


Inspired College Teaching

A Career-Long Resource for
Professional Growth

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Colleagues as Collaborators

This chapter proposes new ways that teachers can realize the potential inherent in relationships with instructional colleagues. Colleagues can keep the life blood flowing in a teacher's veins. They can offer encouragement, critique, advice, ideas, and inspiration. Although some teachers may have more experience, better skills, or more pedagogical knowledge than others, that does not preclude teachers learning from and with each other. We share so much that makes us equal. We all have burgeoning amounts of content to organize and explain, not always well-prepared students to motivate and educate, multiple demands on our time, and tough institutional environments in which teaching is not always valued. When we join forces with colleagues, these challenges are more easily faced and more successfully mastered.

Unfortunately though, as is the case with student feedback, what colleagues can contribute to each other's pedagogical growth and vitality is often unrealized or is experienced as something less than what it could be. Too many colleagues avoid collaboration because they view teaching as a private activity, regularly conflating it with notions of academic freedom. Collegial contributions to instructional growth are also compromised by ingrained ways of orienting to teaching, ways that rob it of complexity and intellectual substance, reducing it to matters of technique. Finally, what colleagues can contribute is being diminished by one of the roles

now regularly assumed by peers: summative evaluators of instruction. This is where this chapter begins.

Following that discussion, the chapter proposes that in order to realize more of the potential inherent in peer collaboration, faculty need to select pedagogical colleagues more carefully. They need a diverse collection of colleagues with whom they explore a variety of roles and activities. When the goal is instructional vitality across the career, colleagues need to work together differently than most do now. New roles and activities can make peers the mainstay of one's efforts to keep teaching on track and directed toward more learning for students.

The Problems with Peer Review

Regrettably, the instructional evaluation saga we have been working to rewrite has one final chapter, and it is not one of atonement and redemption. The story ends as it has played out so far, sadly, with more harm done than benefits reaped. Accompanying the increased use of summative, end-of-course student ratings has been greater use of peers doing classroom observations as part of the promotion and tenure process. Like the other parts of the ratings story, this one begins with the best of intentions. Some aspects of instruction, students are not qualified to judge. Students can't say whether the selected text fairly represents course content. They don't know if the examples used to explain concepts are current and the ones mostly likely to facilitate understanding. They aren't able to judge the merits of presenting the content in a particular order. Colleagues with content knowledge are clearly much better qualified to make these kinds of determinations.

But those good intentions veer off course with the assumption that more experienced faculty (those tenured and promoted) are qualified to judge the teaching effectiveness of those less experienced. Like any other skill, instructional observation significantly improves when those doing it receive some instruction and can

practice skills with feedback provided on their performance. Unfortunately, most tenured faculty lack this training in observation. Instead, most enter classrooms not having seen a lot of what happens in other classrooms beyond their now-dated experience as students.

Untrained peer observers form overall impressions of how the class session went but are often not able to identify the behaviors that coalesced to form that impression. Much like the summative assessments offered at the end of the course by students, peer reviews often contain lots of abstractions, "The teacher had a good command of the classroom," or focus on inconsequential trivia, "The teacher erased the board before starting class." As noted previously, comments like these do not give instructors what they need to grow and develop as teachers. Their potential is further eroded by the judgmental context in which these comments are made. Peer assessments of a teacher's competence can be personally devastating and sometimes professionally damaging. It's not a scenario that sets in motion positive, productive relationships among peers over teaching. And this just starts the list of problems with summative classroom observations by peers.

Even without training, peer reviewers (because they are faculty and generally smart people) do learn something from doing reviews. They see more samples of what other teachers do. One would also hope that experience develops observational acuity, although I could find no evidence documenting that this happens. But the experience of a peer reviewer is pretty much irrelevant. If two faculty members observe—one who has done observations for years and another who has never done one before—once in the promotion and tenure (p & t) dossier, those assessments count equally.

