Inspired College Teaching

A Career-Long Resource for Professional Growth

Maryellen Weimer

Maintaining Instructional Vitality: The Midcareer Challenge

Maintaining instructional vitality is one of many challenges faculty face during their midcareer years. There's promotion, keeping abreast of developments within the discipline, advancing technology, new research projects, program reviews, curricular developments, and changes in academic policies as well as academic leaders. Faculty alone do or don't take the actions necessary to keep themselves fresh and alive as teachers. No institution, no academic leader, no mentor or colleague can do it for a teacher. Other people can certainly help. In fact, for most of us the involvement of others is essential. Even so, instruction vitality remains an individual matter. Moreover, for most of us, instructional vitality doesn't just happen. It results from purposeful action, and, like a good marriage, even after years it still takes work.

The quest to stay alive and engaged instructionally starts early and lasts right up to the end of the career. What makes vitality a midcareer issue is that the best time to prevent tired teaching and burnout is during that long haul across the middle. The decisions faculty make and the actions they taken affect instructional health for the rest of their careers.

That some of the early excitement for teaching dies down is not unexpected. But for some faculty the once-hot passion for teaching diminishes to a few flickering flames. Sometimes the fire completely burns out. What happens that so dampens the zest and

optimism of new teachers? When does burnout start? How does it progress? Are stress and burnout related? What signs warn that this is more than the natural tiredness teaching causes? What actions can be taken to prevent tired teaching and burnout? Can lost passion for teaching be regained? How? These are some of the questions this chapter addresses.

Not everything in the chapter is cheery and optimistic. Academic life comes with vicissitudes that impede—even prevent—growth, but many faculty tend to ignore these negative influences. Waning instructional vitality cannot be dealt with unless its presence has been recognized. But once recognized, there are actions to take that can refresh teaching, maintain instructional vitality, and grow competence in the classroom still further. Throughout, the chapter demonstrates the importance of instructional vitality—to students and to how well they learn, but even more to teachers. Instructional vitality goes hand in hand with inspired teaching. If you have one, you're all but assured of having the other.

Recognizing Tired Teaching and Burnout

I characterize tired teaching this way: it lacks energy and is delivered without passion; it is easily offended by immature student behaviors; it favors the tried and true over innovation and change; it does the minimum, be that feedback to students, office hours, or the use of technology; it decries the value of professional development and manifests a kind of creeping cynicism about almost everything academic. Teacher burnout is simply an extreme form of tired teaching. Burned-out teachers go through the motions. I've heard them described as teaching machines, programmed to run for 50- or 75-minute intervals two or three times a week. These are teachers who no longer care—they may mouth the platitudes, but their actions disavow any commitment to teaching and learning processes.

The tired teaching of concern here is not that resulting from a long night spent grading papers or a semester with four different course preps. Both of those activities make teachers tired, but they are transitory events. This tiredness is that continued feeling of being drained, of plodding through the day, of never really wanting to go to class and regularly questioning whether it's worth the effort. I have a colleague, five years from retirement, who has one of those countdown clocks on his computer. It's the first thing he checks every day, and he can always tell you how many days are left—that's a sign of tired teaching.

Faculty respond to the symptoms of waning instructional vitality differently, but usually not very productively. Some simply ignore the signs, pretending that neglect will cure the problems or that exhaustion is endemic to the profession. Others see the symptoms as signs of weaknesses and blame their presence on students, the institution, or other convenient scapegoats. Pretty much across the board, the problems of tired teaching, even burnout, are quietly ignored by faculty members who experience them, by colleagues who see them happening, by the department in which they occur, and by the institution that often contributes to them.

Despite its importance, instructional vitality is not regularly explored in either the empirical or practitioner literature. I was unable to locate statistics documenting what percentage of faculty experience "tired teaching" or how often tired teaching leads to burnout. If you'd like to take an instrument to see if you are, don't expect to find one easily. Unlike the new faculty career stage, research on the midcareer years in general has been described as "far from robust, offering relatively few suggestions" that might guide faculty through this career stage (Baldwin, DeZure, Shaw, and Moretto, 2008). Given the propensity of the practitioner literature to offer advice on everything instructional, I was a bit surprised to find almost nothing on the topic of tiredness and burnout.

Despite the plethora of topics covered in professional development workshops, I don't think I've ever heard of a session on tired teaching (but then who'd want to be seen attending?) or on maintaining instructional vitality. The most extensive coverage of instructional vitality occurs in literature addressed to administrators; where the topic is identified as being important and administrators are admonished to provide supports that prevent its occurrence. I have read a couple of grim accounts written by burned-out teachers ("In the Basement of the Ivory Tower," 2008, and Smith, 2008). Even though both accounts are depressing, they offer compelling portraits of what burnout looks like. Because they are extreme examples, they can be easily dismissed. "I don't feel like that!" However, the complaints voiced by each author are regularly heard on most campuses. Also of value is how the accounts raise the questions we all need to consider: How in the world did each of these teachers arrive at this place? What path did they follow? What wrong turns led to this dismal end? In essence, what causes the loss of instructional vitality?

Exploring the Causes

The causes of tired teaching may be external, caused by forces outside the teacher, like the stress associated with academic positions or unhealthy institutional climates, or it can occur when teachers ignore teaching's emotional energy demands or when they think about teaching in certain growth-inhibiting ways. This list is not exhaustive but illustrative. These examples can develop the awareness needed to confront tired teaching and burnout.

Stress Associated with Academic Positions

The fact that academic positions are stressful has been well documented, beginning in the 1980s with a national survey of 400 U.S. academics, 60 percent of whom reported severe levels of stress at least 50 percent of time (Gmelch, Lovrich, and Wilke, 1984, and

Gmelch, Wilke, and Lovrich, 1986). In a 1994 study of 400 faculty within a state system (Blix, Cruise, Mitchell, and Blix, 1994), 66 percent reported perceiving stress at work 50 percent of the time. More recently, faculty in Hong Kong (Leung, Siu, and Spector, 2000) and the United Kingdom (Kinman and Jones, 2003) reported high levels of stress, and 75 percent of the U.K. cohort said that the amount of stress they were experiencing had increased over the past five years. New and midcareer faculty report higher levels of stress than do senior faculty, and women report stress levels higher than those of their male colleagues.

What is it about academic positions that cause stress? Some causes are consistently reported across studies—heavy workload, being undervalued, role ambiguity, the lack of feedback—all of which seem abstract and generic. The specific and vivid example well known to most faculty involves the competing demands of teaching well and being a productive scholar. Depending on the type of institution, the expected amounts vary, although expectations continue to increase without an accompanying decrease in teaching loads (Schuster and Finkelstein, 2006, Chapter Four).

The myth persists that faculty members can do it all—that some sort of symbiotic relationship exists between teaching and scholarship that allows one to feed the other. The myth persists even though the two require very different skill sets. For a cogent listing of both, see Prince, Felder, and Brent (2007), who say this in summary: "The primary goal of research is to advance knowledge while that of teaching is to develop and enhance abilities" (p. 283). A large collection of studies denies the existence of a reciprocally beneficial relationship between teaching and research. Several impressive meta-analyses (Feldman, 1987, and Hattie and Marsh, 1996) confirm that the two activities are not related. In a 2002 elaboration of their 1996 work, Marsh and Hattie conclude, "Based on 58 articles contributing 498 correlations, the overall correlation was 0.06. We searched for mediators and moderators

to this overall correlation with little success. The overall conclusion of a zero relation was found across: disciplines, various measures of research output . . . , various measures of teaching quality . . . , and different categories of university (liberal, research)" (p. 606).

Other research documents that the vast majority of faculty do not realize the ideal of excellence in both research and teaching. Fairweather's (1999) thorough and rigorous analysis puts the percentage at 10. "These results strongly suggest that the faculty member who simultaneously achieves above average levels of productivity in teaching and research—the complete faculty member—is rare. For most faculty, generating high numbers of student contact hours diminishes publication rates, and vice versa" (p. 93). Well before any of this empirical verification, Eble (1988) with his usual insight and cryptic style observed, "Research is about as compatible with undergraduate teaching as lions are with lambs. Only by one devouring the other are they likely to lie down comfortably side by side" (xiii).

