

ASSOCIATION OF ATLANTIC UNIVERSITIES

Institutional Award Winners Retreat

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Mount Allison University

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Faculty Development Bulletin

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Participants: Barry Bisson (University of New Brunswick), Katherine Covell (University College of Cape Breton), Brent MacLaine (University of Prince Edward Island), Harold Ogden (Saint Mary's University), John Quaicoe (Memorial University of Newfoundland), Robert Summerby-Murray (Mount Allison University), Dennis Tokaryk (Mount Allison University), Ann Vibert (Mount Saint Vincent University)

Facilitator: Roger Moore (St. Thomas University)

Topics of Discussion Inside Bulletin:

1. ***Introduction***
2. ***Bringing research into the classroom***
3. ***Teaching Leadership and Learning***
4. ***Brave New Electronic World***
5. ***Personal Changes over Teaching Career***

1. Introduction

This year's retreat was different from last year's in that the Showcase organizers invited a selection of institutional award winning teachers from the retreat to sit on the opening and closing panels of the Teaching Showcase. As a result, introductions were brief and the retreat participants moved straight into a discussion on the topics of the two panel sessions. After these discussions, six volunteers emerged to sit on the opening and closing panels and to represent the thoughts of the retreat participants.

2. Bringing research into the classroom

Brent MacLaine began by stating that he found it difficult to bring his own highly specialized research into the undergraduate classroom. Occasionally, perhaps once every four years, there might be a research seminar in which his teaching and his research actually met, but introductory teaching in his research area -- photography and fiction -- was a rare occurrence for there are more pressing issues in the discipline. He also pointed out that with the amount of time spent on committees, teaching, and basic bookkeeping there is now not much time left for research. Robert Summerby-Murray explained how he used his whole classroom as a research group by employing them as assistants in various projects. He told how his cultural geography classes are a hotbed of research as his students *read the cultural landscape*. His investigations had led to a

study of traditional methods for house insulation used in the neighbouring areas. Ann Vibert distinguished between her undergraduate classes, where it was difficult to include research, and her graduate classes, each of which was in itself a research laboratory. She described how she is currently involved in projects that study the effects of poverty on high school learners. Schools whose culture is defined by a high percentage of local poverty were very different in performance from schools where poverty was less visible. She made reference to the literacy programs undertaken in schools from impoverished areas and explained how her graduate students, all teachers themselves, were part of the living experiment of teaching on a daily basis in those institutions which they were studying.

Katherine Covell also linked her teaching and her research, especially in the area of children's rights and associated issues. Above all, her research concentrated on rephrasing and remodelling research questions for it is only when people see the problem differently and ask different questions that new models for alternative solutions can be found. But first we must train our students to create and ask the right questions. John Quaicoe teaches research as part of his normal work at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. He likes to set problems that make students think and ask different questions as he tries to develop enquiring minds which are not content with obvious answers. This creates a culture in which research is the norm. This is

difficult at the first year level, where the dictates of the curriculum sometimes demand the teaching of fundamental concepts over creative analysis. He also likes to use examples from his own research where possible. Harold Ogden said that since he was involved in marketing research, the idea of research was tied right into everything he did. Ann Vibert questioned the exact meaning of *research* and members of the retreat agreed in principle that research held a great many meanings that went way beyond the traditional definitions of the term. Robert Summerby-Murray spoke to the idea that teaching is a form of dissemination of research and suggested that grant giving agencies should recognize it as such for he often delivers his own conference papers to his classes. Dennis Tokaryk agreed that research and teaching went hand in hand and were never separable for to live as teachers, we must research. He told how work and research were closely associated in real life and said he had performed advanced experiments even in first year classes. He also pointed out that the laboratory, as workplace, was also the workplace as a theatre of research. "Nobody can enter my laboratory," he said, "without coming into direct contact with some aspect of my research."

Katherine Covell underlined the way that *excitement* and *enthusiasm* were currently being generated in the room as the retreat participants talked about their own research. It is essential to be scholarly for the learning of something new creates its own excitement. Barry Bisson teaches a new field: engineering and entrepreneurial studies. Teaching therefore, as in the scholarship of teaching, is research in itself. In his classes, firms and business people relay real life problems to the class for study. These problems are not theoretical; they are the actual day to day problems of real businesses involved in the daily struggle of the market place. With information technology integrated into his learning group, they have been able to meet online even across vast distances. One student lives in Norway and is in contact by computer and phone. Barry Bisson said that his own teaching had been revolutionized by the introduction of information technology, not just as a means of communication, but also as a teaching methodology. This preliminary discussion ended with Barry Bisson, Ann Vibert, and John Quaiocoe agreeing to sit on the morning panel.

