# WPAs Respond to "A Symposium on Fostering Teacher Quality"

## Response to "A Symposium on Fostering Teacher Quality"

Sue Doe

The symposium on fostering teacher quality caused me to recall a moment at the beginning of the semester when I was trapped in a groundswell of students in the stairwell of my building, the location where most of the teaching of writing, foreign languages, and other humanities occurs on our campus. This moment occurred during the first week of classes and the halls were teeming with students, so much so that the hallways had become impassable and I found myself in human gridlock, stuck about halfway up three flights of stairs. If someone were to fall, I realized, it would set off a domino effect like the ones we've seen in videos of malfunctioning escalators. As we moved one step at a time, I grew angry. Why were we crowded this way? Why was the important teaching of the university relegated to these cramped quarters? How much expansion to enrollment was going on at the expense of teaching and learning? And what was the effect of this growth on students who were no doubt internalizing a message about the crowded and confused state of the humanities? This feeling was exacerbated, I realized, by the fact that I had just come from the brand new multi-million dollar Behavioral Sciences building just fifty yards to the south of my building, a location where minutes before I had basked, albeit briefly, in the sunlight and open space of New Construction.

However, this perception of material inequity was challenged as I read the essays in the Fostering Teacher Quality Symposium which address how to develop and reward teachers and teaching quality, particularly in the context of teaching that is performed off the tenure track. These essays admonish us to commit to professionalism. The WPAs here suggest that even if we find ourselves in a crowded stairwell, we must still push forward rather than falter, and they offer practical suggestions. Specifically, Mon-

eyhun shows us how the annual review of contingent faculty can be transformed from "uneasy transaction" (161) to a deepening of expertise; Brunk-Chavez connects self-directed faculty development of contingent faculty to useful assessment; Ashe argues for ongoing reform and data capture (assessment) as a central feature of good teaching. The models reported here reinforce what fourth symposium author, Beason, describes as the essential role of "place" or "rootedness" (150) to the development and support of the affective dimension of faculty effectiveness. What are these practical suggestions and how do they contribute to the affective? Here's my sense of how these ideas contribute to this important line of thinking.

Moneyhun's transformation of the annual performance review to "a natural part of the rhythm of the year" (165) shows how closely tied faculty development and a rising sense of professional teaching agency can be. A central component of Moneyhun's model is the involvement of instructors in creating the terms of their own appraisal, even as the WPA provides leadership that pushes instructors to reach disciplinary and institutional objectives. Called upon to participate in the development of their own performance indicators, and subsequently held accountable for them, the contingent faculty in Moneyhun's program were "to a person, amazingly patient and generous," and "began to take advantage of the opportunities… offered to professionalize with reflective teaching practices" (165). Moneyhun's example suggests what is possible when both collaboration and leadership are directed toward setting expectations, measuring performance, and negotiating priorities. This model gives attention to the affective dimension of teaching without sacrifice of high expectation.

Brunk-Chavez, like Moneyhun, argues for practices that help develop "a program community" that focuses on supporting "the faculty member as teacher, professional, and person" (153). Brunk-Chavez suggests that while such professional development is the norm for graduate students, it is less commonly provided for experienced instructors, who nonetheless profit from the experience. Using the notion of "embracing our expertise," (154) contingent faculty in Brunk-Chavez's program not only participate in faculty development but lead it. Such practices, Brunk-Chavez argues, improve the quality of instruction and specifically the teaching of writing. With Brunk-Chavez, we see the importance of the affective addressed through non-tenure-track leadership in professional development, which in turn leads to proactive cultures of teaching.

The notion of culture is addressed even more fully by Ashe's strategies for building a culture of teaching. Her call for measures of teacher quality, after material conditions of the workplace have been addressed, is absolutely essential. She points out that effective teaching is not necessarily popular

teaching, and argues for measures of teaching quality that go beyond the current semester to demonstrate "learning that students carry on to later and more challenging courses" (158). She also argues for annual review processes that provide space not just for information about new courses but for improvements to existing ones. Her point is that an attitude of continuous revision to teaching practices, based on a culture that treats assessment as positive, ongoing reform, is quite simply, "what good teachers do" (159). Her article reminds me of the important 1995 *Change* magazine article by Barr and Taggart that shifted the discussion in higher education from the content of teaching to evidence of learning. Ashe's article suggests that contingent faculty can be part of such change.

Taken together, these three writers—Moneyhun, Brunk-Chavez, and Ashe—suggest strategies for building the essential "sense of place" that Beason argues is needed by all faculty yet is frequently absent in the lives of contingent faculty. Beason asks, "How do we develop the affective components of teaching?" and these essays suggest several concrete steps. As Beason points out, "places are human constructs" that lead people to "feel satisfied, accepted, and attached to significant people and events in their lives" (150). Each WPA in this symposium offers a meaningful approach that demonstrates a commitment to teachers and the quality of their teaching. As such, these WPAs are building nothing less than a sense of place through the development of professional teaching identity and culture, and these approaches are theoretically informed and locally responsive. They treat teaching as high calling and instructors as professional practitioners and partners. They argue for the formation of programmatic bonds derived in a shared local space and through a clarification of values.