But despite these research findings and the firsthand experience of countless faculty trying to do it all, expectations for high levels of productivity continue. In fact, researchers (Finkelstein, Seal, and Schuster, 1998), using data from a huge faculty cohort, found that "views about 'pressure to increase faculty workload at this institution' are uniformly bleak. Roughly half the faculty . . . report that the pressures have 'worsened' while fewer than 10 percent perceive that the situation has improved" (p. 95). Diminished productivity in either teaching or research translates into smaller raises, longer times to promotion, and much personal angst. Years of pressure do take their toll.

In identifying job stressors, typically faculty do not list teaching. Not having enough time to devote to teaching is a stressor, but work with students is more often listed as a source of job satisfaction. Nonetheless, the inability to cope with various work

demands leads to emotional exhaustion, reduced levels of productivity, and fewer accomplishments. Stress, particularly prolonged stress, does affect what happens in the classroom. Teachers without much vitality give less. They are more easily offended, less understanding of students, and less likely to greet student accomplishments with enthusiasm. Pushed for time, they are less willing to innovate. Guilt feelings about what they aren't doing in the classroom replace feelings of satisfaction about what is happening there. The stress associated with academic positions can sap the energy good teaching requires.

Unhealthy Institutional Environments

Besides experiencing the stress associated with academic positions, many faculty do not work in healthy institutional environments. In his studies of faculty well-being, Walker (2002) reports strong relationships between measures of faculty vitality and institutional health. When faculty report negative perceptions of their institutions, like those reported in one study of twenty midcareer faculty where respondents "found the university to be a cold, isolated, fragmented environment, 'a hard place to love,' 'a wilderness,' in which 'the human element seems to be missing'" (Karpiak, 2000, p. 128), it should cause concern. Unhealthy work environments directly affect the vitality of those working in them.

Unfortunately the characteristics of institutions that drain faculty vitality are multiple and widespread. Start with the number of academic leaders always on the move to a bigger and better place. If today's job is for building tomorrow's portfolio, then academic leaders are about collecting accomplishments and mollifying constituencies. With each new administrator arrives a new set of worthy initiatives that cannot be launched or sustained without considerable faculty effort. When the initiative's advocate moves on, programs started previously are abandoned or sidelined for the

launch of the new administrator's agenda. Experiences like these dampen faculty motivation to innovate and change, two of the best activities for maintaining instructional vitality.

Many faculty still find themselves in environments in which teaching is devalued. It is depressing that despite all the attention paid to teaching in recent years, all the calls for its reward and recognition, all the affirmations of its importance, the devaluing continues, starting with the pay stub. In 1994 Fairweather reported findings showing that the more faculty taught, they less they were paid. He repeated the study in 2005 and concluded, "Despite decade-long efforts to enhance the value of teaching in 4-year colleges and universities, this study shows that spending more time on teaching, particularly classroom instruction, still means lower pay. . . . The declining monetary value of classroom instruction across types of institution should give us all pause to consider the fit between our rhetoric about the value of teaching and the rewards actually accrued by faculty who teach the most. Especially troubling is the declining value of classroom teaching over time in teaching-oriented institutions" (p. 418).

The lack of financial reward is often accompanied with policies that faculty believe compromise their effectiveness—large classes, heavy teaching loads, no release time, multiple preps, destructive student rating policies, no clerical or staff support, classrooms on reduced maintenance schedules, classroom buildings in need of repairs, a hiring freeze, few supplies, and so on. Some of these realities exist because of severe fiscal restraints. Sometimes faculty are not as well apprised of these circumstances as they should be, and some (undoubtedly, just a few) are given to whining. The support provided for teaching and faculty perceptions of it can be on different pages. It behooves both faculty and administrators to separate facts from fiction because here the truth matters less than the perception. If faculty think their efforts in the classroom are not being supported, that affects their motivation and commitment.

Finally and regrettably, colleagues can be an energy drain on teachers. Chapter Five identified a variety of ways colleagues can support each other's instructional growth and well-being, but not all colleagues are good for teachers. Generally those who adversely influence others already have instructional vitality issues of their own. Their endless complaints about teaching, their derogatory remarks about students, their snide comments about good teachers, their staunch defense of traditional approaches, and their talk about how good things used to be when they were students and institutions upheld standards—talk like this does to the passion for teaching what cold water does for a fire.

And the problem isn't just with individual colleagues; many of them, say the majority in a department or even a particularly influential minority, can sap instructional vitality and sidetrack teachers. A lot of faculty don't function very productively in groups—they can disagree, debate, and deliberate unto death in department meetings. I remember feeling my hair grow gray in one meeting in which colleagues spent almost an hour arguing the respective merits of a classical versus modern painting for the division Web page. Endless exchanges over trivial issues increase frustration and add to an overall sense of tiredness and futility.

Other times interactions with colleagues are not so benign. Some faculty have been known to carry grudges for decades. Others feud openly, sabotaging policy initiatives with personal vendettas. When egos clash in a department, there is pressure to take sides, to form alliances, to defend turf or stake claims. Attempts to stay neutral can be misinterpreted as not caring. Again the toll is mostly emotional—energy that could be devoted to teaching and students is expended trying to navigate treacherous shoals.

Depleted instructional vitality is not the automatic consequence of working in less than healthy institutional environments. Some faculty manage relationships with their institutions productively. Others of us do not. We get frustrated, then furious. We get depressed, then disillusioned. We get tired, then exhausted. We

get skeptical, then cynical. It's disheartening to care about a place, to work hard to make it better and to have those efforts not make a difference. That failure raises questions about everything else. Does a commitment in the classroom really matter? Is it worth the effort? Faculty and their academic leaders should not underestimate how the quality of life at an institution affects the daily performance of teaching tasks and the likelihood of ongoing growth and development.

Failure to Recognize the Emotional Energy Teaching Demands

In addition to external factors, like the stress of academic positions and impact of unhealthy institutional environments, other factors, like the emotional demands of teaching, can make teachers tired and feel used up. Faculty tend to overlook or downplay these emotional demands. Academics are thinkers, objective problem solvers, critical analysts, and experts with highly specialized knowledge. It's not an environment that gives much credence to emotions. Historically, there has been little space for the affective domain in higher education.

An ongoing commitment to teaching cannot be powered by the intellect alone. Content knowledge and rational thinking don't get faculty through the daily grind of preparing for classes, going to class, grading homework, exams and papers, interacting with needy students, balancing the competing demands of teaching and research, serving on countless committees, and putting up with the political antics of colleagues. These parts of teaching and academic positions require emotional energy, not just every other year, but every semester, every course, every day. Unfortunately, the professional life of most academics offers few places and little time to address emotional needs, and as a consequence teachers get tired. But even with the gauge on empty, they push on, powered by fumes.

There is a mind-numbing sameness to parts of teaching's daily grind. Semesters start with the excitement of a new beginning,

followed by the routine of regular class meetings, then that first exam, followed by triumph or despair, assignments to grade accumulate, students need extra help, and finally there's that fatiguing race to get everything done before the semester ends. Teaching assignments tend to solidify with time. The basics of many beginning courses don't change and must be taught time and again. Students continue to make the same poor decisions about missing class, not doing assignments, and putting other priorities before learning. The repetition inures faculty to how much they recycle and how that repetition of content, assignments, and activities adds to the grinding sameness.

If faculty took their professional development seriously, they could constructively address these emotional demands of teaching. Do I need to document that few do? A survey (Olsen and Simmons, 1994) that relied on faculty self-report found that fewer than 25 percent reported reading books or articles on teaching, fewer than 20 percent reported that they attended workshops and seminars on teaching, and fewer than 10 percent asked colleagues to observe them teaching. Another survey by Quinn (1994) reports much the same results, although in this case all those surveyed were award-winning teachers. Morabito and Bennett (2006) surveyed criminal justice faculty who teach large classes, asking if they could "recommend any literature that had helped them instruct their large classes" (p. 118). Ninety percent "knew of no such literature." And, that is not because there is an absence of literature that addresses the challenges of large-class instruction (most recently, a great book by Heppner, 2007).

