Career Development for College Faculty:

A FACULTY FOCUS SPECIAL REPORT

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A Faculty Focus Special Report

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Waking up to Tired Teaching

Maryellen Weimer, PhD

I have been wanting to write about tired teaching for some time now. Concerns about burnout are what's motivating me. Teachers can reach a place where teaching does nothing for them or their students. They don't just wake up one morning and find themselves burned out; they've moved there gradually, and it's a journey that often starts with tired teaching.

There's nothing on the subject in my big file of articles and resources. I can't remember having read about it, and I'm not sure how much we even talk about it. We do talk about being tired. Teaching is relentless. It happens every day, several times a week—or potentially 24/7 if it's online. And it's demanding. There's so much more than the actual teaching. There's considerable planning involved before each class. Plus, we need to spend time with students—those who want to talk, those needing help, and those with questions or, sometimes, complaints. There are assignments to grade and feedback to provide—all carrying the expectation of a quick turnaround. With multiple courses to teach, we do get tired, but I think we regularly confuse physical fatigue with the more serious emotional tiredness that comes from a heavy workload of always being there, always giving, and always juggling multiple balls in the air.

Sometimes teaching gets tired because we've done what we're doing a hundred times before. Many of us teach the same courses year after year. If they are those bedrock, foundational courses, the content typically doesn't change all that much. We march through the material along well-worn paths. We know the way; we've seen all the sights before. Every student is a unique individual, but collectively they're all novices who ask the same questions we've heard before, who get stuck in the same places, and who repeatedly make the same poor decisions about learning.

In the beginning, tired teaching comes and goes. We may feel ourselves falling into a rut, but it's usually temporary and we're soon back on track. But later, the tiredness returns. At some point, a kind of paralyzing inertia can settle over us. We no longer have the energy or motivation to change the syllabus, alter course readings, or update the assignments or activities. Add new content? No way, the course is already too full with essential material. Offer online quizzes? Who has time to figure how that works? Besides, the students will cheat.

That's why and how tired teaching happens. The more important question is: What can we do about it? I think we have to start by recognizing that some form of tired teaching happens to all of us at one time or another during our careers. It's an occupational hazard when you work in environments that prize always being rational and objective. A quiet assumption prevails that it's the intellect that powers teaching. Content carries the day. We deny or diminish the importance of teaching's affective demands. We may be physically tired, but we may also be emotionally drained and running on empty. The two can happen simultaneously, but they aren't the same.

We can start by facing the reality of tired teaching, no longer pretending everything will be OK if we just get to bed earlier. We can follow that acknowledgement with purposeful efforts to take care of our instructional health and well-being. As many of us have learned, it's not enough to know we need to eat well and exercise regularly. Both depend on consistent action and, like poor health, tired teaching is more easily prevented than cured. Let me start a list of ways we can respond to the possibility and reality of tired teaching. Use this list and add your own preventive steps that work for you.

- Purposefully make changes—not always big ones, not always a lot, but always some.
- Regularly infuse teaching with ideas and information (not just techniques) sourced externally.
- Engage in collegial collaboration—positive, constructive talk about teaching and learning with colleagues (occasional complaining permitted).
- Take time for the pause that refreshes: regular reminders to yourself that this is work that matters and that what happens to many students in college changes their lives. You are a central part of students' experiences in higher education.
- Be in the moment—in that time you and students share, be present! Listen, observe, and be alert, alive, and focused on what's occurring in that moment.
- Celebrate successes—even small ones. The question that generated good discussion, those three papers showing significant improvement, that student who finally mastered a specific skill—all are moments to be savored.

A Case for Coaching in Faculty Development

Nicki Monahan, MEd

I recently spent a rainy afternoon watching the semi-finals of the Madrid Open and noticed how often one of the players looked to his coaching box for reassurance about his strategy. Coaches are not just for players trying to make it into the big leagues; "even Rafael Nadal has a coach. Nearly every elite tennis player in the world does. Professional athletes use coaches to make sure they are as good as they can be." (Gawande, 2011)

If coaching is a proven strategy for ensuring that athletes perform at their best and is used at the highest levels in the business world, why shouldn't faculty turn to coaching to ensure continued growth and peak performance? In a piece in The New Yorker magazine, renowned surgeon Atwal Gawande recounts his experiences in hiring a retired surgeon to coach him to even higher degrees of professional excellence than he had achieved on his own. Rather than coasting at mid-career on his accomplishments, Gawande stretched his skills further, reduced his complication rates, and concluded that "coaching done well may be the most effective intervention designed for human performance." (Gawande, 2011)

