

Relational Teacher Development: Growing Collaboratively in a Hoping Relationship

By Julian Kitchen

A Story of Teacher Renewal

Bob Fitzgerald had just transferred to Lippincott School in Toronto, Canada, when I began observing his class. Towards the end of October, Principal Lois Dexter gave Bob a poor preliminary performance appraisal. Bob described the meeting to me at the end of the day:

The principal asked to see his lessons. He showed her his weekly planner. She then asked to see his unit plan for the Middle Ages. He did not have one written. Nor did he have them for other units. He told her that he was following the Ministry guidelines carefully and had a framework in his head. She said that this made it look like he was “flying by the seat of his pants”. She wanted to see a unit plan for the Middle Ages by Monday. (Field Notes, October, 28, 1998)

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I assured Bob that he had good ideas and had developed a positive class atmosphere. While I was supportive, I acknowledged that there was a basis for the principal’s criticisms. His core strengths, I suggested, would be more evident if he polished the surfaces and sharpened his skills so that he would be more successful.

Over the next few weeks, with my encouragement and support, Bob worked harder and performed more effectively. By January 1999, after the principal had formally observed his class again, Bob had received

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a positive final evaluation from the principal. By the end of the year, the principal spoke in glowing terms of his improvement. A year after the principal's visit, Bob declared, "Everyday is a pleasure" (Field Notes, October 28, 1999). My observations of his classroom practice over the next four years confirmed that there had been a profound transformation. In 2008, three years after he qualified for retirement at full pension, Bob continues to enjoy teaching Grade 4 at Lippincott School.

How had Bob changed? How had our collaborative relationship contributed to his renewal?

In the last decade, educational reform efforts have focussed primarily on "technical fixes—changes in structures and practices" (Welner & Oakes, 2008, p. 92) such as mandated curriculum and standardized tests. The imposition of these accountability measures has led to the deprofessionalization of teachers as mediators between the curriculum and the students in the classrooms. Today, these imposed solutions are increasingly viewed as superficial and ineffective. One of the major criticisms is that these technical fixes fail to address the beliefs, behaviors and core beliefs of the teachers (Fullan, 2008; Welner & Oakes, 2008). There is growing recognition that teachers' activities are central to meaningful learning in classrooms and that teacher development must actively engage teachers in order to improve learning and reculture schools (Fullan, 2008; Spillane, 2004).

While the professional knowledge and ongoing professional development of teachers have long been subjects of inquiry, there is much still to be understood about the experiences of teachers and, particularly, the professional renewal of veteran teachers. This narrative inquiry, which focusses on the experiences of one teacher, examines how a respectful and relational approach to teacher development can result in deep and sustained professional growth and renewal.

Bob Fitzgerald is a teacher who improved dramatically over the course of a few months and, more significantly, maintained his new positive attitude and effective practices for years afterwards. I puzzled over his apparent transformation because there was no apparent cause. It was not due to the acquisition of new instructional strategies or curriculum resources, as Bob had attended only a few professional development workshops, and assigned them little importance. The principal's feedback seemed to act as a spur, yet Bob, fairly or unfairly, viewed her interventions in a negative light. The curriculum and instruction support I offered was very limited as I had no experience in elementary schools.

I was a doctoral student when I entered Bob's school to conduct a narrative inquiry into the personal practical knowledge of teachers (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) in 1998. As the school was involved in a technology initiative, my initial intention was to focus on how teachers' incorporated computers into their understandings of classroom teaching and learning. After several weeks, I narrowed my focus to one veteran teacher, Bob. I observed his class at least once a week during the first year of the study, and continued to observe periodically for three more years. As a

former secondary school teacher, who became a university-based teacher educator after the first year of the study, our relationship was as much teacher-to-teacher as it was researcher-to-participant. During the first year, I interacted with the students as an educational assistant and offered assistance with computers, in order to give something back and as a means of observing Bob and his students in action.

As our relationship deepened, I began to wonder if the rapport we developed working on the computerized report cards had helped foster Bob's professional renewal. Perhaps, befriending and entering into an authentic and respectful mentoring relationship with Bob had contributed to his professional growth. Perhaps, addressing his concerns and demonstrating empathy and respect had a significant impact on his sense of efficacy as a teacher. As I explored these possibilities through the analysis of field texts and discussions with Bob, these relational elements grew in importance. While I had little to offer, I wondered if our relationship had provided Bob with the support he needed to renew himself.