Furthermore, most assessments based on observations are made minus any articulated or agreed-upon criteria. Without them, the standards an observer uses to render a judgment are individually derived, resting on personal views of effective instruction. And so stories, some having gained legendary status, are told of reviewers

showing up on a day when students are working in groups and telling the teacher, "Let me know what days you'll be teaching so I can come and observe you then." That their views of teaching are narrow, eclectic, and uninformed by what is known about how students learn does not disqualify most senior faculty members from doing summative peer observations.

And then there is the issue of reliability. That is, whether or not the sample of instruction observed is at all representative of what usually happens in class. The chance of one class session being representative is much less than when ten sessions have been observed. But how many peer reviewers have time to make ten observations? Believe it or not, ten visits are not beyond what some experts recommend. Arreola (2007) suggests that peer teams of three or four observers observe eight to ten classes of a given instructor.

The issue devolves further over whether the visits should be announced or unannounced. If they are announced, there's the opportunity for the observee to prepare a super-session. If the visits are unannounced, there's the possibility that the anxiety precipitated by a surprise visit will render the teaching less effective than usual. Next, there's the interrater reliability question, which has been studied empirically. At issue is whether three faculty members observing the same instructional sample assess it at all similarly. Research has consistently shown that they do not, especially when judgments are made with no agreed-upon criteria, previous experience, or training (Centra, 1975 and 1993). This fact compromises the credibility of the reviews, which ought to concern those making the personnel decisions, but it also jeopardizes collegial relationships.

Finally, there's the question of what peer assessments based on classroom observations add to what student evaluations have already established. The correlation between evaluations made by current students and peers is high. One of Feldman's (1989) classic meta-analyses looked at fourteen studies that compared ratings given by students and peers (in most studies both used the same

instrument) and found an overall correlation of .55. This means that when current students and peers assess the same instruction, not much new is learned from the peer evaluation.

This collection of facts argues against peers doing classroom observations for summative purposes. It does leave unanswered those aspects of instruction that students are not qualified to judge: currency of course content, propriety of the text, appropriate rigor of the exams, and so on. These aspects of instruction can be assessed without a classroom visit, perhaps more thoroughly because the artifacts can be studied in detail—they aren't over in 50 minutes. Most course calendars delineate the content to be covered in the course. The text itself can be reviewed and assessed given course objectives and course placement in the curriculum. Sample tests can be analyzed. Feedback provided to students on written work can be reviewed. The teacher being reviewed could be asked to identify those examples or problems used to explain certain concepts or principles.

Most practitioners who write about peer evaluation do not take a position against summative assessments involving classroom observations by peers (Berk, 2005, is an exception), even though the research identifying these problems is widely referenced. Many good sources do propose how these issues can be overcome (Chism, 2007, and Cosser, 1998, are two good examples). But despite this knowledge of how peer observations ought to be done, they are not done that way at most institutions—at least in my experience. Faculty regularly do commando-style raids on the classroom, observing once, maybe twice, not using any criteria, perhaps having an obligatory but superficial conversation with the instructor and then writing a letter for the p & t dossier that may at some subsequent point be read by the instructor.

Beyond the questionable data generated by summative observations, it's more about the tone set by these practices. The fact that a "colleague" with questionable views of teaching can render an inaccurate judgment extends well beyond the damage done to the teacher he's observed. That action sends a larger message about

the role of colleagues in the growth and development of teachers. True, among some teachers good collaboration still occurs, but is collegial interaction over instructional issues as involved and widespread as it should be at your institution? If not, why not? I think summative classroom observations by peers could stand in the way of this larger involvement. I'd like to be optimistic about the situation improving, but one of the first articles critical of peer review practices (Cohen and McKeachie, respected authorities then and now) came out in 1980. A couple of colleagues and I raised similar concerns in a 1988 article (Weimer, Kerns, and Parrett). The problem practices identified then persist today, despite the research and literature that spells out how to avoid the problems.