For too many faculty, professional development is a hit-and-miss affair that takes advantage of what's convenient, quick, and easy—an article shared electronically, a short workshop on test construction that includes a free lunch, or a quick conversation with a couple of colleagues about how to enforce a ban on cell phones in class. Should more be expected, given the absence of professional norms expecting the systematic growth and development of

teachers? Probably not, but the absence or very small presence of instructional development in the lives of teachers does increase the risk of tired teaching and burnout. Neglect compromises physical well-being; instructional health is no different.

Beliefs About Teaching That Inhibit Growth

How faculty think about teaching also has implications for instructional vitality. Chapter Seven identified a number of beliefs that direct new faculty away from career-long growth and development. During the midcareer, those initial orientations to teaching can morph into beliefs that stand squarely in the way of growth. Here are two examples.

From Learning to Teach Is Easy to There's Not Much of Consequence to Learn About Teaching

This not-much-to-learn belief becomes the catalyst for a number of related beliefs that pertain to the role of experience in developing instructional competence. Over time, most instructors learn how to handle teaching tasks with a certain ease. They know what questions students are likely to ask and how to answer. They know what questions to ask in order to gauge understanding. They have a repertoire of examples. They develop explanations that help students understand difficult material. Teachers do learn from experience.

However, two question need to be asked about the knowledge that grows out of experience. Does experience teach instructors everything they need to know? And, are the lessons learned through experience always the right ones? Writing about his own development as a teacher, Whetten (2007) explains with an anecdote. "One day at the driving range, I was demonstrating my swing while remarking, 'Practice makes perfect.' His [the golf instructor's] disarming response was, 'Only if you begin with a good swing. My

advice to you is to either stop practicing or change your swing.' In teaching, as in golf, repeating poor teaching mechanics can actually move us away from, not closer to, our performance objective of effective student learning" (p. 340). Most faculty have learned to teach without the benefit of a golf instructor observing and working with them on those first swings. They are self-taught. Yes, they have learned to play, and, yes, they play better than when they first started, but that doesn't always mean they play well.

Besides questioning the veracity of what has been learned experientially, there is the troubling tendency of teachers to hold on to experiential knowledge. Many of its lessons were learned in the school of hard knocks. That others do it differently, even do it better, is not necessarily persuasive. These lessons have served them well and allegiance to them is used to discount instructional innovations, even those with empirically documented results. Experience also emboldens faculty to challenge educational research. People in education "study" what those in the classroom "do." Doesn't it make more sense to learn while doing, rather than from those who observe, theorize, and then test hypotheses in contrived situations? Those who favor the experiential over the empirical are open to the possibility of learning from the experience of others, especially those others within the same discipline who teach the same course.

Beliefs about how much there is to learn about teaching exist along a continuum. Those who rely exclusively on experiential knowledge occupy an extreme position. However, any point along that continuum that diminishes what there is to be learned about teaching is harmful. Without an infusion of ideas and information from outside, without openness to other pedagogical methods, without recognition that education is a phenomenon that can be studied systematically and learned about endlessly, teaching stays put; it runs in place. Even my friends who are diligent about their

treadmills admit that running there is boring. They listen to music, watch TV, or in other ways keep their minds off the fact that they are on a fast track to nowhere. Is it any surprise that those who rely only or mostly on experiential lessons, who keep swinging even though the ball regularly lands in the rough, have less motivation and find fewer reasons to love the game?

Starting a career assuming that mastering the techniques of teaching is easy diminishes the value of teaching by trivializing its complexity. Continuing a career assuming that there is nothing beyond the lessons of experience divests teaching of so much that makes it sustainable across the years. Experience is a great teacher, but not when it's the only teacher. How much would any student learn if he spent thirty years in school with the same teacher?

From Content Is the Most Important Thing Taught to Nothing Matters Beyond Content

For some faculty, their love affair with content becomes an all-consuming passion during the midcareer years. Content becomes the measure a course's worth; the presence of lots of dense, complicated material enhances a course's reputation. A course's reputation for rigor is what makes students take that course seriously. They work harder, study more, and learn the most when the content is challenging. Hard courses test students' mettle. If they can't handle the material, better to find that out before they get serious about the major.

These views are also held to varying degrees, but the thinking is inherently flawed. Excessively hard courses are not taken more seriously by students. Research has shown that students do prefer courses that challenge them (as opposed to easy courses) but not if course challenges cannot be successfully met and mastered (Martin, Hands, Lancaster, Trytten, and Murphy, 2008). Students do learn more in courses that challenge them, but there is a point of diminishing returns.

Equating course worth and content has deleterious consequences for students, but it also stands in the way of growth and development for teachers. When courses are made better by adding more content, improvement efforts are more frustrating than satisfying. In most fields, content is growing exponentially while course length is not growing at all. Despite efforts to leave things out, so much still remains that faculty must race through the material, sprinting ever faster as the course comes to an end. Does teaching feel like a success when the course ends and only a few exhausted students follow the instructor across the finish line?

The content focus impedes growth by ignoring or barely reckoning with the process side of teaching. Thinking that only content matters is to imagine that the car is more important than the road. Both are essential, but for different reasons. Fancy cars with fast motors and great suspensions aren't much good on gravel roads peppered with potholes. *What* is taught and *how* it is taught are inextricably linked. However, despite this interdependence, developing one doesn't automatically improve how the other functions. In fact, development of one only accentuates the lack of development in the other. It results in teachers with sophisticated levels of knowledge but simplistic methods of conveying that material. Instructional methods can compromise teaching effectiveness, regardless of how much or how well the teacher knows the content.

Being able to marry methods and content requires an intimate and sophisticated knowledge of both. Some kinds of content are best taught by example, some by experience. Other kinds are best understood when discussed and worked on collaboratively. Other kinds need individual reflection and analysis. Besides these demands arising out of content structure, there are the learning needs of individual students, which vary across many dimensions.

If content and process are not well matched and the instruction is less effective, content-oriented teachers usually do not blame

themselves. No, it's the students' fault. They aren't bright enough. They don't study enough. They don't deserve to be professionals in this field. Teachers are very good at getting themselves and their content off the hook. But those who teach courses in which large numbers of students fail or do poorly are not the ones making lots of positive statements about teaching. More often they tend to be those who sound cynical and defensive, the ones who make a lot of smoke because there isn't much fire.

The best teachers are not always those with the most sophisticated content knowledge. The best teachers do know their material but they also know a lot about the process. They have at their disposal a repertoire of instructional methods, strategies, and approaches—a collection that they continually grow, just as they develop their content knowledge. They are teachers who know that content is one of many things they teach students.

What About Your Instructional Vitality?

Most teachers have not seriously confronted themselves with questions about their instructional growth or lack of it. Most do acknowledge the presence of burnout within the profession, but admitting that instructional vitality a personal problem is more difficult. Would understanding that tired teaching is not a sign of personal weakness or pedagogical incompetence make the reckoning easier? Tired teaching needs to be thought of as an occupational hazard—something contagious to which every teacher is exposed.

> Is your energy in the classroom and with students less than it should be?
>
> How long has it been since you have changed the syllabus for that frequently taught course?

> How much of your conversation with colleagues focuses on complaints about students?
>
> Are your feelings about the institution and its academic leaders full of hope or despair?
>
> How regularly does procrastination prevent your delivering timely feedback to students?
>
> How long since you've revamped a set of course assignments?
>
> Do you greet instructional innovations, new curricular programs, and assessment initiatives with interest and enthusiasm?
>
> Are student rating results met with action or complaints?
>
> If a new colleague asks for advice on teaching, how much of your response is positive?
>
> Does the absence of students during office hours feel like a blessing?