A body of scholarship has emerged that emphasizes the fundamental importance of caring and relationship in student learning. Nel Noddings (1992) writes:

Caring cannot be achieved by formula. It requires address and response; it requires different behaviors from situation to situation and person to person ... Schools, I will argue, pay too little attention to the need for continuity of place, people, purpose, and curriculum. (pp. xi-xii)

Building on Noddings work, Hollingsworth, Dybdahl and Minarik (1993) identified "relational knowing" as crucial to meaningful interactions between teachers and students. While subject knowledge, a variety of pedagogical strategies, and an understanding of how students learn are important, "good teachers are centrally concerned with the creation of authentic relationships and a classroom environment in which students can make connections between the curriculum of the classroom and the central concerns of their own lives" (Beattie, 2001, p. 3).

Teachers are asked to develop classroom relationships that nurture "experiences that lead to growth" (Dewey, 1938, p. 40), yet little attention is devoted to establishing contexts for authentic teacher development. The consequences are evident in the failure of school change initiatives over the years (Cuban, 1993; Fullan, 1993). In light of the limitations of large-scale, top-down professional development initiatives, there is a need for "research and development projects aimed at supporting teacher learning and development in tumultuous times" (Clark, 2001, p. 4).

An alternative to large-scale school change initiatives is teacher development based on principles of progressive education: response to individual needs, "acquainted with the conditions of the local community," and "based upon the necessary connection of education with experience" (Dewey, 1938, p. 40). If "the quality of relationship is central to success" in building a "school-wide teacher professional community" (Fullan, 1999, p. 37), then more effort should be made to adopt a respectful and relational stance in working with teachers.

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Hollingsworth, Dybdahl, and Minarik's (1993) relational knowing was an important step in this direction. Although teaching children was the focus of their research, they also identified "knowing through relationship to self and others [as] central to teaching the child" (p. 8). Indeed, in recounting their collaboration, Hollingsworth and her two participant-researchers identified personal conversations among teachers as a very effective tool for enhancing teacher passion and commitment in the classroom. By working together in authentic, supportive, and non-judgmental relationships, they were successful in finding individual "voices" and developing "eclectic approaches" adapted to the needs of their students (p. 30). In their application of this concept to school leadership, Regan and Brooks (1995) suggest that relational knowing is best achieved within learning cultures that value collaboration.

While I pondered the importance of relationship in Bob's professional renewal and my developing understanding as an educational researcher, I returned to the work of Carl Rogers. Rogers (1961) wrote, "This book is about me, as I sit there with that client, facing him, participating in that struggle as deeply and sensitively as I am able" (p. 4). He then went on to outline his life history and work with needy children before explaining the simple wisdom that guided his life and practice. As I grappled to make meaning of my profound personal experiences and my new-found wisdom acquired through my relationship with Bob Fitzgerald, I became increasingly aware that, like many others in educational research, teacher development, and teacher supervision, I often acted as an expert judging the practice of teachers using external criteria rather than as a "helper" (Rogers, 1961), celebrating experience and seeking to help teachers discover order in the flowing, changing process of life. "Floating with the complex stream of my experiencing," Rogers (1961) came to regard experience as the highest authority and discovered that "what is most personal is most general" (pp. 26-27). The development of these new understandings also involved a reconceptualization of my experiences (Vygotsky, 1962) beyond Lippincott School. Looking retrospectively at my personal and professional experiences, I sought to understand Bob's professional development and, as the inquiry developed, how our collaboration contributed to his renewal.

In this narrative inquiry, I recount and interpret incidents in my relationship with Bob Fitzgerald. In my interpretations, I am sensitive to the role each participant plays as teacher and learner in the relationship, the milieus in which each lives and works, and the need to present one's authentic self in relationships that are open, non-judgmental and trusting. Underlying such relationships is respect for teachers as curriculum makers (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992) who draw upon their personal practical knowledge to inform their classroom practice. Working collaboratively to address a relatively minor aspect of teaching, Bob and I developed a relationship that led to significant professional growth for both teacher-participant and the mentor-researcher.

Through this narrative inquiry, I sought to identify characteristics of our relational knowing which may have contributed to Bob's professional renewal. I was inspired by Carl Rogers's 'significant learnings' about humanistic psychology, particularly

his central learning: “I have found it of enormous value when I can permit myself to understand another person” (Rogers, 1961, p. 18). This process of inquiry led me to identify seven characteristics that appear to have contributed to our successful collaboration. These seven characteristics I term *relational teacher development*:

1. Understanding the Landscape
2. Helping the Teacher Face a Problem
3. Respecting and Empathizing with the Teacher
4. Conveying Respect and Empathy
5. Understanding One’s Own Personal Practical Knowledge
6. Improving One’s Practice in Teacher Development
7. Receptivity to Growing in Relationship

Relational teacher development is presented as an approach to understanding teachers as curriculum makers and, more significantly, as a way of helping teachers harness their personal practical knowledge in order to renew classroom practice and improve student learning. As an approach, it is sensitive to the role each participant plays as teacher and learner in the relationship, the milieu in which each lives and works, and the need to present one’s authentic self in relationships that are open, non-judgmental and trusting. Underlying such relationships is respect for teachers as curriculum makers who draw on their personal practical knowledge to inform their classroom practices. This narrative inquiry conveys the importance of relationship in fostering professional growth.