3. Teaching Leadership and Learning

The second topic generated more discussion as there was an initial disagreement about the meaning of *leadership*. The retreat participants, as a group, found the utmost difficulty in deciding what was meant by *leadership* and there was no agreement as to its nature and meaning. Harold Ogden said that his most important role was to observe and to shape. Ann Vibert, on the other hand, questioned the whole nature of leadership and asked the vital questions "Leadership of

whom? By whom? In what direction? And for what ends?" In answer, Robert Summerby-Murray outlined the President's Leadership Certificate and both curricular and extra-curricular leadership initiatives at Mount Allison University. Leadership has become a buzz word but there is a great deal of money attached to programs that promise to develop leadership qualities. At Mount Allison University undergraduate students go into the local community and provide leadership for innovative civic enterprises. Summerby-Murray also spoke of enlightened leadership in the academic sense for organizational skills are being developed by involved students and group work fosters academic leadership. Barry Bisson talked about his experiences with Shad Valley where there is a combination of lateral thinking, team work, and group work all of which, at an exalted academic level, foster leadership skills. Leaders and role models are again brought in from the real world and their personal stories of struggle and sacrifice enable students to glimpse the nature of leadership. Harold Ogden addressed the need for the development of ethical thought and moral behaviour among our potential leaders and Katherine Covell told us how in her children's rights programs students were involved in leadership work with local communities. Students involved in the United Nations internship programs were expected to travel and lecture to local communities upon their return.

Brent MacLaine suggested that while leadership as content did not enter specifically into his teaching, he in fact taught intellectual and academic leadership by creating permanent learning teams which stayed together for long periods and developed leadership skills as part of their *modus operandi*. Team learning and team teaching are wonderful for developing leadership as individual responsibility is developed in team situations. Robert Summerby-Murray suggested that our universities may well have a hidden curriculum of leadership and that we should look on leadership as a very broad issue. Barry Bisson observed that extroverts dominate in the initial meetings at Shad Valley, but quiet, thorough workers, often more introverted people, finally take over and lead with firmness and a quiet vision. Group and team work cannot be done without these silent organizers. For John Quaiocoe it was essential to create an appropriate environment for the flourishing of leadership skills. Strengths must be observed and polished at the appropriate, the *teachable*, moment. Katherine Covell stated that one of the basic skills we teach is intellectual leadership for we provide the opportunities for students to lead. Robert Summerby-Murray told how in his Friday classes the students taught themselves, choosing their own material and topics for discussion and Brent MacLaine asked questions about the development of skills portfolios. The group agreed that the skills portfolio was a viable project and one well worth developing by the individual student. There was then a quick fire exchange on types of leadership styles.

Ann Vibert talked about the necessity of forming a community and of giving support, so that the community itself could take appropriate action. This sometimes included social reform and awareness seminars. Barry Bisson spoke of the *teachable moment* and stated that our task was to observe, recognize, shape and polish. Several speakers then posed the question of power structures; it is sometimes difficult to teach leadership when we, as critical and analytical scholars, are also teaching young students to be critical, to ask questions, and to challenge academic authority. At this point it was agreed that Robert Summerby-Murray, Dennis Tokaryk, and Roger Moore would represent the retreat participants in the afternoon panel.

4. *Brave New Electronic World*

Katherine Covell began by stating that the computer, as we know it, is a tool and does not enhance or change our teaching methods nor the minds with which we interact. Our teaching and learning have not changed substantially with the advent of information technology. This point was hotly disputed with John Quaicoe suggesting that information technology has become a field of research in itself. Much time is needed on our part to make effective use of technology in teaching. Furthermore, this is precious time taken from our specialized research. The key to good teaching is the presence of respect for alternate voices as *real teaching*, as opposed to the mere transfer of fact and knowledge, takes place in the one on one encounter, face to face, of *learner and learner* in its equation of *teacher and taught*. Katherine Covell built on this and added that small group discussions of controversial issues were at the heart of her students' search for knowledge. The variety of perspectives that are available to learners in small groups is a quality not achieved by distance education. Robert Summerby-Murray said that we could not equate teaching with technology although many administrators were tempted to do so because of its apparent cost effectiveness. IT is not yet sufficiently developed for us to use it to its full potential and there is not enough information available to us on the nature of the ideal teaching environment. This point was also disputed though it was agreed that there were overt / covert pressures to use IT. Unfortunately, the teacher is rarely off duty when the electronic classroom is never closed. Dennis Tokaryk questioned instant access to knowledge and brought up the quality issue regarding the electronic education scenario.

Ann Vibert suggested that the nature of dialogue was changing with the diminishing of print technology and the increased importance of IT which, with its ability to cover long distances in minimal time, is rapidly changing the face of education. Clearly, there are some naive expectations in regard to current pedagogies and the issues of equal access to hardware and software must be addressed. Traditional

teaching can be blended with IT for a better learning and teaching environment, claimed Barry Bisson, because IT can definitely enhance teacher and learner. He outlined the case study methods he is using and explained how, without IT, these studies would be impossible. Current problems are emailed to the study group from New York on Saturdays and worked on over the weekend so that solutions can be presented almost immediately. Face to face sessions can be achieved by online group work, even with the student in Norway, and a sense of work community can be developed with students and presenters meeting electronically just as if they were present in the same room. He commented too on the rapid improvement of electronic teaching tools which enhance the delivery of factual knowledge thus allowing more quality time in the real or virtual classroom.