One troubling response, even several of them, may not be indicative of a problem. Nonetheless, the questions do poke at realities that bespeak larger issues. To what extent has teaching become about carrying on in comfortable—if not comfortable, then convenient—ruts, going through the motions, finding less fulfillment in the classroom and from encounters with students? Is the passion still there, or has teaching become a job with its semester breaks being the most anticipated part?

Farber (2008) writes insightfully about "teaching presence," which he does not equate with a sense of poise or self-confidence. Rather, it is about being "fully present. Without presence, teachers are like guides in a theme park who tell the same joke a dozen times a day. We're there, but we're not there" (p. 215). He writes that it is challenging for teachers to always be present, that it's easy to go through the motions, relying on what we've done before.

Even a stimulating set of questions lose their edge after two or three semesters. You know the questions and you've already heard most of the answers. You don't need to remake everything every semester, but you do need enough energy to make the most of what happens in every class session, to respond to where students are on that day, even though the content may have been taught a hundred times before. Being present day after day isn't easy, but only being there part time is another sign of waning instructional vitality.

I encourage you to take stock of your instructional vitality now and regularly hereafter. Teaching gets tired by degrees. The signs are subtle, easily ignored or rationalized. Even if your teaching is just a little tired, that merits your attention now. Ignoring the symptoms does not cause them to go away—generally it makes them worse. "Faculty vitality is best preserved through preventive measures rather than heroic measures to save 'stagnant' or 'stuck' faculty" (Bland and Bergquist, 1997, p. 83).

Ways to Refresh Teaching and Maintain Instructional Vitality

There are ways to refresh teaching, even ways back from burnout; this section of the chapter offers a collection of them. Not all the actions proposed are quick and easy. They do involve work, but you can manage the amount. As with exercise, getting back into shape is generally harder than staying there. Maintaining instructional vitality still takes work, but once into a routine, a lot of the required actions become automatic.

Dealing with Stress and Unhealthy Institutional Environments

If external sources, like academic leadership, colleagues, departmental politics, institutional culture, are sapping your instructional vitality, you start by recognizing they're draining energy you need for teaching. If committee work is frustrating beyond belief

or just plain causes despair, it should be avoided. Service responsibilities are part of the job. But at most colleges and universities, opportunities for service abound, including many options that don't involve committee work. If your colleagues are instructionally depressed, hang out with others who are committed to teaching, be they in other departments or at other institutions. Not all the external sources that drain teachers are as easily avoided. If five courses is the standard teaching load, that's how much teaching is expected, although at some places courses can be traded for administrative work, like overseeing an internship program or chairing a curricular review committee. In most cases these administrative tasks are not less work, but they are different from teaching classes and may offer a refreshing change.

Faculty need to recognize the importance of institutional fit, a topic raised in Chapter Six. Not every teacher is cut out to teach eighteen-year-olds who lack educational purpose and are marginally prepared for college. Not every teacher is cut out to be continually pulled by the competing demands of teaching and research. Not every teacher is cut out to handle a steady diet of classes enrolling more than a hundred students. Clearly, the best time to figure this out is at the beginning of a career. But many of us don't make the discovery until later, when it is much more difficult to move. In my next life I will definitely be a professor but I will not teach at a research university (something I should have figured out sooner in this life). For faculty committed to teaching, those are very difficult places to stay focused and fresh in the classroom.

If the institutional fit is not good, the best solution is to move. If moving isn't an option, then it's about facing reality. Boundless energy should not be expended trying to change what cannot be changed. It took me years to realize that no amount of commitment to teaching can change the culture of a research university. Round pegs have contributions to make, but filling square holes is not among them.

The Power of Change

Another sure remedy for tired teaching and declining instructional vitality is change. A regular amount does for teaching exactly what exercise does to improve overall health. Change is equally effective at promoting growth. And change is always possible for college teachers. There are new courses to teach, new texts to adopt, new technologies to employ, new curricular initiatives to launch or join, new strategies and techniques to implement, new colleagues to mentor, and an every-ready supply of new students for whom having something different happening in a course is often a welcome relief. Chapter Six explores the dynamics of change—how to change, how fast to change, as well as a host of other relevant issues.

When the teaching is very tired or the teacher is burned out, change is easily avoided or endlessly put off because it looks like more work and when you're tired, more work is precisely what you don't want. However, some changes are not that much work, and successful change usually motivates more change. The trick is getting the change process started. The tack taken in this book is to characterize the process, both at the discovery stage (Chapter Two) and the implementation stage (Chapter Six) as positive, interesting endeavors. Standing behind these calls for change is the power of change to uplift and refresh what has grown tired. Just like the rain cleans and makes leaves once more brightly green, so change dusts off teaching making it sparkle once more with power and possibility.

The Role of New Ideas

Instructional vitality thrives on the regular infusion of new ideas. There is so much to learn about teaching and learning, and this is learning that can be applied! Regular pedagogical reading ought to be a part of every teacher's life. (I know, it's a point that's been

made several times already.) New ideas, insights, and information can also come from colleagues, as described in Chapter Five. Professional development activities (like those sponsored by teaching centers) are yet another source of new ideas. Much about can teaching can be learned in a group setting when the discussion is informed, stimulating, and provocative. The chance to sit with colleagues and contemplate what there is often little time to consider replenishes depleted reserves and reignites the commitment to teaching.

Unfortunately, in too many academic environments, ideas and information about teaching are not everywhere to be gleaned. Most faculty bookshelves do not hold recent books on teaching and learning. Most campus e-mail exchanges do not substantively address teaching-learning topics. Most college libraries do not subscribe to many pedagogical periodicals—understandably, because few faculty read them. Most departmental meetings do not regularly include discussions of timely teaching topics. Professional development events happen less frequently than they should. Yes, there are exceptions. The point is simply that for most faculty the regularly needed fill-up of new ideas is not as easy as stopping by the neighborhood gas station. Instructional vitality is something teachers maintain intentionally. But the search for new ideas and information is well worth the effort once you understand how much they contribute to instructional vitality.

Conceptions That Help Teachers Grow

The growth and development of college teachers has been of interest to educational theorists and researchers for some time; Fox (1983) and Grow (1991) offer early analyses. More recently, researchers, interviewing diverse cohorts of faculty, have identified a number of different teaching conceptions that can be place on a continuum (Kember, 1997, reviews and analyzes thirteen of these early studies; Samuelowicz and Bain, 2001,

summarize the work in table form, making the conceptions easy to compare).

A teaching conception (also called a "perspective"), defined by Pratt (2002) as "an interrelated set of beliefs and intentions that gives direction and justification to our actions" (p. 6), is important because what faculty believe about teaching affects how they teach. That beliefs affect behavior may seem obvious and not worth research effort, but in the case of teaching, conceptions affect not just what the teacher does but how the students learn. The work that first supported this finding was been done by Kember (see Gow and Kember, 1993, and Kember and Gow, 1994. More recent confirmation is reviewed in Trigwell and Prosser, 2004.)

A brief summary of two sets of conceptions make clear how they influence teacher growth and vitality. Biggs (1999) proposes three levels of development. At level one, teaching (by lecture) is held constant and differences in learning are explained by student ability and motivation. The teacher expounds the content that students absorb. If a student fails, fault lies with the student, not the teacher. At level two, the concern moves to teaching methods, motivated by a recognition that some teaching methods promote learning better than others. At level two, if learning does not occur, fault lies with the teacher and teaching methods selected. Finally, at level three, teaching supports learning, which is now seen as the central activity. Teachers work to facilitate learning that equates with understanding, a knowledge that extends beyond having a command of the facts.

In Akerlind's research (2003), four points along the continuum are differentiated. Starting with the simple conceptions, there is the *teacher transmission-focused* category, in which the teacher's primary aim is to cover material. Students absorb this material in a passive way. The next category is *teacher-student relations focused*, with an emphasis on developing good relations with students. The teacher wants students to respond favorably to the teaching and aspires to teach in ways that motivate students. The category is

followed by the *student engagement-focused* category. The aim here is to get students engaged with course material so that students are enthusiastic and motivated to study. "There is greater focus on the student in terms of what they are doing, rather than the teacher and the students' reactions to the teacher" (p. 384). The final category is *student learning focused*. At this point the teaching aims to "encourage students to think critically and originally, to question existing knowledge, explore new ideas, see new dimensions and become independent learners" (p. 385).