Although considerable resources have been devoted to curriculum development and teacher development, there is a growing recognition that “most strategies employed are too weak to get at what will be required for successful learning on the part of teachers, and hence on their students” (Fullan, 2008, p. 117). Perhaps, the key to improving classroom teaching is as simple, and complex, as professional development relationships that are authentic and collaborative.

Methodology

Over the course of this four-year narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) from 1998 to 2002, I puzzled over the ways in which my assistance and caring contributed to Bob Fitzgerald’s professional renewal and my development as a teacher-researcher (Kitchen, 2005). Drawing on detailed field notes and journals from frequent visits (Kitchen, 2006), Bob’s recollections, and teaching documents (e.g. daily planner, unit plans and assessment tools), I prepared “hindsight accounts of the connectedness of things that seem to have happened: pieced-together patterns, after the fact” (Geertz, 1995, p. 2). During the first year, when the critical events occurred, I visited Bob at the school 56 times, with most visits lasting from four to eight hours. In total, I visited the school 91 times in four years and conducted three lengthy interviews with Bob and one with the principal. By telling,

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retelling, and reliving (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) the experiences recorded in these field texts, and checking my understanding with Bob, a picture emerged of our relationship. I began to consider how the lessons learned from our relationship could inform the development of other teachers.

The research project began as a narrative inquiry into the experiences of four teachers at Lippincott School. As the school was involved in an information technology initiative, I focused on the tensions they were experiencing as they sought to integrate these innovations with their personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) as teachers. After a month, however, I decided to narrow the focus to the experiences of one teacher, Bob Fitzgerald, and his Grade 4 class. I was curious about his experiences as a veteran teacher and, just as importantly, had developed a strong rapport with him during the course of my visits. After he received a poor evaluation from the principal, however, technology ceased to be a priority in his classroom. Once he began to make positive changes, my inquiry began to focus on the causes of his apparent transformation.

Throughout, my interests were teacher knowledge and teacher development. The initial focus on technology was a means of observing how teachers respond to change. Although I offered to assist with technology, in the spirit of reciprocity, I was neither especially interested in technology in the classroom nor especially proficient with computers. As the focus shifted, I became less involved with technology in the classroom, although our work on the computerized report cards seemed to be a critical moment in Bob's transformation and in the development of our relationship.

The story below provides background information about Bob Fitzgerald prior to his arrival at Lippincott School.

Bob's Past

Bob Fitzgerald was a veteran teacher with over twenty years experience when I began working with him during his first year at Lippincott School. He had been a doctoral student in philosophy before earning a teaching degree.

After several years as a substitute teacher, Bob taught for eight years at Abbey Road, a new school in an economically and ethnically diverse neighbourhood. Bob recalled these as rewarding years of devotion to students and involvement in school-wide initiatives and extracurricular activities. Highlights included winning several school district chess championships and being recommended for a teaching award. Bob, however, chose to leave the school as part of a "mass exodus" after a change of principals.

Bob transferred to Penny Lane School, which was located in a neighbourhood of entrenched poverty. While he welcomed the challenge, Bob soon felt trapped in a constant struggle to maintain student safety and basic human respect. In particular, he became frustrated due to four or five students with behaviour issues who swore, refused to cooperate, and required constant attention. Efforts to maintain discipline resulted in less student-centred approach, which diminished satisfaction for teacher

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and students alike. Bob found teaching “less satisfying than before” and increasingly withdrew into himself. As Bob became more dissatisfied and increasingly isolated from his peers, the student misbehaviour escalated. Nonetheless, Bob received a positive appraisal from his principal at the end of his first year.

No assistance was sought or offered, according to Bob, who reported that the principal had not observed him teach. The situation took a turn for the worse in his second year when the principal, without a formal teacher appraisal, encouraged Bob to leave the school. Discouraged and exhausted, Bob passively accepted an administrative transfer to Lippincott School. (Based on Interview, March 22, 2003)

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Professional development activities are often divorced from the practical realities facing classroom teachers. Working one-on-one with Bob offered the possibility of authentic teacher development addressing his immediate concerns in context. The seven characteristics of relational teacher development, which are derived from Carl Roger’s (1961) ‘significant learnings’ about humanistic psychology, are used as a framework for exploring Bob’s professional development and the role of relationship in his renewal.