Perhaps most importantly, these essays suggest what can happen when we take hold of the potential of our writing programs in their current forms. By this, I mean that these WPAs have embraced what *is,* over some eidolon of what *was* or what *ought to be.* Their articles carve out a new discursive space of self-respect and practical accountability and away from the language of scarcity, sacrifice, and defeat. They suggest that we have choices when we stand in the crowded stairwells of our crumbing old buildings and compare our situation to the clean spare spaces across campus. One option, they suggest, is to take a deep breath and move forward. With responsible leadership like theirs, which integrates a professionalized contingent faculty into measures of teaching quality, we can improve teaching conditions while also showcasing improvements to the teaching and learning of writing. In the process, our writing programs might become more visible models of the relevance and success of the teaching mission even as it is conducted largely off the tenure track.

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## Fostering Teacher Quality through Cultures of Professionalism

Claire Coleman Lamonica

Each of the four articles published in the "Symposium on Fostering Teacher Quality" has important points to make about the ways in which WPAs can foster teacher quality and, in turn, improve student learning. In a way, however, reading the four individual texts is like looking at the pieces of a puzzle without seeing the whole picture. We have to assemble the pieces before we can tell if anything is missing. Providing writing instructors with a strong sense of place (Larry Beason), encouraging them to engage in ongoing professional development (Beth Brunk-Chavez), involving them in educative[1] evaluation processes (Clyde Moneyhun), and fostering "cultures of great teaching" (Diana Ashe) can each have a profound impact on teacher quality and retention. But I would suggest that to have the most profound impact on student learning, our writing programs need to be infused with a culture of professionalism that not only includes, but extends these.

The cultures of professionalism to which I refer are clearly broader than Ashe's "cultures of great teaching." Ashe is advocating primarily for evaluation processes that include "multiple points of evaluation" (160) and "encourage the habits that create 'superstar' teachers" (159). These are excellent ideas, and certainly one highly-desirable result of effective faculty evaluation, as Moneyhun points out, is professional development, or, more accurately, the "professionalization" (165) of teaching. But a culture of professionalism must be more than a system of evaluation, even one as well considered and comprehensive as those described by Ashe and Moneyhun.

As Ashe points out, a good place to start developing a culture of great teaching or, I might add, a culture of professionalism, is with a consideration of "findings [such as those offered in] *Teaching as Leadership* [that] encourage us to think about how our departments and programs can influence and encourage the habits that create 'superstar' teachers" (159.) Ashe is careful to note that the "characteristics [offered in the report]… emerge from K-12 schools" (159), but in fact that they are not so very different from the findings of a more relevant study reported in *What the Best College Teachers Do,* by Ken Bain.

Bain bases his findings on fifteen years of research into the "practices and thinking of the best [college] teachers, those people who have remarkable success in helping their students achieve exceptional learning results" (3). Because Bain's investigation *begins* with student achievement as the standard for identifying "the best;" because it focuses on college, not K-12 teachers; and because it includes teachers from a wide variety of institutions (including both two and four-year schools) and academic disciplines (including not just STEM disciplines, but also the arts and the humanities), it addresses most of Ashe's concerns about the studies she cites in her article while also extending the findings of those studies.

Bain's book is organized around seven broad questions: What do [the best college teachers] know about how we learn? How do they prepare to teach? What do they expect of their students? How do they conduct class? How do they treat their students? How do they evaluate their students and themselves? Because the answers to these questions are offered in rich, thoughtful, highly contextualized prose, they are not easily summarized. They do, however, largely support and extend Farr's findings (as discussed by Ashe) while echoing Carrell and West's concerns about the "value and accuracy" of using student evaluations "as a measurement of teaching quality for academic promotion and tenure decisions" (qtd. in Ashe 157), particularly when student evaluations are the only—or even the primary—measure taken into account.

In short, Bain notes that (and I provide these synopses reluctantly, for they reduce Bain's rich findings to exactly the kind of mundane sound bites that can only fail to do them justice) "the best college teachers" understand that learning is a developmental process of constructing, extending, and revising "mental models" (27); prepare to teach by asking themselves important questions about what students need to learn, how best to support student learning, how to best assess student learning, and how to most effectively assess their own teaching; expect that all students can and will learn; create in their classrooms the kind of "natural critical learning environments"[2] (99) that promote and support student learning; treat their stu-

dents with respect; and regularly assess both their students' learning and their own teaching in a variety of appropriate ways, both formative and summative.

