line

— "Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist."

— Pablo Picasso

We are sharing our own 'paying our dues' stories, remembering when we were worried more about if we would be teaching than what or how we teach. "I think the worst time for me was after my first fall semester at Laurier College," I say. "I knew they couldn't offer me any courses for the winter term, so I was planning to work on my M.Ed., and maybe get some other stuff done. I was psyched—I knew that this was probably my last term with no work, so it wouldn't be great financially, but it was like the gift of time. Then another college, MacDonald, called me in for an interview.

"I actually got that call in a shoe shop in England! We were visiting Andrew's family for Christmas. They wanted me to come in for an interview that week, but thankfully, when I said I was out of the country, they agreed to meet with me as soon as I got home. They made it sound like it was really urgent—they needed to do the interviews ASAP, before the start of the winter term.

"I was euphoric. Sure, I had plans for the winter of no work, but having my foot in the door at another college meant being less reliant on the first college. So, I went in for the interview, like a day or two after we got home from the UK, and I thought it went reasonably well. It was definitely *not* the welcoming, friendly atmosphere of the interview at Laurier College—it was a huge committee. I'm sure I remember at least eight people around that massive table. Maybe more. It felt like something out of *The Crucible*. But I felt like I held my

own, and at least I had the two years at the regional campus of Cartier and the previous semester at Laurier under my belt this time.

"Crickets. I didn't hear anything. The start of classes came and went, and nothing. I was devastated.

"The worst part of it was that I had been genuinely looking forward to having some time off, knowing that in the fall I'd have work. I had just spent two years living away from my family, and the idea of being at home with the kids and just recuperating was a really, really nice idea.

"Then the prospect of work at MacDonald, even if it was only one or two courses, came up, and I got myself into that mindset. And I think it was the not knowing that really got to me—if they had called me and said, 'thanks but no thanks,' maybe I would have been OK. But for some reason, not hearing anything at all was worse. It was really depressing.

"I got a letter from them in March—two months after the interview, which was supposedly so imperative—saying that they were adding me to their list. I can't remember if it was in that letter, but there was talk of summer teaching. Eventually, they called to offer me a course for the summer session.

"When I went in to meet the chair—you know, do all the usual new teacher things like find out where the copier was and how to get an office key—I had the weirdest feeling about the actual place. Like the tiles seemed cold. And then, in the middle of our orientation talk, out of nowhere, she leaned in and said 'Maggie, there are more than 75 English teachers here, but there's no office politics.'"

Mauro laughs. "Yeah, that's not suspicious at all!"

"A bit of a red flag, I'd say," says Dana.

"Honestly, I don't remember anything else either of us said in that meeting, but I remember that one line, word for word. We had not been talking about anything remotely relevant. Did I give off the air of someone likely to get into office drama? Was that a warning? Or was it rather a reassurance, and somehow, I came across as someone easily spooked?"

"Sounds like a threat," says Cam, "like, 'don't make trouble.'"

"Well, it gets better," I said. "I really got a weird feeling from that whole meeting. So, I called Gabe, who was the Laurier department coordinator at the time—and it even struck me as odd that at Laurier, and at Cartier where I was before, we called the teachers elected to act on the department's behalf *coordinators*, while MacDonald called them *chairs*. Like the MacDonald faculty were really trying to position themselves as university profs, while the rest of us are college teachers.

"Anyway, I called Gabe, and said I was hoping to have summer teaching at Laurier. He was really great—he told me it was pretty much a sure bet that I'd have fall teaching, but that he couldn't promise summer teaching. He didn't want me to refuse MacDonald based on false hope from Laurier. Maybe there would be a summer course, but maybe not.

Dana, who is our coordinator now, nods. "Absolutely the right message. I'd love to tell our non-permanent teachers that we can guarantee courses for them, but that would be a lie. Nine times out of ten, we end up with unanticipated leaves and end up getting to the bottom of the hiring list, but I'd hate to be the coordinator that promises classes only to renege when it's too late for the person to accept courses somewhere else."

"Well, I was lucky, I guess. I wasn't so desperate for money that I had to take anything. I listened to my gut. I crossed my fingers that something would come through at Laurier, and I

called the MacDonald chair and said, 'thanks but no thanks.' Her response completely validated my decision—she said, 'if you refuse this course, I won't be calling you again.'"

"Is she even allowed to say that?" asks Katie, incredulous.

"Probably not," says Dana.

"Whenever I tell this story," I explain, "I say that 'I'm sure that's illegal.' I'm not actually sure that it really is illegal, but I'm pretty sure I could have filed a grievance—but it felt so much more like I had dodged a bullet that it's kind of a moot point. I could have challenged her, but it's not like I wanted to work there, after that.

"And in the end, I did get a summer course at Laurier, so *all's well that ends well*."

"But weren't you worried that you wouldn't get work at Laurier?" asks Katie. "I'm on this weird teeter-totter right now, with courses at the university and courses at Cartier, and I *want* to be at Cartier, but what I *need* is to be working. I have rent, and eating is good." She raises a forkful of lasagne in a toast to the idea of earning a living.

Lily leans back in her seat, and gazes up to the ceiling, thoughtful. I am struck again by her easy grace, her elegance. "I think it's really easy in retrospect to look back on the salad days with a kind of almost nostalgia—a sort of self-congratulatory fondness for the struggle we survived. I see this now in the way older colleagues will dismiss the concerns of new teachers. Like those guys at the top of the seniority list who are merrily working toward retirement, who take the fall off and work in the winter, even though that totally screws the new people."

"And the department," says Dana. "We end up having to hire in the fall because we have more courses than teachers, then we can't give the new hires anything in the winter because those guys come back. Then we go through the whole thing again the next year, because the new hires from this year don't stick around waiting for next fall, because they have to pay rent."

"And eat, don't forget," laughs Katie.

Cam looks serious for moment. "Katie, I am with you, I prefer Cégep to university or high school. For me, it is the academic freedom. It's fundamental.

"College is better than university, at least for me. University students are already disillusioned, but college students are open and enthusiastic. Cégep might be the first time for many of them that they have real choices, and the autonomy to make them.

"I had no real desire to make a career out of research. I want to contribute."

Katie lets out a breath. "I'm so glad to hear that! I loved my PhD, but I really felt researched out."

Mauro nods in agreement. "Totally! It got to the point where I realized I had no more 'burning questions.' But I surprised myself. I fell in love with teaching. After almost twenty years I still get excited about it. I get butterflies on the first day of class. It's probably one of the biggest surprises of my life—I love this job. It makes me very thankful."

"Yeah, me too—I want to do good," says Katie.

Jason sips his coffee thoughtfully. "Yeah, I think for me it's the same. I love Cégep. We can teach a wide range of things, instead of having to teach within our narrow special field in university. And I love the students, too—they're still forming their identity, but they're mature and positive. I think it's so important to show them we respect them."

"What do you do to show them that" asks Patti.

"Well, for one thing," replies Jason, "I don't take attendance."

Katie's eyebrows shoot up. "Well, that's great if you can do it. My college has a mandatory attendance policy."

Patti nods. “Different programs do, too. It makes sense for some—do you really want a student doing the Nursing program but only attending half the classes?”

“You guys are talking about getting to the end of your doctorate and feeling like you were just *done* with research—it took me one term,” says Jason. “I was out in BC, doing a PhD in literature, and I genuinely felt like I was the only practical person in the room. There was real shit happening in the outside world, and all of these people were arguing about dead authors. I wanted to be dealing with stuff that was happening *now*, not end up writing and publishing in isolation.”

“So what happened?” asks Cam.

“I found out my wife was pregnant. My reaction wasn’t ‘Oh no, what are we going to do?’ It was ‘Oh thank God, I don’t have to finish my PhD.’ I took it as a sign. We moved back to Montreal, and six months later I got the job at Laurier.”

Jason has now been at Laurier for about five years. He and his wife have two very active young daughters; Jason’s wife is finishing up an MA in Communications, with a clear intent on moving on to doctoral work next. I sometimes wonder when Jason gets to just relax, and kid him sometimes that it looks like he comes to work to get away from the really tough job of parenting.

He looks at Cam and raises his glass to her. “I am absolutely in the right place. The world doesn’t need another *Frankenstein* essay.”

What my aunt remembers… in the air, in our blood

When my grandmother was about four or five, she had a bad case of measles that left her hearing badly damaged.

When she was fourteen, she left school to go to work and earn money for her struggling family. She had two older brothers, one of whom made sandwiches of shredded carrots because it looked like salmon, so people would think he was rich.

She married my grandfather during the war, and had six children—my mother, my aunts Sally, Kathleen, and Liz, my uncle Danny, and last but not least, my aunt Bernadette. For many years, my aunt Sally remembers, Gran was very concentrated on her children. Her children got used to acting as interpreters for her—sometimes, someone would say something softly, and Sally would immediately repeat their words for Gran, who would smack her and say "I heard that, of course." Other times, Sally wouldn't bother repeating something someone had said loudly and clearly, and would get a smack because she hadn't told Gran what she'd missed.

In the mid-1960s, Gran's life changed, with a hearing aid.

Before this breakthrough, hearing aids were cumbersome machines that required wheeled carts to transport. These new hearing aids, while still very large and conspicuous by today's standards, were infinitely more portable. So, with her new mobility, Gran decided that she wanted to go out and get a job. At first, she thought she'd find work as one of the lunch ladies at the school where my grandad was headmaster. Grandad hated that idea—how could the head be married to a lunch lady?

So, instead, Gran went back to school.

She started by finishing up her secondary, earning two "highers" and two O-levels, which meant she was qualified for the teacher certificate program for mature students. Scotland was facing a

shortage of qualified teachers, and was working to make it easier and more attractive for people to get certified.

She finished her teaching certificate, at age 51, in 1971, one year behind Sally herself.

My grandfather had been horrified at the idea of his wife as a lunch lady—but he, and the rest of the family, was thrilled that she went back, finished high school, and get her teaching certificate. As Sally points out, she and her sisters were all well-educated—there was never any question that education was important. "We just knew. It was in the air around us. No one had to say it."

Ironically, Grandad was the only one in his own family of five siblings to get a university degree. Perhaps driven by the same vanity that couldn't tolerate a lunch lady wife, Grandad got an advanced degree in math because of a random challenge in high school—the maths brother at St. Mungo's, in an attempt to motivate another student, kept pointing at Grandad, asking "are you going to let this boy beat you in math? Are you going to be top of the class?" until my Grandad, who was "this boy" purely out of a coincidental seating arrangement, was so affronted that he became determined to be top of the year himself.

My grandmother's family were better educated. Her older brother was also a university-educated teacher, as was her younger sister Veronica; he two other younger sisters followed the same path as my Gran, going back to school and becoming teachers.

I asked Sally how she and her siblings felt about their mother going back to school and eventually going to work. Sally says there was "huge excitement." Gran, she said, "really blossomed," and the whole family was supportive, helping with the academics and cheering her on.

According to Sally, the real catalyst in my grandmother's decision to "go outside" the family was the hearing aid. True, all of her children were in school, and in fact the eldest, my mother, was getting ready to leave home for Canada. But for someone who had always been dependent on others to hear the world, the hearing aid was liberating. In fact, Sally remembers a little wistfully feeling like her mum didn't need her anymore—perhaps it was this new independence in one aspect of her life that made her children enthusiastic to help her with her homework.

While I believe that one of the purposes of education is to provide opportunities to those who might otherwise not have access to such opportunities, my lived experience also suggests that circumstance has an obvious role to play in who we become and how. This memory reflects how our environment saturates us. In my classroom, I use the metaphor of a fishbowl to illustrate the concept of ideology for my students, and I tell them this old chestnut:

> *Two young fish are swimming along, when they meet an elderly fish swimming the other way. As he swims nonchalantly past, Grandpa Fish remarks "water's lovely today, ain't it, boys." The two youngsters look at each other, perplexed, then one says to the other: "What's 'water?'"*

My aunt's memory of my grandmother's return to school is one of empowerment—I love telling this anecdote, as well as another in which Gran tells my grandfather, who wants her to vote according to family tradition, that "Emmeline Pankhurst didn't chain herself to railings so you could have two votes, Eddie"—but one of the most fascinating aspects of this particular memory, for me, is the comment my mother made about education, repeated by my aunt in her recollection. It wasn't a matter of conversation; it was in the air they breathed. Education, including higher education, was just there. My family's fishbowl is saturated with education.

Paul scratches his beard and looks at the ceiling. “I get that feeling of research burnout, but one of the things I like about my university is the balance, teaching and research. When I was a grad student, teaching felt like an obligation. It was good money, and even then, I knew it was great experience, but it wasn’t yet my main focus. Now, I want to achieve excellence in my teaching *and* my research.”

“Yeah, but not all university profs are like that,” says Jason.

“Oh definitely. Some of the profs in my undergrad were so focussed on research, it was pretty clear they saw teaching as a nuisance.”

“I saw that, too,” says Katie. “And I’ve taught both now, and that attitude is why I think I prefer teaching Cégep. At university, profs *have* to teach to support their research. But just because you know a subject doesn’t mean you can teach it.”

Mauro laughs loudly and exclaims, “or anything, for that matter!”

Lily doesn’t laugh. She sighs, instead. “I remember talking about this with Brian. I think I was struggling with how to define Cégep—I had no experience with it as a student, and from outside, it’s seen with some suspicion. Is it an extension of high school? University-light? And Brian said that in his view, it doesn’t matter, because you have to go pretty far into post-secondary teaching before you get beyond the everyday problems of learning.”

For many of us in the Laurier English department, Brian was larger-than-life. My own story with Brian goes back even further. After my first, disastrous, attempt at Cégep as a student, I left academia for about two years. When I went back, full of trepidations, Brian was my first teacher. I can still remember him, his energy so big it filled the room. I distinctly remember an occasion on which he jumped into the recycling bin in the classroom. When we read Ambrose

Bierce's short story, "Coup de Grace," he asked the class, "why does Bierce use a French title for an America story?" I ventured the answer that French was more sophisticated a language than English, to which he replied, "well, exactly, although as we all know, the *most* sophisticated language is Welsh." He was, for many years, the president of the local Welsh Society, and cajoled my husband into joining the Montreal Welsh Male Choir, his other passion.

Brian was an enthusiastic champion of new teachers in our department. His mentoring, more often than not, took the form of him popping into a new teacher's office, brandishing a printed copy of a student e-mail or assignment, exclaiming that he just didn't quite know what to do with 'this one.' He would solicit your suggestions, then challenge those ideas, almost gleefully drawing out a better response. He was a raconteur, an inexhaustible conversationalist, and a wonderful tenor—so it was all the more sadly ironic that he was felled by cancer of the throat, a year before his planned retirement.

Lily looks up, her gaze turned to the dark night sky outside the window, and I wonder if she's looking for Brian, somewhere out there. Then she laughs. "You know, I remember being completely thrown by a question in my interview at Laurier. I knew nothing, really, about teaching at this level, so when the committee asked me how I planned to deal with discipline, I rambled on about the disciplines of literature and writing. Then they ever so gently pointed out that they were actually asking about classroom management—that was an eye-opener. In my first couple of semesters, I was trying to be a seminar leader, and I did have a couple of nightmare scenarios. But now I know what I'm doing and what to expect. But it was a paradigm shift for sure, to focus on the pragmatics, on the competencies.

"Now that I know the system, I am a big fan. And I see it as a different level altogether, which is great for us as well as our students. We're not in high school, nor are we in university.

And Jason, I love it, too. Working with students is immensely rewarding. I don't think there's anything more important to do with my life."

I look down and take another sip of wine. I've heard Lily, and other teachers, make this kind of statement before—teaching is the most important thing to do with one's life. It's a vocation. A calling. These statements make a little uncomfortable, in the same way that fellow parents who say things like 'I wish I could be a stay-at-home mom! I can't get enough of my kids. I miss them when we're apart.' Or academics who bring their laptops everywhere so they can always be writing.

Part of my discomfort is rooted my sense of not being as committed, or, perhaps, obsessed, with teaching, or parenting, or researching. Why does that make me uncomfortable? Why does someone else's expression of dedication to the job bother me? I realize that other people's devotion to their job or their kids makes me feel inadequate—I'm not committed enough to any one thing. Is it, as Young (2012) suggests, that I have a more multi-faceted idea of what it means to be successful, to be 'good'? Why don't I obsess? Why don't I want to spend every waking hour writing? Why do I allow myself to be distracted from my lesson planning? Why wasn't I the kind of parent that dreamed of homeschooling and was desperate to be with my kids? And, of course, the imagined consequences of that lack of devotion—students who aren't getting 110% from me. A thin publications resumé. Children who will no doubt write a sequel to Mommy, Dearest. I'm not committed enough, therefore I am not good enough. I am an impostor.

I shake my head, recalling Young's caveat that "having different priorities is not the same as shooting low" (p. 181).

Katie nods again. “I’ve taught both Cégep and university, as I said. My undergrad classes were *huge*—the typical traditional lecture hall, ‘sage on the stage’ setting. It’s kind of weird, because when you walk up to the lectern, all these faces just look at you, waiting. They’re better behaved, but there’s no real interaction. How can you know anything about individual student needs?”

Lily nods.

“My university courses,” continues Katie, “are me teaching my narrow little slice of Biology, to students who are studying Biology. You’d think that would be great, but honestly, Cégep gives me a chance to be a mentor as well as an expert—it’s the whole package. That’s why I so want to get better at it!”

“I’m so glad,” says Lily. “A big part of the shift I was talking about is embracing the whole package. I think we have an awesome responsibility as Cégep teachers. In my classes, I want them to see how important it is to become critical thinkers. It doesn’t matter that they’re not going to do a degree in literature. The ability to see the world through a critical eye, to engage in real analysis, to do good research—that’s what matters.”

Rhys looks up from his plate. “How’s your department for new teachers?” he asks. Katie looks exasperated, then takes a deep breath, as if she’s about to make a confession. She looks at Rhys, closes her eyes, and starts to talk.

“I feel like there’s a major lack for me—no guidance, no mentors. Maybe it’s just bad luck, maybe I’m just not good at asking for help. But I feel like it’s definitely something that’s missing. I feel like I could really benefit from some mentorship, and it’s really frustrating. Right now, I’m teaching a course and there are two of us teaching the same course, and it’s an optional course, so there’s lots of freedom in what we teach. But we’re both doing very different things,

and we're still not sharing material, and she's done this course a bunch of times before. So it's like, why? I just don't understand why there's that disconnect."

Rhys looks disconcerted. "That's so rough. See, where I am, we're really lucky. I teach in a great department, but I know they're not all like that. We share. My first year, there were four or five other teachers who visited my classroom to observe and give feedback."

Cam looks shocked.

"No, really, it was great," Rhys continues. "Once I realized that the teacher wasn't 'out to get me,' it actually made me feel supported and mentored. I think more departments should do it—but I get the hesitation. That kind of peer observation for new teachers has to have that non-punitive aspect, which means it can only really happen within the department. Nothing gets shared with anyone else, like the Dean or HR. No one who can make decisions about your career."

Patti sighs. "I really wish I'd had that helping hand when I started teaching. My timing was off, though—I was hired right after a big reform, so I needed help, but even the experienced teachers were preoccupied with revising their own courses to fit the reform. So I had to muddle my way through. I look back on those first few years now and I'm horrified to think what a disservice I did to those students. It took me years to change my practice, based on time in the classroom and, eventually, talking to other teachers. I think our department has a long-standing tradition that teachers who were hired around the same time find each other, and we end up in a sort of informal community."

Katie turns again to Rhys, and says "I'd really love to have that kind of teaching exchange, a mutual support system." She takes a sip of wine and continues, "Yeah, I don't know what it is at Cartier! Everyone's so stuck in their ways, and there's even teachers there who have

only been there maybe a year longer than me, but they just sort of jumped into this comfort zone that I find very counterintuitive. We're about to lose two teachers for the rest of this semester, so I'm taking on some of those courses. I'll be teaching four things I've never taught before, and no one, as far as I know, is going to give me anything. So I'm just going to somehow, in the middle of the semester, have to figure out where they are, where they should be, and do everything from scratch. And we're even hiring new people, because this whole thing is just such a mess, and I'm just here thinking about what *their* experience is going to be. I mean, maybe they're experienced, but they're going be new to us, and what are they going do? So now I'm finally in a position where I have more experience here than someone else, but I'm still not going to have anything to give them. I mean, I know I'll be, 'I'll try to help you, and I know it's super daunting'. It's going to be interesting to see someone else fall into it, instead of it always being me as the newbie. I'm like, 'is this problem with me, or is this really a real problem, and other people are going feel the same way?' It's going to be interesting. I don't know what's going to happen.

"I just can't help but feel that if I were there for ten years and someone else was in my position, I'd be like 'OK, you're about to be thrown into this position, here's a folder of the stuff I did last year.' They have it. Everyone has their material."

Dana looks shocked. "But surely the teacher you're replacing at least has their material for the courses you're taking over!?"

Katie shakes her head. "When I've replaced other people, that's happened. But this person, I've replaced for him before, and I got nothing. He's given me nothing so far this time. I don't know what to expect."

"Have you asked for anything?" asks Paul.

Again, Katie shakes her head, this time a little ruefully. “No, we haven’t had that conversation. I don’t know. Is it my job to do everything? I don’t know if I’m overstepping. I feel really awkward saying ‘do you have everything prepared?’ I’m the newbie, I have to be the go-getter.

“I would have hoped that being new, and having so many people that have been there so, so long, that they would sort of take people under their wing, you know? And there’s really none of that. It feels like those who’ve been there so long are the least interested in how things are going, and in changing anything, and they’re the most private of all. I just don’t understand what the gain is of that. I mean, I will give my PowerPoints to anyone. I’m proud of making them, but I don’t see the need to be so territorial… and in the end, we’re all teaching the same thing. So, I don’t see what the loss is of sharing that information. It’s just weird. It could save everyone so much work to just divide and conquer, instead of each just doing separately the exact same thing.”

Dana looks thoughtful. She says, “One of the things I had to grapple with when I was looking at burnout was ‘Is what makes you feel good about a job the right thing, or the only thing?’ It’s like a relationship—are you committing to this, or not?

“And if you’re committing, then you are accepting the stuff that works and the stuff that doesn’t work. But at the same time, if you’re committing to a relationship, if you want it to be a long-term commitment, you don’t just make that decision once and never think about it again. You’re always working at it. You talk to the other person. It’s almost as if you’re always renegotiating the terms of the relationship. Not necessarily that you’re always trying to decide whether or not you’re still in it, but that part of being committed is taking steps to make sure that you’re not taking it for granted, or getting complacent, or bored, or just letting it fade into

nothing. You're working on it. And a commitment to a career is like that too. You're invested in being engaged. And it sounds like those more senior members of the department are just phoning it in. They don't seem to care anymore—and if they don't care about their own career, why would they care about yours?"

Katie nods vigorously. "That's my biggest issue. I love the job, I love the students, I think I'm genuinely there because I care about their experience, and it's a happy coincidence that I feel awesome about the job that I am doing to deliver that service, but I get very, very frustrated when I see people taking it for granted. They're not putting the students first. I mean, we had an emergency situation, where someone was injured and all of a sudden, we had to hire to replace her, and in the meantime, we had to share the load to carry us over until we could hire someone. So we had this meeting, and it was like 'OK, this is *now*, we need to do this—who can cover for her, just for a week or two?' And people were saying things like 'Oh, I could do that class, but it would mean I'd be here with four hours between classes and I don't want to be.' But the rest of us are teaching at the time of her classes. That's not an OK excuse! I get that maybe it sucks to have a huge break between classes, but surely you can find something to do, like prep for classes maybe? That's not a huge ask. It's not OK. Then things get put on *my* plate, and I want to help, but at the same time, I feel very overused. And underappreciated. 'Here's seven new courses you've never done before. Just do it. Just do it, Person at the Bottom.' I want to help, but I have a family, I still teach at another school, I have other commitments, and I'm also human. So I start to feel overused, and that this sucks, but I'm not in a position to say no, since I'm still the new guy.

"And no one seems to see this, and say 'OK, Katie's going to have a really shitty time picking up for the rest of us, let's give her our material to make it doable for her, and for the

students—they're going to get a crappy experience. I'm going to try my best, sure, but that's something that upsets me too.

"I'm teaching Current Issues in Environment. *Current*. I can't use slides from ten years ago, and I don't want to. I'm always finding new material. I want to keep it fresh. But they keep adding more to my load, and I can't put the time I want to into any of my courses. It's so unfair to the students. I don't like this mentality of 'Oh, just take some material and slap it together; you'll survive.' They're taking this experience on to whatever they're doing next. I feel really responsible for that experience."

She stops suddenly, and looks around the room. "Sorry, everyone! Rant, rant, rant."

Jason laughs, then, "Well, why not look elsewhere, or get a bigger load at the university instead?"

"Yeah, I know that there are other options," Katie concedes, "but then I hear about the departments in other colleges and there's so much more politics, and departments are just so male heavy, and our department is mostly women, and by and large I get along with everyone, it's just not as supportive as I would have hoped. But better the devil you know. And I want to be at Cégep. I guess I've gotten comfortable enough."

Jason pushes on, and asks her "Ok, so can you plant the seeds for change? Shake things up a little?"

"I hope to," Katie nods. "but because I'm not full time, I can't be on any councils, I can't do some of the fun stuff I'd like, like start an improv club; I want to be more a part of the

community, but until I have a poste[4], I feel like I couldn't, you know? I'd like to be more of a force for change. I get a sense from some of the more junior people that they'd be open to change, they just need a kick in that direction. I'm OK being the person to do the kicking. I'm optimistic that eventually that will be true. Some people are happier just being comfortable, but they still seem open to ideas. But right now, I feel like I have no power, and given that I'm still working contract to contract, no one really cares what I say. And it's true, I could be gone tomorrow, right? I could work somewhere else, they could just not have courses for me, anything could change."

"I remember that awful feeling as a new teacher," I say. "You feel like you can't say no, and at the same time, you feel like an ambulance chaser—someone gets sick, you get work."

Katie nods. "I love the job. I love the job, and I feel so lucky to have it. I hope I don't lose that. I hope I don't get comfortable and turn in to one of those people that sit back and start phoning it in, like Dana says. It's not like me to do that, so it would really surprise me. I honestly

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4 Under the collective agreements governing the Cégep system, teacher status is reminiscent of university structures, but without the ranking system. College teachers are considered either non-permanent or permanent, and these are determined strictly according to the agreements. Typically, after a specified period of full-time teaching, a teacher is awarded *permanence*, or, colloquially, tenure (FNEEQ 2019). Since the collective agreements are drafted in French, the English translations rely on terminology from other contexts—so although college teachers are not required to undergo tenure review, nor is there any college teaching position that is or is not tenure track, we tend to use the term "tenure" to designate a college teacher who is a permanent employee.

love it. I get excited about going to work. I love prepping my classes. I love that I'm the person that informs students about these things. It's my goal to make them care. I feel lucky to be the person that gets to do that. And this is Cégep, where the students want to talk to you about their lives, to share their goals. I do want to be a mentor. I love being that person. I never had that, and maybe that's why I'm so enthusiastic about providing it for my students. And it's because I love this job so much, and it's so important to me, that things like this frustrate me, you know? I worry that I'm going to get so frustrated with the bureaucracy that it's going to kill my spark a bit. I know people that would kill for this job, so when I see people who don't care, who aren't putting the students first, it can be very frustrating. But it's still what I'm made to do; it's still my passion. I hope it doesn't affect that. I don't want to become just another cog. But you never know, I guess."

For a moment, we're all silent, contemplating our own frustrations with all the things that seem to get in the way of the actual work of teaching. Then Mauro says "Y'know, I've had both ends of it. When I started at Marie Victorin, they handed me everything. 'Here's the book, here's the outline, here's the topics, here are the labs, let's give you a tour, what do you need?' They really made me feel supported. But at MacDonald and Laurier—I don't know if it's an anglo college thing or what, but they really didn't seem prepared to welcome an outsider. The mentoring thing? It was non-existent when I started here."

He looks at Katie. "I get what you're saying, really. But it goes both ways. You know, five years ago, one of my colleagues came to me because he was looking into the flipped classroom thing, and wanted to know if I had any material, activities he could use to develop something. I said sure! Gave him a ton of stuff. Happy to. But, y'know, I was expecting a sort of quid pro quo, that I'd get something back, right? It's five years later, and I got nothing. I got a

'thank you.' And so, now, I'm not going to undertake that kind of change in my own teaching, because I got nothing to work with, and it's overwhelming. Y'know, I'm not asking him to give me all the material and prep the class for me, and all I have to do is read from a script… I'm saying 'you got any material so I don't have to do this from scratch?' I'd love to do clickers and all that tech stuff that Ed does in Biology, but *I* don't know how to adapt that stuff to Chemistry. I can't figure it out while I'm teaching it. I have too many things to cover in not enough time. I feel overwhelmed. I mean I'd love to try. But how? And how do I bring that in without turning it in to more work for my students, trying to keep up with everything?

"And, look, lemme give you another example. I tried for ages to get the department to update our lab manual, right, but *every* time, by the time we got to discuss it, the manual had been sent in for printing so it was too late, 'we'll do it next year.' Yeah, that's what you said *last* year. So, I spent two summers converting the NYA and NYB lab manuals[5] from WordPerfect. WordPerfect! That should tell you something. It's a lab manual—fifty experiments, lots of special characters, intricate figures that I went over with a fine-tooth comb. Each one took one whole summer. Then I save each experiment as a PDF, and post it for my students—'don't buy

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5 NYA (General Chemistry) and NYB (Chemistry of Solutions) are the first and second required Chemistry courses for students enrolled in Health Science or Pure and Applied Science (Vanier College 2019). In casual conversation, both teachers and students tend to use only the letter code for both courses. Mauro's mention of lab manuals refers to teacher-customized workbooks.

the lab manual.' Then someone says 'hey, we should convert the lab manual so we can have it online.' Huh. Not mine. I spent years giving people stuff—my class notes, my assignments, my slides, my this, my that. *Nobody*'s ever given *me* anything. So why should I just hand over my manuals? New teachers that come in, I'll share with. But not everything. That's when the debates start. I have prelab questions, right? 'Well, I don't do prelab questions.' OK. It's like as soon as we start discussing a topic, it breaks down. 'It doesn't fit my pedagogy!' OK. My time is better invested. It's not a conversation. It's just defensive. Conversational gambits are taken as challenges rather than 'I want to talk about this because I need to, y'know, think out loud, or get some feedback, or whatever.'"

"And you know," interrupts Rhys, "things aren't all sunshine and roses for our department, either. From the outside, it might look great, but that's mostly a Kyle-and-Rhys driven thing."

"It's true all over. From the outside, MacDonald looks amazing, but then I realize, I keep speaking to the same ten people at MacDonald. They're amazing, but like everywhere else, it's not all perfect."

I nod. "Yeah, I've heard teachers from other colleges talking about how close the Laurier English department seems to be, based on our behaviour at things like the provincial curriculum conference—but that perception only really reflects the fact that those are the people from the department that attend that conference."

Rhys nods. "Sure, some people are trying to do more, especially the newer profs. But there are a lot of people in the middle of the pack who aren't engaging in pedagogical innovation or a community of practice kind of thing.

"But at least for sharing, our physics department has a wiki—I can go find so-and-so's lecture notes on a particular topic, because I like the way he teaches it, and use it myself. We share, and it's for the benefit of our students."

"And I'm open with my students about this departmental sharing thing. I want them to see that Physics is a broad discipline—I might know all they need to know when it comes to mechanics, but I'm not a nuclear physicist. My officemate, Kyle, is. So, sharing notes, using each other's activities, helping each other teach, all that shows the students more concretely that it's OK to be a specialist, and ok to acknowledge when someone else is better in another aspect—way more than just telling them that there are branches.