Understanding the Landscape

By the time I began to help Bob with the computerized report cards in 1998, I had already been visiting the school for two months.

Lippincott School, an elementary school with almost 700 students, was located in a diverse neighbourhood of a major urban centre. The school population consisted largely of recent immigrants who lived above stores on the main street or one of the high-rise apartment buildings near the school. The semi-detached houses in the immediate vicinity home primarily to working class families, according to census data, but there were signs of gentrification: recent renovations, luxury cars, and professionals. This diversity was evident in the school profile published by the school district: 9% of students had been in Canada less than 2 years, and 15% less than 5 years. Of the students in Bob’s 1998-1999 class, 11 were Caucasian and 19 were Asian (Field Notes, October 16, 1998).

As an observer at Lippincott School, I became familiar with the life of the school, the students of Room 28, and Bob’s Fitzgerald’s knowledge, principles, images, and practices as a teacher. As I observed Bob and assisted with students, I was able to draw on my observations and impressions over this time. This was evident in our discussion of students’ progress as we prepared the first set of reports. Our common classroom experiences brought us together as we shared stories and puzzled over student learning. This enabled me to praise Bob’s strengths (e.g., his rapport with kids) and offer suggestions for improvement (e.g., bulletin board displays) in a manner that was respectful of his approach to teaching. My appreciation of school routines and understanding of the principal’s interactions with staff also proved valuable as I helped Bob to adapt his practice in response to

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her expectations. For example, I discussed with Bob how bulletin board displays could be used to draw attention to the interesting work going on in his classroom. Understanding Bob's professional context made me better able to help him face the challenges of improving his teaching practices.

Helping the Teacher Face a Problem

While the use of computers in the classroom was a low priority for Bob, learning to use the computerized report card program became important, both practically and symbolically, as he sought to prove himself after his poor performance review. Bob asked my advice on how to respond to the principal's comments.

In response, I praised Bob's relationship with his class and his talent as a teacher. Even though I lacked expertise in elementary education, I offered my assistance in sharpening his lesson planning, assessment practices, and computer skills. In a non-directive manner, I let Bob identify the immediate problem and then supported his efforts to improve his computer skills and understand the principal's criticism of his assessment and evaluation methods.

While the immediate concern was preparing the computerized report cards, I took advantage of opportunities to praise his strengths and offer ways to sharpen his day-to-day practice in order to bring to the surface his core beliefs and underlying strengths as a teacher. My trust in his "basically positive direction" (Rogers, 1961, p. 26) and regard for him as a curriculum maker capable of identifying his own learning needs were important factors in Bob Fitzgerald's positive response to the computerized report card challenge and the crisis provoked by the principal's negative preliminary performance appraisal.

By assisting with the computerized report cards, I helped Bob to turn around his performance in order to earn a positive final performance evaluation by the end of the year. While he would later say that he could not have succeeded with the reports without my assistance (Field Notes, February, 19, 1999), it would be more accurate to say that I simply helped him confront the problem for himself. In doing so, I also helped him to re-frame the immediate crisis as part of the larger issue of assessment and evaluation. Once he had framed it in this way, Bob was able to incorporate many of the principal's suggestions in the second term. Evidence of this was the comprehensive data on student progress—samples of student work, evidence of skill development over time, and assignments linked to specific curriculum expectations—that he used to prepare the second term reports (Field Notes, February 17, 1999).

Respecting and Empathizing with the Teacher

Another characteristic of our helping relationship was the empathic and respectful manner in which I supported Bob's development. While respect and empathy were present from the beginning, they co-existed with an expert's implicit sense of superiority over the client he was assisting. This tension between respect and judgement was evident in my reporting of our first report card session. Whereas I had directed the first report card session and had sought to guide Bob towards 'better' practices

in the first term, Bob was clearly guiding the learning during the second-term report card period. In the second term, I provided reassurance about his teaching knowledge, values and teaching skills, and encouraged him to consider how new ideas (such as those mentioned by the principal) might be consistent with his teaching philosophy. Congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding—three conditions Rogers (1961) regarded as critical to helping relationships—while present in my well-meaning efforts during the first term, were more fully established by the time we sat down to work on the second term reports.

My empathic understanding of Bob Fitzgerald was in no small measure due to my grounding in narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry has made a considerable contribution to the understanding of teacher knowledge. A large body of work has documented the lives of teachers, the ways their personal practical knowledge informs their practice, and their relationship with the professional knowledge landscape. Narrative inquirers are engaged in an empathic process as is evident from their narrative accounts. For example, in her account of Stephanie and Aileen's images, Clandinin (1986) demonstrated respect and empathy for two participants with very differing perspectives regarding teaching. By immersing themselves in the lives of others and puzzling to understand them from within, narrative inquirers attempt to suspend judgement, empathize with their participants, and document teacher narratives with sensitivity. This immersion in Bob's professional life helped me shift from the "grand narrative" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of delivering expertise to teacher-technicians to relational teacher development.