Ideally, a writing program that embodies a culture of professionalism would build on Bain's findings in a number of ways. First, it would recognize that even the most thoughtful teacher evaluation process, while a necessary component of any successful program, is not sufficient for ensuring quality teaching. Quality teaching is most likely to become a hallmark of a program in which instructors are, first and foremost, prepared to teach. That means providing those "unstable cadre[s] of graduate student and part-time contingent faculty" (Smagorinsky 3, qtd. in "Symposium") with professional development opportunities that help them construct both disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge.

Both Brunk-Chavez and Moneyhun identify rationales for and approaches to this challenge, chief among them being the inclusion of instructors themselves in the design and implementation of professional development programming. This approach mirrors the National Writing Project's highly effective model of "teachers teaching teachers," in which teachers are provided opportunities to develop their own expertise and share that expertise with each other, resulting in demonstrable gains in student learning (About NWP).

At the same time, we must understand that there is no "quick fix" to the issue of faculty development. Students' mental models are not the only ones that change slowly. Thus, in a culture of professionalism, "professional development," like "teacher evaluation," cannot be relegated to once or twice-yearly events. It must be woven into the fabric of the program, ideally in ways that are natural outgrowths of the work writing instructors are already doing.

We also need to recognize that even highly-evolved, well-integrated systems of professional development and teacher evaluation alone are insufficient for creating a culture of professionalism. Such a culture also needs to address, as Beason notes, the affective domain of teacher work/ life. Certainly, supporting instructors in their quest to develop a "sense of place" grounded in their own classrooms and programs is a start, but even more prosaically, we need to take what we might call the Abraham Maslow approach to professionalism.[3]

If we work backward, through Maslow's hierarchy of needs, we discover that writing instructors are unlikely to even feel the need for a sense of professionalism unless they have already established a sense of belonging (Beason's "sense of place"), which is likely rooted in a sense of security

(contracts for periods as long as we can make them), and which grows from the fulfillment of basic human needs.

When I was a WPA, creating a culture of professionalism occasionally involved making sure that graduate students new to the US had access to basic household furnishings or coats warm enough to ward off winter winds. In my current role as a faculty developer, we devote part of our annual New Faculty Orientation to a session called "Connecting with the Community," during which community leaders answer new faculty members' questions about where and how to access community resources for themselves and their families. In other words, we don't expect either graduate students or new faculty members to be truly focused on developing a sense of professionalism without also providing access to resources that meet their more basic needs.

In short, creating a culture of professionalism is about creating a community of caring professionals who share high standards for themselves and their students, work collaboratively to help each other reach those standards, and continually evaluate and re-evaluate their own progress as developing professionals in light of those standards. If we can do that, there is a growing body of evidence[4] that these cultures will have a positive impact on student learning.

NOTES

1. "Educative" assessment, introduced by Grant Wiggins in *Educative Assessment: Designing Assessments to Inform and Improve Student Performance*, focuses on measuring learning through engagement in authentic tasks. Its central components, as described by Wiggins, are criteria and standards, forward-looking assessment, and self-assessment. To these, L. Dee Fink, author of *Creating Significant Learning Experiences*, adds FID-eLity, feedback that is frequent, immediate, discriminating, and loving. Typically, the goal of educative assessment is improved student learning. Educative approaches to faculty evaluation would focus on providing criteria and standards for authentic, professional work (as described by Moneyhun, not only teaching, but also research and service) in an effort to encourage professionalism, improve teacher performance, and, ultimately, enhance student learning.

2. "Natural critical learning environments," as described by Ken Bain in *What the Best College Teachers Do* include "five essential elements" (100): "an intriguing question or problem" (100); "guidance in helping the students understand the significance of the question" (100); the engagement of students in "some higher-order intellectual activity" (102); support for students as they work to answer the question (103); and students who are left with an additional question or questions (103).

3. In "A Theory of Human Motivation," originally published in 1943 in *Psychological Review*, Abraham Maslow identified what has come to be called his "hierarchy of needs" (Maslow). His theory posits that, along the road to becoming a fully "self-actualized" human being, we must first find ways to meet a variety of more immediate needs, including physiological, safety, love and belonging, and esteem.

4. This "growing body of evidence" includes not only the Farr article cited by Ashe and data from the National Writing Project at http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/doc/results.csp, but also a presentation at the January, 2011 AAC&U Conference in San Francisco to which Bill Condon, Washington State University, contributed. The title of the session was "Faculty Development Within Cross-Curricular Initiatives: What Are the Effects on Student Learning?" Gudrun Willett et al.

