

ASSOCIATION OF ATLANTIC UNIVERSITIES

Institutional Award Winners' Retreat

Friday, October 24th, 2008

University of New Brunswick, Saint John

Saint John, New Brunswick

Faculty Development Bulletin

Fall 2008

Participants: *David Flagel, Department of Philosophy (University of New Brunswick, Saint John), David McCorquodale, Department of Biology (Cape Breton University), Kathy Darvesh, Department of Chemistry and Physics (Mount Saint Vincent University), John Grant McLoughlin, Faculty of Education (University of New Brunswick), Elizabeth Wells, Department of Music (Mount Allison University), Angela Brackenbury, Department of Biology (St. Francis Xavier University)*

Facilitators: Dr. Stephen Coughlan (Dalhousie University)
Dr. Angie Thompson (St. Francis Xavier University)

On a warm, sunny Friday afternoon in the middle of fall 2008 university teachers from the Atlantic Provinces gathered along with two facilitators in a retreat/spa-like setting. The conversation documented by a professor in Law School and directed by a Human Kinetics professor, followed the Kinetics professor's teaching philosophy that she describes as a "workout".

In this regard, the retreat began with a warm-up of introductions. These introductions were smoothly paced and allowed each mind and body in the room to share their name, the name of

their institution, a description of their teaching award, and the meaning of the award to them personally and to their institution. It was discovered that a blend of awards driven most often by current or former students, some with substantial personal monetary benefits exist around the Atlantic Provinces. After this delightful exchange, the mind and body were prepared to delve a little deeper, to work a little harder, and to progress to the next, more exciting phase of the workout/retreat conversation.

The nature of the workout was divided into three components – each

focused on a particular aspect of physical fitness/teaching. First, the cardiovascular component was focused upon as it is often considered the most important because its relationship to health is well documented. In this regard, the conversation opened around the topic of motivation, critical to initiate, continue, and finish the process of university teaching. More specifically, segments of this part of the workout/conversation discussed how one prepared or motivated oneself to teach in September and at the end of the term. A common thread amongst these teachers was the effort put into preparation; creating the right environment; then simply performing in each and every class oozing enthusiasm and, in return, feeding off the students' reactions. Considerable time was spent on the motivation required to begin the long, long, heavily engaging process of marking. Another commonality was found in that we each systematically prepare to mark; we create time lines for breaks, short and long term goals, we mark question by question, or one page at a time, and we bribe ourselves with coffee, chocolate, or even a glass of wine or scotch for when have met our goals!

Then, time was spent developing the muscular system – the core of the body. In this regard, our conversation turned to teacher training – the core of teaching. We discussed the sorts of

training we had and the sorts of training we think professors should have.

Though delighted to have completed this portion of the workout, we were collectively disappointed to discover that very little attention is often paid to this particular component and we wondered if/when this might change.

We then moved onto the third component - flexibility as mentors and mentees. Perhaps a common thread in our workout gear was the ease at which we could easily think of a person (or several persons) who influenced our teaching and how we attempt to emulate that person. Our discussion then eased to the realization of our roles as mentors for our students and junior colleagues. Not surprising was the discovery that many of us had created formal or informal lists of “this is what I wished I knew when I started” that we now currently share in our primarily informal roles of mentoring. As such, our flexibility was demonstrated as we easily stretched from our pleasant memories/reflections of our personal teaching mentors to the reality of our roles as passionate, excellent teachers to guide and/or mentor others around us.

As expected, the workout concluded with a cool down which allowed the mind and body to return to

a more relaxed state using a process of positive memory sharing. In this case, each person shared a highlight from his or her teaching experiences. These highlights ranged from “aha” moments to unexpected thank you emails/cards/photographs to learning of the appreciation and understanding that students do have of their professors, their lives, and the potential for unexpected events. This cool down delightfully led to that satisfied feeling one gets after a good workout, one in which the body performed to its potential (or at the very least did what was expected of it). In this way, six teaching award winners and two facilitators left the room, satisfied from their workout/conversation, glowing as a result of their personal efforts, and pleased to have taken the time to participate!

PARTICIPANTS:

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