I chose Bob as my participant because I felt a strong congruence with him. During a presentation to colleagues in my department (March 20, 2001), I stated that I "trusted my gut" in selecting Bob as the one participant with whom I would work; this gut response stemmed from an intuitive sense that we could each be ourselves and understand the other. Early in our relationship, I struggled with my identity as a researcher, found myself at times judging Bob, and attempted with varying success to interest him in experimenting with computers. At the same time, I sought to be receptive to his needs. Later, as I became less eager for immediate results, congruence increased, as did Bob's progress. We shared our personal, teaching and research experiences as our relationship broadened to include our lives beyond the classroom.

Along with congruence, I generally felt a positive regard for Bob from the first October morning when he arrived laden with packages, speaking of psychologist Victor Frankl, and searching for a copy of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. While I questioned Bob's performance in the immediate aftermath of the principal's visit, I increasingly demonstrated unconditional caring and acceptance of both Bob's negative and positive feelings as I became more patient in my roles as researcher and teacher developer. This type of relationship, according to Rogers, results in a "safety-creating climate" in which significant learning can take place. While I formed my own perceptions and ventured my own opinions, I strove to respect the qualities he brought to the classroom and genuinely sought to understand his practice and

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assist him in his efforts to respond to this critical incident. When he praised me for providing practical tips and personal support in learning how to use the computerized reports, Bob was showing appreciation not for pre-programmed resources but for the positive regard that led me to offer him my evenings and weekends to help. While my positive regard was not unconditional in the first few months, my efforts to accept and support were appreciated. In the second half of 1998-1999, in the wake of our shared development, my regard became less conditional.

I also found it equally important that the helper “is experiencing an accurate, empathic understanding of the client’s world as seen from the inside” (Rogers, 1961, p. 284). Although prone to judgement in the first few months, I sought to enter into Bob’s internal world by observing his classes closely, searching for images of teaching that emerged from his practice, listening to his stories of experience as a learner and teacher, asking questions, recording observations and impressions, and restorying these accounts through the filter of my own experiences. My empathic understanding was informally mirrored back in conversations with Bob and, later, by sharing with him drafts of my research report. I recall with pride that Bob said that I had conveyed his feelings as if I were reading his mind.

The help I provided Bob was not only directly connected to his classroom practice. Rather, through the respect and empathy with which I regarded him, I was able to reinforce Bob’s self-concept and prompt him to consider ways in which he might constructively respond to the principal’s concerns.

Conveying Respect and Empathy

While respect and empathy are important, Rogers stresses that it is vital that “the client should experience or perceive something of the therapist’s congruence, acceptance, and empathy” (Rogers, 1961, p. 284). This was evident in our relationship when, in expressing his pride at completing the second set of reports independently, Bob said:

I could not have done this without you! You helped me out in the Fall, when I could not have prepared the reports on my own. You encouraged me in using the computer. I am lucky that you came into my classroom. (Field Notes, February 19, 1999)

I responded, “I stopped urging you to use the computer...I simply decided to accept you as you are.” Bob, who had intended to write a philosophy dissertation on Rogers twenty-five years earlier, said that he appreciated my “positive regard” and “empathic understanding” (Field Notes, February 19, 1999).

In contrast, Bob found the principal’s relentless criticism and grudging appreciation frustrating and unhelpful. She may have been a catalyst for change and a source of curriculum and instruction resources but, according to Bob, she failed to provide the support he needed to move forward in a positive direction.

I was more sympathetic to the principal, appreciated her high standards, and understood the multiple demands placed on principals. Later, Lois Dexter conceded that she could have been more supportive of Bob, but she was comfortable know-

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ing that I was in the class providing support (Interview, May 8, 2003). The staff respected Lois's commitment to the school, even though some were a little wary of her strong presence. Most indicated that they felt supported, and many had close relationships with her, as was evident in the retirement celebrations for her in June 1999. The praise the principal offered Bob at the end of June 1999, directly and to me privately, attests to her appreciation of his professional growth. By not *conveying* respect and empathy, however, she left Bob feeling isolated and judged.

Four years after his arrival at Lippincott School, Bob continued to renew himself and sustain relationships with his students, peers and the new principal. Indeed, Bob remarked that he felt his best years were yet to come as he was continually thinking of new ways to address the needs of his students (Field Notes, July 12, 2002). As a result of my experiences working with Bob, I came to believe that professional development is more likely to be successful and lasting when teachers become committed to facing problems and confident that those offering assistance will demonstrate congruence, acceptance and empathy. Surely, it is time to focus primarily on conveying respect and empathy to teachers as they identify problems to be addressed and ways in which to move forward. Instructional strategies and curriculum resources should be offered to support teachers as they pursue their learning goals.