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## Response to "A Symposium on Fostering Teacher Quality"

Mike Palmquist

As I've considered my response to the symposium, I've found myself returning again and again to the notion of place—and of those among us who feel out of place. Larry Beason's essay, "Fostering Quality through Sense of Place," resonates not only with my experiences as a WPA and, more recently, as the director of an institute that focuses in part on professional development of faculty, but also with my work with the National Council of Teachers of English on its recently published Position Statement on the Status and Working Conditions of Contingent Faculty.[1] These experiences have helped me appreciate the importance of place in its many meanings: as a location in space (as someone who comes to work each day, for example, in a particular institution); as a position within a particular program or department (full-time or part-time, tenure-line or contingent); as a member of a community, with all of its social relationships, affinities, and hierar-

chies; and as a location for our scholarly interests and professional activities. Within the context of professional development, place offers a useful set of metaphors for considering where we are as we begin a program, where we might be as we move through it, and why we might resist or embrace a program's messages about teaching and learning, professional growth, and our role within our institution and the larger field of composition studies.

Citing work dating to the 1970s, Beason argues, "Place attachment, or a feeling of rootedness, is a powerful human need that helps people connect and 'be themselves.' It results in emotional ties to places that 'involve a sense of shared interests and values…bringing a sense of belonging and order to one's sociospatial world' (Cuba and Hummon 113)" (150). Beason's focus on the affective dimensions of place reminded me of observations recently offered by Lisa Meloncon and Peter England in an article included in the March 2011 special issue of *College English* on contingent faculty, which Sue Doe and I edited. As editors, we were intrigued by their use of non-place, a concept developed by Auge' (O'Beirne). Meloncon and England present non-place as "a disconnect between individuals and their interaction with their surroundings" (404).

While Meloncon and England refer specifically to instructors in contingent positions within the field of technical and professional communication—and more generally to the implications of their location within an area of study that is not fully recognized by the academy—their observations apply well to the conditions under which many of our colleagues in composition studies find themselves. With more than 70 percent of composition courses taught by faculty members in contingent positions (2007 ADE Ad Hoc Committee on Staffing), any discussions of professional development must take into account the conditions—that is the places, or in far too many cases, the non-places, in which so many composition faculty members find themselves.

As we consider professional development initiatives for faculty members working in contingent positions, we must ask whether our colleagues feel rooted in our programs and our discipline. Perhaps more important, we must ask how we might create the conditions in which the sense of "rootedness" that Beason calls for might develop.

Some of these conditions are addressed by the other members of the symposium. Beth Brunk-Chavez offers a promising approach in her description of "a high quality faculty and program community," something she also refers to as a "writing program community" (153). Her argument for the value of exploring the relationships among professional development, teacher assessment, and curriculum design suggests (in a move that echoes recent applications of activity theory within composition studies)

the conditions under which shared work can lead to a stronger sense of community—and, I would argue, following one of the key recommendations in the NCTE position statement, a sense of shared ownership—in local institutional and larger disciplinary communities.

Similarly, Diana Ashe's discussion makes clear the importance of full-time, long-term teaching positions as a precondition for the development of measures of teaching quality that are "reliable, fair, and consistent." She calls attention to the need for faculty members to find a place within local institutional communities (156). Her argument that "[i]mprovements in labor practices should go hand-in-hand with improvements in our understanding and assessment of teacher quality" highlights the critical relationship between professional development, working conditions, and investment in the community (157).

Clyde Moneyhun, in turn, offers a thoughtful and useful description of the kind of assessment process that Ashe calls for, one in which all members of the composition faculty share in creating, refining, and enacting a writing program community. In his observation that this kind of assessment process should be consistent with (we might say "rooted in") institutional practices and codes, Moneyhun calls attention to the importance of local context and history. Equally important, his argument for an open process that leads to dialogue about improvements in teaching and learning points to a process that, in his words, is not simply an evaluation process, but is also "a valuable opportunity for fostering faculty development" (165).

The symposium offers strong evidence for the importance of predicating professional development on equitable working conditions, shared governance, and long-term security of employment. My recent immersion—admittedly from a position of privilege—in work related to the status and working conditions of faculty in contingent positions convinces me of the importance of informing our professional development efforts with an understanding of the implications of our increasing reliance on instructors who work in contingent positions. Professional development initiatives must begin with an understanding of the places in which so many members of our discipline find themselves and of the places where we hope to go, together, as a profession. This understanding should also inform our efforts to develop places—local and national, physical and digital, social and disciplinary—where we can work together as communities that advance our teaching and learning.

NOTE

1. The statement was developed by the NCTE College Section Working Group on the Status and Working Conditions of Contingent Faculty, endorsed by the College Section Steering Committee in 2009, and adopted in 2010 by the Executive Committee. The working group was made up of Sue Doe, James McDonald, Beatrice Mendez Newman, Mike Palmquist (chair), Robert Samuels, and Eileen Schell. It can be found at http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/contingent_faculty.

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