Ann Vibert said IT was a very useful resource and stressed that our world was in the process of changing rapidly. She likened IT to the movement incomprehensible to us now, from an oral to a literate society. Robert Summerby-Murray pointed out the changing value of the text and suggested that the sanctity of the printed text has now been broken. He told how his students were designing web pages in which composition is enlivened by the addition of video, picture, sound, and web sites. Dennis Tokaryk questioned the relationship of IT to learning and put forward the idea that not everything on the web is reliable. He spoke specifically to the theme of the encapsulated sound bite which gives a minimum amount of information and presents no in depth critical analysis. The internet is not a profound medium; nor is it necessarily reliable. Katherine Covell stressed the importance of the library, for books, unlike web pages, are peer reviewed. We must now teach our students to discriminate between the different forms of knowledge that are so readily accessible to them. Brent MacLaine emphasized the value of the traditional text based library. Tables of contents, chapter headings, indexes: these are all important. "What is more useful," he queried, "money to develop technology? Or money to develop teachers by sending them to conferences and assisting them with their research?" This led immediately to a rapid and detailed discussion of the advent of web based courses and the necessity of keeping up in a rapidly expanding field to the detriment of one's knowledge in one's own specialization. Barry Bisson referred specifically to engineering problems which can be set and solved more easily in the new multi media design systems. It is time to finish with the old structure of the written problem on the page as modern computer design presents newer and far more effective ways of teaching, specifically in the sciences where great improvements in the delivery of knowledge are constantly being made. Ann Vibert said that since we cannot resist the advent of IT, we must debate it analytically and critically. We must find the best way to use IT.

Robert Summerby-Murray noted that with fewer faculty employed on a full time basis, the university is forced to turn to electronic solutions to solve serious staffing problems. Consequently, we have invented a more flexible classroom that implies a spatial and temporal shift in our conception of teaching and learning. However, effective teaching can still be done in small groups after the electronic stage of information transfer. Ann Vibert again stressed the time demands put upon teachers by the invasive presence of the new technologies. Barry Bisson, on the other hand, questioned why large institutions like MIT were willing to put all their courses online, free of charge. Is factual knowledge, accessible to all, the least valuable part of an education? Real teaching is surely a combination of debating and assessing and applying knowledge, whether or not it is freely available on the web, within a competent teaching and learning community. This combination of community and knowledge is the secret, he added. Brent MacLaine reminded the group that a central issue here is faculty development. It is necessary, he suggested, for universities to spend less money on machines and buildings and more money on developing people. Dennis Tokaryk agreed and admitted that he abhorred the “us” versus “them” atmosphere that was developing between those that did, or didn’t, use IT .

5. *Personal Changes over Teaching Career*

Harold Ogden began by stating that he exited industry 9 years ago. As teachers we possess more than knowledge, we have a wisdom to pass on. However, as we develop we must become aware that we cannot cram all that wisdom into a single course. A mellowing takes place. Moreover, students are not “out to get” the teacher. All learning is team work. John Quaicoe realized as he developed that he couldn’t do it all. Understand the limits, he said, and raise the intellectual barriers whenever it is possible to do so. Dennis Tokaryk said that he had been fortunate to witness some outstanding teachers during his formative years. Teachers within the first three years of their teaching careers were full of ideas and enthusiasm, whereas the older teachers, those with two or three years to retirement, were marked by an absolute clarity of ideas. As teachers, he added, we must mellow and live within our teaching paradigms. Katherine Covell’s own development was summarized in the phrase “less to do with material, more to do with people.” Barry Bisson described how he had moved from lectures to a more interactive participatory style of teaching. He suggested that teaching demanded more time now than it ever did before as class time became more important to the students. Ann Vibert described how people moved from being very traditional teachers in their first five years to becoming much more innovative later on. Teachers learned from their teaching, she said, and developed more ways in which to interactively bring people and subjects together.

Dennis Tokaryk spoke of how his students were becoming more elated and less frustrated. Brent MacLaine suggested we should all probably forget our first year of teaching and concentrate on what we had become. He had finally discovered how to decentre the classroom and make each individual the centre of his or her own search for knowledge. Barry Bisson claimed that he probably taught less but advised more in his efforts to get students to educate themselves. Dennis Tokaryk spoke of the mentoring role that Dr. Robert Hawkes had played in his development as a teacher and the facilitator emphasised the importance of peer mentoring and stated that St. Thomas University was in the process of developing a peer mentoring program for new teachers at the university. With time running out on a very lively discussion, it was concluded that strict teaching structures impeded good innovative teaching and that more flexible teaching timetables along the lines of teaching modules were probably necessary as these offered greater student choice and greater teacher flexibility. This, we all agreed, was a topic, given the time restraints, best left for another year!

Respectfully submitted,

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