Understanding One's Own Personal Practical Knowledge

From the beginning, I had responded positively and respectfully to Bob's request for assistance. As a teacher-researcher committed to narrative inquiry and respectful of teachers as curriculum-makers, I sought to draw out Bob's personal practical knowledge and help him address an issue of concern for him in his present educational milieu. At the same time, I was riddled with doubt as I floundered to make sense of my research and new role. The "restorying" of experience below illustrates the importance of receptivity on the part of the helper in the development of a meaningful collaborative relationship.

After years of studying my experiences and those of others, I came to respect teachers as curriculum makers and narrative inquiry as a methodology for observing the complexity of human interactions on the educational landscape. Yet part of me remained the academic expert objectively observing and criticizing phenomena based on theoretical frameworks to arrive at generalizable conclusions and rules. This was most evident in my initial attempts to impose a theoretical framework on the field research rather than genuinely working out the puzzle as it emerged from my field observations.

At the same time, I viewed narrative inquiry as a way to make lived experience by observing and living in the midst of another culture. I conveyed my acceptance of the importance of enmeshing myself in a culture rather than penetrating it (Geertz, 1995), of letting the inquiry emerge organically rather than imposing a theoretical framework. I acknowledged that I was immersed in the lives that I sought to understand and that the research was covered with my fingerprints. Throughout the opening months of my fieldwork, I resisted the temptation to move from observation to interpretation

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too early by observing closely and writing copious field notes. I was also honest in identifying and reflecting upon how I positioned myself on the research landscape.

Teachers “live and tell cover stories in the out-of-classroom professional knowledge landscape, stories in which they portray themselves as characters who are certain, expert people” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 15). I felt the same way as I struggled with my dilemma as a researcher in the midst of a complex, changing landscape. I lived the cover story (Crites, 1971) of a teacher, scholar and researcher immersed in the educational theory and practice and well prepared for fieldwork. Yet, in order to help Bob through his immediate crisis, I had to immerse myself in the research instead of trying to force it into a written form, and become more receptive to growing in relationship with him.

My involvement with Bob sensitized me to the importance of developing self-awareness as a “helper” (Rogers, 1961) in our teacher development relationship. Reflecting on our relationship led me to better understand my own personal practical knowledge as a teacher and researcher. In turn, I was better able to assist Bob as he confronted a crisis and grew as a teacher. Aware of the complexity of my own narrative of experience, I was receptive to Bob’s personal professional knowledge and able to adapt to his self-identified needs.

Improving One’s Practice in Teacher Development

My work with Bob also helped make me more aware of my own practice in teacher development. Each experience of puzzling over classroom situations, understanding teachers and helping them face their problems has added to my store of experiences. Drawing on the authority of this store of experiences, helped me discover patterns of meaning in a dynamic ever-changing world. Entering into an authentic and meaningful relationship with Bob has deepened my understanding as an educational researcher and a teacher educator. Personal, professional and relational elements have joined together to improve my practice as a researcher, while deepening my engagement in the puzzles presented by teachers.

Whereas Rogers (1961) would participate in the client’s “struggle as deeply and sensitively as I am able” (p. 4), professionals in the twentieth century have often adopted the grand narrative of expertise, in which they assume the role of experts responding to the needs of unskilled clients. The use of this model in education has generally resulted in teacher-centred instruction and professional development that directs teachers to adopt the latest educational theories or solutions. The sporadic and limited success of school improvement efforts (Cuban, 1993; Fullan, 1993) demonstrates their limited value to teachers and, by implication, to teacher development.

Receptivity to Growing in Relationship

In order to help another person understand their experiences, according to Carl Rogers, it is important that the helper be receptive to growing in relationship. Rogers (1961) wrote that the discovery of “order in experience”, when combined

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with recognition of the uniqueness of each individual and situation, deepens understanding and enriches one's ability to assist others. This I discovered for myself in my work with Bob Fitzgerald.

Rather than being a technician mechanically applying an equation to the complex algorithms of life, I was engaged with a teacher in the common pursuit of new meaning and enhanced practice. Although I had committed to observing Bob closely and without judgement, deeply-rooted assumptions about teaching and school improvement impeded my ability to focus on Bob's personal professional knowledge and professional development needs. This journey was a difficult one for me, especially when my research seemed to be unravelling as Bob's career seemed in jeopardy. It was only when I resolved to help Bob through this process of improving his practice, rather than focus on my research agenda, that I was able to be fully supportive. Puzzling over Bob's renewal and writing about our relationship proved to be a fascinating process that enriched my knowledge and understanding as a professional involved in teacher development.