The faculty development movement of the past thirty years has been instrumental in promoting classroom observation for formative purposes. Most teaching centers train the observers they send out. They have developed protocols that prescribe conversations before and after the observations, that focus the observations with behaviorally anchored checklists, and that make helping the teacher decide how to do follow-up a priority (Austin, 1991; Keig and Waggoner, 1994; and Millis 2006). I endorse peers doing these kind of observations, especially when they are reciprocal. Visits by a trained observer from the teaching center can also be positive and instrumental in a teacher's development. Formative peer observations are not the problem. Rather, it's the fact that despite great resources, good literature, and the productive involvement of teaching centers, summative peer reviews involving classroom observations are routinely conducted in ways that devalue teaching and do not promote the growth of teachers. Bottom line: in my ideal university, I'd abolish them.

Collecting Colleagues for Pedagogical Growth

It is ironic that actions, ostensibly supportive of teaching, can in fact devalue it. Classroom observations conducted as just described

and talk about teaching that never moves beyond the "how-to's" are prime but not exclusive examples. A bit more subtle but equally illustrative is how most instructors collect those colleagues with whom they talk about teaching and learning. Generally, it's not a group assembled in any sort of systematic or thoughtful way. More often than not, teaching colleagues are discipline based; their offices may be close by; they may teach the same courses, share a research interest, or had been hired about the same time. Of little or no concern is whether these colleagues (fine human beings though they may be) know much about teaching or learning. Contrast that with how faculty identify, sometimes even court, those colleagues consulted about research and scholarly work. Faculty want the best colleagues possible when it comes to exploring research projects, reviewing grant proposals, research papers, and other kinds of manuscripts, or responding to a publisher or grantor's feedback. But when it comes to teaching, the advice and opinions are heeded without much thought given to qualifications.

Even though the adage about it taking a village to raise a child is old and overused, the idea is not, whether the referent is a child growing up or a teacher becoming a wise pedagogue. Both need others, many others, a diverse group of others and others available for different amounts of time, all of which raise this question: If a teacher were to assemble a "village" to oversee her pedagogical development, who would belong to that support network?

It seems to me there is only one absolutely essential requirement that everyone in the group must meet. Any colleague who is going to contribute to a teacher's growth and development must be one with whom the teacher can share openly and honestly. One of this book's continuing themes has been that teaching expresses personhood. This means any exchange that challenges instructional assumptions, critiques practice, or raises pointed questions about classroom policy must occur within relationships built on trust. Failure to meet this requirement results in a collection of

colleagues with whom pedagogical pleasantries and complaints about students are about all that can be exchanged safely. True colleagues are those with whom meaningful relationships are established and evolve. Beyond this starting point, consider a pedagogical village populated with the likes of these.

A Departmental Colleague

The choice here is deliberate, not accidental. It's not necessarily the person in the office next door, the one who might need to be impressed, or the one with whom a glass is shared at week's end. The best pedagogical colleagues in the department are those who wear their love of the content on their sleeves and can explain how they teach it. Disciplinary colleagues can help each other with all sorts of content related issues—good examples, sample problems, types of test questions, textbook recommendations, explanations that ameliorate confusion, ways of using content that get students thinking, but start the list.

A Colleague from Another Department at the Same Institution

Time and again in my career I've witnessed faculty gaining important pedagogical insights from those who teach very different content. As colleagues from different fields discuss how pedagogical issues look from their perspectives, those differences enable a clearer understanding of the issues in each field. It's not that they start teaching like each other (although they just might start using each other's good techniques), but rather that it's easier to understand how the content of "my" field is taught and learned after having considered how the content of another field is taught and learned.

Faculty who do not have pedagogical colleagues in other fields often resist the idea that they can learn something from someone who doesn't know their content. But they can. We have thirty years of cross-disciplinary faculty development efforts supportive

of that claim. So many instructional issues transcend disciplines and they are every bit as important as those issues unique to teaching a particular brand of content. Teachers everywhere deal with issues of academic integrity, participation, classroom management, fair and equitable grading, poorly prepared, not very motivated students, students arriving in class not having done the homework, students who resist group work—the list goes on and on. For those teachers who resist, often their thinking subsumes teaching in content knowledge—the "If you know, you can teach it" syndrome that equates instructional growth with the acquisition of content knowledge.