How early conceptions are formed and how later ones evolve is not yet completely understood. Kember (1997) credits their formation to "some complex amalgam of influences such as experiences as a student, departmental and institutional ethos, conventions of the discipline and even the nature of the classroom" (p. 271). Researchers agree, though, that most teachers are not consciously aware of these conceptions. Pratt (1998) call them the "lens" though which the world of teaching and learning are viewed (p. 33). Just as the lenses in a pair of glasses influence the view of everything, those of us who wear glasses don't notice the effects until the glasses are removed. As Pratt (2002, p. 6) notes, we are used to looking through, not at, the lenses.

Do these conceptions grow in complexity automatically as careers progress? Trigwell and Prosser (2004) say no, and those of us who have worked with faculty at different career stages have seen many mid- and senior career faculty who basically transfer information—they may have moved a bit in the direction of engaging students, but that's because they want an attentive audience.

The idea of a developmental trajectory presents teachers with interesting possibilities for growth. Trigwell and Prosser's (2004) inventory, highlighted in Chapter Five, can offer some insight as to where you might be on the developmental continuum. Pratt (1998) sees the discovery of other perspectives as a way of understanding the conception of teaching currently held. "If we know

only one perspective on teaching, it will dominate our perceptions and interpretations of all that goes on, yet remain hidden from view. Just as the world above the pond is invisible to a fish, so too are other perspectives invisible to those who only know one perspective on teaching" (p. 34).

The more complex conceptions of teaching contribute to growth and instructional longevity because they add such intellectual richness to teaching. Now teaching is not just a function of content knowledge but an endeavor that begins with what students know and works to design learning activities that enlarge, in some cases revise, but always deepen student understanding. As students engage in these learning activities, teachers are there to assess their progress, intervening when the resources and experiences of an expert can expedite the process. Here the effects of teaching on learning can be seen in much more detail. The influence of the teacher is more telling—the instructional challenges are larger. This is not an easier way to teach, but it is teaching more likely to result in transformative learning, for students and their teachers.

Less complex conceptions are more deterministic and fixed with the teaching less connected to the learning. Because they focus more on the teacher, less complex conceptions make it easier for teachers to get sidetracked in some very counterproductive ways. For example, teachers can become so infatuated with the teaching that it becomes an end in and of itself. They work to develop unique, eclectic, some times dramatic teaching styles. Some become great performers. What they do in the classroom commands students' attention and respect. Their classes are highly enrolled and well attended. Students recount their teaching feats, sing their praises, nominate them for teaching awards, and worshipfully walk after them. Students do learn from these teachers—some learn a lot—but teaching in its purest form is about learning and students, not what the performance in the classroom does for the teacher: how it feels to entertain the masses, to impress

students with eloquence, erudition, and a command of esoteric facts, or to have followers and a daily diet of praise. Sadly, teachers can get addicted to this kind of teaching life, and often students do not recognize that these teachers have taken what is an other-directed activity and made it self-directed. This kind of instructional narcissism violates the fundamental purpose of teaching.

In sum then, much about teaching stays the same during the midcareer years. Semester follows semester, the same courses are taught again and again, students come and go, colleagues stay the same. No matter how familiar the content, good teaching requires effort and energy every semester. Teaching can be sabotaged by the environment when these efforts are not recognized or rewarded, when the workload always increases, when leadership is ineffective and political issues petty. Working in most academic environments today means exposure to energy-draining factors. Instructional vitality is also harder to maintain when teachers' conceptions of and beliefs about teaching are less complex and not focused on learning. But as we've seen, once recognized and acknowledged, what makes teaching tired can be addressed in a variety of different ways.

In summary, this chapter is about three paths through the midcareer: one of declining effectiveness, in which burnout robs a teacher of joy and vitality; one in which teaching stays the same or drifts without purpose; and one of growth, in which teaching keeps changing, interacting with learning in more complex ways, and providing inspiration and satisfaction. As teachers, we choose which path to take. It's not one of those once-and-for-all decisions but a choice made many times. You can choose to take a different path or choose to more diligently pursue the path you're on. Orientations to teaching grounded on its rich potential and inherent complexity offer teachers the opportunity to grow, not for a day or a year, but from the career's beginning to its end, including that long stretch in the middle.

If I were to do my career over, I would take better care of my instructional health. I beat my head too long against walls that didn't give. Disheartened, I became disillusioned and cynical. I never lost my love of teaching, but I struggled to stay alive in the classroom. At the first possible opportunity I retired—before I was ready to quit working but well after being seriously infected with institutional burnout. Writing this book is part of my healing process. Given another career in academe, I would do better.

9

The Journey Continues: Senior Faculty

Are there compelling reasons to work toward even higher levels of instructional vitality as one's faculty career winds down? At first glance, the reasons not to may look compelling. A new textbook means lots of new prep work—so does putting the quizzes online. With only a couple of years left, is it worth fussing about a policy change that ups the class size of introductory courses? Is there enough time to reap the benefits of all the work required to design a learning community? So assignments for students stay the same for yet another year; will anybody know or care?

Maintaining the status quo can look like a viable option, but most faculty do not find stagnation a very satisfying alternative. They tell stores about better times and remember when they were more engaged with teaching—at least that's what Karpiak (2000) found. Some of the senior faculty she surveyed described themselves "in a 'holding pattern,' more driftwood than deadwood, and hopeful for some change so that they can use what they have learned and 'ride that wave again'" (p. 132).

In some ways the task of keeping teaching fresh and invigorated is a bit easier for seniors, despite problems they may have with motivation. The three activities explored in this chapter—advocacy, mentoring, and instructional risk taking—are ones senior faculty are uniquely qualified to undertake. They are also activities of value to the institution, fellow faculty members, and students. Most important though, they give senior faculty the kind of lift

that refreshes teaching, makes use of the lessons learned, and lets faculty still be on the way when they arrive at the end.

But as we've found with career stages, although seniors are uniquely qualified and may benefit the most by undertaking these activities, they are not activities that only seniors can execute and benefit from doing. This chapter, like the previous two, contains content not just for those on the far side of their careers.

Does Teaching Effectiveness Decline?

Before exploring activities that have the potential to invigorate and improve the instructional practice of senior faculty, we must ask whether or not teaching effectiveness declines during the final career stage. Research results are mixed. An early study (Cornwell, 1974) found that age accounted for only 6 percent of the variance in student ratings. Those findings were disputed by a longitudinal study of psychology faculty (Horner, Murray, and Rushton, 1989) in which an overall negative correlation of .33 was found to exist between age and general teaching effectiveness. After reviewing these studies and others, Bland and Bergquist (1997), in a research report on senior faculty, come to this conclusion: "In summary, no studies found a large negative association between a faculty member's age and effective teaching. If a negative effect exists, it is small. It is clear, however, that senior faculty are interested in, committed to, and devote significant time to teaching" (p. 31). Corroborating that conclusion, a 1993 study of 111 New Jersey faculty all older than forty-five and all with at least fifteen years of full-time teaching (side note: the "senior" age category is defined variously by researchers) found that "the overwhelming majority enjoy teaching and care a great deal about student learning" (LaCelle-Peterson and Finkelstein, 1993, p. 25).

The New Jersey study did find, however, that these senior faculty reported that in the normal course of a semester they found little opportunity to formally .or informally focus on teaching.

"Without periodic opportunities to revitalize their professional lives generally and their teaching lives in particular, faculty members report that their 'teaching vitality' tends to slip" (p. 24). And although this source repeatedly recommends institutional support for senior teachers, another study of current and planned programs for senior faculty at eighty research universities found that only a bit more than 10 percent reported having a program for senior renewal, and only another 10 percent were planning to initiate such a program (Crawley, 1995). Findings here confirm points made previously: instructional health and vitality is the responsibility of individual faculty, and seniors, like midcareer and new faculty, can expect to have to do so when they are pressed for time and working in environments not always supportive of their professional development efforts.