"But Kyle and I, and one or two others, we're outliers because we're willing to go into each other's classes, to admit that there are things we don't know yet, or that we could be better at as teachers. But even within a department that seems so open to sharing, there's resistance when it comes to peer observations. 'Sure, I'll use this material or try this activity, but, uh, don't come to my class.'"

Katie rolls her eyes, "But why?"

"Because for them," responds Jason, it's not 'why don't you want to share,' it's 'why do you care what other people are doing in their classrooms?' Drives me nuts. I care because what we do has such an effect on so many people. We have an immense responsibility—we have an opportunity to turn people into lovers of reading and writing, or we can just validate all of their assumptions and preconceived biases. A lot of teachers just don't seem to recognize the central role we teachers play in our students' lives.

"Why does it bother me if other teachers are mediocre?" he asks no one in particular. "Do I really believe that one not-so-great college English class is going to ruin their lives? No… but

maybe it won't change their lives. We're being put in their paths. If we waste that, or squander it, it's a tragedy. A failed opportunity."

"My daughter's taking a psych class this semester," I say, "and she came home the other day and informed me that 'people my age' typically go in two directions—we settle down, or we evolve—thankfully she seems to think that I'm in the 'evolve' group," I laugh. "So maybe some teachers are just not invested in changing. Or maybe they're insecure about having other teachers in their classrooms, because they are uncomfortable with what they perceive as scrutiny, and they're equally resistant to accepting an invitation to watch you teach, because it's a tacit admission that they think they're not good enough, that somehow, observing you teach will expose (if only to themselves) the weaknesses in their own teaching?"

"Maybe," concedes Rhys, "but I was surprised at the resistance. My sales pitch was, let's look at just one thing, one lecture that you feel is ineffective. There's gotta be something. No one has fifteen perfect weeks. So, here's a list of the topics we're supposed to cover—pick a topic, or an activity, that you think maybe could be better, could be easier or clearer, then we'll work on it together. Or even stuff to complement a topic—maybe you've never quite found the activity or the exercise to help students really 'get it.' Or even find the right lab—sometimes the class goes just fine, but we have really shitty labs. Maybe a different lab, or an activity instead, would work better.

"Some recognize that there's some things they can improve on, and they're OK using my materials or exchanging ideas, but they still don't want me in their classroom.

"But you know, if someone came up to me and said 'you're going to be in this Shakespeare play, here's the script, and your costume and props,' I'd still be OK taking notes from the director, no matter how experienced an actor I am. I'd still want to watch the play. You

know, see how it's been done before. 'What is a *good* version of Hamlet, and can I use that to inform my performance?' So I don't get the reluctance.

"If I'm going to coach hockey to fifteen kids, and I'm alone, I can't give them as much as they need. But if there are two, or three, or four coaches, then the players get more out of it and the whole team does better—and the individual coaches are less stressed out. We all benefit. It happens in class, too—I've taught with other profs, and it means that there are *two* people students can ask for help or guidance, and we can plan beforehand and debrief after, so that next time, if we are teaching alone, we have the benefit of the team experience.

"I mean, if I could team teach everything, or at least have a paid in-class tutor for every class, I'd do it. One tutor per group—imagine how effective that could be! How much material we could go through, how much discussion could happen, always with an expert with them.

"Maybe it would work better if we were visiting classes for other subjects—like, maybe my Physics colleagues are worried that I'll catch them in a mistake. But if I'm in a Biology class, I'm not a content expert, I'm just there for pedagogical peer support. It's only about the teaching."

I nod. "Yeah, I can see that—in fact, perhaps that would be even more effective. If I go in to my English department colleague's class, consciously or not, I'm evaluating how they handle the material, because I am also an expert. But I went in to your Physics class, I'm probably at the same level as your students—maybe that's additional insight. If you teach it so that *I* can get it, then you're teaching it so *they* can get it. I'll have a better idea of the effectiveness of the teaching *because* I don't already know the content."

Rhys bobs his head. “Yeah, and I’ve had both. Just last term, someone I know was doing the MTP[6] courses and had to observe a class, so he asked if he could come to my class. He knows nothing about Physics. So, he came, and sat in the corner, and I could just ignore him. It was much easier to ignore him than it was when Kyle came in, because he *does* know Physics, and even teaches the same level. So yeah, I look forward to having non-Physics, or even better, non-*science* people come in.”

“Going into each other’s classrooms could be a really valuable experience for both teacher and observer,” muses Jason. “It seems to me that Katie’s colleagues who don’t want to share material probably haven’t updated their material is god knows how long—letting a newbie in, literally or figuratively, exposes that.

“Which makes me wonder, do we need a higher level of accountability? Even if my students are giving me good evaluations, they don’t have the pedagogical skills to see how and why a teacher is ‘good.’ Would peer evaluation—not in any kind of formal way—help? I come to your class, you come to mine, and we share ideas, observations, questions, et cetera.”

Cam snorts. “I think the union would resist that.”

“Yeah, sure,” concedes Jason, “but it’s not the union’s mandate to make sure you are doing a good job as a teacher—but let’s face it, the union’s approach ignores the pedagogy altogether, even though the collective agreement stipulates our obligations as well as our rights.

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6 MTP, the Master Teacher Program, also known as Performa, is a program designed by and for Cégep teachers, and serves nine Anglophone and bilingual colleges in the province (Université de Sherbrooke 2016). Teachers can choose to complete 15-credit graduate certificate, a 30-credit diploma, or a Master of Education degree.

"Of course, the problem is the very real probability that the government, if invited into our classrooms, would use that access to standardize, rather than improve. Probably. That's why it needs to be grassroots, peer mentorship, organic."

"I think the biggest transition shock for me," continues Jason, "was realizing that my academic skills are not those of my students. I'm the great student who ends up being an English teacher—but that makes me the exception, not the rule."

"Yeah, I learned that as a TA, that I'm not teaching a whole bunch of Rhys's," agrees Rhys. "They don't necessarily learn things the way I do; what makes immediate sense to me doesn't do that for everyone."

Cam jumps in, "yes, I think that's very true. Maybe not that they are not exceptional, but that they are not just like me. For me, that change came from seeing where I come from and how my brain is wired. As a teacher, I don't want to stay limited to that one way of thinking, and address all my students as if they were all mini-me's."

"Right," says Jason. "Our job is to spark *something*—maybe it's not what sparks us, but it's, maybe, about shifting and engaging. Students don't have to agree with my interpretation or feeling about a text—but they have to convince me of their interpretation or reaction."

Jason looks reflective. "Now that I think about it, it's been longer than I realized. I was a new teacher, and at some point, I just wasn't anymore." His remark reminds me of one of my favourite books from my childhood, *The Velveteen Rabbit*. The rabbit of the title is the favourite toy of a young boy, who contracts Scarlet Fever. During the illness, the boy cuddles his rabbit, never letting it out of his sight, until the toy is almost falling apart. When he recovers, all of his bedding, and all of his toys, are thrown out to prevent reinfection, including the rabbit. The rabbit

is heartbroken, but as he lays on the ground, abandoned and forgotten, he realizes that he can move his legs. He has become real, without even knowing this was possible.

Chapter 5: Heeding the Call vs Phoning It In

> "The only sin is mediocrity."
>
> — Martha Graham

Dana looks thoughtful, as if she's trying to find the right words. She begins talking, slowly. "For me the shift was a little different. When I started, I was really infatuated with teaching, and was very excited about teaching literature in Cégep. What I hadn't banked on was that I was stepping into a situation where my students were not intrinsically motivated, a lot of the time. It's not like you never encounter unmotivated students in other contexts, but they're pretty exceptional. But in some cases a large number of these students hated English, didn't want to be there, and were only there because it's a requirement.

"I had taught elementary levels before, where the little people just love you because that's what they do. But now, I was no longer getting the same sense of personal reward. In the past I had always felt validated because my students were intrinsically motivated; all I had to do was be enthusiastic and fun and nice to them and care for them, and that was very ego-stoking for me.

"After a few years of teaching Cégep I felt really *bad*, and something had to give. I was exhausted and emotionally overwhelmed by just how difficult I was finding Cégep teaching.

"I took a step back, and did some soul-searching—and I realized the issue was I was looking for the wrong things in this job. Yes, if you go into any profession with the idea that it's going to make you feel good about yourself all the time, you're probably going to have some issues. What I needed—I mean, I could quit, and try to find that somewhere else, but I'm probably not going to find it anywhere… so what I needed to do was reconfigure what I was

doing, and think about why I am here—and make it about someone else. So not, 'do I feel good about myself all the time because all of my students have a positive response to me,' but 'my job is to help you do something'—so I will feel good about myself, about the job I'm doing, if—regardless of how you feel about me—I can say I have done everything in my power to give you every tool, and every opportunity, to succeed—and that's regardless of whether you choose to take those tools and opportunities.

"You don't have to like me; I don't need your positive reinforcement, I just need to feel like I have fulfilled my commitment to you."

"And any job is hard, and there are plenty of people who go their whole lives working in jobs that they hate, or that are unfulfilling. No matter how hard this sometimes feels, even at the end of a really bad day, I feel like what I do is important."

Mauro nods vigorously. "So true, so true. After a year or two, my goal stopped being 'I'm going to make chemists out of you,' and became 'I'm going to teach you an appreciation of chemistry and teach you enough to get you to the next level.'"

Katie looks perplexed. "That sounds a little cynical, though. Just teach them enough to get rid of them?"

Mauro frowns. "That's not it, though. It's more a question of knowing that they're not all there because they love chemistry. A lot them don't. Some of them hate it. But they need it, if they're going to move on. And I want to help them do that—and if I can get them to see that chemistry is all around them, that it's real life stuff, then all the better."

He sighs, and takes a gulp of wine. "NYA has 110-115 objectives. That's a lot of content. A lot of it is overlap, kinda redundant. But if it was up to me, I'd cut 20, 25%. The problem is that there's so much, you end up running out of time, so you cut some stuff, right? But some of

that stuff, you might need it in your next course, right? So, one of the last topics, say, molecular interactions—it's not that complicated a topic, if you've been keeping up. But then for the next course, NYB, which is solutions, you're basically at the end of NYA looking at 'how does compound A interact with compound A.' How do molecules interact. So, why does water freeze, what happens when you boil stuff, et cetera, et cetera. It all boils down to interactions, right? The first chapter in Solutions is 'now that I know how A interacts with A, what happens when I combine A and B together?' There's a bunch of interactions, but the premise is that you understood what happens, you've defined and understood how the interactions work, so that you now apply that to a system that's slightly more complex. What happens if the teacher last semester ran out of time and didn't cover it? Which happens with annoying regularity… So what happens? Guess what? My first two lectures in NYB, I gotta give them a crash course on molecular interactions, because some other schmuck didn't get to it in NYA. So now *I've* lost two lectures, and now I'm behind on all the stuff I have to cover in this course. And the first third of NYA basically amounts to high school review, 'cause you can't assume that they all got everything they needed from their high school courses, right? But one third? That's *five weeks* where I am doing the high school teacher's job. Now, sure, review is always a good idea, but it shouldn't be one third of my course. Heck, it shouldn't even be course content, technically! My job should be to teach the new stuff. They've seen PV is equal to nRT, the Ideal Gas Law, enough to vomit, right? I should be able to cover that in ten minutes, then move on to other stuff.

"This past semester was great. One of our two labs was rebuilt, which meant we had to cancel half the labs, and alternate. So one week is NYA, then the next week is NYB. Which means that I got them an extra two hours every other week. I got to do all these activities that had piled up over the years, that I'd love to give them, that I think are really super cool, but we never

had time. Usually, I'd get to do maybe three over the whole semester. This time, I had done three by the time we were a third of the way in. I would love to have more time for them to do this kind of thing, to work through the material, to play with it, to work in groups and discuss, and argue, and explore, and review all the stuff. I get to walk around and help them fine tune, to answer questions. They need this, the process—getting a hard problem, working together, taking the question apart, taking a look at what information you have, what information you don't have, and how do you go from there to an answer. And because they're discussing it, each learns from everybody else, hopefully; the better students learn because they're teaching the weaker students, the weaker students are hearing the content from someone who isn't the teacher, right, so maybe it's presented differently, or whatever. So they're generally quite successful. And I wish that I had more time to stuff like that, but I just don't.

"The problem is that the ponderation is two hours of labs every week. So even if we got to the end of this semester and realized that we'd all like more class time and fewer labs, we have to give them the lab time.

"Teaching Science Plus[7] helps with the ego thing. I think some of my colleagues are intimidated by it. A couple of years ago, I was teaching the Science Plus kids, and there was this

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7 Science Plus, as Mauro refers to it, is an honours program that offers students more in-depth study of the sciences, as well as a program of activities outside of the classroom exclusive to the small number of students in the program. Many colleges offer enriched profiles in one or more of the pre-university programs, such as Enriched Science at Dawson College or Honours Social Science at John Abbott College. Other programs,

one guy, Michael, who is just a straight up genius, right? He'd ask me questions, and I'd be stumped. Some teachers would panic right there. But I don't have a big enough ego that I can't admit, 'You stumped me. That's a really great question. I don't know the answer. I can speculate, based on what I do know, or I can look it up…' I know some teachers who would just lose it, thinking this kid's trying to show me up. Nah, he's just curious. Answer him. Or be honest and say you don't know. I'm comfortable with what I know and don't know, or understand. I love it when they ask those questions. They're curious. They're engaged.

"Last year, man, I can't remember this poor girl's name… she came into my office, crying. I'd taught her in NYA. Now she's in NYB, and she's just there, crying. 'What's wrong?' You get these occasional kids, they're really curious, right? 'How does this work? Why is it like that?' So she was used to me, where she could interrupt midsentence almost, to ask 'how does that work?' She did the same thing with her NYB teacher and he said 'Why don't you look it up? Are you too lazy to find your own answers?' She didn't take it well, understandably. And now I gotta defend the moron who said that to her. Cause you can't sit there and say 'yeah, that guy's a jerk in department meetings, too,' right? But how hard is it to answer her question? To at least acknowledge it? Not every question is brilliant, sure, but at least they're listening. They're curious. They're engaged. 'Why don't you look it up?' Well, because I have a teacher in front of me. Do your fucking job. Stuff like that really bugs me. The idea of it bugs me, but even more so that I have to deal with the student, and clean up that mess, without throwing my colleague under the bus."

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such as Liberal Arts, are considered enriched overall. Admission to these profiles and programs is more rigorous than entry into the general program.

"I used to feel like I could never say anything bad about my colleagues to my students," I say. "But now I tell them, look, this is my workplace, so I have to be diplomatic; I'm willing to listen to you, and if there's a real problem, I am happy to point you discreetly to the appropriate solution. There should be some accountability. Maybe in some cases it's just, 'OK, so don't ask questions in that guy's classroom.' But I've heard far worse, and I think we need to be comfortable encouraging students to advocate for themselves."

"Maybe I need to rethink what I'm doing with my Nursing students, find a way to make it relevant for them," muses Katie. "I mean, that course was a tough one, like I said, and not just because of the material. Unlike most of my classes, the Nursing students are, like, a gang. They don't really see why they need Biology, I think, so even with mandatory attendance, there was a lot of absenteeism. And then the ones that did show up were like a clique that you can never be part of."

"Yeah, cohorts like that can be a real challenge," I say, thinking of more than one course I've taught to groups of students who go through their programs in packs, like animals in the Savannah. "The first course I taught at university was like that, and it really threw me. And keep in mind, I had already been teaching Cégep for over a decade at this point. That course was an eye-opener in a few ways, and one of them was realizing that even master's level groups have those group dynamic challenges—maybe even more so, since some of the students are the same age as you are. In this group, there was a general sense of frustration and demotivation that just seemed to permeate everything, and there was one student who was just so negative about everything. So even if I managed to get a discussion off the ground, this guy would somehow ground it with just one comment.

"On the other hand," I continue, "I have had some of my best teaching moments with groups like that. In my Liberal Arts courses, for instance, maybe because I've taught the course before and feel really comfortable with it, I use the fact that the group is already firmly established to my advantage, getting them to interact and collaborate."

"Why do you think being comfortable with the course makes the difference?" asks Katie.

"I'm glad you asked!" I say. "I just taught that same university course for the third time, and this time it went really well. I think it's inevitable that the first time through, there will be some rough patches, at least. It takes tweaking. But now I'm at the point that I feel the course is solid, and I know where we're going, so I can get excited about the journey, instead of scrambling to stay one step ahead."

"But wait," interrupts Jason, "how is that your Nursing students aren't showing up? From the way you described the course, they should be eating it up."

Katie shrugs. "I guess they focus on the courses that feel like they're learning how to be a nurse, and can't get motivated about a 'sciency' course."

I catch Dana's eye. She and I have talked about this aspect of teaching many times. "I know the science teachers probably get tired of hearing this, but we 'General Education' teachers get more than our fair share of the students that would rather be anywhere but in our English class!" I say.

Lily nods. "Yes," she says, "and that's a fundamental part of the paradigm shift. I don't think I'm the only person in our department who came in with visions of teaching great literature, only to find that what they needed was something else.

"I have to admit," Dana says, "I had a vision of what it would be like to teach literature in Cégep, and that vision was not realized. But I did realize that in fact, I really enjoy teaching

people about language and writing… but I still had to recognize that the relationship wasn't what I had envisioned, and that it just wasn't about fulfilling my vision anyway.

"When I first started," she continues, "I think I had it in my head that being a good teacher meant being liked, that students would work hard and learn just because they liked you. But the fact that I might be fun and enthusiastic doesn't go very far toward making this a pleasant experience for anyone, really, and none of that has anything to do with *learning*—and a lot of these kids have real problems with learning. That's what I mean about not fulfilling my vision. My ego is, in the end, irrelevant. This job isn't about establishing happy relationships that make me feel fulfilled. It's about figuring out how I can help them learn—which means, sometimes, making them do stuff they don't like, or that isn't very exciting. It's not about being liked, it's about being effective. That was a *huge* shift for me," she concludes.

"I was talking about just that to a teaching intern the other day," I chime in. "It was a proud moment for me—we were talking after a class, which he taught, and he said, 'Maggie, I've had an epiphany. Teaching isn't about showing them how much we know, it's about seeing what they need and guiding them toward it.' I was thrilled—this was only the second time he'd taught in my class, and the first time, he kind of overplanned it, you know—lots of information, lots of him talking. He has a really great presence in the classroom, and he'd done some great work with students one-on-one, but when it was his turn to be the lead teacher, I think he fell into that 'I have to prove I'm worthy' trap. You have to let go of ego."

Jason squints and looks thoughtful for a moment. "I think I agree…" he begins. "Yes, it's not about ego. But it is still about *you*. They need to know that you know enough to get buy-in."

"What do you mean?" I ask him.

"They need to trust you. To trust that you know what you're doing." Paul nods, and Jason continues. "You say it's not about ego, and that's true—but I'm still the star of the show. It's a performance."

"That sounds like a lot of ego!" laughs Lily.

Jason grins. "Well, yeah, but you also have to be self-deprecating, or at least show them you have no problem being wrong."

"Or not knowing an answer," adds Rhys.

"Right," says Jason. "And trust also comes from respect. So, in the classroom, we need to be knowledgeable, but also respectful and likeable. That was another lesson I learned on the job—sarcasm is my go-to mode outside the classroom, but it can't be part of my classroom persona."

"So, is that performance, that persona, authentic? If it's about building trust, shouldn't we be ourselves?" asks Mauro.

"I see where you're coming from," acknowledges Jason, "but I'm not really talking about pretending to be someone I'm not. I mean that we aren't—shouldn't be—100% ourselves in the classroom. But I don't mean we're inauthentic, I don't think. Just that we are distilled, idealized, artificial."

"I think I probably obsessed a little at the beginning about being liked, like Dana said. So much of why I wanted to teach was wrapped up in idolizing Arlo," muses Rhys. I wanted to be him for my students, to be cool and fun."

"Don't you still want that?" I ask.

"No, I don't think so. I got burned early on. I was teaching a summer course. I'm not even sure any more how it happened, but the whole class were stressing about getting an assignment in on time. So, Cool Rhys says 'heck, everyone gets an extension.'

"Well, this one student was *mad*. She had worked really hard to meet the original deadline, and here I am, casually changing it. Her being mad at me felt worse than the pleasure I got from making the everyone else happy.

"Eventually I had to admit to myself that I'm not their friend. My role is to make Physics relevant to their lives, even if they're not going on to become physicists," he concludes.

"I think for me, part of it was realizing, like Dana said, that my enthusiasm wasn't going to convert them to loving school," I muse. "I think we teachers end up teaching because we liked school—we were probably good at it, and figured out how to use the system to our advantage. If you were happy as a student, you think you'll be happy as a teacher."

Paul shakes his head in disagreement. "I was a terrible student," he says. "Especially in my undergrad, living away from home. I was bored and free. And I was smart enough to get by, and the classes were so huge, and the profs so disengaged, that I was pretty much anonymous.

"In fact, that experience informs my teaching now," he continues. "I ask myself, 'would I have engaged myself, if my former undergraduate self was in my classroom?'"

"It's not about being their friend, but about giving them what they need," says Lily, "and students really do like teachers like that. Once they recognize that you genuinely have something to give them, they engage."

"I'm pretty comfortable in the classroom, and with my relationship to the students," says Katie, "but the testing and grading is tough. I always feel like I'm just looking for some way to pass this one, or fail that one."

"Most teachers hate grading, but it's an integral. A necessary evil," says Paul. "We're not going to love grading, but we're not going to eliminate grading."

Jason snorts. "All new teachers grade too hard, until they figure out the level they're actually teaching."

"And figure out what competencies are, how to focus on criteria," adds Lily. "It's so important to see the connection between the grade and the stuff we wanted them to learn."

"Marking is such a big thing. We should never get too comfortable or complacent about it," says Jason, uncharacteristically serious.

Katie turns to Lily. "Can you explain a little more what you mean about focusing on the competencies and criteria?"

"Are you ready for the 'Hooray for Rubrics' dance?" says Jason. I know that he and Lily definitely don't see eye-to-eye on the use of rubrics. Lily is a real aficionado, but Jason can't see the appeal. Lily explains this to Katie, then continues: "I know where Jason is coming from. Initially, I really hated the idea of rubrics, too." I raise my eyebrows—I wasn't expecting that admission from Lily.

"At first, rubrics just struck me as too cold, too bureaucratic—and they made it way too easy to reward students. Then I started working with the rubrics of the International Baccalaureate program, and later the English Exit Exam. Both of these contexts converted me, made me a believer. The key is rigorous application of a detailed grid. The structure is beneficial for students, and keeps my marking focused on what I've told them matters."

Katie considers this for a moment. "I think we are lucky in the science courses—we have a ton of competencies, and elements of each one, but then, that kind of creates the rubric for you."

It strikes me once again that differences in assessment practices between teachers in different disciplines may reflect the learning objectives and teaching practices of those disciplines; however, differences between teachers within the same discipline reflect the connection between practice and teacher identity. I know from our previous conversations that Jason hates rubrics. He refuses to use one, even post-reform when his students are asking for rubrics. Lily, on the other hand, uses rubrics extensively, before, during, and after assessment tasks. Lily credits her work on the English Exit Exam and the International Baccalaureate program assessment grids for her conversion, but Jason has also worked with the English Exit Exam, and remains a skeptic.

My own approach is to use a rubric, which is shared with students even before the specifics theme of a given assignment is revealed. All my essays are evaluated according to the same rubric, which is an expanded version of the criterion-based assessment chart used in the English Exit Exam.

Why do I use a rubric? Why does Jason not? Can I accept that Jason does not use rubrics? Can he accept that I do? How do we address these differences with students? Do students see one approach or the other as better? Which is better in terms of learning, guidance, creativity, personal voice, and transparent assessment practices?

I've talked to Cam about using rubrics before, too, so I'm not surprised when she says "Well, I for one don't use a rubric, because I know what good work looks like, and I'm comfortable grading it, based on my experience and knowledge. But I don't fault others for using a rubric."

"I think," I say, "that if we assume that assessment is not a black and white, right way or wrong way, aspect of our teaching practice, then Jason and Cam's rubric-free approach is valid,

and so is mine and Lily's, as long as we can all articulate why we adopt this approach. So, Jason eschews rubrics because he wants students to consider carefully what they want to explore, to write, to say, and how, rather than following a checklist of items that must be included. Lily uses rubrics because she wants to evaluate objectively against a standard, and wants students to be clear on what that standard is."

Paul strokes his beard thoughtfully. "Is assessment really part of the learning process? Is it just about judging? If so, then why do we need rubrics? If we're the experts, our evaluation of a paper could be 'this is an A, this is a C.' But if we see rubrics as a teaching tool, as a way to learn, then it isn't about justifying that expert evaluation, it's about guiding students."

"Yes," I reply, "so, if assessment is about not just gathering information but also conveying information, the thing that is going to be tested, presumably, is the thing that matters."

"But is that teaching to the test?" asks Paul.

"You know, I have a real problem with the idea that 'teaching to the test' is always and completely bad." I say. "If the test is a good, authentic test, how is teaching to it a bad thing?"

"It's too narrow a focus." Paul responds. "But knowing that something is going to be assessed is definitely valuable."

"Come on," says Jason. "Teaching to the test is never useful."

"Never?" Lily and I say, almost in unison.

Lily continues, "Isn't it more about the test, rather than the teaching? If the test is a good, valid test, then doesn't it make sense to teach to that test?"

"Yeah," I add. "Think about a driving test, and the lessons that get you there. If I were learning to drive, I'd want to know that the lessons were preparing me for the test. And as a

person sharing the road with a bunch of drivers who have passed that test, I'd want to know that the test assesses the right things. *All* of the right things."

"But standardized academic tests often don't test what we want to teach," argues Jason. "There's a place for that standardized test—and yes, we need to make sure our students are ready for it—but we can and should go well beyond it. Your analogy of the driving test kind of proves that—the test is, what, an hour? But you have hours and hour of practice, hours and hours in a theory classroom."

"Maybe," concedes Lily, "but something like the English Exit Exam is invaluable, for a few reasons. For the students, it's the stick to our carrot. It's external motivation. And the fact that it exists, and is so high-stakes, demonstrates that these competencies matter, in the eyes of the institutions. It's a manifestation of the value we place on critical literary analysis."

"But isn't it kind of artificial?" I ask "In real life, no one is ever going to ask you to write an essay about a text you've never read before. In our classrooms, we discuss, we brainstorm, we revise, we re-evaluate our original interpretations…"

Cam nods. "This is another way that I think Cégep teaching is a better fit for me than high school. I remember feeling really frustrated in my high school History classes because I couldn't understand 'why am I being taught by one but examined by another?'"

"Oh god, do I hate those standardized tests," says Mauro. "They're really easy to grade, but they tell me *nothing*. Assessment should be about knowing that the students *understand*. I want my students to develop an intuition, a way of thinking, to solve problems that aren't just basically math problems."

Rhys interjects, "that *wasn't* my experience as a student in Cégep. I graduated with my Cégep diploma in science, thinking I was *brilliant*. I had great grades. Clearly, I knew what was

what. Then I got to my first year of Engineering and realized I knew *nothing*. Those great grades were all because the teachers just used the same old, easy-to-grade exams, and if you could memorize a few formulas, you passed. When it came time to actually apply knowledge, I was lost."

"That's the nature of exam scenarios," says Paul. "The value in terms of learning is in the prep. Assessment is about gathering information, for us *and* for them. So, in science, we get them to make cheat sheets—good old assessment for learning—they have to decide what to include, how to distill it, into the parameters allowed."

"Yes," I answer, "but something like the Exit Exam is a test without references—how is that authentic? In the real world, you can Google anything any time. They don't get to make cheat sheets for this one."

"Well," says Paul, "maybe that's just as well. We've turned 'memorization' into a dirty word, but reliance on external sources does no one any favours—they're losing their mental agility.

"There is a place for memorization, for things that are just there… not memorizing all the course material, but can we work memorizing into the process of learning? Think about the concept of taxonomy in science. Or of literacy—we memorize the alphabet, and that's necessary for creative writing.

"I think that's my issue with the anti-lecture attitude," he says. "It's a continuum, not an either or—teaching as transmission or teaching as catalyst. It has to change with the level, with the individual, with the discipline, and so on. It has to correspond to their needs—do I need the same kind of teaching if I'm a beginner? Does it really help me to skip memorizing the alphabet to get to writing?"

"It reminds me of learning to knit," I say. "When I was a kid, my mother tried to teach me to knit. But she's a lot like me—I have a ton of patience with my students, but if I try teaching my husband something, I get super frustrated almost immediately. It's like I know he's really smart, so why isn't he immediately getting this thing, that is so easy to do? What does he mean, 'what does 'sauté the onions mean?' So, when my mum taught me to knit, I think it must have been the same—I wasn't getting it right away, so she got frustrated, which made me flustered and unhappy, which made knitting into something that I didn't like. Something I wasn't good at, and there were plenty of other things I was good at, so why would I waste my time on this?

"Then as an adult, I got into crochet. I really wanted a scarf, a long, wide, warm scarf, and I couldn't find one that fit the bill, so I said, 'OK, how hard can this be?' I found a few tutorials and blogs online, got some yarn and a crochet hook, and figured it out. Boom, scarf. So, I spent a few years crocheting, but then I started to think, 'OK, if I can do this, I can figure out how to knit, right?' So again, I went online, and found tutorials with images. The videos weren't helpful for me, but there's so much out there that it's easy to find the approach that works for you. I made more scarves. I made blankets. I got pretty good at variations on the quadrilateral—then I made myself a pair of legwarmers. Halfway through the first one, I realized that a legwarmer is pretty much just a sleeve. So, I found a really simple sweater pattern, and I made a sweater. That first one, I remade twice. But I figured it out, and then realized that I was actually good at this, after all.

"One thing that struck me was that when I first started, I had to look up how to do the basic stuff, every time. How do I cast on? I did it for the last project, but I need a reminder. I had a couple of knitting sites bookmarked so I could translate the weird knitting pattern shorthand,

then go find a tutorial for how to do the stitch itself. Then I got to the point where I didn't need the reminders anymore. The basic stitches and common techniques were second nature. I still find that if I encounter a new stitch or technique that I need to try it a few times—I find it hard to visualize what it should look like. But then once I've done it, I've got it.

"In other words, yes, I memorized that basic stuff, without actively trying to memorize it. It's not rote learning, it's repetition and reiteration. Maybe we're so averse to the idea of memorization because we've forgotten what we've memorized? Those basics are so ingrained in our minds, in our practice, that we don't see that we needed to memorize it. That once upon a time we didn't know how to cast on. That we didn't know what *sauté the onions* meant. That we didn't *just know* the alphabet."

Patti laughs. "How many of us still mentally recite the alphabet song when we're doing a reference list?"

"So what's the best way to assess them, then, for something like Biology?" asks Katie.

"Lab reports," Mauro and Rhys say, practically in unison.

"I swear, the worst part of my job is grading those damned lab reports," says Mauro, "but I want them to be able to express themselves in a scientific manner. How else can I judge whether or not they can do that?"

"Absolutely," says Rhys. "Lab reports are the best and the worst. My wife knows, when I head up to my home office with a stack of paper and a bottle of liquid courage, it's lab report time."