A Good Teacher

I define a good teacher as someone better than you are at the present time. It may be that you need a colleague in your village who is better at the delivery of instruction. There are a couple of caveats here. I have made the point already: Some very good teachers do not know what makes them good. They haven't been reflective in the ways outlined in Chapter Two so they don't have an explicit understanding of what they do, why they do it, and what makes it promote learning. They may still be very effective in the classroom, and some things can be learned by observing them, but the chances of them becoming pedagogical colleagues with whom meaningful exchanges about teaching and learning can occur may not be very good.

The second caveat: some good teachers have very eclectic teaching styles. They dress in costumes, use different voices, tell an amazing array of jokes, do show-and-tell science, and banter back and forth with students. Their antics may motivate learning, but what they do is their thing and is not easily replicated by others. They can be amazing to watch and they may motivate teachers to stretch their styles, but when choosing a "good" teacher, I recommend selecting one with a style you can actually see yourself emulating.

Some teachers are better because they know more. They have greater pedagogical knowledge, possibly derived from exposure to educational research, a familiarity with practitioner pedagogical literature, attendance at teaching conferences, or acquired some other way. Yes, a good teacher may have more experiential knowledge, provided the lessons they have learned from experience are worth knowing, but the bulk of what teachers know about pedagogy is already experience based. There is merit in looking beyond that domain and identifying a colleague with whom you can explore other pedagogical knowledge bases.

Someone from Your Local Teaching Center

Not all postsecondary institutions have teaching centers, but if your college or university does, do consider adding one of these professionals to your network of colleagues. These professionals (a lot of time they are faculty colleagues) will likely know pedagogical resources better than anybody else on campus. They have experience deciphering rating feedback and know how to observe instruction and provide constructive feedback. When it comes to teaching, they've pretty much heard and seen it all.

A Teacher from Elsewhere Who Shares a Pedagogical Interest

Faculty have already benefited greatly from collegial collaboration made possible by a variety of other online exchange venues. Virtually any sort of pedagogical interest, including but not limited to, instructional technology, online learning, problem-based learning, learning communities, clickers, first-year seminars, group work, has an online presence that offers not just the chance to find resources but also the opportunity to network with colleagues with whom that interest can be explored.

Continued growth across the years is fueled by collaborations with colleagues at other places. In some departments, faculty colleagues remain the same for years. With some colleagues, that's great news; with others it's not as beneficial to instructional health

and well-being. In both cases, it is still very refreshing to have colleagues who are beyond local issues, politics, and perplexities. With colleagues at other places, conversations are less likely to get hijacked by local issues. They can be exchanges about a shared pedagogical interest instead of belabored moaning about the new department head who has old ideas about research productivity.

Someone to Teach

Even faculty new to college teaching have experience and expertise to share with those less experienced, to say nothing of how often the more experienced can gain insights from those new to the profession. However, the primary beneficiary here is not the one being taught but the one doing the teaching. Most of us learned this lesson when we first started teaching. Suddenly content we thought we knew and understood became clearer and more deeply understood as we searched for ways to explain it to others. I remember one of my teachers in graduate school who told me, "You really don't understand something well unless you can explain it clearly to someone who does not." I argued with him at the time but have since seen the wisdom of that observation. College teachers at every stage of development stand to benefit when they work to explain clearly their insights and understandings of the educational enterprise.

This list is not exhaustive or necessarily prescriptive. Different times during a career make one kind of colleague more appropriate than at other times. Some colleagues may last a lifetime; some are helpful for a season. Some teachers do best with a large group of collaborators; for others, fewer is better than many. You can figure out who best fits your needs, but not without selecting instructional colleagues thoughtfully and systematically, not without recognizing that some teachers make better pedagogical colleagues than others, and not without realizing how much a carefully assembled "village" can do to ensure a positive and productive life in the classroom.

Roles and Activities for Colleagues

When colleagues are collaborators, what kind of roles and activities accomplish the goals of ongoing growth and vitality for the teacher and improved learning experiences for students? Possibilities abound, not all of them new, but even the familiar ones can be refocused with these goals as the objective. The examples that follow illustrate and can be used to generate still other appropriate venues in which colleagues might work together beneficially.