However, all the activities advocated in this chapter can be done to varying degrees, and they need not all be done at once. Given personal style and interest, faculty may find some more appealing than others. Chapter Six's discussion of change choices and how faculty need to make good ones is relevant here. Decisions about which activities should reflect a growing faculty awareness of who they are as teachers weighed against how much an activity will contribute to instructional vitality. Which of these or other activities stand the best chance of making the last years the most exciting and rewarding part of the teaching journey?

Instructional Advocacy

Whether protected by tenure or simple longevity, senior faculty (and certainly some midcareer faculty) can advocate for instructional causes that faculty not yet tenured, promoted, or contractually secure may find more risky to tackle. With longevity comes the freedom to say what needs to be said, to point out what's broken and needs to be fixed, and to be outspoken about policies and practices that undermine the efforts of teachers and students

in the classroom. In addition to being able to speak forthrightly, most seniors have acquired at least some wisdom about change. Junior faculty think they can rebuild Rome in a semester (two at the most). Senior faculty are more sanguine. If they do go out on a limb and advocate for change and then it happens slowly, to a smaller degree than needed or not at all, they are less likely to despair and need antidepressants. They understand that colleges and universities move with glacial speed even in this season of global warming.

As for what needs advocacy, that depends on the institution and the particular passions of the advocate. There is no shortage of potential issues. Perhaps those issues high on my list will provoke those of you considering advocacy to make your own lists.

Better Experiences for First-Year Teachers

Most institutions have directed considerable attention to the experiences of first-year students. These students are offered transition to college courses, first-year seminars, learning communities, linked or clustered courses, and service learning opportunities. Corresponding attention has not been paid to those first college teaching experiences. Oh, there might be an orientation during that hectic time just before the semester begins, maybe even a series of meetings across the first semester or year, or an assigned mentor, but beyond these professional development needs, little else about first-year teaching experiences has been addressed.

What should the first-year teaching assignment look like? How many different preps is the absolute maximum for that first year? What class sizes are appropriate? Should beginning teachers be learning the ropes while teaching large, required, survey courses? Should student ratings be collected in every course, and should those first evaluations become part of the new teacher's permanent record? How appropriate for a senior faculty member or group of them to articulate a "first-year bill of rights" that sets out what

every beginning teacher has a right to expect the first year they teach at an institution.

Better Treatment for Part-Time and Contract Renewable Faculty

Although faculty do not respond to the increased number of these positions with enthusiasm (and with some justification), given current economic conditions, most institutions simply cannot pass up the financial incentives to use part-timers and fixed-term appointees. As Gappa, Austin, and Trice (2007) point out, those in untenured positions are not always treated well by the institution or their tenured faculty colleagues despite the fact that students pay the same tuition price for courses taught by these faculty. Interestingly, a study at one institution also found no statistically significant differences between course evaluation received or grades given by full and part-time faculty (Landrum, 2008).

Faculty may need to object when tenure-track positions are replaced with contract renewable ones, but they need to support the instructional efforts of the teachers who fill those part-time and fixed-term positions. Those college teachers need less-vulnerable advocates who can speak for them on salary issues, work environment (like office space), and instructional resources (like computer access). They need mentors who can acquaint them with the culture of an institution, characteristics of its students, and history of the courses they are assigned to teach. If they are brand-new college teachers, they need the same instructional supports given tenure-track faculty new to teaching.

Substantive and Meaningful Teaching Awards

I have been on a kick about teaching awards for many years now. Why should teachers up for the awards have to assemble materials and make the case for themselves? Is this even ethical, to say nothing of how accurately the teaching may or may not be portrayed by a teacher who wants to win the award?

Who wins the awards? Teachers with showy styles or teachers who quietly promote the learning of individual students? The question asks about the criteria being used to select award recipients. An analysis of 144 teaching awards (Chism, 2006) found that, for a little more than half, there were no criteria or nothing more than a global statement referencing teaching excellence being used. And when criteria were stated, Chism discovered a decided disconnect between them and the evidence collected—so awards using organization as a criterion did not use teaching artifacts like syllabi to assess course coherence. Absent or abstract criteria make it easier to manipulate these awards so that they can be used to accomplish other objectives. For example, a collection of award recipients can make a faculty look way more diverse and gender balanced than they are in reality.

Stipends that accompany these awards pale in comparison to even a small salary increase awarded for a good year of scholarly productivity. I have never forgotten a statistic I read some years ago. Kimball (1988) compared a $1,000 teaching award (the passing years haven't changed stipend amounts much) with a 4 percent salary increment awarded for scholarly productivity and calculated that at the end of twenty years the salary increment was worth twenty-four times more than the teaching award, assuming both were put into savings.

How appropriate for a senior faculty member or group of them (like those who've won awards) to undertake an analysis of the institution's teaching award, looking at the nomination process, selection criteria, award recipients, as well as stipend amounts and the way faculty recipients are recognized. There are alternatives, including some very creative ones.

More Humane and Empirically Defensible Evaluation Policies and Practices

Chapter Three makes the case on this topic. What a travesty that so much is known about evaluating instruction and so little of that knowledge affects practice. Advocacy here might focus on

clear distinctions between formative and summative evaluations, use of reliable and valid instruments, time off for midcareer faculty who want to do a complete course revamp, a more constructive role for peer observation, and administrative practices that recognize instructional effectiveness needs to be assessed with more than overall scores on a rating form.

How appropriate for senior faculty to become even modestly informed on ratings so that inappropriate policies and practices can be challenged and more constructive approaches advocated. Ratings are not measures of popularity, and the advocacy is not about abolishing them. Teachers need to be accountable for the quality of instruction delivered—that's part of valuing teaching and treating it as a profession. But most institutions could be doing much better and senior faculty could play an important role in identifying what needs to change and how. To leave the institution having contributed to a more constructive and viable set of student rating policies and practices—now that's a satisfying legacy.

Myth Busting on a Wide Range of Topics

Any number of beliefs about teaching and learning, some widely believed, are only half true or just plain untrue. Here a few of the ones tackled in this book:

1. Content is more important than anything else taught.

2. The way to win at the ratings game is to teach a Mickey Mouse course.

3. Any faculty member can be an effective teacher and productive scholar simultaneously.

4. The harder the course, the more students learn.

5. If teachers don't take control of the classroom, students will behave badly.

6. Experiential knowledge is the only pedagogical knowledge teachers need.

Effective myth busters are informed with more than opinions. They come with evidence in hand. But any informed faculty member who goes after these part-truths and falsehoods can instigate the kind of talk about teaching and learning that should be the norm at institutions and within departments. Obviously, myth busters don't always win popularity contests, but some things believed about teaching and learning need to be challenged.

Although wisdom about institutional change comes with longevity, effective advocacy skills don't develop automatically. They may need to be cultivated; certainly they should be reviewed if advocates aim to be successful and if advocacy is to be a personally positive and invigorating experience. Many advocacy skills are based on common sense, like the need for advocates to pick their battles—not to imagine that everything wrong with education can be changed through the efforts of one advocate. Some single leaders and solitary voices have changed the world, but most advocates do not end up having that kind of impact.

The chance for advocacy to make a difference and be personally enriching is greatly increased if it avoids the personal—even the generic personal. Faculty love to decry administrative travesties amorphously. The administration is made up of people. They identify with the title "administrator," which means a tirade against "the administration" can be personal. Advocacy should focus on policies. It should unabashedly be about what's needed for better teaching and more learning. Even so, advocacy also needs to be flexible and realistic. Colleges and universities aren't going to be in business long if class sizes are reduced to less than five and faculty have a semester off for every new course prep. Flexibility is about compromise—the wisdom to see that some progress is better than none, that a little movement forward is better than staying in the same place or slipping backward.