"But labs are where they are doing it, not just watching me talk about it. And for the reports, I use peer review, I go over things line by line. And then I see that in the peer review, even though everyone has the same rubric, everyone's interpreting it, and it's all subjective. So

some are really hardasses, and some let things go. But then they see each other's reviews, and the strong students who were really critical see that they can relax, and the ones who were a little too lax see where they need to be more rigorous. There's lots of feedback from each other—but then the final version that comes to me still has mistakes, of course. But then I use the rubric, and even then, I'm asking myself, is this 7? 7.5? If that one was an 8, but this is a different error, this group made two mistakes and that group only one, but that one was a pretty major error and these two are not so bad… but I have to step back and say I'm doing my best, and in the end, who gives a shit if they get a 30 on 35 or a 30.5 on 35?"

"That was exactly the kind of question that would drive me crazy," says Patti. "I obsessed over every little nuance, every word. It broke my heart if a student failed."

For Patti, assessment was the aspect of teaching that broke her. She invested too much of herself in the process. She says that she was elated when students wrote well, and devastated when they did not. Her approach to providing feedback was to be the teacher she wanted when she was a student — she used feedback to explain, in detail, where students were going off-track.

When she says this, Dana looks at her intently. "I can see how that would get to be too much. With our class sizes, and the fact that we only work with them for a semester, it's really hard to find the time and space for truly sensitive feedback."

"Or the time and space for reaction to that feedback," says Patti. "Ideally, we'd have room for them to feel frustrated in the face of failure, or of challenge, then figure out a strategy to move forward."

"But why do you feel so compelled to give so much feedback?" asks Cam.

"Because when I was on the other side, as a student, it used to drive me bonkers when I didn't get really detailed feedback," Patti replies. "Like, my prof would write something like

'your logic is faulty,' and I need to know *why*? How is it faulty? What do I need to do here to make this work? So when I became the teacher, I felt like I could never just write something short and simple—I *had* to explain the why and the how and the what next."

Cam shifts in her seat. "You know, one of the things I have changed is how I think about feedback, actually. It's through conversations with Maggie that I started to rethink some of my approach. Marking is a big burden especially when it comes to language, or as we call it at our college, proficiency in the language of instruction. In History, they write so much. I used to point out every error, but now I do what Maggie does—I find one example of an error they make a lot, and point it out, what's wrong, why it's wrong, and note that it's a recurring problem. I think it makes it easier for them to digest all the feedback." She looks steadily at Patti.

"More feedback doesn't necessarily help the weakest students. Either they're weak because they're lazy, which means they don't care about your feedback anyway, or because they're struggling to understand, and too much feedback can throw them off the stuff that matters. If their writing is really bad, maybe I'll go all out for one or two paragraphs, just to show them why they're losing marks in language. But then the rest of my feedback is about the subject matter. It saves me time and helps them focus."

Lily coughs. "As long as there's *some* indication of how they're doing with language. I've heard colleagues, even in English, say 'I don't correct for expression'—I was aghast at that. How can you separate form from content? How can you see that as beneath you? I found myself kind of indignant. Good teachers are constantly asking themselves if what they're doing is what these students need. Assessment practices that vary so wildly make me uncomfortable."

Cam replies quickly, "I don't have a position that my colleagues should do the same as me when it comes to assessment or teaching in general. It's hypocritical to pretend that we are all

teaching and assessing—or thinking—the same way. It's human nature. That's not academic freedom, and it's not realistic in higher education. It's ok—it's good—that teachers in college are different, and have different approaches and styles, and are more or less challenging for different students. That's a reflection of what's waiting for them on the outside."

"No, of course," says Lily. "We don't need to standardize and try to do everything the same way everyone else does—but we need to recognize that we all do it differently, and be transparent about how and why we do things our way. Not standardization, but transparency.

"And even on the outside, there are clear standards, and people giving feedback," says Lily. "Individual students are always going to interpret your feedback, with or without a marking grid, in their own way—so feedback needs to be a dialogue, to be interactive. It's like the grid is just the starting point, the first statement in the dialogue.

"I have a rubric," she continues, "that is detailed, easy to understand, with evidence-based objectives, and works really well with my approach. I use the grid, I rely on the grid—but I know that for a lot of students, it's distant, it's sterile—and maybe it's not entirely clear—so we learn use the grid together. It's why I insist on meeting with students—I've heard people say 'I have a rubric, so I don't *need* to give more feedback or meet with students to talk about their work.' But that can't work. I have to meet with my students. I even offer a little extra credit—at first I felt a little weird, offering them marks for coming to meet with me, but then I thought, well, this is probably the most important instance of assessment all semester, so why shouldn't it have a value? Those meetings are essential."

Cam shrugs. "What works for you works, even if it wouldn't work for me. Besides as teachers we need to remain flexible, to adapt. The students I am teaching now are not like the students I taught when I started twelve years ago. Even the students I teach at four o'clock are

not like the students I taught at noon. You have to be sensitive to that, to read your group and adjust.

"For me the hardest thing about assessment in college is that we have too many students, and most of them are not used to real assessment. Growing up, in their soccer games, everyone's a winner, and gets a participation medal. Nobody fails. So college is often the first time they have to face their limits."

"Even if what's limiting them is not their own ability?" Patti asks.

"How do you mean?" asks Cam.

"Well," Patti answers, "what if it's a question of social inequality—is the student who lives at home with two parents, ten minutes from the campus, with no obligation to earn money of his own, really a better student than the single parent who has come back to school to make a better life but who still has to work and care for her kids? Maybe the first student gets 80s, but the second student gets 60s. Is her mark a real reflection of her ability?

Cam takes a moment, considering her answer. "Maybe not of her ability, but of how much she has retained from the course—that might matter. If she's a nursing student, it matters to me that she can only get 60s, even with all of those other circumstances.

"It isn't for us as individual teachers to fix social inequality. Imagine if that single mom wants to go to law school. The problem isn't me giving her a 65 in my course, the problem is that she has to finish her social science DEC in two years or law school won't even look at her. So either she gets low marks because she has to push all her courses into four semesters and deal with all the rest of her life, or she gets better marks by taking an extra semester or two—either way, the system is set up so she's not getting into law school."

Patti presses on: “Ok, but imagine those two students are both getting 70s, with same circumstances. Does that 70 mean the same thing? In the young student’s case, that 70 means only average effort, but for that single mom, that’s real effort. But the transcript, and the R score, don’t tell that story.”

Cam says, “At the same time, we have to hold students responsible for the quality of their work. It’s a reflection of us as an institution, too.”

“The problem,” interrupts Paul, “is that you can’t weight grades based on life experiences. But there is space; there are mechanisms in the system where life experience can be spoken to—statements of purpose, references…” he pauses. “Of course, once you get beyond undergrad, it’s about funding, and the problem then becomes that student A gets funding over B, and it gets easier from there—so B never gets to the point where the external pressures can be eased.”

“One of my friends from my undergrad,” interrupts Katie, “is *brilliant.* My grades were better, because it was all remembering the textbook answers, but her mind is awesome. But in our first year of grad school, I got a grant, and she didn’t. That was all based on grades. Then, once you’ve that first grant, it way easier to get the next one—and harder to get if you are further into your career without one.”

Lily nods. “That’s why accommodations matter—but there’s a difference if we’re talking about being nervous and not wanting to do an oral presentation versus a nursing student who is squeamish and wants to avoid blood.”

Paul nods too. “Right. Professional objective assessment means we can make accommodations, but exam results are results.”

Cam leans back in her chair and says, “Assessment—evaluating student work—is a fundamental and necessary part of our job. Assessment is really another way of teaching, and not just in terms of the subject matter. The fact of assessment teaches them about personal responsibility, how to handle criticism, even how to be a good citizen—stay away from plagiarism!—and self-assessment skills they need later.

“Imagine you open a restaurant. But you have no customers. Why? It could be the location. It could be your prices. But if all you do is cry about losing your investment—you didn’t bother to plan or research, maybe, but now you’re just going to abandon it and not learn, or save it, then we didn’t help you at all, if you went through the college system. College should be teaching you to reflect and self-assess—what did I do? What can I do better? So, there’s a limit to how much our sympathy should affect our accommodations.”

“I agree,” says Jason. “It’s not about making friends or looking like a rock star—it’s about using assessment to see their progress, and *show them* their progress, because our job is to make sure they get where they are supposed to go, whether that’s to spark a love a reading, a better appreciation of academic writing, deeper critical thinking, This is identity—how we see ourselves includes how we think about our students, and the relationship/obligation we have with them.

What I remember… *C-*

My undergraduate poetry professor, Maria Johnson, was a tall, thin woman, whose turtleneck was always the same colour as her trousers. Her hair was always piled up in a large, tight bun

high on her head. She had a habit of clutching her pearls as she lectured. I referred to her as the praying mantis.

For our first major essay, we were to choose one the 17th century poems discussed in class, and present our interpretation. I chose Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress"—the one that begins "Had we but world enough and time." I wrote that the speaker was clearly trying to bed the coy mistress, and furthermore, to father her children.

When Professor Johnson handed back our papers, I was devastated. C-

I couldn't believe it. I had worked really hard on this paper. I was sure of my interpretation—it made perfect sense. It was supported by the poem. How could I be wrong?

I approached Professor Johnson after class.

"Professor, I don't understand why my grade is so low."

"Maggie, your paper is well written, but I do not agree with your analysis."

For the next essay, my 'interpretation' of the text was essentially the one Professor Johnson had presented in her lecture. I didn't put anywhere near the same effort into this essay. I wrote what she spoke.

I got an A.

Patti's recollection of the frustration she felt as a student when it came to feedback resonates with me when I consider the Professor Johnson memory. Basically, from what I

remember, Professor Johnson explained my C- by saying that she didn't agree with my interpretation of the poem. All of these years later, why does that one moment stick with me? How can I learn from (or how have I already learned from it) as a teacher? If, as Ramaprasad (1983) has argued, feedback should be information about the gap between student performance and expectations, then Professor Johnson's explanation was not feedback, or if it was, what it communicated was more about the expectation than my performance. I was being judged against her interpretation, not against a knowable standard, namely, a literary analysis. I felt like I wasn't being asked to demonstrate that I could interpret and analyse poetry, but that I could predict what Professor Johnson's interpretation was likely to be.

Even my interpretation of what her evaluation meant was guesswork, really — I assumed from what she said to me that my low mark was a result of not presenting an interpretation of the poem that corresponded to her own interpretation. It may be that in fact, my argument wasn't well constructed, or that I was missing some crucial piece of information that belied my interpretation. Perhaps my analysis was too narrowly focused on the ending of the poem and failed to account for ideas presented in the opening lines. With no specific feedback, however, I had no choice but to guess, and naturally, I fell into the time-honoured student tradition of blaming the evaluator.

This particular memory, alongside Patti's memories of feeling frustrated, lost, and unsupported by her evaluators, adds a new facet to my consideration of assessment. If the apprenticeship of observation phenomenon suggests that we teach as we were taught, then it follows that we assess as we were assessed, and we provide feedback as we were provided feedback. My previous research (McDonnell, 2006, 2012) revealed that even in a relatively small department or network of departments, teachers' feedback practices are wildly divergent. One

teacher might write copious comments in an end-note, another might write nothing at all. One might ask questions in marginal comments throughout the student's text, another might instead underline everything that needs attention without commenting on why.

When I share the memory of that C- with the group, I question if I'm even remembering it how it happened, but then say "maybe it doesn't matter how accurate the recollection is. The way I remember it has influenced me as a teacher. I tell my students this story. I don't want to be the praying mantis. I will accept interpretations other than my own, as long as you can back it up."

Jason nods. "So, this student got a 90 in my class, then the following semester, comes by and says her new teacher insists that everyone in the class has to write their essay based on the same thesis statement, even though this student didn't agree with that thesis. How is that pedagogically useful? How does that create any spark, and motivation for learning?

"Even if there is a justification for it, clearly the teacher hasn't been transparent with the class, if they don't understand why they have to do this this way. They need to know why they're doing it—which means the teacher has to know why they're doing it.

"In high school," he continues, "I had math class with teacher who never explained *why* formulae worked that way—over and over, she'd model a formula, but I never got *why* it worked, and no one would tell me. So, no more math for me.

"Not knowing the why is a great way to turn people off. Even if I learn how to do it, if I don't understand it, then I don't care, and I don't engage," he shrugs.

"That's a real problem," says Paul, "and there's a growing trend of math phobia. Lower levels aren't taught by mathematicians. Then in higher levels, students get written off. 'Some

people are good at math and some are not,' that's bullshit," he says. "Hey, Maggie, you told me once about teaching math teachers, and this came up, right?"

"Oh, yes," I say. "It was a Master's level course on assessment, a little like the old teaching certificate program. I started the course with the idea that I wanted these student teachers to recognize the fundamental connection between teaching and assessment, because as people like Wiggins (1993, 2014) have pointed out, assessment practices tend to lag behind other pedagogical shifts. So we're all keen on constructivist learning, or collaborative learning, but at the end of the day, we whip out the old-fashioned multiple choice test or the one thousand word essay to evaluate their learning.

"So, Day One, I ask the class 'Let's say you have a class of thirty students, and you've just given them a big test. Half the class fails the test. What does that tell you?'

"Of course, as I had hoped and expected, their responses were things like 'there's something wrong with the test' or 'I must have missed something when I was teaching.' Then this one student sticks up her hand, and says 'Yeah, well, I teach math, and that's just what happens. Math is different.' And then the other potential math teachers in the group backed her up. I couldn't believe that this 'some people get math and some don't' attitude was still so active."

Mauro rolls his eyes. "Look, we've all had that, you know, that test that is just a disaster. When that's happened to me, I bring it back to the students, and say, 'OK, am I doing something wrong?' If I'm doing something wrong, I need to know right now. Some students think that we're trying to fail them, right? But realistically, if I wanted to fail them, it would be, like, the easiest thing in the world. My basic *goal* is that I don't want to you to fail. But my *job* is to test whether you understand that material or not. I would love to pass all of my students.

Realistically, it doesn't happen. If all of my students in a semester passed, it would be a statistical fluke, right? Like it or not, in the usual group, you're going to get the one, or two, or six, or ten, stragglers. But those math student teachers are stuck in that mindset. Don't pigeonhole all of us science teachers with those snotty, narrow-minded teachers. You get those in all subjects, right? I have seen it more in math, though—there's a sort of 'this is equal to that, or it's not' approach. There's no maybe, there's no gray."

"It's too easy to fall back on 'that's just what happens' or 'we don't matter—good students do well, bad students don't'," says Jason. "It's passing the buck. 'I have no responsibility.' 'If they're bad in Cégep it's because someone in high school messed up.' 'Anything we don't get to they'll find out in university.' Every student who fails is someone else's problem, it's someone else's fault."

Rhys looks exasperated. "It's easy to fall into the idea that in STEM there are right and wrong answers. But I want my students to focus on the process, not just the product. So, for instance, last semester, I asked my second-year students to build musical instruments. They could work alone, or in a group of three or four. If they were working alone, I expected them to put in about 10 to 12 hours, and a group, 3 or 4 times that. Now, I'm not expecting them to master instrument-making. I'm not making *luthiers*. The idea is that they developed their own rubric—like, if a student decided to make a flute out of a PVC pipe, part of our discussion was, well, what are the standards? If it's flute, it needs to make more than one tone—so, what is a reasonable number of tones to expect?"

"Ok, so if I'm your student and I'm ambitious and say I want my flute to play an octave, but then four hours in to my project I realize that eight tones is not at all feasible, what happens?" Paul asks.

"Part of what I'm teaching them is design choices, and rationale. So you start by saying your flute will play an octave, but then you document the process, and discuss in your report why you changed the design—for a flute made from this material, it would have to be this much longer to play an octave, and that's just not feasible, so you changed the design to three tones, or whatever. And that happened—you know, I had students who were all gung-ho: 'I'm gonna build a guitar or a violin!' but then they come back in, 'wow, a violin is really hard…maybe I'll just buy the violin casing and build the rest'—then in their report, they talked about how making the case would exceed the limitations of the project, but within the time given, they did a good job with the strings and so on. I am an engineer after all, and this is like engineering in a way, and you have to make tough decisions, and recognize your own limits.

"What's great about it, what makes me excited, is that I have them agreeing beforehand on what they need to do. They decided on the time frame, they're designing their project and their evaluation tools.

"Which makes me wonder if I can take the same approach with the lab reports—you know, 'ok guys, what do you think you need to give me in these reports? What do you think you need to tell me, what is the important data? What is a good lab report?' The peer review thing is useful, but at the end of the day, they're still not consistently good, there's still a step missing."

"Do they ask you 'why bother with lab reports?'" asks Jason.

Rhys nods.

"And what do you tell them?" asks Paul.

"I tell them that scientific writing matters. I've published papers; I wrote a thesis; I had to defend my thesis. It's humbling. Things have to be clear. Even the ones who tell me they're going to grad school just to get the degree, then go work for some corporation that doesn't need

publications—they're still going to face a committee, with external examiners, who really don't give a shit about you as a person, so if your thesis isn't convincing and clear, you're out of luck. You have to convince them. And let's be real—even in those corporations, they're going to be writing procedures, and protocols, so your career as a scientific writer isn't going to end. And I've had my share of getting pissed off by peer review, I've had papers come back with 'needs major revision,' and of course my first reaction is 'what's wrong with you? This is clear, it's good.' And then you go back, because you have to, you're not going to get published unless you convince them, and you rework it, and you have friends read it, and work on it some more, and you resubmit it, and you realize, 'oh my god, they were right. It's *so* much better now.' I no longer get mad at peer review. In fact, I've shown my students one of my first drafts and the revised draft, and they can see how much better it is. The reviewer is, usually, on your side. Just like we are when we give them feedback!

"But they're not there yet—they're not grad students. They don't see the value, or at least the same way, not yet. And maybe I shouldn't worry so much about their lab reporting skills. But that's where I am, even though lab reports and assessment are the areas I'm most unhappy with."

"The thing is," says Lily, "it might not be easy for students to recognize pedagogical strategies, but at least we can make the environment a good learning experience."

Patti, bringing us back to the math question, says "I think, it's not an easy thing to teach math well, and if you're a math teacher, chances are, you were good in math. So, you don't know how to teach people who don't have the same ease, that don't know how to do it without help. The best teachers are often the ones who weren't great students in that subject. They've learned to break it down, to look at a problem from more than one angle to figure it out—so they can show that to their students.

"I wasn't great at analysis and writing essays," she continues. "It took me time, and it took certain teachers, to help me get my thoughts together. I could analyse, but my analysis was unstructured, a little chaotic. Sometimes I was just summarizing, because no one had ever taught me the difference. Then I found a TA who was willing to teach me, to really break it all down. So, when I became a TA, I used the same approach, and it was amazing how many students said it was the first time they really got it. All because as a student, I had to tunnel through to find a way, and now I could show them the path.

"Math is different, and it requires different skills. And I think that the way it's taught often just comes down to 'just do it. Do it that way. That's the rule.' So maybe we need to be teaching our math teachers the logic behind the rule, so they can use that to teach the rule—so students understand it, not just 'do it.' And teach them how to teach that logic. Teach them the history of how the rule comes to be, what came before. It's really cool to go back to the beginning and see how we started. Why, and how, and who, how did we get here. Give them context.

"If there's no context, how do you make the learning meaningful? My son's teacher is testing them on the Baroque, but her tests are just meaningless, like a trivia quiz—why does it matter to me as a student that the period spans certain years? Why does it matter to me that specific composers or artists are associated with it? Why does it matter to me that Bach's first wife's middle name was Barbara—because that's something that was on the test! How is that useful information? How does testing that add to the students' learning? Or is that just about making it easy for the teacher?

"If that is what the test is, what on earth are you assessing?" Patti says, shrugging.

Katie picks up the thread, saying "The way we test science is a huge, huge issue. And it contributes to why so many people hate science. I found science boring in high school. I was good at it, because I have a good photographic memory, so it was easy, but I didn't like it. Read a textbook, memorize it, regurgitate it: boring! And then you learn that science is an activity: it's doing, it's observing, it's creative. You come up with an idea, you design how to test that idea, which is a whole set of skills unto itself: being able to recognize a problem, find a new question, test that question, do that test, analyze the results, *that's* science. But we don't do that almost at all. When do we challenge students to come up with a question? Maybe science fairs? And those are all optional, extracurricular things, all the way up to grad school. What if we said 'OK, here's a bunch of material, here's a phenomenon, figure out a question, find a way to test it.' That would be the way to make a scientist.

"We have problems in grad school hiring assistants to do research; people have good grades, and that's apparently the only way we have to determine merit. But they might have no idea how to *do* science, to carry out research, and that's what we're asking them to do. And the students who don't have the great grades, maybe they *are* the scientists, but you have no way of knowing, because that's not what we're testing."

Rhys nods. "I'd love to just sit down, one-on-one with each of my students, talk to them, let them talk, and then ask, 'Would I hire you?' That's a genuine assessment—it's about that person's ability, but also their suitability. Are they genuinely a researcher? A scientist? A physicist? Do the grades really reflect that? But they obsess over the numbers, which means we have to obsess over the numbers, at least in terms of how we determine them and defend them."

Katie replies, "Oh, totally! Recommendation letters should carry more weight than transcripts. Science is creativity, it's problem solving, and sometimes it's really physical labour.

My research assistants had to do long hours outdoors, in the rain—my best one was someone who had worked on a farm. She didn't have the best grades, but she put in the hours, never complained, and got the job done. You gotta be a beast. Bookworms tend not to do that. Grades might be the *worst* way of assessing the suitability of someone to field research. Maybe they'd be great in the lab, but in the field, you need the farmer, not the genius. So, these multiple choice tests, you get it right or you are wrong. Failure is about gatekeeping, not experimenting and solving problems. And then when you get to grad school, and you do start designing experiments and things fail—because inevitably they do, that's why these things take two or three years to do—you're not used to embracing failure, to seeing it as an opportunity. There are so many awesome stories where something failed, they realized why it failed, and it all became a more interesting question. But you have to be open to those opportunities, and the more exposure you get along the way to trying and failing, the more likely you are to see and exploit them. You learn that science always fails, that it's messy, it's hard, it's repetitive, sometimes it's boring, and maybe if we had those kinds of experiences early on, we'd find out 'is this something I want to do?' People do an undergrad, a master's, then realize 'I hate science.' Meanwhile, we lost a bunch of people who were no good at memorizing the textbooks who might have loved it.

"And we don't do it more because it's difficult to do with three hundred people in the class; but it's gotta be doable," Katie insists. "We still manage labs with that many people in a course. It takes a new way of thinking, a new approach. It would be harder, it would be a lot more legwork for the teacher, but so much better."

"I so wish we were more open to the fail-and-try-again approach in academia," says Patti. "Video games are the perfect analogy—and people get addicted. Why? Because they fail and become determined to succeed—I failed this level again! I have to keep playing. You go

through, and each time you fail, you reassess—what decision did I make at which point that I can do differently? Which object should I have used, or collected, or whatever? OK, now I'm ready to try again. You learn every time you fail, until finally, you beat the level. And people will do it, and do it, and do it, because the reward is 'I figured it out' rather than 'I passed.'

"There are so many really interesting things we could do—but we still have to give them grades in the end. But does it matter if one student has a B and another one has an A? They're both going to finish the program and have a diploma, and no one is going to say 'well, what grade did you get in Maggie's course' They're going to say 'we need an English teacher for Grades 9 and 10, and you have a B.Ed. with an ELA specialty, so you're hired.' It's not going to be about who got the B and who got the A; it's going to be about how you present yourself.

"Of course, you have to assess whether they're ready to move on, that they've done what they need to do in your course and they're ready for the next one. But I think many of us come into Cégep teaching with the idea that we're supposed to have a certain pass:fail ratio, that not everyone can just pass.

"But at the same time, there is some gatekeeping, naturally. And maybe that's one of the functions of assessment at this level—you know, to combat the helicopter parenting or that sense of entitlement that people complain about. We do have a kind of 'everybody gets a participation medal' approach sometimes—but once you've got a job, your boss isn't going to say to you, 'well, you didn't deliver, but I know you tried really hard and you participated at the meeting.'

"But these teachers who think they are doing students a favour by keeping the gate, what they're really doing is creating the barriers. They don't even know that they're doing it. They don't realize the power of their words.

"And so maybe failure needs to include 'but I am still moving, I can get through this. Maybe I won't get there all in one go, or I won't get there this week or this semester, but if I keep trying I can get there.' So sure, let's support and accommodate, but also encourage our students to develop their metacognitive skills, to adopt strategies to get around the things we're currently accommodating, to persevere."

"It's the threshold concept,[8]" I say. "Think about when you are an infant, taking your first steps, literally. Of course you're going to struggle. You're going to fall, you're going to bonk your head on the coffee table. You're going to grab your mum's pantleg to steady yourself, or get knocked over by the dog. But at some point, you've got it—and then you'll never not have it. You can walk. And what's interesting is that we get all excited about our kids talking their first step, but that moment when they cross the threshold, when they are officially walkers, we don't

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8 Meyer and Land first proposed the idea of threshold concepts in 2003, and the idea was widely embraced in pedagogical research (Meyer and Land 2012). The original discussion focussed on post-secondary education, and suggested that

> in many disciplines there is an important class of transformative concepts, the internalisation of which, respectively, open up for students a previously occluded, and integrated, view of the subject landscape and aspects of the perceived world beyond it – "integrated" in revealing a previously occluded "web" of interconnectedness between threshold and other concepts, including other threshold concepts, associated with them. This experience shapes the process of the student "becoming" and "being" in that landscape (Meyer 2016, pp. 463-4).

even notice it. It's like it just happens—and maybe we get worried because our kid isn't walking by a year, or 18 months, or whatever—but then years later, we can't even really remember exactly how old they were when it happened."

"I read about this democratic school in the States," Patti continues, "where kids can study what they want, so there's this one kid who's 13, and he's taking algebra with kids who are 17, and it's because he loves algebra. Those teachers recognize that not everyone is at the same level, nor do they have to be. But then I think, well that works really well for kids who are motivated, but what do you do with someone who just will not study the stuff that he doesn't like, because it's hard and he doesn't feel good, he doesn't love it. My son used to hate math, and was convinced he would always hate math. And we pushed—we said 'maybe you'll come to like math, but you will never know if you don't learn this stuff.' And now he loves math. So there's a certain point where some kids are just going to have to do some stuff that's too hard, or too easy and boring, or whatever. You can't just say, 'hey, you say you love algebra, but you haven't learned how to add and subtract, multiply and divide, but no matter, come and be in algebra.'"

"I think that works better for some subjects than others," says Paul.

"And some people better than others!" adds Cam."Some people don't recognize their own limits."

"Maybe it's OK to let people find the limits themselves, though," I say. "I teach two yoga classes—one is advanced, and sometimes involves difficult poses and intense work. The other is all-levels yoga, and it's slow, and relaxed, and the poses tend to be pretty straightforward and standard. I have some people who come to both, and some who will only ever come to one or the other. Some people will only come to the all-levels class, because they don't feel ready for the advanced class. And there are others who only ever come to the advanced class because the all-

levels class is just a little too basic for them. And there are some people who come to both, because they appreciate the basic stuff, and they appreciate the challenges—and all three of these groups decide for themselves. I don't say 'you can't come in to this advanced class because I don't know whether you can handle this;' I don't send people back to the basic class if they seem to be struggling in the advanced class; it's entirely self-directed. You decide. If you want to do both, you do both. If you can only do one, or you choose to do only the other, that's your choice."

"Sure," says Cam, "but there's a difference between self-assessment when choosing a yoga class and deciding whether or not you'd make a good surgeon. But it's true, what I was saying before, that my students aren't just younger versions of myself. That means I have to adjust my teaching and my assessment. I love writing papers, and if I were the student, that's the kind of assignment I'd love. But for many of them, writing a paper is the scariest thing to ask."

I nod, and put down my fork. "Are you all familiar with Lortie's *apprenticeship of observation*?" I ask, to a chorus of silent, blank faces. "OK, well, in 1975, Lortie wrote a book on teaching—his focus was on high school teachers, but this idea that he proposed makes a lot of sense to me as a teacher at this higher level. In fact, I'd argue that we're even more prone to the apprenticeship.

"So, the idea of the apprenticeship of observation is that even if we have training as teachers, we tend to fall back on conventional teaching modes."

"I think that's probably true," says Patti, "but why? We're inundated with new pedagogy. Why aren't we changing?"

"I think we are, but maybe slowly. And the fall back makes sense to me—we go back to the familiar when we are feeling threatened, even if the threat is only feeling like a new teacher

trying to establish a presence in the classroom. We're trying to assure students that we know what we're doing, and maybe deferring to the practice of our more experienced colleagues. And that's why I think it's an even greater tendency in higher ed—most of us don't even have the exposure to new pedagogical ideas and theories that we might get through a B.Ed. or certificate program. I mean, look at my path: I spent a year in preschool, seven years in elementary school, four years in high school, approximately three years in Cégep, three years as an undergrad, and six years (part-time) as a Master's student—a total of 24 years—before teaching my first course. I only began my training as a teacher two years *after* I started teaching Cégep. For those first two years, I taught based on how I had seen 24 years' worth of other teachers do it."

"And," interjects Jason, "if good teachers make it look easy, everyone thinks they can do it, too."

I laugh. "Lortie said pretty much the same thing—because we see teaching happen all the time as we are growing up, we think it's easy enough. Yet, if I go the dentist for a cleaning twice a year for twenty years, I don't assume I can be a dental hygienist with no actual training."

"Yeah, and then when we step into the classroom and realize we have no idea what the heck we're doing, we panic," says Rhys.

"Exactly—and in our panic, we switch to traditional teacher mode, because that's at least somewhat familiar," I add.

"Not to mention," adds Dana, "suddenly realizing that teaching in front of the classroom is, like, a third of what we actually do."

"Oh my goodness, yes!" exclaims Katie. "When we're observing all those teachers for all those years, we don't see the planning, and correcting, and meetings, and so on, and so on…" her voice trails away, her eyes wide.

Chapter 6: Time and Talk

> "The right sort of practice carried out over a sufficient period of time leads to improvement. Nothing else."
>
> — K. Anders Ericsson

"So," says Paul, "does it get better if we get training?"

"Actually, a lot of research seems to suggest that no, training doesn't change much. There's no shortcut—becoming a teacher is a constant process, and we get better and more effective, more comfortable in the role, with time." I reply.

"Time, and, I think, talk," says Patti. "we learn from each other, from the newbie cohort that we're hired with, from our mentors, and from our students."

"Well if apprenticeship is based on idea that we learn, initially and unconsciously, how to teach by observing our teachers, perhaps emulating the best ones, even though at the time we didn't know what we were seeing," says Lily, "how much more enriching would it be if we could observe each other now, like Rhys does, now that we know what we're seeing and what we're seeking?"

She seems to check herself, and says "but then, I see my classroom as a sacred space—but it's not about resistance to being observed, but about disrupting the dynamic, shifting the space.

"Are the students thinking 'hey, this class is for us, what is this student teacher/observer/apprentice doing in here?' Is our focus being split?"

"But ask your own kids about that," I say. "I'll bet they have student teachers in elementary and high school all the time, and I think that in fact not only are they really open to it,

but maybe it demonstrates that we care, that we're investing in our practice. That's certainly the feeling I get from my students, when I have interns teaching with me."

"I guess what I'm wondering," says Lily, "is whether I've become a teacher like the teachers I had, and if so, is it by osmosis or through my own reflection and understanding of what teaching is. True apprenticeship isn't a matter of mimicking or adopting someone else's approach, but of basing myself on the theory, and maybe seeing how those teachers we might emulate walked that same path.

"Who you are, and your presence in the classroom, is rooted so inextricably in how you understand the discipline—what do my students need to get out of my class? For me, it's to become critical thinkers," she says.