Colleagues as Collaborators

By *collaborators*, I mean two teachers (maybe three, but I'd keep the group small) working together on a shared project. For example, the colleagues might decide that one of their regularly taught courses would benefit from a new assignment. Let's say they have some interest in infusing more writing into the course and are considering learning logs. They work together to design the assignment, not necessarily the exact same assignment, but they jointly hash out the design features, they talk about implementation issues, and they figure out up front what assessment mechanisms they will use. The next semester they both use the new assignment, sharing what's happening, brainstorming solutions should problems arise, and finally they debrief, figuring out what worked, what needs to change, and whether the assignment merits doing again or doing in more courses. By the way, if a log assignment is of interest, the colleagues could start with an excellent article by Varner and Peck (2003) that recounts the lessons they learned during seven years of using log assignments.

Collaboration over an assignment is only one option. Colleagues might agree to undertake a review, analysis, and refresh of their exams, deciding to try at least one new testing option, say online quizzing, a group exam, or student-prepared test questions. If they teach the same course, they might collaborate over the choice of a new text and then share all course revisions necessitated when

a new text is adopted. They might decide to teach courses that are linked (a cohort of students take both courses during the same semester), working together to integrate and relate content, class activities, and assignments. They might decide to administer some of the instruments identified in Chapter Four, with the shared goal of discovering more about the learning experiences of their students.

Regrettably, team teaching is less and less an option for financial reasons. But if it's a possibility, it can be a great growth experience. To accrue its benefits, faculty must truly integrate the course and avoid tag teaching, where one does and assesses one unit and the other does and assesses the next unit. The process of explaining and justifying a particular approach to content or assignments clarifies the rationale for the teacher as much as for the colleague. If team teaching an entire course is not an option, colleagues might collaborate on the redesign of a course they both currently teach, perhaps doing some sessions in each other's classes, or they might team teach a unit within one or both of their courses.

Doing instructional activities with a colleague (or several of them) not only creates a whole new level of pedagogical awareness; it motivates greater attention to details, which increases the likelihood of success. It makes implementing changes a shared adventure, often bringing new life to teaching in other courses as well.

Colleagues as Colearners

The activities associated with this role help colleagues build their relationships. The goal here is to "study," to learn more about some aspect of teaching and learning. It goes beyond colleagues getting together and sharing what they have learned from experience. Certainly that can be part of the conversation, but discussions of teaching become more interesting, informative, and useful when they transcend what has been learned firsthand. Besides, despite years in the classroom, some very fine colleagues may have learned little worth knowing.

The value of learning beyond experience is a theme revisited through this book. There is much to learn and many good sources from which to learn. Whether the colleagues decide to explore a topic of mutual interest, read a book, or share favorite articles, what makes this activity successful is doing it systematically and diligently. Given all the demands on faculty time, taking time to read won't happen unless the colleagues make it a priority. As with many other ventures, the quantity of time devoted to the endeavor matters less than the quality of the time. A 20-minute exchange can be just as substantive as one that lasts more than an hour. Four meetings a semester is likely better than meeting once a week and having to cancel two or three times. To reduce the time commitment, a group might decide that one colleague will read an article on the designated topic and then share its contents when the group meets with those interested doing the reading after the discussion and exchanging further (as time allows) electronically. Discussions of readings can occur online. Being systematic and diligent also means structuring the exchange in ways that work for the group. And of course, busy faculty will be more likely to do the reading if the reading is good. There are sources that can help faculty find their way to good material: I'm partial to a newsletter I happen to edit (www.teachingprofessor.com).

Instructional practice and attitudes toward teaching are improved by the regular infusion of new ideas and information. New learning makes even old activities feel new and different. Teachers need this kind of refreshment if they are to maintain instructional vitality and effectively improve learning experiences for students. They also need low-risk activities with which to engage colleagues when they first begin working together.

Colleagues as Students

Colleagues aren't students; they especially aren't like the vast majority of students in college today. But faculty colleagues are the kind of students every teacher loves to teach, and that is what

makes this role so potentially helpful. Let me explain how I see it working.