And finally, despite the gifts of age—things like thick skin and a gritty tenacity—advocates can still be hurt, disillusioned, and made to despair, which is why the decision to advocate should not be made lightly. If previous battles resulted in wounds slow to heal, is there any reason to risk the chance of being wounded again? Along with the potential for personal pain, advocacy also offers the potential to reenergize. Arguing for something, advancing a cause only increases the level of concern felt for the issue. Caring, being concerned, believing in something strongly—that can pump new blood in tired veins and cause energy levels to surge. For teachers who've started thinking about being old, tired, and used up, advocacy can melt those feelings like warm sun deals with old snow.

Many of us faculty now in the senior cohort came of age during the 1960s. We went to college during an era when students carried signs and protested against pretty much everything. We have grown up and put our signs away, but not always our spirit of confrontation. However, advocacy need not always occur in a loud voice from a public platform. Sometimes the voice of reason is more persuasive; the ability to oil troubled waters more productive of change. Here advocacy and mentoring start to overlap—sometimes they become one as a senior faculty member quietly works with an overly zealous academic dean or senate chair about storming the Bastille with a new policy on grade inflation.

Mentoring

Mentoring activities benefit the mentor as much as the mentee for a variety of reasons. Mentoring gives the mentor the opportunity to share insights, answer questions, and offer advice. The questions asked of a mentor, even the preparation of the advice to be offered, can prompt reflection and stimulate thought. It's a chance to tell stories of past conquests (and defeats, if the mentor is honest). It feels good to be looked to for answers and respected for experience. It is also rewarding to offer advice that others find helpful. Sometimes the passion and zest of a new faculty member can relight the fire in a teacher who hasn't burned hot in the classroom

for some time. For senior and otherwise experienced faculty, there are all sorts of good reasons to mentor. Mentoring is, after all, the best kind of teaching. It lets teachers bring content to students who want to learn and who show respect for their teachers.

Senior faculty are frequently called upon to mentor those new to teaching and an institution. Sometimes this takes place in the context of formal mentoring programs, where mentors and mentees are assigned to each other and participate in a designated set of activities. The quality of these programs and the experiences they provide vary.

Mentoring can also occur independently of any formal structure or program. It can be something a faculty member decides to do on his of her own. In fact, sometimes when the mentor is in charge of the "program" she can design it so that there is even more personal benefit. In this case, the mentor can select those with whom to establish relationships. The mentoring happens more naturally—it isn't forced and can be cultivated. If nothing grows, the mentor simply moves on to others. Mentor and mentee have the freedom to define the relationship in ways that make sense to them. It may be a short exchange over a specific issue or something that evolves into a friendship that lasts years. Mentoring relationships defined by the individuals involved often stand a better chance of achieving the traditional goals of mentoring. "The mentoring relationship is one that provides an environment that supports adults while they continue to learn and develop themselves. It is a supportive environment that allows closeness and distance and recognizes the similarity as well as the individuality of both the mentor and the protégé" (Otto, 1994, p. 16).

Traditionally in academe, mentoring relationships connect junior and senior faculty, but when teaching and learning are the agenda, senior faculty can join just as easily midcareer faculty, say over a course the senior has experience teaching that is a new prep for the midcareer person. Most certainly part-time instructors and those who have fixed-term appointments can benefit from the

counsel of someone who knows the institution, its programs, policies, and students. From our faculty development experience of the past thirty years we have learned that when the topics are instructional, it can be beneficial to connect with someone from another discipline. Many of the challenges that face instructors who teach large courses transcend disciplines; learning a new instructional method, say problem-based learning, can be supported by a teacher in any discipline who has experience with the approach. Senior faculty can also profitably connect with new academic administrators who might benefit from knowing a bit about the place's pedagogical history. And always there is a need for mentoring students, especially those seniors in the major. In other words, for the senior faculty member who opts to mentor, the possibilities abound, many beyond traditional combination of junior and senior faculty.

Whether it's mentoring a new faculty member, a peer with less experience in a particular area, or a department head, understanding certain principles can make mentoring relationships more effective and more likely to boost the instructional vitality benefits for the mentor. First, there is the balance of power issue and the fact that it is not equal in a mentor-mentee relationship. In that respect it resembles the teacher-student relationship. One is there ready, able, and needing to learn (mentees more often than students, I think). The other is there having already learned and with wisdom to share. But teachers are not all knowing, and neither are mentors. They do have some of the answers and know where to find others, but there are still questions they can't answer and others they should be asking. Mentors are much less effective when they opt for the role of answer "man" (person is the more gender-neutral alternative but it doesn't convey the intended meaning quite as well). Unfortunately, this is often the tone taken in much of the literature written for new faculty, as noted in Chapter Seven. In contrast, mentoring relationships should be characterized by the tentative and honest way the mentor approaches what

is and isn't known; what is fact and opinion; and what is believed and what is true.

Because the balance of power favors the mentor, good mentors take the initiative. They reach out and don't wait for those needing advice and counsel to come to them. They are proactive; they volunteer to help. Most senior faculty members don't think of themselves as intimidating or exceptionally knowledgeable (especially about teaching), so it's easy to sit in the office and wonder why those with questions don't show up. Often they don't because they are afraid or reluctant to bother the respected full professor with what may seem like trivial issues. Will the senior faculty member think it's stupid that the newcomer can't seem to fend off student excuses? Being willing to share the questions, mistakes, and trials that plagued you early on can do much to prompt the mentee to ask what he really needs to know.

Mentors can offer help in very creative ways. I once worked with a group of new faculty who repeatedly told me about a senior faculty member who had stopped by their offices, introduced himself, and handed them a letter. He said it was a letter he wished someone had given him when he first started teaching. Each letter was personally addressed, contained lots of good advice, and included a P.S. about being happy to take the newcomer for coffee someday. The mentor can use creative approaches to generate interesting exchanges about teaching; "hypothetical" stories about other forever anonymous teachers, discussion of teachers in movies or books, or disclosing the ways I most want my teaching to change in the next five years, for example. There are creative in the ways messages about teaching can be conveyed. I know a mentor who sends his mentee a quote about teaching and learning once a week, and another who gives new teachers a journal with a first entry that details all the reasons to record first lessons learned about teaching. There's lots of room here to find those ways and means that fit personal style and that, in addition to helping the new teacher, are meaningful and motivational for the mentor.

Good instructional mentors offer informed advice—something you've read elsewhere in this book. Instructional practice should be informed by what is known experientially as well as what has been established empirically. If the instructional advice being offered is based on individual experience, it needs to be presented with that caveat. "This is how it happened to me. This is what I learned. It happens differently for other teachers. Not all teachers agree with what I've come to believe." Being a good instructional mentor means having resources to which others can be directed. Offering informed advice is an opportunity to continue the education of the mentor, most of whom already have a well-established love of learning.

Good mentors respect confidentiality. It's back to the fact that teaching expresses personhood and carries certain vulnerabilities. It takes courage to ask for help, to admit that things aren't going as well as they should in the classroom. Nothing will shorten a mentoring career more quickly than chatting with others about what a new teacher has admitted or has been observed doing in the classroom. It is also not reasonable to expect a mentee to be open, honest, and forthcoming about their teaching, if there's a chance the mentor will one day sit in judgment on the mentee's teaching. For a number of years, I served as an instructional mentor on my campus; I accepted that role with the administration and my colleagues agreeing that I would never serve on a promotion and tenure committee or write letters for promotion and tenure (p & t) dossiers if I had had a mentoring relationship with that faculty member. That way I found out much more about what was really going on in their classroom, which put me in a better position to make useful suggestions.

Good mentors believe they can be mentored—that there are things to be learned from the mentee. It's a mind-set they take with them into the relationship. Again parallels with the classroom pertain. Mentors have areas of expertise mentees do not share, so it is expected that the mentee will learn more than the

mentor. But mentors can still learn from mentees—it may be the way a question is framed or the reaction to a bit of personal history or some other observation offered by the mentee that opens a new vista of insight or understanding for the mentor—to say nothing of the fact that just maybe the mentee knows something about teaching that the mentor does not.