"I realize that there are theoretical divides—there are some who don't espouse the close reading philosophy that I feel so strongly about… and I kind of take issue with those people," she grins.

"I know that new teachers are loathe to raise their hand and say 'I'm not really sure if I'm marking these essays the right way,'" she says. "We used to work together on those aspects at Laurier, but we seem to have abandoned that kind of collaboration. I still hear a lot of teachers say they're inundated, they have too much work, and they don't want to remark assignments—but students need to learn revision strategies—they need time and space, and see their progress.

"And it is the same for us, as teachers. We're in a process, too, and we should be looking for patterns and epiphanies. This what I've been wondering about, and what are other teachers thinking about. What is really important is the willingness to reflect, and based on that reflection, to be able to understand and articulate your practice, even if it's not the same as someone else's. Engaging in the reflection as part of an ongoing dialogue deepens and broadens the reflection—

but some resist. Some see it as a challenge, a matter of scrutiny of their method, rather than self-scrutiny in an exchange with someone who has been in the same place."

Jason nods. "Yeah, it's the difference between the ones that settle in and those of us who have this constant drive to develop, to evolve, to grow."

"Right," says Lily. "As opposed to 'I've been doing this long enough and I've worked hard to get here, so don't bug me. Who are you to be challenging me?' Some seem to develop a sense of entitlement, but I'm inclined to see it more as insecurity—a fear that we'll be exposed, like impostor syndrome."

I get up to clear the table, and Cam jumps up, too. "Let me help you with this, Maggie."

"And me!" says Katie.

Between the three of us, it's a pretty quick job to get everything off the table, and the two of them help me do some preliminary kitchen cleanup before moving on to dessert.

"You know, Katie, I wanted to say something to you before, but I wasn't sure if we wanted to talk about it with the whole group," says Cam in a low voice. "It's something that Maggie and I have talked about before, and I wondered if it might help you to hear my thoughts on it."

Katie leans back against the counter, and nods. "Of course! Any chance to learn from what someone else has already figured out!"

Cam tells her a little about her own early days of teaching—Cam is a History teacher, and I know that her department is perhaps a little more male than female. Like me, she's taught in the smaller Liberal Arts program, as well as teaching some of the largest courses in Social Science,

like the mandatory Western Civilization course and the methodology courses. Like Katie, Cam is lovely and dynamic, and looks younger than her age. This is what she's talking about with Katie.

"It's less of a problem now, I think, probably because I don't look quite as young anymore, but also because I've found little tricks to subtly let them know more or less how old I am. But am I wrong? Do you have the same 'looking like a student' issue?"

"Oh, definitely," says Katie, her eyes widening. "I look young, and I do silly things like sing to get their attention, and I think even having bangs adds to the illusion!"

I laugh. "I've never had a big problem with it myself—in fact, more often than not I've been mistaken for older than I was, which was great when I was trying to get into bars as a teenager. But I know a few people who have had to sort of prove themselves—to their colleagues as well as their students—because they look like they could pass for students."

Cam nods. "Yes, and I think it's always women. Men who look young—like Rhys, maybe—don't have the same skepticism about their ability to teach or their knowledge."

"So, what are your little tricks?" asks Katie.

"Well, for a history course it's pretty simple—I teach them about timelines, and draw one on the board of Quebec history, and talk about how things might happen differently relative to the person observing the event. Like the Montreal Olympics, which happened in my lifetime but not in theirs. Sometimes I can see them doing the math," she smiles.

Katie laughs appreciatively, but then pauses. "Ok, so how could I do that in a biology class?"

Cam looks serious. "I don't know," she admits. "I just know it's really important to me to set boundaries. Nobody messes with me. And it's not just about me—I think a good teacher

makes a good space for herself and the rest of the class. You can't let one or two who are determined to challenge you derail the whole thing."

As the three of us load up the dishwasher and start bringing out the next course, I find myself reflecting on one of my own first big classroom challenges…

What I Remember… Did You Expect Me to Read It?

It was my first semester at Laurier, and I was feeling like I had finally landed in the right place at the right time. After two years at the remote college, and a few college teaching courses under my belt, I was confident in the classroom, and enjoying my time there.

Except for Tomas.

Tomas was a student in my Introduction to College English course, a requirement for all students, regardless of program or career ambitions. He was an Industrial Electronics student, and clearly felt that required English courses were a complete waste of his time. He also seemed to feel that the rest of us in the class needed to know how he felt. His attitude in class was contemptuous. He never arrived on time, often more than fifteen or twenty minutes late. When he did arrive, he didn't follow the convention among tardy students of slinking in, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible—no, Tomas wanted us all to know that he would arrive when he wanted, and there was nothing I could do to stop him. He would strut in, throwing open the door, and make his way along the front of the class to the far side of the room, sighing into his chair, legs sprawling into the aisle, without taking off his jacket or opening his schoolbag.

During class discussions, Tomas would interject comments—no raised hand, no acknowledgment of any previous speaker. He went out of his way to demonstrate that he did not bother with the assigned reading.

"Man, I'm glad I didn't read that story. Sounds like a piece of shit."

At my wits end, I snapped.

I had tried making it clear that this behaviour was unacceptable, but Tomas clearly felt that I was powerless.

So I took back my power.

When I returned their first writing assignment, I made a point of asking the class to read my feedback, and start to strategize about how they could use this feedback on their next assignment. The rest of the class diligently got to work, reading my comments on their papers, occasionally asking me to interpret my handwriting. Eventually, Tomas's hand went up.

"Miss, you didn't write anything on my paper."

"Sure I did. '37%.'"

"But there's no comments."

I paused. I made eye contact with him.

"Did you expect me to read it?" I asked.

There was a brief silence.

Then the class, as one, laughed.

"See me at the end of class, Tomas."

And I continued teaching.

At the end of the class, Tomas stayed, waiting until the room was empty. He didn't seem angry. He seemed a little forlorn. A little confused.

I handed him some papers.

"What's this?"

"This is a photocopy of your essay, with my feedback. Of course I read it."

"Can I redo it?"

I considered.

"No," I said. "But you can ask me again, at the end of the semester. In the meantime, you need to understand a few things. I get that you might not want to take this course. I get that you might not see how English is relevant to what you want to be. But failing the course isn't going to change the requirement.

"You need this course.

"But here's the thing—this is my classroom. If you don't come to class, nothing changes. If I don't come to class, there is no class. So that means I need to be comfortable in this space—but that's hard when you are going out of your way to disrupt things. So here's the deal. You can drop the course, or you can stay. But if you stay, you get here on time, you do the reading, and you contribute, rather than disrupt. If you can't do that, I will have you removed from the class."

When I look back on this episode, I'm never really sure how I feel about it. As I shared with my friends when we were talking about cohorts, that group dynamic can make or break a course, and as a new teacher at the time, I needed to take back some control of that dynamic. So, the older me argues, I did the right thing, and it is certainly true that the rest of the semester was much more successful. At the same time, for years after this incident, I would wake up thinking about it: had I sacrificed Tomas for the sake of my own comfort? Again, the older me argues that my comfort wasn't the only factor—I needed to gain that control for the benefit of the other

students, whose semester was also in jeopardy if I allowed Tomas to derail the whole course for his own amusement. But the older me also recognizes that now, I would probably handle things differently, that I'd recognize Tomas' discomfort and find ways to engage him much earlier. No matter what, though, as Cam has said to Katie, sometimes we need to set boundaries, for our own comfort and for the integrity of the learning space of our students.

Katie presses the button to start the dishwasher, steps back, and says "I don't have a hard time being authoritative; I don't feel mousy or lacking in confidence. And for me I think the young thing helps, I don't know, endear myself to them. I feel like I get a lot more empathy or credit from them, a lot more sort of them cheering me on. I think that they can see themselves is me. I think they're also more forgiving, if they think I don't know everything about the subject or whatever. And I think it makes them feel more comfortable coming to talk to me as well. I did worry that it would be a hindrance, but in fact I think it's helped me."

"I'm glad for you," says Cam, but I can see that she's not convinced. I take out the dessert plates, and Cam and Katie help me bring everything back into the dining room.

Chapter 7: Teacher Brulée

> "Sometimes it's hard to keep up with what might be about to be new. Usually, when there's a whiff of change in the air, you pick it up in the staffroom or on a training course. Most teachers neither seek nor embrace change, so any gossip about it is usually negative. I'm beginning to understand why."
>
> — Kate Herbert, "A Change is as Good as a Rest: Diary of a Primary School Teacher"

Dessert means a table just as crowded as it was for the main dishes: there's a fruit cobbler with fresh custard, Rhys' pouding chomeur, Dana's fruit, and Mauro's homemade tiramisu. I've put out a couple of bottles of sparkling water, and the coffee is perking in the kitchen as we settle in for dessert.

Katie looks around the table, puts down her fork, and says to Patti, "I'm really curious, Patti. You seem to love teaching so much. How could you walk away?"

Patti leans back in her seat and releases her breath in an audible puff. "I loved teaching. I still miss it. But it was killing me."

I've heard Patti talk about how difficult it was for her to walk away from the classroom, but I've also seen how deeply and negatively teaching sometimes affected her. I genuinely believe Patti is an amazing teacher—but she is, as she readily admits, unable to disconnect, to see her students' work as separate from her own. She commits herself completely and selflessly to anything she undertakes—marriage, motherhood, teaching—with an all-or-nothing attitude. I know that as a teacher, she was so committed to her students' success that their struggles became

hers; if they failed, she felt she had failed, no matter how hard she had worked to support their success.

Dana nods. “I hear that. I almost quit, too. I felt completely burned out, and I felt like I had no time to write. I was losing myself in the job.”

“But you stayed,” says Katie.

“Yes, because a very wise friend asked me why didn’t I write *about* teaching? So, I started blogging. I wrote about teaching, about what was burning me out.”

“Honestly, Dana’s blog was a revelation,” says Patti. “I loved it. I felt like everything she was writing about resonated with me in a big way.”

“You got a pretty big following, if I recall,” I say. Dana nods.

“Yeah, it turns out there are a lot of teachers out there who want to talk about how a job you love can be pretty shitty sometimes! And this is why we need to keep talking. It’s just really important to keep the conversation going. The nature of our relationship to the job changes, even if the job itself doesn’t change, fundamentally. But we change, so naturally our relationship to the job has to change. But you have to keep renewing your investment in it. When you start feeling numb and bored, that’s when you need to ask yourself, ‘what am I going to do to remind myself that I want to be here, and just how wonderful teaching is?’

“So, did all of you all figure it out on the job?” asks Katie. “I mean, for the undergrad classes, it’s pretty straightforward—I prep my notes and talk for an hour. I’m finding that in my college classroom, though, I’m channelling old teachers, and not just science teachers—my improv training has come in handy more than once!” she smiles.

Mauro says “I think we probably all end up modeling ourselves on our favourite teachers, consciously or not, like Maggie said with the apprenticeship thing. I think about my Sec V chemistry teacher. We called him ‘the great little man;’ he was just a ball of energy. He really was great. He really exploded my burgeoning interest in chemistry. I think subconsciously I have probably modelled myself after him.”

Patti nods. “Yes, sometimes it’s just one little thing that really sticks. I had a prof in my undergrad that I adored. His big thing was ‘OK, you can disagree with me, but you need to prove your point.’ He challenged me.”

“And the other side of the coin is the ‘what not to do’ profs,” I say. I recall my third philosophy course in my undergrad: I had taken two courses with Irini, an amazing prof who, despite her relative inexperience, was open and engaging. She recommended a course, but just before the semester began, the prof was changed, and instead of the eminence grise that Irini thought I should learn from, we had a brand new prof. “In the first class,” I say, “she introduced the premise of the course, Logic, by saying that one thing that distinguishes human from other animals is our ability to reason and argue. I raised my hand. ‘So does that mean that someone in a vegetative state is no longer human?’ I asked. Deer in headlights. Eventually, she said, just, ‘we aren’t going to discuss that’.”

When I recount this episode to the group, there is a chorus of empathy—it seems we have all encountered the prof that shut us down.

“But,” I say, “now I wonder if maybe I was unfair. I dropped that course like a hot potato. Who knows, maybe it would have been fine. But I felt like my whole motivation for taking philosophy courses had been kind of deflated. Now I look back on it and think, wow, she was so new—I must have been terrifying.”

Katie laughs, but Rhys looks thoughtful. He nods. “I think one of the biggest shifts for me as a new teacher was learning to be comfortable with not knowing the answer.”

“Yes, that’s it,” I say. “If I were that new prof and had a student challenging me with that kind of question, I totally understand the ‘we’re not going to address that’ response, but now I think I would be solid enough to field that question.”

“How?” asks Katie.

“Well, you could do the old ‘throw it back to the class’ trick,” says Lily.

“And open yourself up to a twenty-minute debate,” says Paul. “Sometimes you can’t deal with the rabbit-hole questions, not because you don’t want to, but because you just don’t have time. New teachers always have way too much material. I look back on the lecture notes from my first couple of years now and I honestly have no idea how I managed to get through all of that stuff. It’s easy now; I know what matters and what I can just gloss over.”

“Turn it into an assignment,” says Patti. Katie raises an eyebrow, inviting elaboration. Patti continues, “You could ask everyone to think about the question for next time, and start the next class from that,” she explains. “Or take note of it to come back to at a later point—after all, it does seem like a great topic to work with if you’re teaching a class on logic!”

Katie leans in. “Ok, I see it; if there’s a question that comes up, I’m generally comfortable now saying ‘I don’t know,’ because I follow that with ‘but I know how to find out.’ Then we can either research it together, then and there, or I’ll come to the next class with an answer.”

“Yes, exactly,” says Rhys.

Katie continues. “I remember, as an undergrad I had this one prof who just said ‘huh, I don’t know,’ when I asked him something. That was a big moment. It’s a little frustrating at first,

because you still expect that *someone* knows *everything*, but it showed me that teaching isn't about knowing all the answers, but about knowing—and showing—how to *find* the answers.

"But," she adds, after a moment, "the big one for me was facing an entire course that I wasn't really sure about. Like my Biology for Nursing course. It was the first course I felt frightened to teach. It's all about microbiology and immunology. *Not* my speciality. In fact, there's a bunch of stuff that I kind of skated through as a student. I learned it enough to pass the intro courses and move on to the stuff that made sense, the stuff that I *got*."

Rhys nods. "Yeah, that's me and nuclear physics. Waves and mechanics, that's my domain."

"So I've got to teach this course," says Katie, "and I basically spent the whole semester trying to stay on top, to go back and figure out stuff that I didn't figure out as a student. But here's the thing—because that stuff was hard for me, it gave me insight into why students might find it hard. So, because I had to turn it over and look at it from different angles, just so *I* could understand it, I can explain it now in different ways. I think I probably teach that stuff better because I struggled with it myself."

"I think it's really healthy for us to sometimes not know what the heck we're doing," says Mauro. "Years ago, my ex and I used to come in every Saturday and help with a life skills course, like social skills, even dancing. The teacher of this course was a science teacher, but he said, 'I really love the dancing.' He said it was a humbling experience. Dancing isn't necessarily part of the skill set of your average scientist," he laughs. "It's interesting to be put in a situation where you literally know nothing, and you have to learn everything from scratch. It's really easy for me to stand in front of forty kids and say 'here's how kinetics works. Here's how equilibrium works. Here's how you do a dilution. Here's how you do this, or that.' I know what I'm talking

about, right? So, for me, it's obvious, right? But for somebody on the other side of things, who's looking in, and has to absorb that, whether it's a physical skill or something more intellectual, it really kind of puts you back in your place. The guy who's showing it to me is making it look really easy, yet I keep stumbling over my own feet!"

What I Remember… *¡Dios Mío! Creo que soy una idiota*

"Your letter was so cute, bebe! You write Spanish like a little kid!" Cruz, the gold-toothed first mate aboard our dive boat laughed. I blushed. I had written a one-page thank-you note to Cruz, who is warm and happy, despite his tough, tattooed exterior. This was our second dive trip to Cozumel, and we were thrilled to reconnect with Cruz and the dive shop he worked for. Between the first and second dive trips, I had taken two Spanish courses, and was feeling very proud of myself as I navigated transactions with cab drivers and waiters, and, best of all, as I prevailed in an argument with a hotel clerk who tried to overcharge me on a laundry bill.

That one-page letter took me well over an hour. I wrote it by hand, taking pains with my vocabulary—every sentence required at least one dip into my Spanish-English dictionario*—and tenses. Yet I wrote "like a little kid."*

I didn't see Cruz on our third and fourth trips to Cozumel. I attribute this lack of contact—entirely my doing—to my natural, if not obvious, inclination to introversion. Part of the appeal of travelling is finding myself in a place where no one knows who I am, where I can be anonymous and alone. But if I'm completely honest, I avoided Cruz because I was embarrassed, both by my childlike Spanish and by the fact that I'd abandoned (temporarily, I promise myself) my Spanish lessons.

I sometimes joke that I'm addicted to learning. Professionally, there was no need for me to continue beyond the Master's degree in Literature that my college teaching position required. Yet I signed up for the Master's in Education, and when that was done, decided sooner than even I expected to do the doctorate as well.

My addiction, or more positively, my commitment to learning extends well beyond the academic context, and I believe that these forays into studenthood in areas outside my expertise—that is, outside my comfort zone—have directly influenced my teaching. My attempts to learn Spanish are reflected whenever I tell an international student that I can empathize—it is incredibly frustrating to have thoughts that you can't adequately express, to feel like you sound like a child.

Every instance as a student changes our teacher self.

"Rhys, how do you deal with nuclear physics, then?" I ask.

"I swap with Kyle," he says. "Our department is great. He is a nuclear physicist, so he comes in and teaches that section of my course. Then I go in to his class and do the same for waves."

"It's not just new teachers that only teach what they know," interjects Paul. "It's great if you can do that sort of collaborative teaching model, and once you, I don't know, settle in, as a teacher, learn to let go of your hobby horse and teach what the students actually need to learn.

"Maybe this is less of a problem for Cégep, but I have colleagues who still see teaching university as self-promotion; they teach their own interests, so students get exposed to these really esoteric aspects of the subject. This is the stuff that these profs are researching, that they find really interesting. The problem is, it all goes over the heads of the undergrads, who need to

know the fundamentals before they can even begin to approach the weird tangents," Paul concludes.

Patti nods. "That's why the transmission model can't sustain itself in this day and age. If all we are is a voice behind a lectern, with no interaction, we might as well be words and images on a screen instead. We need to do more for our students than just deliver content."

I look at Paul. "We've talked about this before, Paul, and I've always had the impression that you're a fan of the transmission model." He nods.

"Well, yes and no. I do believe that we're at the front of the room for a reason. We're the experts. We have the knowledge. So we have to share that with our students. It's definitely, for me at least, not an equal relationship. I know more than they do."

"So do you just lecture, then?" asks Katie.

"No, but I don't *not* lecture, if you see what I mean. I mean, in STEM, we're teaching people to build bridges or be surgeons—do you really want to experiment with radical new teaching methods? So, I use slides, but I also use the good old blackboard. If nothing else, using the board slows me down. It's a little too easy to zip through a bunch of slides. If I have to stop to put things on the board, we can linger on things. It also helps me limit the slides to a purpose. I use them to illuminate concepts. They have their textbooks, and they have the Internet. I am there to help them figure out all the stuff they find, to show them how and why it works the way it does."

"I don't even make them buy the book," interjects Mauro. "Science textbooks are so expensive! It's obscene: $150 for one text. And the science hasn't changed so much in so long, so I tell them go find *a* textbook, from a cousin or sibling or whatever. But then the one thing

they *have* improved are the figures, the images. And when I stopped having them buy the book, that's when I discovered how bad I am at drawing."

We all laugh, and Mauro continues. "It was like Broken Telephone but in figures, right? They draw a crappy version of my crappy version. But there are a million really great images online, of course. So now I use PowerPoint, and refer to the figure, the graph, the table, anything that needs to be visualized. So, I have ten, fifteen, sometimes even twenty slides for every chapter—and when I'm done, I package it all up into a PDF and throw it up on the course page for them."

Paul nods in approval.

"'Illuminate the concepts.' I like that," says Rhys. "You're absolutely right, Paul. Good teaching means they have a reason to come to class. We have to make it worth their time. I try to make it fun, but really, it's about learning beyond what's easily accessible."

I laugh. "Paul, you're not as traditional as you think you are, you know."

He grins sheepishly. "Well, sure, because I believe in the lecture format, but I need to engage them, or none of it is going to sink in. Listening to some of my colleagues—ten minutes into a lecture and I want to eat glass instead of listening to this guy. That's how terrible some people are. I think a lot of them see teaching as a nuisance, as something they have to do. But to 'teach' that way is almost a dereliction of duty. You're a professor. If all you want to do is research, you should be in a research institute. You're in a university. Teaching is incredibly important.

"It really bothers me that some actively avoid teaching.

"Research-heavy institutes essentially fund themselves by accepting undergrads and then ignoring them. It's a dereliction of duty as professors and dereliction of social duty as institutions."

Rhys sighs. "On the college side it's the opposite problem—it's hard to get support, release, funding, et cetera. but If you really want to focus on teaching, it's great."

"Balance is good," says Paul emphatically.

"Well, part of it is the apprenticeship of observation spiral," I interject. "You do elementary, then high school, the college, undergrad, grad school… One of the things you're learning is what teaching looks like—we default back to the way we were taught. In higher ed, maybe it's even that we default back to the way teaching is done *in that discipline*. There's not a lot for room for pedagogical innovation, experimentation. It's self-selection—we got to the lectern being taught that way, so it must be working, right?"

Paul nods, but adds "There is some latitude at least in how you *present* the material, even if the material itself cannot change. Creative analogies, stuff like that." He shakes his head. "Do they not remember being in the student seat, thinking 'I'd rather be doing anything than listening to this for another hour and fifteen minutes.' Your brain turns off.

"So, reflection for me is sometimes about remembering exactly that. I put myself in their seats… I ask myself 'where are they coming from? what do they know? What do they need to know? How can I make that compelling for them? Impress upon them that they need to know this?'."

Mauro puts down his spoon and looks around the table, smiling. "Look, here we are, from Chemistry, History, English, but day to day, we are all dealing with the job of teaching—what often doesn't come out in conversation is how much stuff we have in common. Maybe we

don't stop to think about it, but it's fun. I've had exchanges with teachers in Physics, Math, other Chemistry teachers, but it's rare to sit down and talk with English teachers, Biology teachers, History… and just say, "hmmm, what do you do? How do you do it?" You sometimes feel like there's so much competition between departments for stuff—allocation, space, resources, project funding—and it's easy to focus on what pushes us apart. But it's interesting to see how much we have in common. I have to grade lab reports, and you have to grade essays, and y'know, at the end of the day, we're both doing roughly the same job. Maybe the approach might be different from one to another, but it's comforting to know that we're sharing the same misery."

"I wish I had more time and space for lingering, as you put it," says Mauro. "Cégep STEM courses are so overloaded with competencies. Fewer mandated objectives would give me more room for depth and discussion."

"Well," interjects Paul, "for me, I had to learn to linger. You know, I keep all my lecture notes, and I took a look at some of the sets of notes from my first few semesters teaching, and it's crazy—I have no idea how I got through all that material, and who know how much of it actually stuck with the students. Now I understand the value of lingering."

Cam turns to me. "So, to answer your question, good teaching looks simple, but is complex."

"It's like driving," adds Dana, who has only recently learned to drive, so is perhaps more aware than the rest of us of the aptness of the simile. "As a teacher, if you have the air of someone who knows where we're going and how we're going to get there, students can relax and let you drive. If you don't appear to have a plan, they are uncomfortable, and some of them feel like they need to take the wheel."

"Yes, absolutely. It looks easier than it is," interjects Jason. "This might sound weird, but I think I really learned how to teach by being a dungeon master."

"Ah! A fellow gamer!" exclaims Mauro.

"I think I see the D&D thing," says Paul, "but I'd love to hear your thoughts on it."

Jason leans forward. "Well, as a DM, you have to create an adventure where the players feel like they have free will, but really, you're leading them every step of the way," he explains. "You have to lead, but let them connect the dots. Players, or students, they get to the end and feel like they've accomplished something."

Katie looks intrigued. "My partner and I are definitely gamers. I like the DM analogy—and I bet the first few times, you feel like you're completely out of your depth, too."

"Well, it's like Maggie's new Philosophy prof story," says Jason. "Experience, as a teacher and as a dungeon master, means you don't get thrown by questions, challenges, and tangents. I've planned, but I'm flexible. If the plan is good, you can always get back on track."

"Yeah, and if you're a good teacher, you never get to just phone it in," adds Mauro. "I'm still tweaking, even after twenty years."

Rhys nods his head in agreement. "Yep. But we all have colleagues that fall into the phoning it in camp. I grew up outside of the big city, and went to a regional high school and Cégep. Arlo, that prof I talked about before, he was great. But there were definitely some teachers who should not have been teachers."

"Just settling in is nice—for a while," says Dana. "Sometimes we maybe need to coast. But eventually you have to start paddling again. Part of what makes the job meaningful is that it isn't easy."

"I have to admit," I say, "that I genuinely don't understand why some of our colleagues chose this path—they seem so disengaged and apathetic."

"And plenty of students seem to be in it for the wrong reasons," says Lily. This is a little surprising, coming from her, and I can see that I'm not the only one to think so. She continues, "when I was a grad student, I learned pretty quickly to be a little cynical, I'm afraid. Especially in the big-name places like Yale, there are a lot of students whose learning goal seems to be figuring out how to work the system."

Cam nods her agreement. "There are so many who seem to have a real sense of entitlement," she says. "I find myself being stricter with students than I used to be, because I need to show them they can't walk all over me. I had one student this semester who threatened to take me to the dean because she 'expected' to have a choice of when to write her final exam."

Paul guffaws.

"When I told her, 'that's not how this works,' she just couldn't seem to get it," continues Cam. "The exam period is on the calendar. Yet somehow she expected me to accommodate her vacation plan, and let her write the exam according to her schedule."

"Yeah, some of them seem to think they're still in high school," says Jason. "And to teach at the Cégep level, I think I also had to figure out what that level was."

"How do you mean?" asks Katie.

"It's like a paradigm shift," he continues, "and probably one that's even harder to make if you were never a Cégep student. I did go through Cégep, but by the time I was teaching at this level, I had finished my Masters and started the PhD, and I taught as a TA in university classes, and then taught my own undergrad courses at Mount St. Vincent. I was already in love with teaching, but it took me a semester or two to slow down, to focus on fewer texts.

"One big learning moment for me was early on—I lost, like, 25% of the class after the first reading assignment, which was a 20-page excerpt from Darwin. It was too much, too soon. I hadn't earned the buy-in yet. Now I know better—I can still assign those pages, but not right off the bat. I need to earn their trust, so they feel it's worth it to slog through a tough text."

Lily sighs. "I still feel like I have too many assignments to keep up with. But my students get where they should be by the end of the course. So it's a lot of work for me, but it pays off for them."

"I hear that," exclaims Rhys. "For me, the transition shock wasn't about planning or teaching, it was all about assessment. I thought, like a lot of people, that assessment for STEM was easy to do. So, I didn't put a lot of thought into it, the first time around. I made this test, with several parts. That was my real 'this is way more work than I was expecting' moment," he laughs. "Making a good test takes longer than I could have imagined—but when you put in the time and effort to create a good assessment, it pays off."

Chapter 8: The Sweetest Thing

> There is nothing better than a friend, unless it is a friend with chocolate."
>
> — Linda Grayson

Mauro's tiramisu is creamy and sweet, and I help myself to one of Dana's oranges, feeling full and contented. One by one, forks and spoons drop onto empty plates. I slip away to start the coffee, and the kettle, then with tea or coffee, or a nip of brandy, we make our way back to the living room, settling down comfortably.

"So, Katie" says Paul, "Have we overwhelmed you with our pearls of wisdom?" He grins.

"Honestly, yeah, a little!" She laughs. "I'm trying to distill it all into a few key ideas, I think. Like, how do we define what a teacher is, or, more to the point, how do I define who I am as a teacher?"

"Right," I say. "I've actually been thinking a lot about this one—at first I was thinking in terms of facets of a jewel, you know—like, we're all unique gems, as it were, so even if we are all linked, or recognizably one kind of stone or another, none of us is exactly like the other."

Patti's eyes light up. "Yeah, I can see that one for sure. It kind of makes sense for individual personality, I think. One facet is our subject area, another might be our background in education, while another might be our cultural background or family upbringing, like you were saying about your family, Maggie."

I nod. "Yes, that's the sort of thing I was thinking about. But then I got in my own way, because I started thinking about how the metaphor doesn't work, after all."

Katie looks puzzled, but then her face lights up. “Because they’re set in stone. And we’re not.”

“Exactly. I like the facets idea, and the uniqueness thing, but gems are hard and aren’t supposed to change. That’s not what deliberate practice and reflexive practice are about. We’re supposed to change, to evolve.

“So I started thinking about how else to illustrate the idea—a metaphor that incorporates the idea that we’re each starting from different places and motivations, that we teach different things, that we have different classroom experiences, as teachers and as students, and that we have different ideas about what we want our students to learn, and how.”

“And?” asks Mauro.

“I don’t know!” I exclaim. All this time, and all this talk and self-reflection, all this reading and writing, all this great food,” I grin, “and I’m still not sure if there is a single, coherent metaphor that really gets it all.”

This is true. I think back on the evening, but also on the years that brought us all together. How have I thought about teaching? How have I thought of myself as a teacher? How have I changed? I look around, and take a deep breath.

“A few months ago, I toyed with this idea—tell me what you think: we’re like paint colours.”

“Ooh,” says Jason, “can I be *sea foam*?”

I roll my eyes. I think I love Jason’s sense of humour essentially because it’s so good for my eye muscles.

“Ha ha,” I say. “No, really, listen. Take Jason as *sea foam*—maybe all English teachers are some variation on green. Jason’s shade of green in influenced by his love of sci-fi, his

experience teaching in Halifax, his decision to abandon the PhD, his upbringing, his notion of helping students find their voice, and his abhorrence of rubrics."

Paul looks skeptical, but then I realize he's processing. "So," he says slowly, "it's like mixing paint colours—you want 75% base, 10% pure green, 5% grey, 5% blue, and 5% white. That's *sea foam* Jason."

"Yes!" I smile. "I'm glad someone gets it."

"Well, I get it, but I'm not sure it works as a metaphor. Because those mixes are really precise—the idea is that if I go in and get two cans of *sea foam*, they better be identical."

"Maybe," ventures Patti, "it's more like a mountain hike. Our students are hiking up the mountain with us. There's perhaps more than one trail that takes us to the summit; our role as teachers is to guide students, but allow them to explore at the same time, as long as eventually they make it to the top. Assessment, both formative and summative, is a crucial element. Hikers need to self-assess — they look around to gauge their progress against that of their peers, they refer back to the trail guide, they glance up the trail to see how close they are, they glance back down the trail to see how far they've come. Peers can use something akin to the buddy system—they make sure each is on track, help each other interpret the guide, that kind of thing. The teacher is the guide, making sure that progress is steady, not exhausting nor too slow, that people who are in better condition versus those in poor condition have the support needed to ascend, et cetera."

"Oof. After all that food, no way am I getting up any mountain tonight!" exclaims Mauro.

There's easy laughter around the group, but I can see a few eyes drooping, energy fading.

Paul looks around at everyone. He says "This has been really great. It's interesting to articulate how I feel about teaching and how I do it—it's a highly personal process, what works

for some doesn't work for others. I think it's good to hear what others are doing, even if I find their approach 'interesting'," he finishes, making quotation marks with his fingers.