The activities I describe are more beneficial when the colleagues do not share the same discipline. Classroom observation illustrates why. Two colleagues decide to visit each other's classes, and they agree that they will come to class taking the perspective of a student. They imagine how they would respond if they were a student in the class. They come to class prepared, having done the reading or assigned homework. They listen intently and take notes in class. I recommend that they do not participate in class because of how those contributions might affect the teacher and the real students.

In the follow-up conversation, each colleague focuses on how well the teaching strategies observed promoted understanding of the material.

What examples made it clear?

Were there enough examples?

Were the questions the teacher asked easy to understand?

Could the "student" answer those questions?

Were any of the questions not clear?

Was anything confusing?

How obvious was the overall structure of the class?

Were the connections between content chunks easy to see?

Could the "student" correctly identify the most important points in the material presented?

Did the "student" find the material interesting?

Was there anything that made it hard to listen?

To prepare for this role, the two colleagues might begin by observing the class of a third colleague—again in a field unfamiliar

to both. The same questions can be discussed by the observers. What often emerges is how the same example, question, activity, discussion affected efforts to understand in decidedly different ways. This can be an eloquent reminder of what Foisy (2008) observes: “Any given class is really many different classes—one for each student involved” (p. 8).

The evaluative atmosphere that surrounds teaching tends to make thinking about it very judgmental. Consequently, it is easy for colleagues to fall into a critique of the teaching observed. When the context is formative, critiques of what was observed can be useful, but the objective here is to change the perspective—to try to understand more deeply how the teaching is affecting efforts to learn. Descriptions will likely produce more insights than judgments.

Classroom observation isn’t the only option here either. Two colleagues (or more) might exchange syllabi and after a review share what they’d conclude about the course and its instructor based on the document. Here too, they might start by looking together at a syllabus from a course and instructor they don’t know. (Many examples can be found online.) If during the conversation a judgment is rendered—“I think this instructor is a stickler for details”—then the colleague who made the observation should point to specific aspects of the syllabus that convey this message. Colleagues could also look at each other’s texts and provide commentary about how they might appear to someone assigned to learn the material. The same insights can occur if the colleagues decide to learn something new together—say they take a jazzercise class, a short course on making brew, or a woodworking class. In this situation both colleagues are learners, and in addition to whatever interesting they might be learning, they can spend time talking about the process of learning it.

Obviously an instructor’s students can be asked to provide the feedback I’m suggesting colleagues share with each other. As noted

when this discussion began, faculty colleagues aren’t like most students—so why not just ask students? Let me offer several reasons. First, faculty colleagues tend to be more articulate, more thoughtful, and therefore are more likely to offer insights that enlarge understanding. Colleagues can also question each other in ways that students might find intimidating. Colleagues can persistently ask follow-up questions, and the teacher being questioned is much less likely to feel threatened than when a student pressures for details and justifications. It’s one of the benefits of being equal in a relationship and having colleagues with whom exchanges can be open and honest.

Losing the student perspective is something that happens to all of us. We reach a point when we no longer see how things look to a student. Colleagues can help each other regain that perspective. Also, when colleagues attend class as a student, or read a syllabus imagining that’s it introducing a course they’re taking, they will make discoveries about their own teaching as well as offering helpful insights. Austin (1991) says it eloquently: “Observation can be a mutual gift between the observer and the observed. Both stand to gain self-awareness, perspective, an introduction to new teaching techniques, and fresh enthusiasm for their craft” (p. 216).

Colleagues as Questioners

Relationships between colleagues take time to develop. As they explore issues and participate in different kinds of activities, colleagues discover the extent to which they can delve into topics deeply and openly. Taking the role of student is less risky than taking the role of questioner. But the colleague as student role provides a natural segue way to the role of questioner.

What I have in mind here are exchanges between rigorous interlocutors. In the beginning it might work best for colleagues to assume this role one at a time. The syllabus is a great place to start; questions can be asked about almost any part of it:

- What's the rationale behind your participation policy?
- Why no extra credit options?
- Why such a rigid policy on deadlines?
- Have you had lots of problems with talking in class previously?
- Does this strong statement about coming to class prepared cause students to show up having done the homework?
- Do students have the right to remain silent in your class?
- How did you come to decide on three exams for the course?
- Why isn't the final cumulative?
- How closely do you adhere to the course calendar?