This receptivity helped me to circumvent Bob's defenses in order to discover the submerged passion and skills that had previously made Bob an effective teacher. Being authentically present opened me to a more empathic understanding of teachers and enhanced my capacity to help them find their own solutions. In turn, I have discovered that "it is highly rewarding when I can accept another person" (Rogers, 1961, p. 20).

While his internal strengths and willingness to change were essential to Bob's professional renewal, it is my contention that my personal engagement was critical to prompting and nurturing his development. Deep commitment from both participants, I learned through this inquiry, is key to genuine teacher development relationships.

Conclusion

How to teach again, however, what has been taught correctly and incorrectly learned
a thousand thousand times throughout the milleniums of mankind's prudent folly?
(Joseph Campbell, 1949, p. 218)

Relational knowing is crucial to meaningful educative experiences, as "to care and be cared for are fundamental human needs" (Noddings, 1992, p. xi). Dewey, Rogers, Hollingsworth, Noddings and other humanist thinkers remind us of the importance of treating student and teacher with respect, empathy and care. Through this narrative inquiry, I have attempted to convey the power of relational knowing in the professional renewal of teachers in contemporary classrooms and schools. Relational teacher development, a term I coined years after the critical incidents at the heart to this narrative, affirms the centrality of relationship in professional development and renewal. Reflecting on our experiences, I identified seven characteristics as essential to what I now term *relational teacher development*. These characteristics are: (1) understanding the landscape; (2) helping the teacher face a problem; (3) respecting

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and empathizing with the teacher; (4) conveying respect and empathy; (5) understanding one's own personal practical knowledge; (6) improving one's practice in teacher development; and (7) receptivity to growing in relationship. These characteristics, which are overlapping rather than sequential, provide a framework for developing helping relationships in which teachers and teacher developers grow through collaboration.

In the interpretative section of this paper, I inquired into how our relationship helped Bob move from a crisis to professional growth to renewal. Seven characteristics of our relationship were used as a frame for understanding Bob's professional renewal and my growth as I supported him on the journey.

Educational Significance

Teacher development has received considerable attention as administrators have sought to implement new curriculum and improve learning in schools. The researchers studying these teacher development efforts, however, are beginning to question the effectiveness of these efforts. Fullan (2008) states that "reculturing is proving far more difficult than previously realized" (p. 114). Ball and Cohen (1999) observe that most of the money devoted to teacher development "is spent on sessions and workshops that are often intellectually superficial, disconnected from deep issues of curriculum and learning, fragmented and non-cumulative" (pp. 3-4). They also criticize teacher development as lacking consistency, coherence and offering few opportunities for practice-based inquiry or teaching for understanding. Spillane's (2004) study of professional development that substantially changes teaching practices indicate that "day-to-day classroom practice was a core element of professional" and that it was "constructed through conversations with teachers, administrators, and external experts" (pp. 60).

This study of Bob Fitzgerald is an example of teacher development that substantially changed practice by probing beyond the surface. Conversations situated in day-to-day practice helped Bob tap into his personal practical knowledge in order to respond positively to critical feedback from his principal. Bob Fitzgerald, like many teachers sometimes viewed as labelled "underperforming" or "at-risk", possessed the knowledge and skills needed to be a successful classroom teacher. The challenge was to help Bob shift from being a "stuck" teacher to a "moving" teacher (Rosenholtz, 1989) again. By observing Bob in his classroom context, understanding his images of teaching, and offering empathy and respect as he faced a self-identified problem, I was able to help him renew his commitment to teaching and sharpen his skills. The fact that he continued to thrive as a teacher ten years later suggests that there is promise in a relational approach to teacher development as a means of renewing teacher performance.

Although this is a study of only one teacher given ample one-on-one, it has relevance for teacher development on a larger scale. As Anthony Alvarado (Elmore & Burney, 1999, p. 271), a highly regarded and innovative school district leader in New York, said, "The worst part of bureaucracy is the dehumanization it brings." Alvarado, who recognized that staff development must accompany school develop-

ment (Fullan, 1992), stressed the importance of caring, collegiality and attention to the needs of individual teachers. His leadership team accomplished this by cultivating “a culture based on norms of commitment, mutual care, and concern” (Elmore & Burney, 1999, p. 271). Among their innovations was a heavy investment in teacher developers “who work directly with teachers individually and in groups at the school site” (Elmore & Burney, 1999, p. 274) in order to anchor new practices within specific classroom settings. As Richardson and Placier (2001) concluded in their review of the teacher change literature, systemic innovation can be more effective if it is attentive to the needs of individual teachers in their classroom contexts. Although this involves an investment of time in conversation with teachers and observing their practice in the classroom, this type of mentoring or coaching can help teachers re-adjust their cognitive frames and improve their practice (e.g., Goldsmith & Lyon, 2005).