Dana laughs, and says "do you think we see things in a new way when we share our thoughts like this? Differently from other forms of reflection?"

"Conversations like this make things more concrete for me; it's like we're shining a light on things that were already there, in the back of my mind," says Paul.

"Yeah," says Jason, "teachers should be talking to each other; some of us are so oblivious— they seem to be unaware of how our choices affect students. So few of us engage in ongoing reflection. How does this job work? What are our goals?"

Lily adds, "Yes, reflection is so important, and sharing, too… and developing an appreciation of the job really being about what students need, not what you like, or even what you're most comfortable teaching. Our collective goal has to be their education. But I see what Jason sees, too, a certain intransigence among some teachers, a failure to see things from the student perspective.

"I loved what you said earlier, Paul, about remembering what it was like to be in the student seats," Lily continues, "I do ask myself, 'how well would I be learning if I were in my class?' But they're so resilient—they will survive," she smiles. "They might not learn what we expect, but if nothing else, they learn to read the teacher."

"Assessment is still the thing I have a hard time with," says Rhys. "The way I see my role, how I see myself in class, who I want to be, what I want my students to get out of my class, that's all clear. But I still have a hard time with assessment. Am I fair? Am I stressing on the right things or not? Am I too hard? Too easy? I mean, very rarely do students complain about how I grade a quiz, in fact, most of them say that I'm more than fair—I look for the steps, so that

if they mess one step up, I don't carry that through the rest if they get the subsequent steps right, but with incorrect data from the misstep. Using the right equations at the right time. I'm happy with that. But then I start questioning it all over again."

Patti says "One of the things about assessment that I've come to really appreciate is just how much your attitude matters; toward what you think it accomplishes, and how that affects your approach to everything, and your interactions with the students. What is our attitude toward their learning? So many programs seem to have a gatekeeper mentality—so it's like they're doing a good job if they discourage students, if they say 'you're not good at this subject, you should switch.' But of course, if you believe that you aren't any good at something, you won't be any good. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy. And I've seen it in students—when they're faced with a topic that they don't love, or maybe a teacher that doesn't seem to connect with them, or assignment instructions that aren't clear, or aren't there at all, and the students flip. They melt down. And then they quit.

"My sister and I were talking about this just the other day, and she reminded me of when we were kids, and she was struggling in math. She said to me, 'Patti, if *only* mum hadn't said 'Oh, I struggled in math too, so I guess it's my genes.'' It was like she gave my sister permission to give up, to say 'I'm not good at math and I never will be.' And now she has a real fascination with astronomy, and she's very, very frustrated that she never took more math, and she said to me, 'if only my belief system had been different.' She probably would have done better."

She looks at Rhys, and adds "Did you know that in Finland,[9] kids don't have *any* formal testing until the age of sixteen?"

"Yeah," he replies, "I have seen that, and it's really interesting. Those students have the opportunity to try and fail and try again and fail again and they end up learning. In the sciences, do you have any idea how many discoveries were 'oops' moments?"

Patti nods, "right—like the alchemists never did find the Philosophers' Stone, or turn base metals into gold, but now we have Chemistry."

"Thank god for that," laughs Mauro.

"But it's so disruptive," continues Patti. "We'd need an explosion of the current system to allow for the change. The factory model doesn't work for so many students. But the question then becomes how would you administrate something like that? How do you reset the system without utter chaos? I don't know. It's tough."

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9 Interestingly, the recent history of education in Finland is comparable to that of Quebec. Both nations underwent significant educational reform in the 1960s, following periods of repression and exclusivity: Quebec's *revolution tranquile* under the Lesage Liberals represented the same seismic shift away from the dark days of the repressive Duplessis era, just as the "Big Dream of Finnish education" (Hancock 2011) marked a departure from Soviet-era oppression. Current reforms in Finnish education include not only eliminating most standardized exams and student rankings, but also fewer hours in the classroom and less homework, not to mention an emphasis on individual support of students.

"Do you need that big a change, though?" challenges Paul. "We can admire how things are done elsewhere, but maybe we shouldn't throw the baby out just yet."

"That's what I love about these conversations," says Jason. "No one's feeling like the others are criticizing—it's not 'my way is right, yours is wrong'; neither of us is going to convert the other—but I come away feeling like I can better understand and articulate. Your different choice isn't the point—the exchange is what matters."

"Right," agrees Dana, "we can sit down and talk about assessment, and maybe my ideas about assessment and your ideas about assessment are really not the same, but just the fact of having the conversation means we all walk away feeling we can better articulate and understand our own approach. 'This is why I do it this way.'"

"When we don't care enough to talk, that's when the system starts to fall," Mauro pronounces.

"Well," I add, "one thing that's struck me is that it's easy to chalk up differences in our practice to subject—Rhys teaches one way because he's a Physics teacher, but Cam teaches the other way because she's a History teacher. But disciplinary differences in assessment are only one thing—it's our sense of teacher identity that makes assessment different in other ways."

"Like I said, I like to imagine I'm creating something in my classroom that allows students to grab the opportunity—I never assume that they can't get it, can't shift. And if they can shift, we can shift," he says.

"We all seem agree that there should be a constant self-reflection—should there be mentorship? Oversight?" Jason wonders.

Dana leans forward, choosing her words carefully. “It seems to me that with all the changes in the Cégep context over last 30 years, it just no longer seems viable to bring people in to teach at this level who have no pedagogical training. It just doesn’t seem sensible.”

I can see Cam and Jason bristling. Jason speaks first, saying “maybe at the Cégep level, we can no longer rely only on discipline background. But if there were mandatory ‘training,’ I’d resist—I don’t want anyone to tell me what to do, what to put on my syllabus, how to teach, et cetera.”

Cam nods. “For me, it’s important to maintain my academic freedom, and keep my classroom as my domain. Administrators—and even departmental colleagues—go on weird power trips and we end up feeling bullied. It has happened to me too many times.”

“Academic freedom is key,” says Jason. “We’re not trained as teachers, sure, but the good ones think about it. How do we define *good*, and who gets to decide the definition? Is there a way to define the ‘rules’ of how to teach well? Is my reflection on my own practice transferable? If I do something well, can I explain to someone else how and why? If I do it well, maybe it’s because to me it’s common sense, and maybe I haven’t stopped to think about it, at least as much as the things that I’ve had to change or adjust.”

“So what do we do?” asks Dana.

“Well, is it really a problem?” he replies. “Maybe most of us are fine, most of the time. Probably most are fine.”

“Well,” interjects Lily, “I feel like I’ve really benefitted from exchanges with my colleagues. We are a wealth of information for each other. Territorialism defeats that. In a true community of practice, we have respect for other people’s methods, and an openness to learning from each other. But I have to say that every time I’ve seen a institution try to formalize

mentorship, it seems to wither. The most successful instances I've seen were really grassroots, from the ground up."

Lily puts down her coffee cup, and stretches, yawning.

"Oh wow," says Dana, "I had no idea it was already this late! Any idea when the next bus is?" she asks me.

I reach for my phone, to check the schedule, but Paul jumps in to say "I can bring you to the metro—I have room for three people, and I'm heading to NDG, if anyone's headed there."

"Oh, that's perfect," says Katie. "Can you drop me near Sherbrooke and Old Orchard?"

Arrangements are made for lifts to the metro and shared rides to different parts of town, and everyone starts to gather their dishes and coats.

Patti sighs, and squeezes my hand. "Maggie," she says, "this whole evening has made me kind of wistful—it's been great talking and sharing, I've really enjoyed this, but it's created a kind of emotional tension. Tonight, and our talks in the past, have been encouraging, because I have realized that without any guidance, or at least with very little guidance, I *was* able to develop certain strategies, that I *did* help my students; I was doing active learning before I knew what active learning was…but I think about how much more I could now, I could have been more UDL, I could have been better at assessing; I could have learned to grade more efficiently, so I wasn't overwhelming them with the feedback and overwhelming myself with the workload. Maybe I wouldn't have left teaching. It's sort of bittersweet. I don't think I want to leave what I'm doing now as a ped counsellor, but every once in a while, I visit other teachers' classrooms, and the second I walk into the classroom, it's like "boom, *teacher*." I end up interacting with the students, asking them about what they're working on, getting into it., and I walk out of the

classroom thinking “oh my god, I just miss this *so* much.” I miss *them* so much. But I remind myself about the grading and think, nah, I’m good.”

Everyone laughs again.

One by one, everyone hugs me goodbye, and ventures out into the night.

Katie gives me a hug on her way out the door, and says “Thanks again for this, Maggie. I feel like I’ve learned a lot about myself and my teaching, and what my feelings towards it are, and I’m excited to learn more, and grow more.

“Teaching’s not objective, this is the way I do it and that’s OK. It’s not the only way of doing it, but it works. You put your own goals and your own baggage in it, and I guess what matters is that you are aware of all of that. My goal is always ‘show them that you care.’ That’s all I can really, really control, is to at least *try* up there.”

The door closes behind her, and the evening’s discussion with it.

Part Three: Food for Thought

> "I cannot fix on the hour, or the spot, or the look or the words, which laid the foundation. It is too long ago. I was in the middle before I knew that I had begun."
>
> — Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*

It is easy as teachers in higher education to feel isolated. While many of us cherish the relative autonomy of our work, and our curricula, we can get lost in that autonomy. In my college English department, we have a running joke about one colleague that none of us can clearly remember ever meeting—this teacher has never made an appearance at a department meeting, has never attended a department social event, and has never shown up on the picket line. We're pretty sure he exists, but he is our Snuffleupagus.

So it is easy, and perhaps for some, desirable, to go about the business of teaching without any interaction with our colleagues. Yet, as is clear from my interviews, and the many informal conversations I've had before and since, once we do engage in dialogue with other teachers, we have plenty to discuss. We talk about classroom management challenges, new material we've just discovered, assessment strategies, the latest administration decisions, deadline policies, alternative instructional strategies—in short, we constantly vent and bounce ideas off of each other, and inevitably come away from these interactions with ideas and resources, not to mention professional validation.

Whether we, as a collective, formally recognize these interactions or simply allow them to happen organically, we are engaged in a community of practice. My experience with my interview partners, and with all the other colleagues with whom I've exchanged along the way,

reveals that teachers in Cégep are open to and even hungry for peer interaction. It is clear that these interactions have several benefits, for the individual, for our institutions, and for the college network, and that making better teachers and better institutions means making better learning for our students.

As Katie's frustration with her ambivalent colleagues suggests, we can do more to make our new colleagues feel not only welcome, but also supported. We must explore ways to reduce the mutual isolation of teachers and the resulting loss of valuable knowledge" (Lortie, 2005, p. xi).

Over the course of dinner, each speaker dominated the conversation at one point, or championed one idea throughout the evening. Each of these monologues and recurring threads reflects a concern voiced by that person, but which resonated with me and the other guests. Lily and Jason's discussion of rubrics, standardized testing, and assessment in general education represents an ongoing and important discussion: how and why do we assess student learning? As their conversation suggests, the aim of this discussion is not to land on a definitive, universal answer, but rather, to explore and share in order to better understand and articulate our own approach to assessment. Their willingness to entertain each other's idea about teaching and assessment, with no view to proselytize, is an aspect of the academic freedom that Cam cherishes. She and Lily also share a belief that to teach is to do good; it is perhaps Cam's sense of the profound responsibility of the job that she seems to act as a foil, challenging others' statements and playing Devil's advocate. Paul also tends to challenge the others, although his almost poetic depiction of what he does in the classroom—lingering and illuminating—reveal a softer side to his apparent skepticism. He also engaged in a dialogue with Patti, Katie, and Rhys

about what they see as problematic assessment practices and culture in STEM, and the value of failure as seen outside of academic contexts.

Both Patti and Dana grappled with burnout, but with different outcomes. Patti's intense involvement with her students, and her untenable approach to feedback, brought her to the brink, and now that she has stepped away and into pedagogical counselling, she is happier and more relaxed. She admits that she misses the classroom, but recognizes that it was, as she says, killing her. Dana, on the other hand, found her near-breaking point because, as she says, she was looking for the wrong thing from the job. Her decision to write through her crisis, and to re-evaluate what she *could* get from the job, as well as her strategy of using teaching release for coordination, have made it possible for her to stay in the classroom. Although she no longer maintains her blog, her experience that there are "a lot of teachers out there who want to talk about how a job you love can be pretty shitty sometimes" is an instance of the organic community of practice at work. Rhys, whose collaboration with his officemate is another good example of the value of the community of practice, felt thwarted by the resistance he encountered from other colleagues, when he tried to collaborate in the same way. Mauro's frustration stemmed from his feeling that there were too many objectives to cover in too-short a semester, leaving him no time to linger, and impacting his sequential courses when his colleagues were unable to get to the end of that long list of objectives.

All of these experiences and emotions helped Katie see that she is not alone, no matter how isolating it may be to be at the bottom rung of the seniority ladder. Katie's frustration with the lack of support within her department, and with the insecurity of a new career, resonated with

us all, and our shared experiences became a sort of 'it gets better,' a source of community and encouragement.

Lao Tzu said that the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Once upon a time, I set out to investigate discrepancies in feedback provided to students by teachers. That first step became a journey that meandered, sometimes without a clear destination, through my doctoral research into teacher identity and assessment. Through my interviews, and my analysis of these conversations, several main themes emerged:

1. Teachers in the Cégep system often come to it almost accidentally, and without a realistic or well-informed sense of what the system is, or how to teach. That said, once we are in that system, we come to appreciate its unique role in the education of our students;
2. The function and form of assessment can be a source of frustration, especially when there is apparent disconnect between how teachers perceive the function of their assessments and how their students, colleagues, and institutions see that function (Wiggins, 1993);
3. Becoming a teacher in higher education is enriched by deliberate, reflexive practice. This practice relies on introspection and the practitioner must embrace the Growth Mindset (Dweck, 2017). New teachers, consequently, must grow into the role, and recognize the value of time as necessary to development;
4. Both the frustrations of assessment and the deliberate practice of teachers are made better through organic communities of practice and peer mentoring moments.

Chapter 9: I am a teacher… right?

It was really valuable to have Katie as one of my participants, because she is at the beginning of her teacher life. The other participants and I have been through everything that Katie is now experiencing, and it is easy from our mid-career perspective to forget how challenging those years as a novice, with no sense of job security, can be. Katie feels compelled to take all the teaching that's offered to her, even if she's already teaching a full load—I did the same thing in my first semester at Laurier, accepting a single night class that became a full night-time teaching load, that then became part day and part night, and then accepted a replacement halfway through the semester, so that I ended up teaching a full load plus one, with days that started at 8 a.m. and ended at 10 p.m.

Katie has also taken on replacement teaching, and as she talked about, her experience has had its ups and downs, to say the least. As a teacher, she has found the challenge a genuine learning opportunity; as a doctoral researcher, she was very narrowly focused on one particular aspect of environmental biology. She recalls that as an undergraduate student, she learned to gloss over any concepts in broad, introductory biology courses that didn't come naturally to her; she was able to get past these on assessments when the need arose, and eventually got to the point in her studies that she could focus on concepts that made sense to her. So, she knows environmental biology like the back of her hand, and never needed to know other areas, such as molecular biology, anywhere near as well. But now she finds herself having to teach the foundational concepts in introductory level courses, and even teaching a molecular biology course. She discovered that in grappling with those concepts that she never quite *got* as a student, they became the concepts she finds easiest to teach. The concepts that come easily to us as students are, she feels, harder to teach because we don't see how others might not immediately

see how they work. Concepts that we have to struggle with, to explore from a variety of angles, in order to grasp them, are easier to teach because we have a much clearer idea of what is challenging about them, and where and why students might not understand. We can use our own difficult learning experience to make their learning easier.

Perhaps naturally, when researching teacher development and identity, the research focus tends toward new and pre-service teachers, rather than on development in veteran teachers. Flores and Day (2006), for instance, looked at new teachers, and how their identities were "shaped and reshaped" (p. 219) over just the first two years of their careers. Flores and Day identified two milestone phases in the professional development of new teachers: "the *threshold* and the *growing into the profession"* (p. 220, italics in original). They characterized the threshold period as a confrontation between the new teachers' ideas of what teaching was and the realities of their everyday classroom experience; teachers embarked on their new careers "from a more inductive and student-centered approach" (p. 227) but were quickly derailed by the transition shock. The crisis of this transition shock tended, in these teachers, to invoke a shift toward "more 'traditional' and teacher-centered [approach] (even if their beliefs pointed to the opposite direction), owing to problems associated with classroom management and student control" (p. 227). As new teachers, they tended to "use the history of their own schooling and [emulate] specific teacher role models" (Enyedy, Goldberg, & Welsh, 2005, p. 70). In other words, when faced with challenges in the classroom, teachers tended to fall back on their own experience as students and engage in "strategic compliance" (p. 225), negotiating the discrepancies between their pedagogical training and personal beliefs and more conventional methods espoused by supervising teachers and administrators.

Flores and Day (2006) noted, as did Borg (2004) and Lortie (2005), that this strategic compliance is recognized by the new teachers, and most have "personal reservations" (p. 225) about the conventional methods. These reservations mean that although the more conventional approach to teaching may temporarily solve the problems associated with transition shock, as teachers like Rhys, for example, grow into the profession, they "tend to focus their attention on the improvement of skills, methods and competencies" (p. 220). Gradually, tentatively, these teachers create their own professional identity, in "an ongoing and dynamic process which entails the making sense and (re)interpretation of one's own values and experiences" (p. 220). In short, a new teacher is not, quite, a teacher, yet.

As many of the dinner guests revealed, the transition shock and threshold crossings for teachers in higher education have little to do with entering the profession from a particularly progressive pedagogical theory. Jason, Cam, and Rhys all talked about realizing that their students were not younger versions of themselves ('mini-me's' as Cam said). As Paul revealed, even though he sees a lot of value in the "more traditional" chalk-and-talk lecture model in university, he wants to find ways to engage his students, rather than shifting back to the 'I'd rather eat glass than listen to this guy for another 45 minutes' convention.

At the same time, relying on more traditional teaching practices is perhaps even more prevalent in higher education, simply because so many of us are not exposed to the evolution of pedagogy through formal teacher training. If, as Borg (2004) and Lortie (2005) suggested, new teachers enter into the profession with a set of preconceptions about teaching—unlike other professions, in which people "are more likely to be aware of the limitations of their knowledge" (Borg, p. 274), then the transition shock comes from the failure to realize that the aspects of teaching which they perceived as students represented only one facet of a teacher's job. The

many hours spent as a student constitute what Lortie (1975) called an *apprenticeship of observation*. As I shared with my participants, I spent 24 years watching other people teach before I stepped into a classroom as a teacher myself, and only deliberately sought out training as a teacher two years after I had already begun. Many of my colleagues rely only on the occasional half-day workshop to engage in formal teacher training. Many teachers in the Cégep network attend their local *Ped Day*, a college-sponsored day of workshops and discussion aimed to promote pedagogical development. However, a quick look at local Cégep Ped Day offerings reveals that in fact, very few workshops are designed to help teachers develop their practice; most are either technology-oriented (Introduction to Using SMART Boards in Class, Dawson College, 2018) or are only indirectly related to teaching in Cégep (Writing for Research Proposals, Vanier College, 2018), and some are oriented toward helping teachers deal with stress (Awakening: Meditation through Breathing, Standing, and Visualization, Dawson College, 2018) rather than seeking to understand the sources of tension.

When the idea of training came up, Paul asked if it actually helped. The answer seems to be, bluntly, no—or at least not as much as time and introspection, experience and peer mentorship. Borg (2004) claimed that "teacher education courses are said by many to have a weak effect on student teachers" (p. 275), so even with formal training, teachers were likely to revert to "a set of tried and tested strategies," based on their observation from the student perspective, "in times of indecision or uncertainty" (p. 274). Borg's argument may not ring true for all teacher educators, but it suggests that the biggest difference between those with formal training and those without is that the teachers who have been exposed to new pedagogical practices and theories "recognized the limitations" (p. 275) of the conventional methods, but feel powerless to change: "'I don't want to teach like this, I don't want to be this kind of teacher, but

I don't have any other experiences. It's like I fall into the trap of teaching like I was taught'" (p. 275).

In higher education, teachers may not even recognize the patterns into which they have fallen, and often don't have the tools to rebuild their practice otherwise. Denise Barbeau, who began teaching psychology at the Cégep level in 1970, when the Cégep system was in its infancy, recalled "basically repeating the traditional patterns [she] had observed" (in Doucet, 2016, p. 6). Like the new teachers studied by Borg and Flores and Day, Barbeau did see the limitations of this borrowed practice. Barbeau is a good example of what Dana and I discussed, namely, that the apprenticeship of observation phenomenon has been exacerbated by the fact that Cégep teachers are employed to teach as experts in individual disciplines—that is, English Literature, Chemistry, Respiratory Technologies—rather than based on their accreditation as teachers. Thus, our individual professional identity, and in turn our pedagogical approaches and attitudes, reflect this non-academic affiliation. In other words, we become only teachers after we have already become a nurse, or sociologist, or chemist.

In an interview with Isabelle Fortier (2007), Cégep teacher Caroline Chateauneuf reflected on her development as a teacher:

> when I first began as a CÉGEP teacher, I considered myself primarily a guidance counsellor. I was eager to defend my professional identity as a guidance counsellor. I was anxious about losing this identity. … During the master's studies program … I realized that my professional identity as a guidance counsellor was affecting my teaching practice. In fact, my teaching and evaluation styles bear a close resemblance to my image of myself as a guidance counsellor. … through [reading] and exchanges with other teachers, I realized that my guidance counsellor identity could not be ignored but it could be

> moulded by my teaching position. Being a college teacher does not mean I lose my identity as a guidance counsellor. It simply means that I am unique in my way of teaching and the way I view my practice (p. 2)

Similarly, Thornton (2011) explored the "dual roles of artist and teacher" (p. 31). Thornton's focus was on art teachers, but much of what he explored is universal. He wrote "art teachers for whatever reason (there can be complex motivational factors involved) have chosen to teach" (p. 34) but

> there seem to be a variety of difficulties some experience regarding identity. There are teachers of art who feel uncomfortable because they are not making art. There are artist teachers who feel uncomfortable for not devoting themselves more to teaching. There are artist teachers who believe they can only function in both roles if they keep them separate. There are artist teachers who are concerned not to impose their own ideas as artists on their students. There are artists who work in residencies who are not sure whether to act as teachers or artists when working with students. There are artists who are determined never to teach for fear of losing their identity as artists. (p. 35)

These ideas of artist/teacher identity struggles can be extrapolated to the larger post-secondary teaching community, and to the idea that our sense of professional identity directly influences our practice, regardless of discipline. Enyedy, Goldberg, and Welsh (2005) argued that "a missing component in the construct of [teacher] identity is practice" (p. 71). While our competence as teachers is based in our knowledge—both pedagogical and disciplinary—and our beliefs about learning and about our subject matter, Enyedy and his co-authors wrote that these factors are "mediated by a teacher's multiple, professional identities" (p. 69). These identities, in turn, lie "at the intersection" of personal history and culture, and community of practice. Identity

is “a complicated construct … shaped and negotiated through everyday activities” (p. 71). Izadinia (2013) echoed this definition when she wrote that teacher identity lies at “the intersection of personal, pedagogical, and political participation and reflection within a larger sociopolitical context” (p. 694).

Ultimately, then, I am left with an understanding of teacher identity as the sourdough starter: a dynamic construct, neither uniform nor immutable, based in my beliefs, practice, sense of self, knowledge, dispositions, relationships, and attitudes. My professional identity, my teacher-self, comprises aspects that are, invariably, permanent personal attributes, as well as aspects related to my practice, that change over time, over contexts, through interactions, and with reflection.

How might we consciously develop our teacher-self?

One might argue that teachers like Barbeau (Doucet 2016) and Chateauneuf (Fortier, 2007) demonstrate that those of us who strive to be more effective teachers, to find more fulfilment as teachers, can simply take it upon ourselves to reflect on and improve our practice, in self-directed independent professional development. Danielewicz (2001) argued that good teachers are essential to social well-being, since all members of society have at least some compulsory interaction with teachers. Therefore, she said, “we need to know how the best teachers have become themselves” (p. 3). Like Izidinia (2013) and Enyedy et al (2005), Danielewicz saw a strong and necessary connection between practice and identity, and said that we need not only to consider methodology and ideology, but to engage with identity, “the way individuals conceive of themselves,” so that being a teacher is truly a *state of being* (p. 3). Likewise, Grossman, Hammerness, and McDonald (2009) proposed that teacher education include consideration of professional identity. Identity is constructed, and it is contextualized—

and as teachers, that context is the classroom, a space that Danielewicz said we must inhabit as if it is "the most natural place in the world" (p. 10). Importantly, Danielewicz described the classroom as a social setting or the primary site of interaction, which implies that it is the principal source of meaning-making for our students and ourselves—and our selves. As Cam and I discussed, this notion of our classroom as our natural habitat also implies that we be prepared to adapt, develop, and even defend that environment. This implication is how I reconcile myself to the way I dealt with Tomas—after all, I needed to create and maintain a learning space for the whole class, and that meant not allowing one individual to pollute the habitat. I have no doubt that were I faced with a similar situation now, I would deal with it differently—but the motivation would be the same: make this classroom a natural learning environment in which as many of us feel comfortable and stimulated.

In her extensive review of research on teachers' professional identity, Izadinia (2013) reported that "all studies suggest that having [student teachers] reflect upon their own values, beliefs, feelings and teaching practices and experiences helps shape their professional identity" (p. 699). Becoming reflexive in one's practice, then, includes becoming conscious of the "continued influence of former teachers" (Lortie, 2005, p. 139), and the teaching habits hitherto unconsciously embraced, and, most importantly, acting on that consciousness to change our practice. This is not to say that all of those habits are necessarily bad; in fact, as Lortie points out, people "usually have little difficulty in recalling their former teachers and, particularly, in discussing those they consider 'outstanding'" (p. 139). Lortie's discussions with teachers, however, revealed that even when they were aware of former teachers' influence, they didn't recall those teachers in terms of instructional strategies or assessment practices, but in terms of personal warmth and nurturing. If teachers are to become reflexive practitioners, they can start

by recognising the disconnect between the qualities they remember as "outstanding," which Lortie discovered tend to reflect "nurturant" qualities (p. 140), and those that they identify as important in a professional capacity—and perhaps start to question why the notion of being nurturing is somehow alien to professional practice.

At the same time, those of us who, like Patti, are drawn to the nurturing aspect of teaching must develop ways to set boundaries, to bring themselves back from the spiral of caring too much. In the course of the interviews, I asked my participants to name movies or television series that depicted teachers, and whether these depictions seemed to reflect a sense of what teaching really is, or should be. Every single person mentioned the Robin Williams' film *Dead Poets' Society* (Weir et al, 1998), but only Patti did so as an example of what teaching should be. Everyone else seemed adamant that, as the Simpsons put it, "*Dead Poets Society* has destroyed a generation of educators" (Snee & Anderson, 2003).

For teachers like Cam, the autonomy of the job is a necessary characteristic of the academic freedom they crave. As Jason suggested, one of the reasons teachers may resist even the best-intentioned forays into community of practice is a sense of proprietorship and a desire to defend academic freedom; arguably, even Katie's frustratingly unhelpful colleagues are simply staking out and defending their territory. Hakala (2016) argued that for pedagogical research to be welcome in practical classroom application, researchers must approach teachers with some deliberation and sensitivity, not only taking into account disciplinary culture, but also the need for teachers to feel that they can experiment pedagogically without relinquishing control of their classroom or curriculum.

The transformation(s)

> "Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself."
>
> — Rumi

Many of us didn't plan to become teachers. Personally, although I enjoyed teaching composition courses during my M.A. in English Literature, I didn't seriously consider teaching as a career option, because with a Master's in Literature, I was qualified to teach English at the college level, but nothing else. My options were limited—to one—and there did not seem to be many secure teaching positions on the horizon in the early 1990s. Some of us hadn't even considered teaching. As she said, Dana never planned on teaching, until she fell into it as a university student. Others were attracted to teaching, but had not considered college as an option. Cam, whose first foray into education was as a gymnastics coach for a day camp, loved working with the very little ones, but actually didn't enjoy working with the teenagers. Rhys chose Cégep teaching over a lucrative engineering job in California because his wife was offered a good job in Montreal—and in the end, he says, he's glad he did, and not just because the California company was short-lived.

What does it mean to be a Cégep teacher?

So, in the end, we found our way to teaching, and for most of us, that was Cégep teaching. For some, like Mauro and Jason, it was a matter of choosing to focus on teaching, rather that teaching as a way to justify research. For others, like Cam, it was a matter of the academic freedom they craved and knew they would not find in high school. In my case, the choice to teach was necessarily a choice to teach Cégep. I did not have the PhD required for permanent teaching positions at the university level, and I did not have a degree in Education,

but rather, in English Literature. Secondary was thus not an option. But in Quebec, postsecondary education begins earlier than in the rest of the continent. Quebec students complete high school studies in Secondary V, otherwise known as Grade 11, meaning they graduate at 16 or 17 years old, typically. Students are not required to continue their studies beyond high school, and graduation from high school does not allow direct entry to university-level studies. Most Quebec graduates choose to continue at one of the province's 48 Cégeps (College d'études générales et professionnelles, or, College of General and Professional Studies).[10] Students can choose to do a two-year pre-university program, such as Social Science, Science, Commerce, or Liberal Arts, or they can opt for a three-year technical program, such as Animal Health, Nursing, Aerotech, or Professional Theatre. Certification from the three-year programs denotes professional competency; for instance, students graduating from the Nursing program are qualified to work in Quebec as nurses, without mandatory university certification.

The Cégep system is unique to Quebec. In the early 1960s, Quebec was in a period of social upheaval, conventionally referred to as the Quiet Revolution (*la révolution tranquille*); after *La grande noirceure* (the 'Dark Ages'). The 'noirceure' was an era marked by almost two decades of conservative governance under Maurice Duplessis' Union Nationale, with heavy

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10 In 2009, Quebec had the highest rate of post-secondary graduates, with 71.7% of Quebecers between 25 and 29 with a post-secondary diploma. The national average in the same year was 65.2% (Statistics Canada, cited in Perron, 2011). Perron (2011) credits the Cégep system, introduced in the 1960s, with taking the province from the lowest rate of education—an average of only eight years of schooling in the 1950s—to the current level of performance.

influence from the powerful Catholic church. After the death of Duplessis, the province elected Jean Lesage's Liberals in June 1960, on a platform of massive reform (Durocher, 2015). As well as a shift from federal to provincial administration of health, finances, and, famously, Hydro Quebec, the Cégep system, implemented in 1967, along with the formation of the Université du Québec system in 1968, represented a significant part of an overall reform of education in Quebec—a far cry from Duplessis's statement that education is like drink: there are some that just can't handle it (Gauvreau, 2013). Based primarily on the work of the Parent Commission of 1963, reform in higher education in the province was intended to address the clear disadvantages hindering Francophone students, compared with their Anglophone counterparts (Burgess, 1971; Magnuson, 1986). Burgess (1971) noted, for instance, that despite the significantly larger francophone student population, pre-reform post-secondary education offered the same number of spaces to both populations. In 1960, approximately 3% of university-aged Francophones were actually in university, compared with 11% of Anglophones; in both populations, most students were male, and several programs excluded female applicants altogether (Pigeon, n.d.). Adding to this disparity was the post-war Baby Boom, which meant an even larger population of Francophone young adults, with only 7,500 spaces allocated among the three French universities, Université Laval, Université de Montréal, and Université de Sherbrooke (Pigeon, n.d.). Finally, regional disparity meant that the predominantly francophone rural areas were underserved, while the predominantly Anglophone urban area of Montreal was home to the lion's share of post-secondary educational institutions, both French and English (Magnuson, 1986).