And finally good mentors recognize that mentoring relationships evolve and inevitably change. The mentee does not remain a new faculty member. As experience accrues and confidence in the classroom begins to develop, the balance of power changes mandating a redefinition of the relationship. Just as parents sometimes find it difficult to see that children have become adults and should no longer be addressed as children, some mentors find it difficult to accept mentees as colleagues, instructionally of equal stature. If a mentor does his work well, the mentee grows and develops, often to the point where what was once needed from the mentor is no longer necessary. Fortunately, though the need for mentors transcends individual relationships.

What activities can be recommended to mentors interested in advancing teaching-learning issues? Chapter Five's exploration of colleagues contains a number of possibilities. Listed here are a set of instructional topics worth talking about with a new (or even not so new) college teacher. They are topics that foster the development of beginning teachers and rejuvenate those no longer new.

Talk That Gets Past the Pleasantries and Basic Techniques

The "How's it going?" "Everything's good" exchanges are fine for first conversations, as are topics related to the mechanics of teaching. But details like how many points for extra credit, what gets papers submitted on time, and whether students should be allowed to eat in class are not topics that grow teachers, new or old. If new teachers are to develop into strong and vital pedagogues, they need to realize early on that the instructional issues that matter most

are complex and intellectually provocative. Mentors can help new faculty ratchet up the caliber of their talk about teaching. They do so when they ask questions that have no easy answers and offer answers that lead to more questions.

Putting Student Ratings in Perspective

Most college teachers don't get their best student ratings in the first college courses they teach. But most new college teachers do take early ratings more seriously than those received subsequently. Much like beginning (and sometimes not so beginning) writers, new teachers have trouble separating themselves from the performance. How beneficial to have a mentor who's been rated lots of time before and can look objectively at the newcomer's ratings and say, "Well, if these ratings were mine, here's the three things I would conclude." Or a mentor who can share a copy of Gallagher's (2000) wonderfully insightful article describing how he responded to lackluster ratings received early in his teaching career.

Seeing in the Syllabus Something Beyond the Details

Creating a syllabus is really about the design of a learning environment and the construction of learning experiences. But most of the time, beginners get bogged down trying to decide what to put in the syllabus. Here the literature offers lots of advice; my favorite, because the advice is solid and illustrated with examples, is a newly revised edition of The Course Syllabus: A Learning-Centered Approach (Grunert O'Brien, Millis, and Cohen, 2008). Looking at the examples in this book, a collection of syllabi from other courses on campus or various versions of the mentor's syllabus, can answer the what-to-put-on-the-syllabus question. Then the mentor can redirect so that the discussion explores how the syllabus reflects what a teacher believes about students, learning, and classroom climates.

Reminders That Exams Not Only Assess Learning, They Promote It

Too often faculty (not just new teachers either) see exams as the means that allow them to gauge and then grade student mastery of material. Teachers forget that exams promote learning. They "force" an up-close and personal encounter with course content. Students review their notes, they read the text, they work problems, they quiz each other, they discuss what's important and make decisions about what they need to know. All of these activities promote learning. Mentors can talk with those they mentor about how exams and the events surrounding them can be designed to maximize their potential to affect learning.

Wise Advice on Classroom Management

Not being seasoned, confident pedagogues, new teachers can be suckers for rules, especially those that make clear the teacher's authority over life in the classroom. Despite having the power to make and enforce the rules, teachers still cannot control everything that happens in the classroom. A wise mentor can explore with new teachers who's responsible for what in the teaching-learning process.

Mentoring is an activity made for experienced teachers. It offers a new venue for teaching and one that makes use of those well-honed teaching skills. Mentoring provides the same rich satisfactions as teaching, as well as the same opportunities for creative expression and personal growth. It's one of the few one-on-one teaching opportunities available in these times of large classes and heavy course loads. And it works like a charm. Most mentors aren't going to be able to talk about the role of motivation in learning without looking yet again at levels of motivation in their own classrooms.

Instructional Risk Taking

Risk taking was discussed in Chapter Six as a change strategy. Faculty at any career stage can take risks; doing so enhances instructional development and personal growth. But the best time for all-out risk taking is during that final career segment. Mature teachers have nothing to lose and much to gain. Taking risks can transform teachers, even old, tired ones.

For me, doing things differently in the classroom is what saved me during those last years of teaching. It enabled me to shut out a lot of institutional dysfunction and kept my efforts focused on the classroom. My learner-centered teaching book (Weimer, 2002) recounts my initial transformation as a teacher, and that growth continued after the book was published. By the time I retired I worried that I was pushing the envelop more for my benefit than the students'. I had discovered that those instructional strategies that made me uncomfortable were the ones from which I learned the most.

Admitting some bias here, I do think those instructional strategies called variously "learner centered," "learning centered," or "student centered" are enormously successful at forcing teachers to revisit the basic tenets of instructional practice. They promote the kind of reflection and analysis called for in Chapter Two. They raise fundamental questions about the teacher's responsibility to promote and assess learning. They shed light on disconnects between beliefs and practice—how it's possible to support something intellectually but craft policies quite inconsistent with those beliefs. As already noted, making students and what they are doing the focus of the classroom changes the teacher's role dramatically. It is a more difficult way to teach. The script is less fixed and the action much more spontaneous, but that is exactly the challenge many experienced teachers need.

If the principles of learner-centered instruction violate beliefs about educational goals and purpose, that is not the arena in which to take instructional risks. There are many other possibilities, including instructional methods not tried previously, problem-based learning or case-based instruction, team teaching, working with students in a learning community, short or long travel

experiences associated with a course, service learning, online learning courses, or intern supervision, to name some of the options.

New learning experiences offer risk-taking opportunities for faculty. Nothing in the world motivated me to change my teaching as much as a learning communities program that designated faculty as master learners and put them in a required general education course with twenty beginning students. The semester I took chemistry for poets was an instructional awakening unlike anything else I ever experienced. An engineering colleague I once knew took a poetry course. He wrote terrible poetry, but the course enlightened him in unusual ways. He thought poetry courses ought to be required for all engineers, maybe even all teachers.

The new learning and accompanying risk might involve teaching in an entirely new venue, such as at the local prison, science summer campus for kids in grade school, or online. For me it was tutoring four hours a week in the Writing Center. (I called that my service and declined virtually all committee work.) I also signed up for an office space available in one of the residence halls and committed to hold evening office hours. Way more students than I expected showed up; they brought issues I'd never before discussed with students during office hours, and I looked forward to these office hours in a way I hadn't for years.

The risk may have nothing to do with delivering instruction or working with students. Elsewhere in the book I've advocated attempting some scholarly work on teaching and learning, be that an empirical analysis or a thoughtful critical reflection. My on *Enhancing Scholarly Work on Teaching and Learning* (2006) references a wide variety of articles illustrating the different kinds of pedagogical scholarship that are possible. In fact, writing for no audience other than self can positively affect instructional health. Eierman (2008), a chemist, writes persuasively about what happened one semester when he started each day with five minutes of freewriting. Scholarship has standards, and pedagogical scholarship should be no exception. To make writing a truly risk-taking

adventure, it should be scholarly work that rests on what has already been discovered and involves a thoughtful analysis, writing and rewriting, a review with peers, and the serious pursuit of a publication outlet.

Risk taking prevents stagnation. As Chapter Six points out, new activities are risky to varying degrees, just as they can be done to different degrees. Returning to the metaphor that opened the chapter, risk taking can be the surge that puts the driftwood back to the top of the wave for one more great ride to the shore.

Advocacy on teaching and learning issues, mentoring, and instructional risk taking are activities best done when one's academic career is well established, when the tolerance for risk is higher and when the stakes are lower. These activities aren't always easily accomplished, but when they are accomplished, they renew instructional vitality in significant and telling ways.

Why make a commitment to instructional vitality as one's career ends? Because staying with the status quo means stagnation—at best just getting through those final years and at worst having teacher and students experience the debilitating affects of burnout. Making the commitment matters because teaching needs advocates, new faculty need mentors, and students need instructors who challenge them to grow and develop by doing so themselves. And finally, senior teachers need to leave the academy not feeling worn out and used up but refreshed and dressed for the rest of life.