Colleagues must go into these kind of conversations having discussed and agreed upon the goal beforehand. Otherwise, even though most teachers can handle some persistent questioning, if the inquiring gets too intense it may well engender defensiveness. Classroom policies and practices say much about who we are, and that makes it more difficult to separate the teacher from the policy. The point of a conversation like this is to unearth those assumptions that have become so ingrained in thinking that they are no longer part of conscious awareness—it's a way to facilitate the critical reflection called for in Chapter Two. Besides revealing assumptions, the goal is to ask questions that provoke thinking—more thinking, deeper thinking, perhaps even new thinking. The colleague interlocutor should be thought of as a semi-sharp stick that keeps prodding the colleague down, around, and through those mental pathways. Woodie Weimer (my intrepid beagle) doesn't particularly like how I keep her moving during our morning walk. She'd rather dawdle, exploring every scent of interest. But we are out for a walk—we both need the exercise. If I keep her moving, we cover more ground and get back in time for breakfast.

If the relationship between the colleagues doesn't feel ready for a conversation about "my" policies and practices, colleagues might try reading a provocative article, something like Spence's "The Case Against Teaching" (2001), Singham's "Death to the Syllabus" (2007), Newman's interesting book, *Teaching Defiance* (2006), or Nathan's amazing account of life as a student (2005). The conversation begins with each colleague stating whether or to what extent or with what parts they agree and disagree. The colleague interlocutor then asks questions about those positions but does not argue (as in point out that the colleague is wrong or not defending the position successfully).

Too much arguing sidetracks the objective of a conversation like this. Interlocutors use questions to help the respondent arrive at a clearer, deeper, or better understanding. They use lots of probing questions:

- Why do you do that?
- Why do you believe that?
- What has happened that makes you think that?
- Is there any empirical evidence that supports that?

One of the goals of these questions is to get the respondent to articulate reasons clearly. If something can be stated clearly, then the thinking behind it is likely clear as well. The "correctness" of the answer is something the individual teacher needs to grapple with. Colleagues can very effectively promote the kind of deep thinking and analysis necessary to decide if something does or doesn't facilitate student learning. They do that more effectively with questions than answers.

Colleagues as Critics

There is a developmental sequence to these roles and their accompanying activities. The colleague as critic is not the place to begin

when colleagues are just getting to know each other and explore the boundaries of their relationship. But when the collegial relationship is well established and constructive, this is the most valuable role in terms of instructional growth.

Very little, if any, growth comes of interactions in which colleagues agree with everything each other does. Every teacher needs someone (and colleagues can do this better than department chairs, students, or anybody else in the academy) who constructively disagrees, who says that they think a particular practice inhibits learning, or that a policy is excessive or that research evidence doesn't support an action. Every teacher needs a trusted colleague who will call it as he or she sees it—not in a general, amorphous way—"I'm not in favor of grading on the curve"—but in a constructive in-your-face way, "I think your grading policy makes it highly unlikely that students will learn with and from each other." Brookfield (1995, Chapter Seven) offers great advice on the conduct of these kinds of conversations.

As a profession we have yet to deal with instructional standards. We care deeply about content competence, but when it comes to teaching as close as we get are statements of "best practice." However, there has never been any expectation that teachers will use those practices deemed best, and there isn't much in the way of repercussions if a teacher does not. I'm not terribly optimistic about the profession dealing with standards during my lifetime, but I do believe one place to start is by having colleagues who constructively get into it with each other, taking each other on over those practices that questionably affect learning. Examples? Teaching that is mostly lecture, courses running over with content, grading on the curve, or otherwise creating highly competitive learning environments, evaluating learning in only one way (with a multiple-choice midterm and final, for example), deciding for a particular student that he or she doesn't belong in the major.

The needed critique may not be over one of these large-scale issues. I would guess that colleagues working together on teaching

are less likely to endorse and use practices that violate what is known about how students learn. But maybe the colleague refuses to use group work or doesn't accept electronic references, or writes hard to read and sometimes cryptic comments on papers, or calls on students in what looks like an intimidating way. Trusted colleagues ought to be able to call each on any instructional practice with the potential to compromise learning.