The five-volume *Rapport de la Commission royale d'enquête sur l'enseignement dans la province de Québec*, published between the spring of 1965 and summer of 1966, is more commonly referred to in both English and French as 'the *Parent Report*/le *rapport Parent*.'

Under the leadership of Msgr. Alfonse-Marie Parent, a Catholic priest and educator, the commission brought together nine leaders in education from the English and French communities, to study the crisis in education in the province, between 1963 and 1966. The *Parent Report* proposed a major reform, including over 500 recommendations, with five main objectives:

1. To provide greater access to higher education for the larger francophone population;
2. To provide technical and vocational programs of study, in both languages;
3. To instill some form of coherence between the hitherto separate English and French systems;
4. To regulate both systems in order to be more credible and useful both domestically and internationally;
5. To integrate general education, that is, the humanities, into all programs.

The Parent Report, widely regarded as the catalyst of a seismic shift in education in Quebec, led to the creating of the Ministry of Education in 1964, deliberately distancing education from the control of both the federal government and the Catholic Church (Durocher, 2015), and insisted that post-secondary education was a right, not a luxury (Pigeon, n.d.). Part of this sweeping reform was to abolish the so-called "classical" colleges, previously administered by the Church; however, many of the newly-established Cégeps were, in fact, classical Jesuit colleges with a new lease on life. Unlike the classical colleges, however, Cégep was tuition-free, and very deliberately secularized.

As the acronym suggests, the Cégeps, from the beginning, offered two streams, namely, the two-year pre-university track and the three-year technical and vocational track. According to Burgess (1971), the Cégep system was intended to be unique, rather than an imitation of an already-existing institution. Burgess argued that despite certain similarities with junior colleges and community colleges in other provinces and states, Cégep is exceptional in that its programs are not parallel to the first two years of university programs, but more of a transition and foundation. Like the British sixth form, Cégep is a foundation for further post-secondary education; however, unlike the British system, a Cégep is its own institution, physically and administratively, and can offer a wider range of programs (Burgess, 1971). Ironically, given its intent to make higher education more equitable, Burgess argued that the Anglophone Cégeps were better positioned to "put into effect the spirit and purpose" (p. 98) of Cégep education proposed by the Parent Report. The Anglophone Cégeps, that is, Dawson (opened in 1969), Vanier (opened in 1970), and John Abbott and Champlain (both opened in 1971), had the advantage, said Burgess (1971), of starting from scratch, rather than making over an existing classical college[11]. Faculty were recruited from universities and high schools, but with a clear mandate to create a new, intermediate, curriculum.

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11 The fifth English-language Cégep, Marianopolis, has a slightly different history. It was in fact originally the first post-secondary college for English Catholic women in Quebec, and was affiliated with two French universities (Université Laval, and subsequently Université de Montréal). Marianopolis partly adopted the Cégep model in 1969, at which time it also opened its doors to male students. It only phased out the university-level programs in 1972. It remains part of the Catholic order under which it

For teachers, Cégep can be an excellent opportunity. Most teaching positions, pre-university or technical, require a Master's degree or equivalent, rather than a doctorate[12]; furthermore, Cégep teachers are not required to conduct research, publish, or present, although many institutions support individual teachers who wish to pursue such endeavors; several institutions have affiliations with grant-funding organizations such as the SSHRC or Entente Canada-Québec. Teaching in Cégep is a largely autonomous affair; teachers are not accountable to parents, and in fact by law, teachers cannot discuss student performance or progress with parents of students over 18. The default therefore tends to be limited or no parental interaction.

At the same time, teaching at the Cégep level can present its challenges, not least of which is navigating the question of what level are we really teaching. Some Cégep teachers, like Dana and Lily, were educated outside of the province and have only vague ideas, often inaccurate, about Cégep. Others, like me or Rhys, were educated within the system, but our student experience was prior to more recent curricular reforms, or took place in regional colleges that could not provide the resources needed to implement the reforms. Since there is no equivalent, the Cégep system has had to address this question—or ignore it, despite Burgess' enthusiasm for starting from scratch—internally. Most of our students are in late adolescence, especially in the pre-university programs, and they are not yet in university, so we might think of them as high school students, and ourselves as high school teachers. On the other hand, they are

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was founded, although its faculty, curriculum, and admissions are secular (Bélanger, 2004), and is the only private Anglophone Cégep.

12 Depending on the program and college, minimum requirements vary; however, a review of local Cégeps confirms that most programs require at least an MA or equivalent.

verging on adulthood; they have graduated from high school, and are now enrolled in specific programs akin to undergraduate programs in universities, so we might think of them as young freshmen, and ourselves as university professors. Many of us, as reflected in my conversations with my dinner guests, are well aware of the distinct nature of Cégep, even if it's not always easy to articulate. For one thing, we have class sizes (see Figure 4) that are more amenable to interactive, collaborative learning strategies, as Katie experienced first-hand. Her university courses took place in large lecture halls and enrolment was often over 100; in Cégep, even first-year course enrolment is significantly smaller, so that we think of a 'large' class as over 40 students.

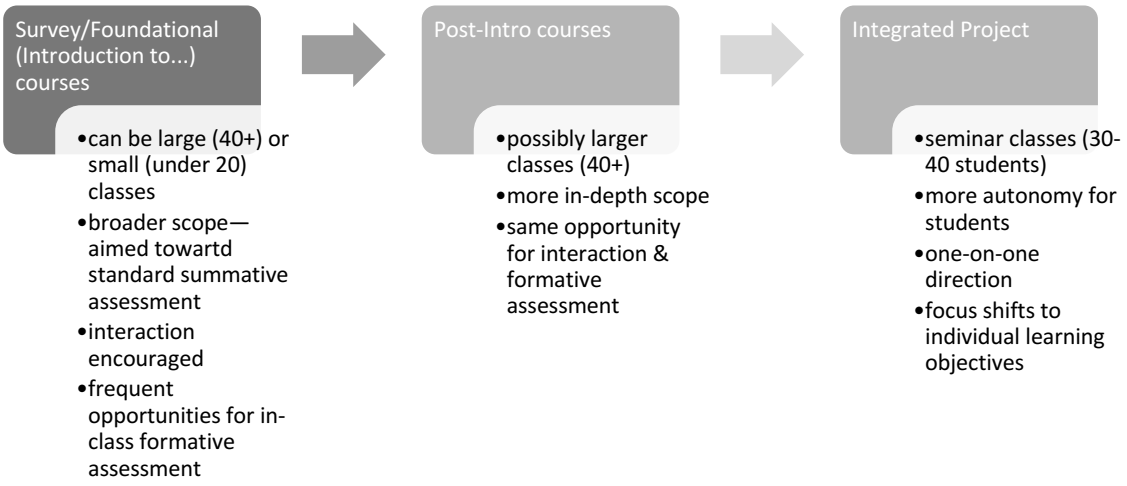

Figure 4 Evolution of scope in Cégep program course.

Note that unlike the corresponding university-level progression, course size is less likely to change over the course of the students' progress through their program. As such, even with foundational courses designed to introduce students to foundational concepts and a broad general knowledge of the subject, teachers have more opportunity to engage in the facilitator model of teaching and learning.

Good teaching, as Jason says, isn't as easy as it looks. Whether we think of ourselves as driving the car or leading the mountain hike, we recognize that our role implies a certain hierarchy, if only thanks to our experience within the discipline. So, as Katie learned, we don't have to know everything, but we can demonstrate to our students how to find the answers. At the same time, *teacher* is such an ubiquitous term that some may feel that there is no need to define the term—a teacher is one who teaches. What could be simpler?

In their research on developing teacher identity, Beauchamp and Thomas (2011) chose to use the concept of metaphor because, as they argued, "the process of envisioning the self as a professional is a crucial stage in the development of an effective teacher identity" (pp. 762-3), and "one approach to examining aspects of identity that are difficult to articulate is through the use of metaphor" (p. 763). Many metaphors have been used to illustrate what we mean by *teacher*. Badley and Hollabaugh (2012) included medical metaphors (teachers are doctors, and the students' illness is ignorance, a metaphor that Mauro in particular found very amusing), military metaphors (teaching is about instilling discipline and conformity), agricultural metaphors (teachers plant seeds) and even spiritual and religious metaphors (school as sanctuary, and teacher as mystic/priest). More recently, Weimer (2016) described teaching as midwifery, and teachers as "present at the birth of learning" (para. 3). Many of my participants weren't sure

about the midwife metaphor, although Lily did eventually come around, and was in fact enthusiastic about it in the end. Cégep teacher educator Denise Barbeau (Doucet, 2016) has compared teaching to directing theatrical productions or being a gardener, metaphors clearly rooted in Barbeau's notion that the task of teaching "is not to showcase our own knowledge, but to guide students in developing theirs" (p. 5). She argued that "a teacher's role is to foster harmonious contact" between the learning task and the student (p. 5).

The fact that so many different metaphors exist to describe what it means to be a teacher, or what it means to teach, suggests that the concept of what a teacher is, and how I might understand my *self* as a teacher, is not that simple. If nothing else, the constantly shifting theories of learning and knowledge would imply a parallel shift in how we understand what it means to teach; generally speaking most "metaphors portray teachers positively, as people who meet the needs of their students" (Badley & Hollabaugh, 2012, p. 53), regardless of where the metaphor falls on the epistemological spectrum. Badley and Hollabaugh (2012) identified three 'clusters' of teaching metaphors that seem to reflect the evolution of our concepts of teaching and learning: transmission, facilitation, and catalyst (p. 52). Metaphors from the transmission category reflect a teacher-centered concept of teaching as the act of moving information from the source to a destination, often perceived as an empty vessel to be filled with our knowledge. Much of our common expressions in education are in fact rooted in this perception. Consider, for examples, idiomatic expressions such as *getting ideas across* or *getting through to students*. Badley and Hollabaugh believed that transmission metaphors reflect the reality that teachers have knowledge that students do not yet have, but need; however, "when a teacher attempts to become the sole transmitter and interpreter of knowledge (the *principle source and cause* of learning) within a classroom, meaningful learning is easily undermined" (p. 56).

The notion of the teacher as facilitator is arguably a more commonly used metaphor in contemporary pedagogy, which is typically more student-centered, as Barbeau's theatre director and gardener metaphors exemplified. Badley and Hollabaugh suggested some problems with the facilitator metaphor, however, which implies that learning somehow comes from within students, and teachers are simply tasked with setting the stage for learning. Badley and Hollabaugh propose a more accurate term, *prime mover*, which

> more openly recognizes the teacher's dual role of preparing the environment for student learning to occur and guiding the process as it unfolds [and acknowledges that] it would be nearly impossible … for teachers to prepare for student learning to occur … without some expert knowledge in the area which the students were to study (p. 58).

In other words, while a facilitator may seem like a friendlier way to think of teaching, a teacher must still have knowledge to transmit. Furthermore, as the coaching metaphor suggests, this model of teaching maintains the idea of facilitation but brings in motivation and inspiration: "Good coaches are able to inspire those they coach to perform at their highest level, whether in training, in competition, or in life experiences" (p. 59).

Finally, Badley and Hollabaugh described the teacher as catalyst, that is, the teacher who creates dissonance to inspire learning, perhaps by playing devil's advocate, engaging in Socratic dialogue, or stirring the pot. Dissonance becomes the irritating grain of sand that ultimately becomes the pearl. Proponents of the teacher as catalyst claim that students are more engaged in their learning; however, the authors caution that while lively and rigorous debate might engage students, teachers must ensure that curricular objectives are not neglected, and engaging in this approach to teaching requires "exceptional classroom leadership and discussion-leading skills" (p. 63); sensitivity to student discomfort, recognition of boundaries, establishment of safe

learning spaces; and recognition of "the ceiling of students' capacity for dissonance" (p. 64), so that students are not so stressed that they lose sight of the task.

When I discussed these metaphors with my fellow teachers, I was initially surprised by how enthusiastically even the more steadfastly literal of them embraced the notion of metaphor to explore teaching and learning. We all felt that there were aspects of transmission, facilitation, and catalyst in our teaching, to greater or lesser extent. As suggested in the narrative, however, collectively we seem to think *not* that we transmit, facilitate, or inspire, but rather that we engage in all three models of teaching, along a spectrum, in response to the actual context—the subject, the level, whether the class meets at 8 a.m. or 2 p.m., even our own familiarity with the topic. As we talked about metaphor, a pattern began to emerge for me: in higher education, the system generally encourages a hierarchy of teaching and learning approaches, as illustrated in Figure 5:

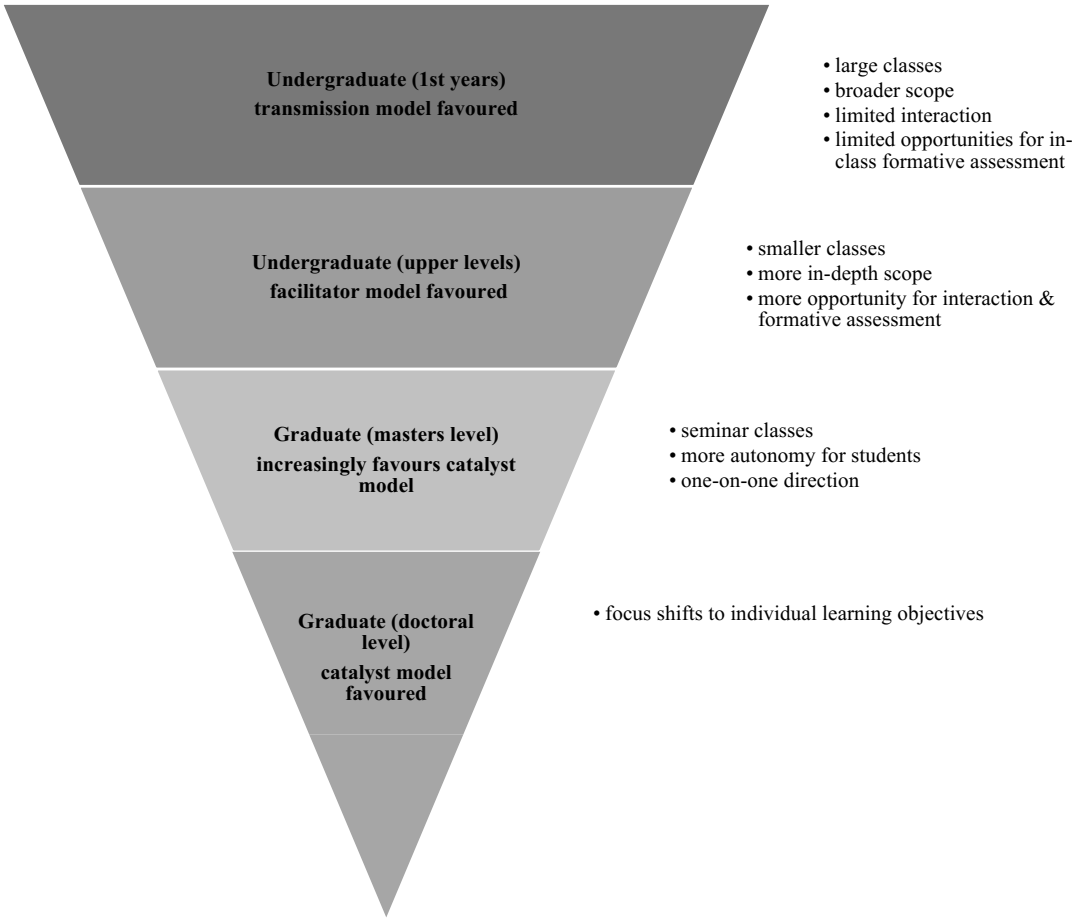

Figure 5 Hierarchy of Metaphor in Higher Education Teaching Approaches. Class size diminishes and depth of scope narrows as students move into higher levels of post-secondary education; this system favours a shift in teaching methods, described in terms of the metaphors of transmission, facilitation, and provocation (catalyst)

As suggested by the hierarchy, the traditional university model favours a shift from transmission to catalyst over time, as students move ever upward in their post-secondary education. From the student perspective, this shift may be natural and, arguably, imperceptible from semester to semester: first-year students come to understand the dynamic of the undergraduate lecture hall, in which they have limited interaction with the professor, and even

with each other in the classroom. Depending on the university and program, first-year courses may have close to 1,000 students (Charnalia, 2015). As they move into more advanced undergraduate courses, class size gets smaller as the subject matter becomes more narrowly focused, providing more opportunities for in-class activities that encourage peer interaction, as well as interaction between student and teacher. By the time students get into graduate level programs, class sizes become more amenable to genuinely formative assessment strategies. Once students have reached the thesis stage of their graduate programs, their interactions with teachers are almost exclusively one-on-one, and the teacher's role is, by necessity, to provoke the student's learning, to stimulate the student's own autonomous progress.

For those of us teaching in Cégep, as previously noted, there is less of a radical shift from beginning to end, in terms of both class size and complexity of material. We seem to find ourselves pretty comfortably aligned with the upper-level undergraduate teacher, relying most frequently on the facilitator model, but employing the transmission model when necessary and indulging in the catalyst model when circumstances allow.

Chapter 10: The Hard Part

> "We often miss opportunity because it's dressed in overalls and looks like work"
>
> **— Thomas A. Edison**

At the heart of my doctoral research was an exploration of how my ideas about myself as a teacher are manifested in my assessment practices. The connection between my development of teacher-self and my approach to assessment is clear to me: my identity as a teacher is founded on my belief of what teaching and learning are, and part of that belief is the notion that assessment is, as McMillan, Hellsten, and Klinger (2011) wrote, "a process that supports and enhances student learning" (p. 2). In other words, to be a good teacher, I need to consider how, what, when, and why I conduct assessment. At the same time, I need to reconcile my philosophy of assessment in pedagogy with my professional, institutional obligations to evaluate and record student achievement. In this third cycle of interviews, I opened the discussions with an exploration of how each of us felt about assessment, and how we implemented it in our everyday practice.

The connection between my development of teacher self and my assessment practices is clear: my identity as a teacher is founded on my belief of what teaching and learning are, and part of that belief is the notion that assessment is, as McMillan, Hellsten, and Klinger (2011) said, "a process that supports and enhances student learning" (p. 2). In other words, to be a good teacher, I need to consider how, what, when, and why I conduct assessment. Assessment is, however, often maligned by teachers and students, as well as institutions and the non-academic community. Students fear exams and struggle with deadlines for papers and projects; teachers complain of weekends spent correcting those exams, papers, and projects. If, however, teachers

in higher education (and even, as we have seen, in other levels) rely on the apprenticeship of observation as the primary guideline for their practice, then I can see how assessment may be perceived negatively by teachers. As students, we too feared exams and deadlines; furthermore, we were not privy to teachers' assessment planning, correcting, or departmental discussions. Is it any wonder then that teachers don't instinctively know how to approach assessment, or how to use the information it provides?

Pedagogically, assessment is an integral and essential aspect of learning, "intrinsic to effective instruction" (Wiliam 2011). At its most basic sense, assessment is about information; teachers gather information about what their students are learning, students get information about their progress, institutions get information about their success rates, and so on. Of course, "information does not become 'feedback' unless it is provided within a system that can use that information to affect future performance" (p. 4), to alter what Ramaprasad identified as the gap between performance and mastery (1983). The problem is not that teachers don't know *why* assessment happens; the problem is that, as Rhys said, we hate it.

As a teacher, then, I have to go deeper in my understanding and appreciation of assessment; I am not merely assessing student learning, I am getting feedback on my teaching through student performance. Wiliam (2011) suggested that formative assessment can help teachers make decisions about future iterations of a course, a lesson, or an assignment; in other words, I can use assessment for the benefit of future learners, based on present learners' experience. As implied above, feedback is not simply what comes after assessment; as explored by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), particularly in formative assessment, feedback is "at the heart of effective learning" (Wiliam, 2011, p. 6). If teachers complain about correcting papers, perhaps they need to reflect on what they see as the function of assessment and feedback. A

teacher like Patti burns out because correcting papers took too many hours, too much ink, and too many of her own tears to be sustainable.

Wiliam (2005) said that the remediation model of assessment or feedback + correction, has been particularly espoused in the Anglophone education model, whereas

> within much of the research undertaken in Francophone countries, the central concept is 'regulation,' summarized as 'feedback + adaptation. … [here, regulation] used in the sense of adjustment in the way that a thermostat regulates the temperature of a room (p. 8).

In fact, simply correcting student work implies a closed process, that is, student production, teacher correction, end of process. Regulation, on the other hand, implies student production, adjustment, reproduction, adjustment, and so on; in other words, assessment and feedback become dialogic. This assessment model, according to Broadfoot, then becomes "the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go, and how best to get there" (as cited in Wiliam, 2011, p. 10). If, in my context, feedback is essential and constitutes a dialogue, and social interaction creates meaning, then assessment creates meaning, which is why I need to be mindful of it. Cam's shift, which in our final interview she described and attributed to our first interview, reflects her recognition that students can seek and interpret the feedback they need, and this feedback need not be overwhelmingly exhaustive. For Cam, it has become about finding the balance between pointing out gaps and pulling too much focus to a single aspect of the paper. Her new method of providing feedback clarifies the feedback "distortion" (Gobble et al, 2016) she felt had previously derailed her students.

The struggle many of us feel in the face of our assessment practice derives from a tension situated in the intersection of assessment demands. Any discussion of assessment must acknowledge that the different stakeholders expect different outcomes from assessment (DeLuca et al, 2016). Institutions, including the students' current college, their future university, and funding bodies, rely on assessment for evaluating and ranking candidates. Particularly for Cégep teachers in the English colleges, there is also a pressing need to re-evaluate our assessment practices in light of the diversity of our students and environments; more and more colleges are exploring UDL in education, and for many years, teachers in the English colleges have accounted for the effects of Bill 101—students in Quebec are required to attend a French-language school, unless at least one parent was educated in English in Canada.[13] Since it is not mandatory, and is considered post-secondary, Cégep enrolment is not governed by Bill 101, and students are free to apply to college in the language of their choice. This is reflected in enrolment; at Vanier, for instance, recent enrolment data suggests that close to 50% of our students are studying in English for the first time (McDonnell, 2011).

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13 Under Bill 101 (The Charter of the French Language, first adopted in 1977), students are eligible for permanent exemption from the law if:

- They have been educated in English in Canada and at least one parent is Canadian;
- Their siblings were educated in English in Canada and at least one parent is Canadian;
- One parent (who must be Canadian) received the major part of their education in English in Canada;
- One parent attended school in Québec after the implementation of the law and was exempt themselves.

At the same time, teachers are asked to incorporate formative assessment practices that better correspond to more progressive pedagogy. According to DeLuca, Valiquette, and Klinger (2016), there are six characteristics of formative assessment:

- assessments are planned and integrated as part of learning activities
- learning objectives and criteria are transparent and shared
- information is gathered before, during, and after a period of instruction
- information gathered informs instruction
- timely and specific feedback is given
- peer- and self-assessment skills are developed

The challenge, as reflected in Mauro's discussion of the 110-115 objectives in NYA, the first Chemistry course in the Science program, is how to implement effective formative assessment in a 15-week semester, without compromising those objectives, that is, without running out of time. As he observes, taking one's time in NYA places the burden on the teacher in the next semester, who must revisit the NYA objectives before beginning the NYB curriculum.

In 2011, the Quebec Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sport (MELS; now the Ministry of Education and Higher Education/Ministère d'éducation et enseignement supérieure, or MEES) announced pedagogical reforms, applicable to primary, secondary, and college curricula. The reforms included a revised approach to assessment, based on the ministry's proposed understanding of the role of evaluation and assessment in learning (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). This role, according to the reform documents (2013), includes providing ways for learners to reflect upon their work and their world. Teachers are expected to evaluate students' competencies throughout the learning process, to determine that these competencies are solidly

acquired, understood, applied, and put into practice. The ministerial *dévis* (2013) outlines the evaluation criteria for each discipline, including how these criteria reflect the statements of competency detailed in the encompassing curriculum. In English courses, for instance, students are expected to learn "ways to *refine* oral and written communication in the language of instruction" and how to "*edit* their work" (p. 5, italics added).

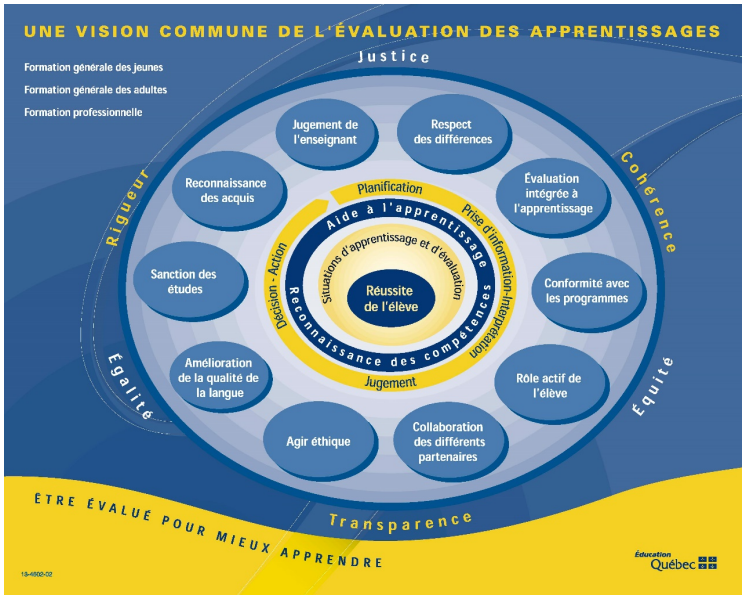

Figure 6 Quebec's policy on assessment, a common vision on the assessment of learning. Like other provinces, Quebec values assessment for learning (*évaluation integrée à l'apprentissage*), transparency, and student engagement (*rôle actif de l'éléve*) for general education of youth and adults as well as professional education.

The ministerial reform document (2013) outlines the role of the teacher in assessment, beginning with acknowledgment that provincial legislation accords teachers the right to choose the assessment instruments that they deem best suited to measuring and evaluating student needs and achievements. From this acknowledgment, the reform document assumes a simple extension of that right to choose assessment tools best suited to assess students' competency.

The problem on the ground, however, is that many teachers feel that any reform at the ministerial level may be well-intentioned, but implementation is underserved. Reforms, typically, are introduced, but it up to individual teachers, schools, or boards to interpret and implement the revisions, with little or no governmental intervention or consultation. This, of course, is not a phenomenon unique to Quebec; Lortie (1975) described a similar sense of frustration among elementary and secondary teachers in the USA, where "schooling is long on prescription" (p. xvii) but lacks corresponding understanding of the actual classrooms such changes affect.

What does Cégep assessment look like?

There are, of course, different kinds of assessment; McMillan, Hellsten, and Klinger (2011) linked the different forms of assessment to the different functions, namely, assessment *of* learning, assessment *for* learning, and assessment *as* learning. Assessment *of* learning suggests summative assessment, while assessment *for* and *as* learning implies formative and iterative assessment.

In the current climate of problem-based learning and post-constructivist pedagogy, summative assessment is often perceived as an unwelcome if inevitable aspect of institutional education. Yet if summative assessment remains inevitable within the Cégep system, then we need to acknowledge and teach to it, even if that means, despite Jason's objections, teaching to the test—or at least, with the test in mind. Outside of the classroom context, summative assessment serves institutional and social purposes; it is how we determine who gets in, who gets out, who gets funding, and who gets employed. Yorke (2011), among others, argued that assessments can—and often must—be both summative, providing a quantitative measure that

contributes to the student's grade, and formative, providing feedback that contributes to the student's learning. According to Yorke, there is a definite place within constructivist teaching for summative assessment, in that it can be a test of independence that counters the potential pitfalls of student overconfidence from success that is really attributable to "the work the teacher put in at the draft stage" (p. 258). Similarly, Taras (2005) saw no conflict between summative and formative assessments, and in fact argues that the formative assessment must be connected to the same standards and expectations as the summative evaluations. Even those of us who bristle at the reductive nature of standardized tests and R-scores feel that unless we're willing, in Patti's words, to explode the system, we must work within that system. And, it must be acknowledged, at the Cégep level, we have a level of accountability to society that goes beyond the social responsibility of our primary and secondary colleagues, in domains such as Nursing, Early Childhood Education, or Mechanical Engineering. When we confer upon a student a diploma in Nursing, we are attesting to that student's competence as a nurse. Group work participation may indeed help this student develop necessary interpersonal skills in the medical environment, but as a member of society, I also want to know that this student has been evaluated and deemed competent based on a standard of patient care and medical knowledge.

Yet, although both teachers and students are concerned—often to their own detriment—about grades, post-constructivist pedagogy sees formative assessment as the site and vehicle for learning. In his seminal work on the topic, Sadler (1989) defined formative assessment as a set of judgments "used to shape and improve" competence (p. 120). The essential difference between formative and summative assessment is one of purpose and effect—formative assessment, unlike summative assessment, aims to help students shape their learning, rather than measure it. Formative assessment, defined by Sadler (1998) as "assessment that is specifically intended to

generate feedback on performance to improve and accelerate learning " (as cited in Nichol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2006, p. 2), happens before, during, and after teaching. In Black and Wiliam's (1998) comprehensive overview of the subject, formative assessment includes any activities from which students receive feedback which in turn modifies subsequent activities. According to this definition, then, feedback does not merely *overlap* with formative assessment; it is an integral component. In our discussion, feedback was indeed always discussed as part of our assessment practices, and as more than one participant noted, feedback we received as students influenced our own approach to it now. So, Patti, who desperately always wanted more detailed feedback, spent hours painstakingly providing that kind of feedback to her own students, until there was nothing left to give.

Can we, realistically, engage in assessment *for* learning within the context of an academic institution that demands reporting, that is, assessment *of* learning? Can we get students on board with assessment for learning in the context of a system that implicitly encourages them to prioritize grades over learning?

Facing these questions, I realized that I have to make a choice—decide that, like Patti, I cannot reconcile my teacher identity with my institutionalized obligations to grade student work, or, like Dana, accept those obligations, and learn to recognize my own limits. If I were to choose the first option, it would mean abandoning a career as a teacher, and even if there was another career path that appealed (and was feasible), abandoning higher education doesn't fix my problem, nor does it help anyone else who might be grappling with the same dilemma. Theoretically, I could spearhead a radical revolt and try to explode the system, but even if this system were open to change, change inevitably happens at a snail's pace. At the same time, of course, it is my professional and social obligation to speak to the system, and be transparent with

my students, my colleagues, and my community about the aspects of that system that demand scrutiny.

So I am left with reconciliation. Not resignation.

When I ask "how do I reconcile teacher identity and assessment obligations?" I don't mean "is there a way I can be the teacher I believe I am yet grade student work?" In other words, I am not seeking for an elegant way to justify a hypocritical conflict between my teaching and assessment practices. Rather, I am exploring what assessment means to me, and how I can articulate—to myself, to my students, and to my colleagues—how assessment, in all its various forms, fits into my understanding of what it means to teach and learn.

Consider the English Exit Exam, a provincial exam that is a diploma requirement for Cégep students. Regardless of program, and regardless of students' post-Cégep ambitions, all students who wish to be granted a Cégep DEC or AEC must pass the English Exit Exam (EEE). In French, which is, of course, the language of the Ministry of Education in Quebec, the exam is referred to as l'EUA, l'Épreuve uniforme anglais. As *uniforme* suggests, the EEE is a pass-fail, standardized test. Although students are granted some accommodations, none are exempt. The exam is administered three times a year across the province, and graded in large marking centres by teams of teachers and other qualified markers. Student papers are coded, so the markers do not see student names, gender, program, or even college. Papers are graded according to twelve criteria, divided into three categories—comprehension, organization, and expression—and students must pass in all three categories in order to pass the exam. If the student fails the exam, they must wait for the next sitting of the exam; they can write as often as necessary to pass, but their diploma will not be granted until they do. Although students receive a record of their

achievement in each category, all that is recorded on their official transcript is EC (échec/fail) or RE (réussite/pass)—and the number of times they have taken the exam.