Coaching as a professional development strategy is beginning to take hold in the education sector. In the preface to his text, "Instructional Coaching" Jim Knight recounts an experience all too familiar to those of us working in faculty development in higher education. At the conclusion of a workshop, he invited participants to send him an update after they've had a chance to experiment with some of the evidence-based instructional strategies discussed during the session. "At the end of 2 years, I had not received one postcard. The reality was, I suspected, that inservice sessions just did not provide enough support for most people to implement what they had learned." (Knight, 2007)

I processed the familiar thud that signals the recognition of something I know to be true, but wished it weren't. For faculty, just as for students, the transfer of learning takes time and support. With coaching, you are never alone to watch yourself fall flat on your face when you try something new. Together you can examine what went wrong, regroup, have a practice run, and try again. At the core, coaching is a deep collaborative project in which two individuals engage in conversations about teaching and learning that advance the teacher's agenda of change, growth, and improvement.

Effective coaching in the context of higher education must be grounded in the principles of learning. One principle that has found its way into learner-centered classrooms is the critical role of feedback and practice. Providing multiple means and opportunities for ongoing, authentic feedback and time to practice skills in the light of that feedback, is crucial to student learning. Most faculty members, however, rarely have opportunities to receive feedback about their teaching skills from any source other than student evaluations. How can we expect to improve our performance in classrooms without identification of areas for growth and improvement? Most of the work in our classrooms takes place without the benefit of being seen by others who could provide some fresh perspectives. Coaching allows us to invite a trusted colleague to walk into our teaching worlds with us and take a close look at what is happening.

Coaching uses a variety of approaches, including reviewing videotape of classroom teaching, but the most common method is simply conversation. Coaching provides a deliberate, focused opportunity for dialogue. The direction of the conversation is in the hands of the coachee. It could be a discussion of the "nuts and bolts" of teaching practice or an exploration of deeply held beliefs that may be getting in the way of our own improvement. In the context of a trusted coaching relationship, simple questions like, "What worked?" "What didn't go so well?" "What could you have done differently?" can create a shift in practice. Skilled coaches also know how to ask deep, meaningful questions, the ones that get to the core of who we are when we enter a classroom, and what happens to us and to our learners when we get there.

I have discovered that teachers have burning questions inside them, often ones that they have been walking around with for years! When I dare to propose, "What is the most powerful question I could ask you right now?", the real issues emerge— questions about our fears and

vulnerabilities, our personas and our authentic selves, our capacities and our limitations. What comes to the surface is the risk of losing control, and anxieties about what happens when learning gets really messy. In some instances, the questions are as fundamental as "why am I here?" or "what is it that I am really doing here?"

When powerful questions arise, and no immediate answer is apparent, this is when the hard work begins. Coaching gives teachers the opportunity to explore their own most critical questions, and having the time and space to truly think about those questions is critical to the process. "The real work of coaching is done in the coachees' episodes of thinking and feeling in which the coach plays no part other than silent witness." (Fletcher, 2004) Fully engaging in a coaching model is a commitment to self-reflective practice that is absolutely essential to transforming our teaching.

Many of us teach in complete isolation, and think nothing of it. We close our classroom doors and continue to practice our craft largely unnoticed, except by students who marvel or moan. We should not expect our students to tell us how to do our job more effectively, or ignore them when they try. But when is the last time someone watched you in your classroom with the same investment in your performance and success as a professional coach? If it works on the tennis court, boardroom, and operating room, perhaps it's time for coaching to enter our classrooms.

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A Professional Development Makeover

Valencia Gabay

The Before

I have been an online educator for almost 10 years and feelings of isolation and complacency were familiar companions on my teaching journey. Many virtual work environments lacked channels for educators like myself to connect and maintain meaningful conversations, and I longed to build a sense of community with my colleagues in the field. The constant dripping of policy changes from the top made for limited self-reflection and minimal opportunities for collaboration. Departmental attempts at transformative shifts in work culture were captured in ephemeral professional development methods that operated on low frequency when it came to encouraging personal growth and knowledge creation.

How can virtual work environments offer meaningful professional development opportunities that help their faculty manifest fruitful teaching experiences?

The Make Over

In 2016, I signed up to mentor a group of five career faculty members. The goal was to introduce the concept of learning with and from your peers as a way to leverage new teaching expectations that aligned with the university's core values. My team was one of eight teams in the department that would be immersed in a group coaching and mentoring framework (Algozzini, Besselo, Gabay, Voyles & Batchelor, 2016). Essentially, I participated in a professional development makeover that introduced a new twist on the application of community of practice. The idea of community of practice is not new; however, the idea that it could be used purposefully in a virtual work setting was surprising. The following quotation lends perspective to this experience. *"Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor: a tribe learning to survive…"* (Wenger-Trayner, 2015, para.1). In this case, the use of communities of practice provided a continuous loop of networking as I learned to "survive" the pitfalls of working in the online setting.