But what if the colleague makes a call and isn't right, or it's one of the many aspects of teaching for which there isn't a definitive right or wrong way of doing it? It does matter whether or not the colleague is "correct," but probably not as much as might be expected. The power comes from having a respected colleague who challenges some aspect of teaching. That the colleague objects should cause a serious examination of the practice, a careful consideration of the colleague's view and possible revision, just in case what the colleague thinks is correct.

An article recounting the experiences of several groups of English composition faculty who used teaching circles to structure conversations about teaching writing contains a participant (identified in the article as AS) comment that eloquently illustrates and sums the essence and value of this role for colleagues.

It took considerable self-conscious humility—not many academics' strong suit—to submit one's practices to peers and listen to their feedback. It also took considerable courage for members of TCs [Teaching Circles] to criticize each other's practices and hold fellow teachers, many of whom were just getting started with their teaching, up to high standards. When we could get that humility and courage together with some critical energy—and again, this did not happen every day in every teaching circle—the results were a terrific learning experience for everyone. I will always remember a colleague's comment in one teaching circle that we

need to uphold standards of teaching in the same way we uphold standards of scholarship, which means being willing to point out when certain practices just are not good enough. The purpose is not to rate other teachers or pedagogical theories, but to help instructors improve and teach more effectively. (Marshall, 2008, p. 420)

Colleagues as Advocates

In Chapter Nine I propose advocacy as a renewal activity for senior faculty. It's a role very much needed to advance the instructional issues most teachers care about deeply. Advocating for instructional causes is always more effectively done by groups than by individuals. Besides that, numbers afford some security. Those of us who came of age in the 1960s know (and hopefully can remember) the power of a protest to energize and build camaraderie.

The days of marches, sit-ins, and sign carrying are pretty much over and are not really an appropriate way to advocate for instructional issues. It's more about making statements in department meetings and the faculty senate, sending e-mails, writing letters, and speaking up when institutional policies and practices compromise the learning experiences of students and the teaching effectiveness of faculty. Chapter Nine includes a list of areas where advocacy is needed—most faculty who care about teaching can generate lists of their own. Given these tough economic times and the political milieu of the modern university, advocacy isn't always effective even when the cause is just. Even so, often the act of protest and speaking out is in and of itself enough. From it come feelings of pride for having done the right thing and a renewed sense of commitment to the classroom—that place where faculty do have the power to implement change.

Colleagues as Confidants

Many teachers are lucky enough to have colleague confidants—those colleagues who will listen to the joys and struggles that are

a part of every academic career. Whether it's a complaining or belligerent student, a new technique that went belly-up, an off-the-wall comment made on an end-of-course rating form, or colleagues in the department who bad-mouth teaching, it helps so much to talk through these kinds of issues. Colleague confidants listen, they commiserate, they comfort, they brainstorm solutions, they follow up, they share the joys and sorrows of teaching, they support in whatever way is needed at the moment.

Most teachers do not take as good care of their instructional health as they should—a point that is made more than once in the book. Pardon the gendered reference, but I think instructional health issues are more often ignored by male than female faculty members. Many of my male colleagues are reluctant to acknowledge to themselves, let alone share with someone else, that these affective aspects of teaching influence attitudes and actions in the classroom. There is room for teachers to share with confidants to different degrees and in different ways, but I still maintain that all teachers need at least one colleague with whom they can sort out and through the emotionally demanding aspects of teaching. To ignore these parts of teaching or to solve them alone makes staying instructionally vibrant all that more difficult. I can scratch my own back. I have a nice brass backscratcher, but it feels better when a person I love does it for me.

It is time to expand the number and scope of the roles colleagues fill for and with each other. The practice of using peer evaluators to make instructional observations and render judgments significantly diminishes what colleagues can do to keep each other instructionally alive and well. To move forward, faculty need to carefully select pedagogical colleagues and then explore those roles and activities that will sustain their commitments to teaching at the same time that they grow competence and improve learning outcomes.