Some English teachers might look at the EEE as a ministerial assessment, disconnected from their own course material and teaching objectives, and simply ignore it when it comes to their own teaching and assessment activities. Others might incorporate EEE preparation into their courses, or develop their own assessments to reflect the criteria of the EEE, considering it to be the ministerial standard. Teachers who participate in the marking centers report that the process does indeed influence their teaching, to greater or lesser extents, and say that engaging in the process also affords them an opportunity to discuss assessment with other teachers. My own stake in the matter is affected in two ways: first, because I am engaged in research that explores the relationship between teaching and assessment, I feel compelled to question how the EEE fits into the competency-based program approach of Cégep, and into my own ideas about teaching and learning, and the role of assessment in both. Perhaps more pertinent is the fact that I worked for several years as a member of the committee that sets the exam and runs the marking centers, including three years as the coordinator of that committee. So I find that compulsion to question the EEE even more pressing. It is not simply a matter of learning to live with the existence of the EEE, I must justify its existence, to myself, my students, and my colleagues.

I recently found myself having to explain the English Exit Exam to a college administrator, and realized as I did so that I have come to appreciate the form and function of this exam, particularly as compared to its French counterpart. The English Exit Exam reflects the competencies students must demonstrate in order to achieve their college diploma; these competencies, in turn, reflect the institutional values of communication and critical thinking. Of course, it might be argued that students must also pass four English courses as part of their

General Education requirements; however, a criterion-based summative evaluation of their ability to think critically and communicate effectively in the language of instruction, assessed according to agreed-upon criteria, suggests a more profound commitment on the part of the government and its colleges to these values.

Sense and sensibility

> "Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself."
>
> — Leo Tolstoy

As Jason said, the reconciliation comes down to introspection, to reflexive practice. I can challenge the system, yes, but I must also probe my own motivation and objectives. Prior to our third interactive interview, I asked my participants to complete DeLuca et al's (2016) *Approaches to Classroom Assessment Inventory* (ACAI); however, I cautioned them that some of the questions would be problematic. The ACAI is a useful tool, particularly for pre-service teachers who are learning about teaching and about themselves as teachers. It asks respondents to choose their preferred response to a series of scenarios, with a view to assessing the individual's general assessment profile. Beyond simply determining if the respondent's approach to assessment is *of*, *for*, or *as* learning, the inventory also aims to identify how the participant's approach aligns with one of 12 approaches, which are determined based on an intersection of responses in terms of the purpose, process, fairness, and underlying theory of assessment. For post-secondary teachers, however, the ACAI results were inevitably inaccurate; for instance, several scenarios asked how respondents interact with parents, a situation that (almost) never presents itself for Cégep and university teachers. As well, while the ACAI inventory may push

pre-service teachers to explore their own assessment philosophy, and to engage in critical self-examination, for active teachers, the choices offered for a given scenario occasionally did not ring true. Several scenario choices are presented as “ideally, you would…” when those of us who are currently working as teachers don’t operate in an ideal world. Based on this appraisal of the original instrument, DeLuca, Coombs, and I have embarked on a project to create an ACAI specifically for teachers in higher education.

One of the sources of tension is that often, theories about assessment rely on ideal scenarios that don’t reflect real world contexts, as demonstrated by the original ACAI (2016). We don’t work in our ideal world, though—we work in departments, within programs, within institutions, under the governance of a provincial or state education system. So I might, ideally, want to assess students when they are ready (Boud 2017), or to offer them an extensive list of alternative assessments (Bracken & Novak, 2019), or to engage in more assessment as learning practices (McMillan, Hellsten, & Klinger, 2011), but I have certain professional restrictions. My college English department, for instance, mandates all teachers to accord at least 50% of the semester grade to written assignments. My college requires me to submit final grades within a specific period immediately following the semester. My provincial education system demands that I assess students according to proscribed competencies—and subsequent levels, both within and beyond the Cégep curriculum, assume that students who have successfully completed my course have mastered those competencies.

It must be said, as well, that I am not chafing at these restrictions, because I have reflected on and understand the how and why of each. The grade deadline is perhaps the easiest constraint to accept: the college needs me to submit my grades within a specific period because it has an obligation to report student grades in time for students to be admitted to the next

semester's courses, or to the subsequent stage of education, and so on. Personally, this deadline has never been particularly onerous, as I tend to work best with clear deadlines, and can complete my evaluations relatively quickly. The ministerial competencies are also reasonable—first, because it makes sense to have learning objectives articulated clearly, for the benefit of students, teachers, administrators, and the society outside the academy walls. This logic is clear if we consider the three-year career programs, such as Nursing. Clearly, Nursing students must learn a standard set of skills and knowledge; course competencies and program frameworks must reflect that requirement, and assessments must be connected transparently to it. In the two-year pre-university programs with no narrowly-defined end goal, such as Pure and Applied Science or Commerce, we operate under the assumption that graduates will go on to university-level studies in related fields—Physics, or Medicine, or Accounting, or Business—and so these programs are expected to prepare students for the next stage by building a foundational set of skills and knowledge. The matter becomes, arguably, murkier in the context of general education courses, such as English. Our learning goals must be broader and consider a variety of possible directions and outcomes for our students, since they are drawn from every program, pre-university and career alike. Our statements of the competencies reflect this broader reach, and general education courses tend to have fewer competencies, with deliberately ambiguous phasing, to allow individual colleges, departments, and teachers to interpret the competencies within their particular frameworks. Despite this ambiguity, the general education competencies do reflect a shared set of values, namely, the importance of critical thinking and analysis, the importance of clear and reasoned communication, and the importance of metacognitive academic skills.

Finally, the departmental obligation to accord at least 50% of the final grade to written work also makes sense to me—perhaps more sense than the requirement to include oral

presentation as another assessment. It is easier for me to see the logic of requiring written work than to justify requiring students to present to their classmates; there is nothing in the ministerial competencies that seems to mandate us to evaluate students' oral presentation skills. It might be argued that oral presentations present an opportunity for more creative assignments—in fact, in one of my genre courses, students can choose to write a script based on one of the genres we've studied, and present a live or filmed performance. It might further be argued that if communication skills include oral communication, we should be evaluating accordingly; however, although many teachers include oral presentations in their evaluations, most do not teach oral presentation *skills* at all, much less to the same breadth and depth as the writing skills. In my own courses, I have tried to articulate the how and why of oral presentations for the benefit of the students, as well as to feel comfortable including them in my evaluation toolbox. While my essay rubrics are derived from the ministerial competencies and the criteria of the English Exit Exam, my oral presentation rubrics are created from that articulation of how and why I believe the corresponding skills are important. I try to use that rubric, then, to motivate the students in their formative stages of the presentation, as well as to inform my feedback during and after those stages.

According to Wiggins and McTighe (2005), "feedback is information that provides the performer with direct, usable insights into current performance, based on tangible differences between current performance and hoped-for performance" (p. 182). As such, it is essential in Wiggins' model that feedback be provided during the assessment, so students can judge if they are doing what the teachers has asked them to do, based on the feedback. Similarly, Bérubé (2011), a teacher within the Quebec Cégep model, said that while "one main goal of feedback is to signal the satisfaction or displeasure of the teacher" (slide 12), best practice dictates that such

affective feedback must be used temporarily and, more importantly, in conjunction with comments that "signal a gap between the product and the expectations" and with appropriate follow-up (slide 24).

Although the wording of the definition of *feedback* may change from one study to another, the basic premise, that feedback consists of communication between the teacher and the student regarding the gap between the student's performance and the expected or ideal performance, is common to most studies, and this seemed to be the collective understanding of the function of feedback among my participants. Sadler went a step further, however, arguing that the communication is only *feedback* if and when it is used to "alter the gap" between performance and expectation (p. 121). In other words, in Sadler's view, feedback cannot be feedback if there is no interaction, no formative function, or, perhaps in the Cégep context, no revision or rubric-driven evaluation. Furthermore, students must recognize the standard, and appreciate its quality, in order to monitor their own production and results. In Sadler's model, students must "possess a concept of the standard,… compare the actual… with the standard, and… engage in appropriate action [to close] the gap" (p. 121). Truly formative assessment is an ongoing, iterative and generative process, and feedback—both to and from the student—is the key to learning through formative assessment.

Although most teachers would agree that students benefit from feedback, Wiggins (1993) lamented "how little … we understand what constitutes usable, helpful feedback" (p. 183). For feedback to be truly effective as a formative learning tool, both the instructor and the student need to understand what to do with it, why to do it, and how to do it consistently. Chanock (2000) found that without interaction, models and explanations of feedback, close to half the students she surveyed did not understand the fundamental concepts of instructor comments.

Instructors, she found, did not provide such interaction because they felt that students "should know" how to interpret the comment (p. 102); I have heard this very sentiment expressed by my own Cégep colleagues. In fact, Sadler's seminal work in formative feedback (1989) was in part prompted by his "puzzling observation" that student performances on assessments did not necessarily improve, even when the students were given "valid and reliable" feedback from teachers (p. 119). Sadler argued that chief among a teacher's responsibilities is training students to become independent learners, so that "teacher-supplied feedback [can] give way to self-assessment" (p. 82). Cam's shift away from flagging every linguistic error in her students' History papers, to a focus on content and the competencies, has not only made her correcting load more manageable, it has helped her help them learn from her feedback. Indeed, one of the key premises upon which Sadler based his research (1989) is that students can only improve if they "develop the capacity to monitor the quality of their own work" (p. 119). Several researchers (Bardine, Bardine & Deegan, 2000; Chanock, 2000; Covic & Jones, 2008; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Price & O'Donovan, 2006; Walker, 2008) concluded that feedback without interaction and guidance is ineffective, for the most part because students frequently do not understand instructor feedback. Indeed, Boud (2017) stated adamantly that feedback just isn't feedback if students cannot interpret it or apply it; as such, our role as teachers is to guide our students in that interpretation and to build application of our feedback into our curriculum (Carless & Boud, 2018).

I may believe that my criteria, instructions, and written feedback are very clear, but the recipients of these messages may not read them as I intended, or apply them as I expect. Sadler (1989) identified factors that may delay or distort the effectiveness of feedback; the most influential of the factors, "temporal conditioning," refers to the notion that students are

conditioned to accept ineffective or even “defective” feedback, as well as a wide variety in the nature, amount and depth of feedback provided by different teachers. Through temporal conditioning, Sadler claimed, students learn “survival habits” (p. 77) which must be overcome in order to establish a more effective learning culture. Furthermore, Pollock (2012) pointed out that teachers themselves tend to think of feedback as unidirectional and “based on a behaviourist” model (p. 3); that is, that feedback is provoked by student performance, but generated only by the teacher. If, however, in higher education we are concerned with “the development of independent, autonomous, lifelong learners” (Ellery, 2008, p. 427), then, as educators, “we need to provide time for assessment-related learning practices” (p. 428), including dialogic feedback. Lizzio and Wilson (2008) determined that developmental feedback that provided strategies to help students bridge the gap between their performance and the expected results was perceived by students as the most effective; this student perception validates Lizzio and Wilson’s contention that effective feedback “should contribute to knowledge of performance and the nature of the performance gap between actual and ideal performance” (p. 264).

So in order for me to create learning opportunities through formative assessment, I need to create space for training my students to interpret and apply feedback. More importantly, I need to take time to demonstrate to students that I am listening to *their* feedback, and I recognize feedback as an ongoing dialogue or “system of feedback loops” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 185). Especially for weaker students, this training will support student learning and encourage them to solicit feedback. Finally, as a consciously reflexive practitioner, I need to strive to see feedback as that system of loops, providing information to both student and teacher—in an ideal feedback loop, both of us making "deliberate adjustments" to our learning and teaching activities (Pollock, 2012, p.5).

As post-secondary teachers, we are called upon to evaluate our students, and, in many cases, to confer certification. The stakes, for students, teachers, institutions, professional bodies, and the public, are high. Arguably, then, high-stakes summative assessments replicate the high-pressure demands of real world professional milieus. Doctors, for instance, are frequently in high-pressure circumstances, in which their ability to diagnose and determine treatment on the spot may literally mean life or death for a patient. This reality of the discipline is often cited as justification for the intense, inflexible pace and workload of pre-med, med school, and even college-level health science programs.

Costopoulos (2012) argues that specific summative assessment scenarios, however, do not accurately reflect professional demands. In my classroom, for instance, are my students better served and assessed through a four-hour exam with no access to resources, or through a take-home exam that allows them to exploit the resources that would, in real world professional circumstances, be at their disposal? In fact, arguably, I should be asking them to demonstrate not only content knowledge, but the skills required to find and use disciplinary resources, under time and space constraints that reflect what it is reasonable to expect to find in their future workplace. For Paul, a test aid such as the so-called ‘cheat sheets’ not only reflect a more realistic setting—that is, access to relevant information—but also provide students with a familiar study scenario that makes their learning more concrete.

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What I remember… *"There's nothing wrong with your son."*

Colin was in Grade 1, in French Immersion. His teacher was Line, and would be in Grade 2 as well, thanks to the cycle system.

Line first communicated with me in Colin's agenda, to let me know that Colin was struggling. We met in person at the first parent-teacher evening of the year.

"You are Colin's mother?"

"Yes."

A concerned look settled on her face. She was a tall, thin woman, with bright blue eyes behind large glasses. She closed the classroom door.

"I am very worried about Colin. He finds it very difficult to move from one activity to another. He gets very intensely focused on one task, and I have to stop him—sometimes I have to shake his arm to get his attention. And at recess, he doesn't play with any of the other children. He just draws maps in the dirt."

None of this was all that surprising to me. Colin was a quiet child. He loved to read—he had already read the Harry Potter books to himself, and he did indeed love to draw maps, subway diagrams, and entire city plans. It had not occurred to me, however, that his intensity, his curiousity, his vivid imagination, were problems.

"Ok," I said, "Is there anything I can do?"

"I think he needs to be tested. I believe he has Asperger's."

"What will that mean?" I was, frankly, terrified.

"The school psychologist can talk to you. Colin might need medication to help him."

I had visions of my beautiful boy, drugged, eyes glazed over, jaw slack.

"Are you sure about this? I know he gets very focused, and I've seen the map thing too, but medication?"

"I assure you, Mrs. McDonnell, I know what I have seen. I have been teaching for more than twenty years. I've never seen anything quite like your son."

I allowed her to set up an observation with the school psychologist, and agreed to meet with him and Line, and to take their recommendations seriously.

Two weeks later, the meeting took place. The psychologist, a bearded man with a checkered shirt, pulled out a file and put it on the table between us.

"There's nothing wrong with your son," he said.

***

If I consider my son's post-secondary trajectory, at first glance, there seems to be an inherited, if hitherto unrecognized, destiny. After Cégep, Colin announced that he wanted to get his pilot's license; first, as a private pilot, then, ultimately, as a commercial pilot, with the ambition of becoming an airline pilot. He began working toward the pilot's license, doing well and enjoying his training; at the same time, he was also pursuing a bachelor's degree in Cultural Studies, a natural continuation of his college diploma in Liberal Arts (if not a natural complement, at first glance, to his aviator aspirations).

I was often asked if we "saw this coming," that is, had he always talked about flying, or otherwise sown the seeds of this flying fruit. The short answer is "no." The longer, more nuanced, answer is that while he's always been interested in public transport, we really had no idea about the pilot plan, but we were not altogether surprised… because his maternal grandparents both worked in aviation, and his late paternal grandfather, Bob, was an avionics engineer. So, it's "in his blood," as someone inevitably says, or in the air that he breathes, as my mother would say.

Shortly after he began his private license training, his paternal grandmother visited from England. She produced a thick, padded envelope, and invited us to gather at the dining room table. She opened the envelope, and pulled out a hardback book, then another, and a framed photo. Then she reached into the envelope and pulled out several bundles cossetted in bubble wrap. One of the books was Bob's pilot log book—which I had no idea existed, since I had no idea that Bob had ever flown. The other book was another log book, in which her father had logged his military flights; the framed photo was of her father in uniform, and the bundles, once unwrapped, turned out to be his insignia and medals. She even had his pilot's cap. So, it turns out that Colin's fishbowl was saturated in aviation.

Perhaps the point is that in any family or community, we're often not aware of the water, of the air we're breathing. We're surrounded by a particular atmosphere, immersed in it, soaking it up while rarely conscious of "it" at all. In my family, teaching and learning are so prevalent that "it's in the air that we breathe." So none of us would, in another fishbowl, necessarily find our way to teaching, but it's hardly surprising that so many of us—myself, two of my mother's sisters, her brother, her niece, and her brother-in-law, to name a few—have. I recently recounted some of this history to my cousin, who agreed that this immersion was her experience, too—and

in fact, she and her sister and I all recalled an almost identical revelation in our early post-secondary studies: many of our college and university classmates were the first in their families to go beyond high school, but in our family, university was the norm. If anything, we all recognized that we were none of us going to be paving any new paths—we had aunts and uncles, parents and grandparents, who were teachers, engineers, physicists, and doctors.

It is important to note that I am not suggesting a natural, "one is born a teacher," destiny. It is certainly true that professions tend to recur within families, but, I would argue, this does not mean that teaching, or flying, or any other profession, is somehow genetically coded. Rather, I think it is immersion in the fishbowl that inevitably leads to some members of the school of fish to follow similar career paths. If a child grows up in a household, and extended family, where there are books, and family members have higher education, and one or more members of the adult generations are teachers or professors, then there is a tacit value attached to teaching, an unspoken validation of education as an ambition and as a career choice. So, it is not a question of it being in the blood, or in the genes—it's in the air, and we're breathing it in without question.

One of the lessons I take from this particular reflection is that I need to remind myself sometimes that my students *are* educational pioneers in their families, and that they are breathing this air in an unfamiliar fishbowl. Particularly in the Cégep context, students whose parents did not grow up in Quebec have no instinctive understanding or appreciation for the Quebec approach, even if their parents have studied beyond high school. The Cégep system is designed in part to provide training to students who do not want to pursue university studies; these students have quite deliberately chosen (or been steered toward) a different path than the one their teachers have likely walked.

Chapter 11: The teacher in the rye

While our fishbowls may influence our choices, leading to seemingly inevitable outcomes, it is important to recognize that we can leap into another fishbowl and learn to swim. Good teachers are *not* born; they become. Becoming a good teacher, like maintaining a good sourdough starter, requires conscious, deliberate care. Some may indeed inherit a good sourdough starter, but it is possible to start from scratch. In his discussion of a study of children with apparently inherent 'perfect pitch,' Ericsson (2016) concluded that "perfect pitch is not the gift, but, rather, *the ability to develop perfect pitch* is the gift—and, as nearly as we can tell, pretty much everyone is born with that gift" (p. xviii). Thus, it follows that the *ability to become a teacher* is the thing that is inherent, not being a good teacher. As a reflexive practitioner, I can be—should be—deliberate in my practice. I could choose instead passively to teach, without reflection or striving to evolve, just phoning it in, as Dana put it. Can I call myself an 'expert' teacher just because I've put in the hours, in the 10,000-hour Gladwell (2013) model? My teaching may change, like the hypothetical teacher with forty years of service, but I have no control or direction if I'm not reflecting on the things that spark change. Gladwell's discussion of the 10,000-hour 'rule,' however, is in fact derived from Ericcson's research into expertise. If I engage in what Ericcson (2008) calls deliberate practice, which relies not only on thousands of hours of *doing*, but also on consideration of feedback, conscious focus, and ongoing reflection, I will be able to see what needs to change, develop what works, and use that reflection to help others along the path. As tempting as it may be to just coast for a while, as Dana said, becoming a good teacher means leaving one's comfort zone, pushing one's limits, and grappling with troublesome knowledge (Meyer & Land, 2012). All of us described a transformative epiphany in our teaching career, an irreversible shift in our understanding of our role; but as Meyer and

Land's model suggests, this crossing of threshold is a necessary step in our journey, not the destination itself.

In our discussion, we delved into the consequences of failure for our students, and how we would like to shift the perception of the value of failure in an academic context. We also revealed some of our own failures as teachers—Rhys's deadline extension, my own confrontation with Tomas—and how we learned from those moments. Although academic failure can sometimes be an impediment for our students, our own experience demonstrates the value of Dweck's (2017) Growth Mindset, where failure only means 'not yet.' Dweck argued that the Growth Mindset reflects the belief that an individual's talents and abilities are not set in stone or predetermined, and the fact that training and effort change those abilities. Likewise, Duckworth (2016) defined 'grit' as, among other things, the ability to manage one's fear of failure, to remain resilient, and to recognize that excellence is possible, even if perfection never is.

The reflexive practitioner (according to Lafortune & Deaudelin, 2002) is someone who can describe and analyze their practice, and examine the efficacy of—and create and adapt accordingly—their practice, drawing on existing models. There are in fact several benefits of reflexive practice identified by Lafortune and Deaudelin, namely:

- evolution of beliefs and practice,
- evolution of self-image,
- pedagogical evolution from reflection and theoretical base,
- ability to make connections,
- ability to analyse situations based on different aspects (individuals, context, theory, program),

- clear perspective on our own practice,
- active and evolving model of practice,
- openness to research in classroom context,
- better informed autonomy, and
- appreciation of pedagogical debate.

A recent e-mail exchange circulated among teachers in my college English department, beginning with one teacher seeking advice from the rest of us regarding "strategies about how to get [70 student] papers marked in a reasonable amount of time, in a sane, manageable way" (Robb, personal communication, October 26, 2016). A few of our colleagues responded, offering various suggestions based on individual practices. What I found most interesting about the exchange were two things: first, that the different responses revealed different ideas about what our role is, as teachers, and what our attitudes are about assessment and evaluation within that role. Secondly, I was interested in the idea that the teacher who sent the initial query noted that she has been teaching for a decade, so her appeal was not that of an overwhelmed and underexperienced novice teacher. This exchange highlights for me both that who we think we are as teachers has a direct influence on how we approach assessment, and many of us are willing to engage in reflexive, deliberate practice.

Communities of practice

As my fictional dinner party suggests, and as my lived experience confirms, whenever two or three (or more) teachers are gathered together, the conversation inevitably drifts into 'shop talk,' as it were. We cannot help ourselves. We want to talk to other teachers, to share classroom experiences, to think through some challenge out loud, to get feedback, and to reflect

on changes we've made. It is within these communities of practice, no matter how impromptu or directionless, that we work through our ongoing development.

In the spring of 2018, I co-taught a course on assessment for an advanced certificate program in education. For this course, we asked students to develop a complex assessment task for their students, including several differentiated products of learning. Our students struggled with the concept; this was a true threshold crossing for many of them. As we, the teaching team, struggled ourselves to find ways to illuminate their path, I had an epiphany of my own: I had been teaching, very comfortably, a college English course for several years, and while I occasionally changed the novels I assigned as reading, I hadn't really touched my assessments after the first instance of the course. After all, the goal of this course is for students to demonstrate their understanding of theme in literature; an analytical essay about a theme in a novel is the clear choice for a demonstration of that learning. I had a well-developed and detailed rubric, and offered students three choices of thematic topic for each of the three novels we read. For example:

Choose one of the proposed topics and formulate an analytical essay:

1. *Both Victor Frankenstein and his creature are plagued by alienation and loneliness, yet also seek isolation from society. Both seem to think that a female companion represents an end to loneliness and a promise of happiness and peace, yet both manage to sabotage any hope of genuine happiness through a male-female partnership. Compare the two characters in terms of alienation, loneliness, and the desire for female companionship.*
2. *Men and women in the novel have different duties and responsibilities, and not everyone accepts his or her obligation. Other characters accept responsibilities for which they are*

not, in fact, accountable. Compare how men and women in the novel deal with their respective responsibilities, and how events and people are affected as a result.

3. *Certain women in the novel are idealized, yet despite their inherent virtue, suffer as a result of Victor's experiment. Is virtue rewarded in the novel? Which female character(s) are ideal, and which are idealized? Which male characters? Compare the ideal men and women to those who are idealized, and determine what makes a good woman or man.*

As I worked with my co-teacher on how to show our student teachers how to consider different ways for students to demonstrate learning, I realized that my own assessment task was pretty limited. At the same time, my learning objective for my students, reflective of the Ministerial competencies and departmental guidelines, included knowing how to plan and write a strong analytical essay. How could I provide my students a little more leeway, while still taking them where they needed to go? This is what I came up with:

Choose any two characters or groups in Frankenstein *and compare them in terms of one of the following themes:*

- *Alienation, loneliness, and exclusion*
- *Duties, responsibilities, and gender*
- *Objectification and idealization of women*

In your analysis, be sure to examine the theme through a feminist lens, and pay particular attention to the treatment and outcome of female characters.

Remember that your discussion is meant to be analytical, rather than summary. Your response should conform to standard literary essay conventions; please refer to the essay grid for specific elements that will be considered in assessing your work.

- *Regardless of which topic you choose, your essay (500 words or more, not including quotes or notes) should include specific references from the main text, and demonstrate an understanding of some of the relevant ideas or motifs presented in other texts discussed in class.*
- *Your mark for this essay will take into consideration any prewriting and outlining, as well as your revisions to the first in-class draft based on my feedback. You must submit a detailed outline and any prewriting or draft work you do.*
- *Finally, remember that you will have an opportunity to rewrite this essay – so don't get bogged down worrying about being perfect. We have plenty of time to work on refinements when we get to the second stage of this assignment.*

Questions to guide reading and analysis

NB: reading questions are designed to guide your reading, and you are not expected to address every question in your analysis.

- *Who is alienated by society? Who chooses to abandon society?*
- *What does a female companion represent to whom?*
- *What is modelled by Alfonse and Caroline Frankenstein?*
- *What is the role of Clerval?*
- *How does the structure of the narrative influence theme?*
- *How are women and men expected to act, and what choices are available – or not – to them?*
- *Is virtue rewarded in the novel? Is virtue gendered?*
- *How might the author's own lived experience be revealed or concealed in the novel?*

A few weeks after my epiphany, one of the student teachers asked me to explain why our feedback on her work so far was challenging her to develop different assessment strategies, and I was able to use my own struggle to inform my discussion with her. She had developed an interesting project for a secondary science course, in which she was asking students to present a written proposal for an environmental initiative. We kept asking her to find other ways for students to demonstrate their learning—the goal was to understand environmental problems and consider solutions. A written plan wasn't among the desired learning outcomes; it was just the most natural way *from her perspective* for students to demonstrate their learning. I focused my discussion on the idea of perspective: I explained that if I were in her shoes, the written report would be my first idea, too, because as a student, writing came to me naturally and easily. I was comfortable expressing my ideas in writing, and knew how to present research and thoughts on the page. But, I pointed out, my own challenge is to see that it's not that *writing* is easy, it's that it's easy *for me*. Like Rhys and Cam and their revelation that we are not teaching younger versions of ourselves, we need to take a step back from our assessment design and question whether the design is optimized for learning, or for our own comfort. I would be demoralized if a teacher insisted that I demonstrate my learning as an oil painting, for instance, because I don't see myself as a painter, and I would approach the project and the class feeling like there was no way I could really excel. I have to assume that for some of my students—and for some of her students—the thought of writing as a way to demonstrate learning is their oil painting. So, I asked her, how can *those* students show us that they've learned as much as the ones that are as comfortable as we are with written work?

My interaction with this student exemplifies the value in "hearing the experiences of others" (DeLuca, Valiquette, & Klinger, 2016, p. 151). Is this what a community of practice, in

practice, looks like? My participants shared so openly and warmly with me, but at least one of them remarked that he and I had talked about teaching more in the year of my research cycle than he had with any of his departmental colleagues. Our repeated interactive interviews seemed to validate the idea that reflexive practice "works most effectively when associated with interaction among peers who can also personify different types of teaching and provide examples of alternative practices" (Lortie, 2005, p. viii). All of us had become jaded about 'official' mentoring projects or communities of practice, yet when I shared my research progress with my own college department, my colleagues became so enthused by the idea of sharing stories of assessment—without a "fix it" agenda—that within a week, one coordinator had set up a coffee hour "empty of intention besides sipping [coffee], [in case anyone felt] moved to discuss ways to help make the feedback-and-grading process most effective" (S. Dinsmore, personal communication, March 29, 2018). The session was reasonably well-attended, but of course, the coordinator is walking that thin line between organic, spontaneous dialogue and institutionally-mandated scheme.

Perhaps part of the problem with creating and maintaining an authentic community of practice lies first in a paradox between the appeal of academic freedom and autonomy on the one hand, and the compulsion to engage in group dialogue on the other. Another facet to the problem may lie in a narrow understanding of what we mean by 'community of practice.' Do we need to be face-to-face, in a designated space, with a pre-determined theme, in order to call it a community of practice moment? Don't most of these authentic moments happen spontaneously, organically, when we need to reach out for help, insight, guidance, commiseration about a specific and time-sensitive issue? Perhaps, then, the value of the coffee hour is not to 'fix' a problem, but rather, to establish the sense of community that fosters bonds that can be called

upon when we find ourselves in those moments. Perhaps these moments, and this community, need not be choreographed, but can be recognized more overtly. In the writing and researching of this dissertation, I have frequently switched from my text to my Internet browser to send a quick 'hivemind' query to my friends, colleagues, and fellow researchers, through platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. This is, for me, community of practice in practice.

The interview conversations were always a pleasure. For each round, the listening produced epiphanies and direction for my thinking, reflecting, writing, and next stages. After the second round, for instance, listening to our conversations about mentorship brought me to the realization that we typically don't want mentors, we want *mentoring moments*—and that, as a community of practice, and as institutions, we should strive to create spaces in which those moments can more organically occur. In that same round, I developed my articulation of teaching metaphors, which has helped me not only in my own practice but in my role as a teacher educator. In listening to the third round, in which we discussed assessment, I identified two important concepts: first, that differences in approaches to assessment between teachers in different disciplines may be perceived as arising from the differences between the disciplines themselves. As an English teacher, I naturally approach assessment, both formative and summative, differently from my colleague who teaches Chemistry. Differences in approaches to assessment between teachers within the same discipline, on the other hand, *must* be seen as expressions of individual teacher identity. I use peer review and detailed rubrics because these assessment strategies reflect my understanding of learning as a dialogic, interactive transaction, and my belief that students benefit from transparent evaluation. My colleague in the same

discipline eschews rubrics and peer review because he fosters autonomy in his students, and believes that each should be encouraged to find and develop their own voice. A second, parallel idea that emerged from this particular revelation is that within our community of practice, whether it is organic or institutionally-mandated, we engage in these conversations not with the intent of proselytizing or defending our particular approach, but rather, of engaging in dialogue in order to better understand our own approach, and emerge better able to articulate our identity and its influence on that approach.

Loose in the Joints: Learning from Teaching in Other Contexts

In the three years between completing my M.Ed. and beginning my doctoral studies, I focused my learning energy on becoming a certified fitness instructor and then a yoga instructor, and most recently, a cardio-cycle (spin) instructor. I'm perpetually awed by the connections and crossovers between the yoga studio, the fitness centre, and the college classroom, both in terms of practice and in terms of the benefits of being open to self-discovery. Palmer (1997) says

> teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in that mirror, and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge—and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject. In fact, knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge (p. 15).