Teams were required to meet weekly throughout the year via a web-based conferencing platform called *UberConference.* It allowed for screen sharing and file sharing and meetings could be recorded and disseminated, if needed. During meetings, faculty supported each other in the application of new teaching guidelines, bridged gaps in classroom management techniques, shared helpful resources and collaborated on departmental curriculum projects. Being part of a community of practice proved to be a period of profound change and enlightenment. Overtime, throughout the process, the goal changed from simply learning with and from each other to coaching and mentoring, shifting work culture, and creating a collective consciousness among the faculty.

All mentor leads, met weekly with leadership to receive coaching on how to provide their teams with a safe place for self-discovery and a better understanding of the administrative modifications needed to advance the department. The use of community of practice teams built on other foundational links of the model as well. All teams examined the impact of metacognition and self-regulated learning processes on the achievements of adult learners, and we addressed the significance of questioning and its role in developing discussions rooted in critical thinking.

Further, because metacognition promotes self-reflection, a necessity in developing independent thinkers and lifelong learners (Malamed, 2016), the teams incorporated self-reflection into their practice to enhance problem-solving strategies and address major concerns in team building. These dynamics were essential for uncovering challenges to effective teaching performance and stimulating spirited dialogues that would prompt change.

From there, faculty would apply these same processes in their classroom to enhance instructor-to-student and student-to-student engagement. Instructors spent time in their teams learning about the value in thinking about how you think, and its role in creating full-bodied class discussions. It was not long before instructors developed a clear understanding how to better support the needs of a 21st Century learner and prepare them to function in a global society.

The After

Change is not easy to swallow when complacency and isolation are the norm, but what is pure genius is melting small doses of professional development into a teacher's everyday routine. Professional development will no longer be seen as an afterthought but as an assortment of goodies among teaching responsibilities; it becomes

part of the process. It is a steady stream of coaching, mentoring, collaboration, and open, honest discussions.

This year-long professional development revamp created a pathway for myself and many of my colleagues to recharge from the inside out. The group coaching and mentoring model, garnished with community of practice, allowed us to see ourselves as contributors to the legacy of our academic department by becoming leaders and students of change. My deepest revelation was that all I need was to be *heard, engaged* and *fully supported.*

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Climbing the Stairs: Observations on a Teaching Career

Patty H. Phelps, EdD

My office is on the first floor of the education building. I have spent 27 years in this building. Unless I have a meeting in another department, I rarely go upstairs. Recently, however, I started a daily routine of climbing the four sets of staircases in the building. Trying to slow the progression of osteoporosis in my right hip, I go up one set and down another three times as I make my way around the building. This physical activity has given me a chance to engage in some mental reflection. Here I will briefly share five observations on a career spent teaching in higher education with an eye toward encouraging newer faculty to achieve longevity in the profession.

1. Adaptability is key.

On the first day of stair climbing, I passed by the classroom where I taught my very first class as a newly "hooded" faculty member. As I looked in the room, a smile came across my face as I thought of those thirty graduate students—most of whom were older than I was. While I remained at the university, they went on to become school principals, district superintendents, and curriculum coordinators. Seeing this classroom now made me think about the changes in my teaching. The large chalkboard once mounted on the wall is long gone. Even though I always liked using chalk (and had a special stainless steel holder for it), other tools have definitely replaced the infamous dust producer. Technology has been the greatest change in my delivery of instruction. Yet no matter what the innovation or new requirement (e.g., reporting assessment data, using iPads in the classroom, etc.), maintaining flexibility and being open to alternative approaches will serve faculty well over time.

2. Become resourceful.

As I walked the hallways, I noticed the office directories at the main entrance to each department. So familiar, these are easily ignored. Actually looking at them each day reminded me that people are the most valuable resource available to us as faculty. Whose expertise complements ours? Whose interests are similar to ours? With whom can we bounce off ideas for teaching a new class preparation?

Furthermore, a large part of being successful in any professional endeavor is knowledge of whom to call for which dilemma. Aging in the profession reinforces that knowing where to get help surpasses knowing all the answers. Sometimes teaching faculty must let pride subside and not hesitate to find out where to get assistance. As we seek out and use the multitudinous resources that surround us on a college campus, we can become more effective faculty members.

