

Title of Grant: "We Teach Who We Are": A VCCS Faculty Colloquy on Who We Are as Professionals

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Abstract:

To achieve excellence, faculty must understand and teach from the values, attitudes, and practices that make us who we are as professionals. This forum had faculty, including counselors and librarians, explore professional identity and how it determines interactions with discipline, subject matter, colleagues, and students.

Actual Outcomes:

Faculty from PVCC, BRCC, LFCC, GCC, JSRCC, and DCC carried away greater professional self-awareness as well as a newfound spirit for our work. The benefit to faculty was considerable but the primary benefit will be to students. Students have an uncanny ability to sense character in their teachers. When a teacher embodies professional passion, knowledge, eloquence, and caring, students come alive to the teacher and subject, and are more likely to persist in learning.

Other Colleges:

All 23 VCCS Colleges were invited. Nine VCCS colleges were represented (and fifteen different disciplines).

Discussion and Critique:

The four hosts/facilitators (three from PVCC, one from GCC) were delighted with the day. As needed, we cooperatively adjusted the schedule to allow more or less time for X or Y. Were we to host another such colloquy, I'd make very few changes. I'd work to get even more colleges and disciplines represented. To increase opportunities for participants to get to know one another more deeply, I'd have them work with two or even three teams of three during the course of the day rather than continuing with the same team. Frequency and intensity of all-group sharing seemed about right. The tone of the day was inspiring.

Evaluation:

Participants' Written Reflections on the Colloquy Quoted Verbatim (14 submitted)

Directions: Please take five minutes or so to reflect on your experience today. Possible questions to consider: What elements from today's event do you imagine having the greatest impact on your professional life? How has today's event affected your opinion of your profession/discipline?

1. Today was especially great for me as I have been away from teaching for two years. Going through these exercises reminded me what I love about being a teacher. Hearing the other participants' ideas also reminded me of how many different ways can be used to achieve great educational goals. Today made me remember why I love teaching and that I share that passion with many interesting, dedicated others.

2. I haven't been terribly impressed by what I've read of Parker Palmer so far—it seems a bit “New Agey” for me—vague and filled with the jargon of pop psychology. I was glad that this seminar focused less on his particular approach to teaching and more on the opportunity for teachers to share with one another their enthusiasm for their discipline.

3. The listing of the graces was enlightening . . . as I explained them to myself I realized their importance to the making of art and the learning from art. It made me realize that much of what I am passionate about in art is sometimes so removed from the intro level classes that some folks can't catch that passion. But doing these things that are able to be included in beginning classes is crucial for lighting that potential fire. I am reminded of the grace and passion we as human beings share . . . even when we are passionate about divergent disciplines or truths. The grace of Passion [*sic*].

4. Renewed appreciation of the professional dedication of VCCS faculty. Frustration with limited interaction/exchange with participants other than the 3 person team. They were interesting, but I would have liked to hear more from others also.

5. Thinking about the Grace of Great Things was very valuable—seeing the Truths written out was inspiring. Putting the Great Things into my courses seems hard and I will keep working on it. Being with peers who joined in this honest, open conversation was renewing. I'd love to have a list of participants, their calling, and discipline. Thank you!

6. I am a bit tired and having difficulty finding words—here goes—I am delighted to find Others (capital “O”) that are like hearted (and maybe like minded).

7. I like the idea of promoting listening to others without judging/debating and taking away new ideas. It would be nice if all group members would stick to that concept and if all voices were heard if they wanted to be heard. I think I profited most from stating “The Grace of Great Things’ with other people outside the group. I also enjoyed simply sharing ideas/experiences with colleagues. Time well spent and I hope to receive the book soon. [There was a problem with the book order, so some received their book by mail.]

8. Coming from a college where teachers don't discuss their teaching with each other, it's motivating to experience the interest, the passion, the perspective of other teachers. And that makes it more possible to re-examine my own teaching, and even to try to organize some campus forums for discussion. My great wish for education is more working together to help students—to break away from just my discipline (i.e., learning communities). But I see from today many more possibilities for involving students in my discipline areas.

9. My teaching will be enriched by new information I heard today.

10. I believe that the sharing sessions with the team and with the whole group will have the greatest impact due to inspirations I've received to in turn share them with my students in the hopes that in turn they might be motivated to keep trying and try harder to be successful—to persist, etc. [*sic*] I have been

so impressed by the collegiality of the members of the group and continue to be proud to be one of them.

11. Communicating with representatives of other disciplines (from other colleges) on applying “The Grace of . . .” within our classroom environment. I was challenged within our group in an informed manner on issues being practiced in today’s society.

12. I’m not sure—I got some ideas of new things to try. I loved what the one woman said about “teaching to your strengths.” I’m horrible at running group work, and I’ve been trying to implement more than I feel comfortable with. Maybe I can be happier doing what I’m really odd [sic] at, which happens to be lecture. There are many dedicated, excellent teacher out there. It was fun and interesting. Thanks!

13. I learned today to take some time and analyze my education, the purpose of my career, the greatest and not so greatest part of my career. I learned to listen and I enjoyed very much learning from other colleagues and their teaching experiences.

14. Today has been such an encouragement. The very premise that there are “graces of great things” in our classrooms—how re-affirming is that oasis in the middle of essay evaluations and hiring committees?! I am grateful for the introduction of Palmer. To acknowledge the heart of the teacher—that’s a refreshment I am really looking forward to. I do not believe I have unearthed any new strategies per se, but I have met some fine people, and I have had an opportunity to speak of and listen to discussions about our life’s love.

VCCS Benefits:

PVCC enjoyed the professional experience and satisfaction of hosting and facilitating a stimulating, eye-opening colloquy. The workshop raised self-awareness regarding core values and practices inherent in one's own discipline and subject area(s) as well as appreciation for core values and practices inherent in others' disciplines and subject areas. The event clearly promoted cross-disciplinary camaraderie. Nine VCCS colleges and fifteen disciplines were represented. With little exception, faculty participants expressed heightened awareness and exhibited desire to share their learning with students and colleagues at their home campuses.