This makes a lot of sense to me, perhaps because of my yoga teacher-self. I have always been glad to see college student evaluations that comment on my enthusiasm, and they do often go along with *She really knows her subject*. The reciprocal relationship—to know my students/subject, I must know myself; to know myself, I must be willing to look at myself in the midst of my students/subject—brings us back to the importance of iterative, generative feedback, an on-going dialogue between teacher and student, as well as the value of self-

knowledge, and suggests that the two are facets of the same thing, namely, being a 'good' teacher. Palmer says that "good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher" (p. 16). I find this notion to be full of hope, because it doesn't fall back on the old chestnut of vocation—some people are born teachers, some never can be teachers—yet it also doesn't say that completing a few teaching workshops means one can teach. If teaching comes from teacher identity and integrity, then introspection must be a fundamental part of our teacher evolution. It seems to me that the idea of vocation sometimes misidentifies good teaching as talent—but it's not that we have an inherent ability to teach, it's that we are self-aware and willing to engage in deliberate practice. Looking back to my career counselling experience, the myriad test algorithms all produced *teacher* as my most obvious career path—suggesting that there may be certain characteristics, attitudes, and aptitudes inherent to teaching. My substitute teaching experience, which almost deterred me from teaching altogether, belies the inherent ability notion, though, suggesting that rather than just naturally *being* a teacher, I have to find the space to explore and develop my teacher self.

One of the most valuable facets of teaching in the fitness context, in terms of crossover to the academic context, is how fitness instructors approach assessment and evaluation. Several aspects of this crossover are relevant here:

1. Self-assessment—my Wednesday evening cardio-cycle (spin) class is flagged as "advanced" on the fitness centre schedule. I have no system to determine if someone entering my cycle studio is, in fact, advanced. Perhaps some potential participants choose another class, based on their self-assessment. Perhaps others ignore the "advanced" label. As the instructor, my job is to prepare and perform an advanced-level class, but also to recognize that not everyone on every bike is necessarily at the

same level. So, my cues reflect the potential range in ability and stamina of my participants: *Listen to your body. Have some water. Choose a resistance that feels like an 8/10 on your effort scale*. I provide options: *If you need extra recovery, do every second sprint. If you want a real challenge, do these sprints with higher resistance. Do this second series of intervals as climbs, rather than sprints*. I offer assistance to set up bikes before class, and invite questions and feedback at the end of each class. In short, I don't tell anyone they cannot do this "advanced" class; I provide scaffolding, guidance, and options so that almost anyone who wants to try can get through the class—and, I hope, choose to come back and try again next week.

In my academic classroom, I see this respect of students' self-assessment, and scaffolding of their learning, in activities such as my multi-step essay-writing assessment.

2. Focus on practice—my yoga participants aren't worried about a final exam. So why are they there? Because yoga makes them feel great, or helps them stay flexible as they deal with aging bodies and sedentary jobs. My cycle classes aren't training for the Tour de France. So why are they there? Because cardio classes make healthier hearts. Because working out is a rush. Because they want to be fitter, or slimmer, or stronger. Because this class is something they do with their significant other or their teenager, and it's harder and harder to find activities they can do together. Because they came to last week's class and slept better than they have in years. Because they came to last week's class and the meditation made them weep and they don't really know why.

In the academic setting, I can work to shift my students' focus from grades and

their R-score to learning the writing and reading skills that support their learning in their program courses, or perhaps to a genuine appreciation for their own writerly voice.

3. SMART goals—instructors in most fitness centres ask their clients to set SMART goals (O'Neill & Conzemius, 2006):

   S: Specific and/or strategic

   A goal that is too broad (*I want to lose weight*) or too vague (*I want to be fitter*) is hard to work toward, because there are no parameters to provide structure. Goals that get specific (*I want to lose 10 lbs*) and strategic (*I want to run a 5 km race by next September*) provide focus and structure for training. Similarly, providing guided reading questions encourages students to read strategically.

   M: Measurable

   As the examples above illustrate, putting numbers or other means of measurement on a goal provides definitive progress. It also allows the trainer to help the client see the goal in stages or increment—losing ten pounds can be seen as losing, on average, a pound a week for ten weeks, which in turn can be more easily explained in terms of how much exercise to do or how many calories to consume in a week.

   In the academic context, it is easy to reduce this to grading; however, I interpret this aspect of SMART goals in the classroom as generated by the student. So, for instance, I might encourage students to keep a reading log, and using the log to develop personal goals for improvement.

A: Attainable

As a fitness instructor, I consider this to be the most important element of the SMART formula. Setting an unrealistic goal results in abandonment. I cannot possibly lose ten pounds a week, but if that's my goal, and after two or three weeks I've only lost two pounds, I'll give up. If my goal was an average of a pound a week, on the other hand, that two-pound loss is motivating.

As a college teacher, the importance of attainable goals is equally paramount, and for comparable reasons. Students who believe that they are destined to fail, or even to flounder, drop classes, or, in other instances, turn their fear and frustration outward, and become disruptive, like Tomas. Faced with a Tomas now, I would work with him to set attainable reading and writing goals parallel to the ministerial competencies.

R: Results-based or relevant

My interpretation of this element is that the goal needs to make sense for the individual. I don't need to aim for an Olympic medal in cycling; I need to get and stay functionally fit, and I'm making cycling part of that endeavor. So the goal needs to be relevant and realistic—but also results-based, in the sense that I want to see some change, some progress. For students in the Cégep classroom, this means working to make their general education curriculum relevant to their program goals, and asking them to set personal goals—I want to improve my essay writing by learning how to construct a solid thesis; I want to improve my reading speed—at the beginning of the semester, and coming back to these goals throughout the term.

T: Time-bound

Deadlines matter. I want to lose ten pounds isn't an effective goal; I want to lose ten pounds in ten weeks is. Choosing the deadline can be flexible, and the deadline can ultimately be adjusted, but the deadline becomes part of the motivation and structure.

4. Feedback is about the particpants' needs and they recognize that

   In a yoga class, if I tap my shoulders while making eye contact with my participant, she knows to lower her shoulders. She also knows that I'm not being 'judgy' or saying that she's done something wrong or incorrigible. There is a recognition that instructor correction is intentional—I make suggestions or adjustments so that students are more at ease in a pose, or more safely aligned, or getting more benefit from the pose. In the cycle studio, novice riders are comfortable saying they're not comfortable, and expect me, as the instructor, to be able to diagnose the problem and show them how to fix it. Ironically, it's the more experienced riders that tend to be resistant to correction—sometimes I think it's pride, but more often, it's that they have learned how to adjust their technique to suit their body or their goals.

   This is the big challenge with feedback in the college classroom setting. We need to shift students away from the idea that feedback is negative, even when it's drawing their attention to a weakness. Our feedback must be dialogic and generative, and we must work to establish trust between our students and the feedback we engage in.

5. I don't need to be perfect and neither do they

   There is an adage among yogis that *saying you're not flexible enough to do yoga is like saying you're too dirty to take a bath*. Another common yogic maxim is that

> *you're a beginner for the first decade of your practice*. Even the term *practice* is meaningful here: no matter my level or my experience, every time I step on the mat, I am practicing. Some poses I will find easy, and others will elude me even on my 'best' days. One aspect of this self-awareness is simple anatomical awareness. I know that my limbs are short relative to my torso, so when I demonstrate staff pose to my class, I will point out that my fingers won't touch the mat, but they might be able to put their hands flat on the mat, or even have to bend their elbows. This body awareness also means that I have a different centre of gravity than taller people with longer limbs, so balance poses are generally easy for me—but I know enough to explain to them that their half-moon is shaky and scary not because they're not strong enough or good enough, but that they're blessed with long legs.
>
> As we talked about in our dinner conversation, one of the aspects of a teacher who is comfortable with their identity is their recognition that we don't need to know everything. What's more beneficial is to demonstrate to students that no one knows everything, and that it's more important to know how to get an answer than to try to have all the answers.

Truth(s) and Trustworthiness: Addressing Validity

I admittedly struggled with how best to articulate the validity of a deliberately subjective method and methodology, but I'm increasingly convinced that it is at least as valid—or, to use Craig's word (2009), trustworthy—as any other method, if not "more authentic than traditional research approaches, precisely because of the researcher's use of self" (Wall, 2006, p. 9). Given its self-conscious sensitivity to questions of validity and value, autoethnography is arguably more trustworthy than the "intellectual traditions" of the positivist stance (Harding, 1992, p.

569), which both construct and perpetuate themselves, and, in the interest of self-preservation, resist change.

In her discussion of the problematic intellectual traditions, Sandra Harding (1992) referred to Novick's idea that truth is not singular, i.e., "THE" truth, but rather, perspectival (p. 570). Operating from a critical feminist stance, Harding (1992) believed that the researcher must maintain a critical distance that allows her to recognize her own "institutionally shaped research assumptions" (p. 572); in autoethnography, the notion of critical distance is, by definition, impossible, as the subject is the self. Harding's challenges to the conventional, supposedly neutral, tradition of research can, however, inform my understanding of my own stance. Harding proposed a model of strong objectivity, which operates from the premise that researchers are aware of the tacit social assumptions underlying their field, their research problem, their institutions, and even their own thinking.

Identity is a deeply personal concept, whether we are thinking of individual or collective identity. At the same time, as my research reflects, we gravitate towards other individuals, and our personal evolution is influenced by these interactions.

Chapter 12: Conclusion

> The beginning is the word and the end is silence. And in between are all the stories.
>
> —Kate Atkinson

> Inject a few raisins of conversation into the tasteless dough of existence.
>
> —O. Henry

Conclusion

As Montreal as a 5-à-7

My mother once told me that if you're feeling a little under the weather, the best thing to do is have a shower, dress up, and put on some make-up. What's on the outside—the clothes, the mask, the projection—does more than disguise what's on the inside; the mask becomes the face. Put on a brave face, and somehow, to some extent, the bravery becomes real.

This is what I remind myself as I sit, showered and dressed up, perched on a barstool, nervously twisting a coffee stick into myriad figures, waiting for everyone else to arrive. What was I thinking? Am I ready for this? What if they ask questions I can't answer? What if my answers make no sense? I'll have a sparkling water and a dose of impostor syndrome, please.

I have invited some friends, colleagues, and family to this intimate 5-à-7, the Montreal happy hour tradition. We're meeting at a bar near my college, where teachers gather after

department meetings, general assemblies, and, well, any other event. We think of it as "our" bar. In summer, we fill the large sidewalk terrace, but now, in the depths of winter, we're crowded around tables inside. The windows are slightly steamy. People are arriving, shaking snow off their coats; greeting each other with the two-cheek kisses so familiar to our city. Eventually, everyone seems to have arrived, and have a glass in hand.

I clear my throat.

"OK, everyone, are we ready?" I momentarily feel like my fitness instructor self, setting them up for a sprint. "Thank you all for coming, and especially for reading my work! I'm hoping to get your feedback, so I can knock it into shape for the final stage." I look around at this circle of familiar faces, and take a deep breath.

"Just as a bit of a recap, so we're all on the same page, as it were…" I laugh nervously, and take a sip of my water. "Although the stories presented in my text are the experiences of ten people, the overall idea, regarding teacher identity and assessment, rings true far beyond our small fellowship. I set out on this journey hoping to arrive at reconciliation between my responsibility to my students, as determined by my sense of who I am as a teacher, and my responsibility to my institution and to the larger community to evaluate with integrity.

"I know that my approach is a little different from what we're used to, but I feel like this approach makes a lot of sense, given my research questions, and the lack of definitive answers. The whole point is that this research is part of a larger, ongoing conversation. A definitive answer is, perhaps, an always-not-yet-there destination. If we are indeed always becoming ourselves as teachers, then my concepts of teaching, of myself as a teacher, of the form and function of assessment, and of what constitutes integrity in assessment, are always also necessarily fluid and dynamic.

"It was this idea that teacher development is a matter of interactive dialogue that led me to my approach. I wanted to talk to other teachers, to share each other's stories. When it came time to turn those conversations into data, I needed to find a way to represent all of our perspectives while staying true to that notion of conversation as the site of learning and becoming. When I first hit on the dinner party narrative, I kept waiting for someone to tell me it was ridiculous, but I'm happy—and reassured—that instead, the reaction I get most often is 'that sounds like something I'd actually read!'"

Everyone laughs, and I feel a little more relaxed.

"But now it's your turn to talk," I say. "Whenever I use peer review in my classes, I tell my students that they're helping each other when they challenge their classmates. There's plenty of time for pats on the back, but what I need from you now are your critical eyes. What do you want to know? What's left for me to explain?"

I look around the room again, conscious that, unlike the classroom, everyone here is comfortably meeting my gaze. We're relaxed, yet eager to engage.

Jason is the first to speak. He asks, "well, I guess the first question is, are we supposed to raise our hands, Miss?"

"Oh, goodness, no," I say, "please just speak up. You can even talk to each other. This isn't a lecture, just a very strange sort of conversation. After all, that's my whole point—we learn from each other in conversation."

"OK, I get that," he replies, "but I guess I'm wondering what all of that has to do with assessment."

"A great place to start," I say. I can feel myself warming to the exchange, finding my feet. "I think there's a lot of great work out there on assessment in general, and even in so-called

higher education specifically. People like Wiggins, Black and Wiliam, Ramaprasad, and, of course, Sadler, have written extensively on formative assessment and the crucial role of feedback. More recently, researchers like Boud and Carless have continued that work, and it's increasingly accepted that students need to be guided, that we can't just assume they know what our feedback means or what to do with it.

"At the same time, there's plenty of work exploring the nature of feedback—is it formative or summative, are those two the only two options, what do they look like, and are they mutually exclusive? People like Deluca have done a lot with the more quantitative research in that area. In fact, I'm actually working on a more quantitative study with one of Deluca's team, looking at approaches to assessment in post-secondary settings.

"So yes, there's already a lot of work on assessment. But my work touches on some areas that are a little more overlooked. For one thing, I'm looking at Cégep teachers in the English colleges in particular, and I think we can all agree that we are a sadly neglected group," I say with a smile.

"The other, arguably bigger, thing I'm bringing to the discussion is how individual teachers, who come from different places, have different experiences, and see their role as teacher in different ways, think about assessment differently.

"I began this research grounded in my own history as a teacher, including my feelings of insecurity and confusion as a new teacher. When I began reflecting on developing as a teacher in higher education, without the benefit of training as a teacher, it occurred to me that even within our fields, we often feel lost and isolated as we navigate disciplinary identity. Not only are we not taught to teach, we're often not taught how to be students in our own disciplines; how then, can we feel adequately prepared to teach our own students these skills?"

"And did you answer that question?" asks a familiar voice from the back of the room. The speaker is my thesis supervisor, Lisa. For a moment, I'm taken back to our very first meeting, when I confessed to her that I was completely intimidated by her. Sure, I had a decade of teaching experience and two advanced degrees, but *she* had a PhD. Who was I to be knocking on this academy door?

"Hey, Lisa, thanks for coming—and thanks for everything else! But I think you already know the answer to your question!" She smiles. "It occurred to me recently that my questions changed, or rather, they changed direction. Initially, I set out to answer the question 'how does my sense of self as a teacher, developed over time and with experience, affect my approach to and attitude toward assessment?' While I still feel that this question is the core of my quest, I now recognize that the two sides of the question—teacher identity on the one hand and assessment practices on the other—are engaged in a seesaw relationship. Yes, the identity I have developed over the past fifteen years of teaching has informed my assessment practice. At the same time, my experiences with assessment—as a teacher, as a teacher educator, as a fitness instructor, as a parent, as a mentor, and as a student—have fundamentally changed who I am as a teacher." Lisa and I have, naturally, spent a lot of the last few years talking about all of this. I'm no longer intimidated by her, but have immense respect for the career she is building.

"So I guess what I'm saying is that I don't have an answer, or at least not *the* answer, to how we feel ready to teach. In fact, one of the big take-aways in my research is that the answer is necessarily different for each of us, and, if we're engaged in reflection, we're always going to feel a little unready."

"Like the sourdough," Lisa says, "That's still one of my favourite analogies."

"Yes, exactly," I nod. "As new teachers, we want some magic bullet, some piece of definitive wisdom that will turn us into good teachers overnight. But as we develop in the profession, I think many of us recognize that it's a process. Most of us would be aghast if we taught today the way we taught our first few classes, and that's true even for the best of us."

Lots of heads are nodding. My friend Aurora, with whom I shared an office for many years, flutters her hands in excitement. "Oh yes," she exclaims, "I was terrified my first year. I kept thinking, 'why in God's name did these people hire me?' Now I look back on that and I can't even remember what I taught those students.

"I think what I value most as a teacher," she continues, "are all of the other teachers. Having Maggie as an officemate is like a constant brainstorming session. I mean, when we aren't talking about our shoes and our ridiculous partners." More laughter.

"Well, there might not be any concrete 'do assessment this way' answers," ventures Grace, my knitting buddy and former Exit Exam colleague, "but I find it interesting to think about what your work means for the Cégep system in general. I mean, part of what I see in your story is that a lot of us feel unsupported."

"Oh my god yes!" says Phillip, "And that's from Maggie, who's experience has been a lot less traumatic than mine." He sighs dramatically. Phillip spent several years teaching in what he describes as a toxic environment, perhaps not coincidentally at the same college where Katie felt so unsupported. Phillip's department was much bigger than the biology department that left Katie adrift; in his case, it was a series of clashes with administration and his departmental colleagues that drove him to leave. He dealt with everything from departmental cliques to homophobic microaggressions from students, and felt that the union and the administration did very little to help him. "And now here I am, homeless," he continues, "I just couldn't take it

anymore. I don't regret leaving, but oh my god, it's draining to be back at the bottom, trying to get a foot in the door anywhere else."

"I hear so many stories from other teachers, and it seems to me that there's a disconnect between pedagogy and institutional practice." I say. "I get the impression that our unions, for instance, are so focussed on their protection of members that they lose sight of the pedagogical mission."

"Well, hang on," says Grace, "I'm an old union hack, and lots of us feel like we need our unions."

"Oh, I'm sure," I reply, "I'm grateful for everything unions have done for us collectively. I'm happy to do my time on the picket line. I know the union gets a lot done, and goodness knows I'm perfectly happy to let them do all the grunt work when it comes to negotiations with the government. But sometimes I wonder about their actions when it comes to individual cases. I mean, we work in a system that rewards longevity, and disregards merit. So if a teacher has been teaching for twenty years, there's no incentive at all to innovate. We all know teachers who have taught the same syllabus forever—like they found a course plan that basically works, and now they're just coasting to retirement. Thankfully, I really don't believe that's the majority, but those teachers are out there, in all of our colleges."

"Right, sure," says Grace, "but that's the nature of collectives. We have to protect the coasters because that way we protect everyone."

"But we don't protect everyone, do we?" says Phillip. "My union at 'The Asylum' was pretty much useless when I had to deal with the students who defaced my classroom. I had to do all my own fighting, believe me. And Grace, I love you, but your college is one the ones I've been trying to get into—I've even taught a few courses, and the students love me, other teachers

love me, but your union isn't helping me at all. By all rights, I should have had at least two courses this fall, but at the last minute, the union dredged up some obscure technicality and boom, no courses for Phil. The old geezers are iron-clad, but god help you if you're trying to get in."

"So Maggie should wave a magic wand and get rid of unions?" challenges Grace. Phillip rolls his eyes. "Look," Grace continues, with a conciliatory tone, "I get what you're saying—and believe me, I know that I have to rely on my own first-hand in-depth knowledge of our collective agreement to get anywhere with things like working with the Exit Exam committee. But those are the things that make me think that the problem isn't so much about the union, or the administration, or the Ministry. The problem, really, is that each of those players have a different idea of what the game is."

"Yeah, I think that's my take on it, too," I say. "Sure, I've dealt with my share of individuals in admin, or on the union executive, who don't seem to be in it for the right reasons, or are basically incompetent, but in general, the conflicts seem rooted in different mandates rather than anything nefarious."

Grace nods. "There we agree. I think everyone would benefit from a little more cooperation and a little less confrontation."

"Right," I say. "Maybe this is the rose-coloured glasses perspective, but it would be great if we could at least meet each other on a level playing field, and begin discussions with the belief that regardless of our systemic role, we are all in education for good reasons."

"Use your power for good, not evil," laughs Mauro. "I just want to know," he says, still smiling, "do I really say 'right?' that much?" Rhys, sitting on a bar stool next to him and nursing a pint of dark beer, laughs, and answers for me, "buddy, you use it like punctuation!"

Everyone laughs again. I am heartened that we all seem so positive and I am buoyed by a sense of community support, which is entirely fitting.

Just then, another voice rises above the chatter. “I don’t want to be a wet blanket, but I have a question,” says Bruno. Like Rhys and Mauro, Bruno was just another colleague until we travelled together with our students; we’ve been to New York two or three times, and although we rarely see each other between trips, when we’re on those trips, I feel like we just naturally connect. On the other hand, given his tone now, I don’t know what to expect.

“OK…” I say, cautiously.

“Sorry, but someone has to ask it, since we’re talking about research. Every study has its limitations—what are yours?”

“No apology necessary!” I say, relieved. This isn’t such a tough question, after all, I think. “I guess the most obvious limitation is that I looked almost exclusively at Cégep teachers, and outside of Quebec, Cégep just isn’t a thing. So it might be interesting to explore other post-secondary contexts, not to mention K12—I think a lot of the K12 studies in assessment practices and teacher identity focus on pre-service and new teachers, and the voices of experience aren’t heard much. And, of course, even within the Cégep context, I spoke only to teachers working in the English network. It could be really interesting to take this concept into the French reseau; I’m sure in both languages, we share a lot of the same challenges and concerns.

“The other gap in this work is that although I got to talk with teachers in different disciplines, we were all from pretty large departments and mainstream fields—English, obviously, but also Chemistry, Physics, History… I’d love to sit down with teachers in some of the smaller programs, and in particular, the professional programs, and take up the conversation. I know a few Nursing teachers, for instance, and I know that their approach to assessment is

necessarily different just because they have the spectre of certification exams, including language proficiency exams, shadowing all of their classroom practices.

"So, sure, there are limitations, as there are with any study. But I'm thinking of them more as ideas for future research." I conclude.

Bruno nods, but then looks contemplative. "Maggie, do you remember that day we ran into each on the metro?"

"You mean the time I told you I was headed to class, and you asked…"

"Why in God's name would you start a PhD *now*?" he finishes.

"Oh yeah, I remember. I couldn't decide if I should be more offended by the implication that I'm *so* old, or that this whole thing was kind of pointless," I laugh.

Just as I'm opening my mouth to elaborate, Phillip interject "I for one don't understand why you did education. A doctorate in literature is so much sexier."

"I'm choosing to take both of you seriously," I say, one eyebrow raised. "Why a doctorate, and why in education? Looking back, I remember asking myself, "what do I want to know more about?" and the answer was, pretty clearly, education, and in particular, higher education and teacher education. I did consider a PhD in English Literature, but ultimately realized that I really wasn't interested in literature enough to explore some narrow aspect of it in such deep detail for years to come. As Jason so wisely observed, the world doesn't need another *Frankenstein* essay, or, in my case, another dissertation on Jane Austen. Angela Duckworth (2016) contends that truly successful, happy people, those with what she calls *grit*, have the perfect combination of *interest, practice, purpose, and hope*. So, in considering my personal path, and how it might prove useful for the teaching community, I took some time to think about these components, which Duckworth sees as progressive, but which I believe can be cumulative

or comprehensive. Given my continued interest in my research, and the enthusiastic responses I have witnessed among all of you, I have no doubt that there is *purpose* to my work, and *hope* for its impact. My research has also clearly embraced the emergent theme of the value of reflexive and deliberate practice.

"So the only question left to ask, for now, is this: Am I *interested* in this work? Definitely—I'm four years into this now, and I am still excited about the project. Sure, I want to cross the proverbial finish line, but I have no regrets, and I'm pretty sure I'll keep working in these areas as time goes on. I get excited talking about my research, and various aspects of it, with people, and that enthusiasm gets reflected back to me more often than not. I definitely feel I have more to learn, and a lot to contribute. I definitely did not feel that kind of interest when contemplating doctoral work in Literature. I genuinely couldn't face the idea of spending years focused on one obscure angle on Jane Austen. I felt derivative and uninspired. In the context of educational research, however, I find the challenge is to focus on one rabbit hole at a time—I want to write about how teachers are portrayed in popular culture and social media; I want to write about how teachers in professional programs, such as Nursing, Police Tech, and Fashion Design, think about their professional identity as teachers *and* practitioners in their field; I want to write about variations on the idea of community of practice; I want to write about methodology. There is so much that interests me in this research area that I can't imagine ever getting to the bottom of the well."

One by one, people are finishing their drinks, finding their coats, preparing to venture back out into the cold. I'm pulled into hugs and hearty handshakes as my friends say their goodbyes. My parents are among the last to go; my mum, as always, glows with pride. "Good job," she says, giving me a peck on the cheek. My dad, who has been pretty quiet all evening,

stands, arms crossed, and gives me a very rare smile. “Looks like it wasn’t totally useless,” he says, which is his way of saying he too is proud.

Finally, everyone’s gone—just me, and my husband, left in the bar. He helps me into my coat, and takes my hand. We walk out the door, and head toward home. The night air is cold, but the sky is filled with bright stars, and I’m warm at heart.

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Appendix A: Research Ethics Board approval

McGill

Research Ethics Board Office
James Administration Bldg.
845 Sherbrooke Street West. Rm 325
Montreal, QC H3A 0G4

Tel: (514) 398-6193

Website: www.mcgill.ca/research/researchers/compliance/human/

Research Ethics Board II
Certificate of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Humans

REB File #: 426-0317

Project Title: Teacher Identity and Assessment in Higher Education

Principal Investigator: Margaret McDonnell

Status: Ph.D. Student

Department: Integrated Studies of Education

Supervisor: Prof. Lisa Starr

Approval Period: **April 6, 2017 to April 5, 2018**

The REB-II reviewed and approved this project by delegated review in accordance with the requirements of the McGill University Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Participants and the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.

Deanna Collin
Ethics Review Administrator, REB I & II

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* Approval is granted only for the research and purposes described.
* Modifications to the approved research must be reviewed and approved by the REB before they can be implemented.
* A Request for Renewal form must be submitted before the above expiry date. Research cannot be conducted without a current ethics approval. Submit 2-3 weeks ahead of the expiry date.
* When a project has been completed or terminated, a Study Closure form must be submitted.
* Unanticipated issues that may increase the risk level to participants or that may have other ethical implications must be promptly reported to the REB. Serious adverse events experienced by a participant in conjunction with the research must be reported to the REB without delay.
* The REB must be promptly notified of any new information that may affect the welfare or consent of participants.
* The REB must be notified of any suspension or cancellation imposed by a funding agency or regulatory body that is related to this study.
* The REB must be notified of any findings that may have ethical implications or may affect the decision of the REB.

Appendix B: Participant recruitment letter

McGill

Integrated Studies in Education
Faculty of Education
McGill University
3700 McTavish Street
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
H3A 1Y2

Département d'études intégrées en éducation
Faculté des sciences de l'éducation
Université McGill
3700 rue McTavish
Montréal, Québec, Canada
H3A 1Y2

Dear colleague,

Thank you for your interest in my research project, Teacher Identity and Assessment in Higher Education. It is encouraging to know that so many of my fellow teachers are eager to talk about their practice!

I'm hoping to find four or five teachers with whom I can meet four times over the next year – once in the late spring, once in the summer, once in early fall, and once at the end of the year. Our meetings will of course be arranged to suit your availability.

Each meeting will take about an hour, and will consist of us engaging in a one-on-one conversation about a particular aspect of our teaching practice. This style of interviewing, called interactive interview, means we won't have scripted questions to address, but rather, will let our discussion go where it will.

Following each interview, I will engage in reflection, and voice-centered analysis of our discussion, looking for patterns and themes that emerge. I am happy to explain this process in more detail if and when we meet.

Our sessions will be recorded in digital audio, so that I can revisit them as part of the reflection and analysis. These recordings will not be made public, and the digital files will be kept in password-protected files on a separate digital drive.

The interactive interviews form an important part of my doctoral research. My reflections and analyses of the interviews will be incorporated into my dissertation; you can choose to be identifiable in the dissertation, or if you prefer to remain anonymous, you may choose a pseudonym, or have a pseudonym assigned to you.

Of course, if you agree to participate, you can choose to withdraw at any time during the year.

The details regarding anonymity and confidentiality can be found on the consent form, which I will ask you to sign prior to our first meeting.

Please do let me know if you have any questions, and if you would like to be included in this project.

Regards,
Maggie McDonnell
PhD Candidate
McGill University DISE

Appendix C: Participant consent form

McGill

Integrated Studies in Education
Faculty of Education
McGill University
3700 McTavish Street
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
H3A 1Y2

Département d'études intégrées en éducation
Faculté des sciences de l'éducation
Université McGill
3700 rue McTavish
Montréal, Québec, Canada
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Participant Consent Form
Researcher:
Maggie McDonnell, PhD Candidate
McGill University Faculty of Education, Department of Integrated Studies in Education (DISE)
514-262-9975
margaret.mcdonnell@mail.mcgill.ca

Supervisor:

Dr. Lisa J. Starr, DISE
514-398-4527 ext. 00957
lisa.starr2@mcgill.ca

Title of Project: *Teacher Identity and Assessment in Higher Education*

Purpose of the Study: This is an invitation to participate in a research study. The study explores the development of teacher identity in higher education, and the relationship between that development and assessment practices. Information gathered in this study will be used by the researcher in the completion of her doctoral dissertation.

Study Procedures: You will meet with the researcher four times, each time for approximately one hour. Meetings will be arranged, at your convenience, in late spring, summer, early fall, and late fall of 2017. Meetings will take place at a time and place that best suits the participant.

Each meeting will consist of an interactive interview, in which you and the researcher will engage in an open-ended discussion of an aspect of teacher identity and practice. Audio of the meetings will be digitally recorded so that the researcher can revisit the discussion for further analysis.

Voluntary Participation*:* Participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in parts of the study, may decline to answer any question, and may withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any material gathered in previous sessions will be not be considered for the study, unless you provide permission to include it.

Potential Risks: There are no anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Potential Benefits: Engaging in discussions about our practice can be very rewarding, and forms an essential part of our reflexive, deliberate practice. As well, this research may contribute to our colleagues in higher education, and to higher education training programs.

Compensation: No compensation is offered for your participation.

Confidentiality: Although no personal identifying information is required for the study, certain identifying details may emerge in the interviews, such as background and professional details. These details can be excluded from the dissertation if requested. Audio recording of the interviews will be stored on digital media, under password protection, and kept in a locked cabinet for seven years. Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to these recordings.

Material from the interviews will be incorporated into the dissertation, and possible subsequent presentations. You can choose to remain identifiable under your own name, or to choose a pseudonym. If you prefer to use a pseudonym, you can propose your own, or have one assigned to you.

It is likely that during the course of the interview, the names of educational institutions will be used. You can choose to exclude these names from the dissertation, or to include them.

Yes:____No:____You consent to be identified by name in the dissertation and related presentations.

Yes:____No:____You consent to have your organization's name used.

Yes:____No:____You consent to be audio-taped.

Questions: If you have any questions about the project, please contact the researcher. You may also contact her supervisor.

If you have any ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study, and want to speak with someone not on the research team, please contact the McGill Ethics Manager at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca".

Please sign below if you have read the above information and consent to participate in this study. Agreeing to participate in this study does not waive any of your rights or release the researchers from their responsibilities. A copy of this consent form will be given to you and the researcher will keep a copy.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____