3. Connect across departments.

On my fifth day of stair climbing, I saw two colleagues from another department on the second floor. I had last seen them on campus the previous semester. From the brief hallway encounter, they asked me to help with a research project. Had I not been upstairs, this opportunity may have not been extended. My simple exercise strategy prompted me to realize (again) how isolation within one's own department may stifle growth and development. This incident also reminded me of the need for faculty to be visible and available. On several other recent self-guided building tours, I have seen past and present students in the halls or on the stairs. This too strengthens our connections and enhances efficacy.

4. Be observant.

On each stairwell there are bulletin boards. Opportunities abound for campus involvement. In the deluge of email messages, it is easy to overlook some of these options that are available to us on campus. Even if not personally interested, sharing posted information with students is a possibility. Additionally, the content of stairwell bulletin boards contains significant clues about what is currently relevant to students. Flyers with information on upcoming comedy acts and anxiety support groups serve to remind us of the lives outside the classroom that our students lead. We can then incorporate this information into lesson planning and perhaps better reach students.

5. Take regular breaks.

The whole stair-climbing experience has reminded me of the importance of building in short breaks during the workday. After each stair climbing endeavor, I have returned to my office and computer in a more refreshed state of mind. I gained a new perspective on my work. As faculty, we must try not to spend all our time in our office. Leave the building at lunch or mid-afternoon. Breaks offer a chance to recharge.

I believe that longevity for teaching faculty boils down to risk-taking and resilience. Be willing to try new things, say "yes" to opportunities, and aim to bounce back after disappointments. Taking these factors to heart, perhaps I could step it up a notch by enrolling in a tap dance class as a way to combat my deteriorating hip!

Avoiding Burnout: Self-Care Strategies for Faculty

Camille Freeman and Bevin Clare

Now that you've finished assessing your students, it's time to turn the assessment process around by looking in the mirror. If you limped across the finish line last semester, it may be time to identify some new strategies for self-care. In our "Tending the Teacher" session at the recent Teaching Professor Conference in Washington, D.C., we presented a menu of ideas to help faculty design a balanced and productive work life. Here are our top tips:

1. **Examine how you spend your time and energy:** Which work-related tasks or activities leave you feeling energized or excited? Which feel like unnecessary chores rather than positive contributions? Next year, prioritize the aspects of your job that build you up or represent an important contribution to the field. Minimize tasks that drain or deplete your energy without commensurate benefit. Cultivate the art of saying "no" in order to focus on what's important to you.
2. **Check your rhythm:** Circadian rhythms allow us to anticipate and respond efficiently to environmental changes. Creating a degree of predictability in your schedule can help align your internal clock. While it's rare for an academic to have a "normal" day, you can control some aspects of your schedule. Waking up and going to bed at about the same time each day will help to synchronize your body clock. Similarly, eating and exercising at predictable times both support this process. Many people feel more energetic and productive when they follow these basic guidelines.
3. **Rethink course design:** While we all strive to have engaging and interactive courses, doing so can be quite time consuming. Use creative course design strategies and tools to provide engaging experiences for students without taking up a disproportionate amount of your time. For example, use a simple audio recording tool to provide feedback instead of typing your comments. If your school's LMS doesn't provide an audio feedback tool, *Vocaroo* and *VoiceThread* make great options. Students appreciate the personal approach, and providing verbal feedback takes far less time than generating written comments. Also, consider using peer-to-peer review with select activities to allow students to get supplemental feedback without adding to your workload.
4. **Refine your daily workflow:** Are you getting bogged down with e-mails? Watching deadlines zoom by? Putting your own health on the back burner? The start of a new semester is the perfect time to change your default pattern. Consider using a service that delivers e-mails a few times per day rather than trying to work through the persistent interruptions of new emails arriving in your inbox. Some apps will also turn off notifications on weekends or after hours. Use an electronic "to do" list like *Todoist* or *Wunderlist* to organize reminders and deadlines. Many of our nutrition clients find that using Google or Outlook calendar scheduling and reminders is a good way to prioritize a daily walk, meditation, or a quick stretch.
5. **Evaluate your food and fuel:** Food can drag you down or prop you up. Step away from your desk periodically for a snack, and be sure to choose one that is nourishing as well as invigorating. Good choices include a piece of dark chocolate; nuts and seeds (especially walnuts); berries; or foods with spicy, sour, or tangy flavors. Preliminary evidence even suggests that chocolate may be associated with cognitive enhancement (Scholey & Owen, 2013). (You can thank us later.) As nutritionists, one of the most common things we see is unhealthy or mindless snacking. Avoid snacking at your desk while you're doing other things. Use your snack break to get outdoors or connect with your colleagues while you nourish yourself.

Self-care isn't an all-or-nothing approach. Starting small is ideal. Pick one or two practices to implement tomorrow, and you'll be on the road to a more sustainable work-life balance.

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