In recent years, there have been many promising approaches to teacher development. There is an increasing awareness that teaching has become highly complex and that professional development needs to be both responsive to these challenges *and* sensitive to the needs of individual teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2001). Large-scale change initiatives, when conducted in a manner that is respectful to teachers, offer much promise for teachers who are “moving” (Rosenholtz, 1989). At the same time, it needs to be acknowledged that factors such as poor pay, a dearth of opportunities for growth and advancement, ineffective leadership, and the relentless pace of educational change (Stoel & Thant, 2002; Troman & Woods, 2001) have caused other teachers to “stall” (Rosenholtz, 1989). A truly effective professional development program needs to support “continuous improvement throughout the teacher’s career” (Stoel & Thant, 2002, p. 17). I Bob’s renewal suggests that an investment in personalized attention and receptivity to the individual teacher’s situation can lead to significant professional growth. Thinking narratively—beginning with experience—and engaging in conversations—and coming to know in relationship—can help one understand the professional development needs of teachers.

Teacher development, like teaching, involves a complex interplay of intellectual, emotional and social processes. In particular, teachers who are underperforming need individual consideration by principals, mentors and professional development personnel if their contextual needs are to be addressed. Given the ineffectiveness of large-scale teacher development efforts in addressing deep understanding, I propose shifting some resources from systemic application of external standards to responsiveness to individual needs. While I did spend considerable time, my focus for most of that time was not in the role of relational teacher developer. A mentor or administrator who adopts a relational approach to teacher development might well achieve similar results through weekly conversations and several classroom visits.

A relational approach to teacher development can be both sensitive to individual needs and rigorous in identifying problems to resolve. The seven characteristics of relational teacher development extend beyond *pressure* and *support* (Fullan, 1992) to include principles of caring and helping. As a constructivist approach, it recog-

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nizes that “[o]nly by wrestling with the conditions of the problem first hand, seeking and finding his own way out, does he think” (Dewey, 1916, p. 188). As an approach developed from the principles of “helping relationships” in psychology (Rogers, 1961), it is a rigorous process for assisting individuals in identifying problems and developing solutions. The relational teacher developer, by listening empathically and providing resources as needed, facilitates individual learning and professional growth. Principals and teacher developers can be trained in the principles of relational teacher development in order to draw out the underlying intellectual, emotional and social aspects and provide appropriate guidance and support.

While relational teacher development may be particularly effective with teachers who are underperforming, all teachers can benefit from a relational approach to professional development as they cope with the effects of sustained educational change, which has been identified as a significant factor in teacher stress and burnout (e.g., Troman & Woods, 2001). Also, as they pass through various life and career stages, teachers’ motivation and performance may change in significant ways (Huberman, 1993). In particular, teachers who transfer between schools often need to adapt their expectations and practices to a very different educational context (Bullough & Baughman, 1997). Bob’s struggle began when the expertise he developed at his first school did not transfer well to his second. In the absence of help from the principal or his peers, Bob’s satisfaction and performance diminished as he focussed on imposing discipline on a small group of challenging students. Relational peers, supervisors or teacher developers may be able to help teachers develop and sustain expertise in the face of these intrinsic and extrinsic forces.

The need for a relational approach seems even greater during the first two years of teaching. After being inducted into the profession, many new teachers are offered little or no support by their colleagues or the school district (Stoel & Thant, 2002; Johnson, 2004). Teacher induction methods that draw on the life experience and expertise new teachers already possess are necessary if new teachers are to apply the understandings they developed in their teacher education programs. Otherwise, concern for classroom survival may cause many of them to focus on surface structures, as they do not yet understand which details are salient and are not yet ready to delve more deeply (Pinnegar, 1995). In order to increase opportunities for new teachers to move from survival through mastery to expertise (Huberman, 1993), the timely support of sensitive and skilled mentors is important. The challenge for the relational teacher developer is to avoid “rescuing” novice teachers. Instead, the helping relationship should be driven by new teachers’ personal practical knowledge and the problems they face in practice within their unique classroom and school contexts. By promoting “conversation, dialogue, and narrative” (Clark, 2001, p. 4) from the beginning, we can help new teacher develop the beliefs, behaviors and skills needed to cope with the challenges of teaching in a time of change. Also, the skills developed by the mentors of new teachers can be used be applied to supporting veteran teachers and providing leadership in schools (Hanson & Moir, 2006).

In an era in which innovative educational leaders are increasingly acknowledging the centrality of professional development in school improvement (Sykes, 1999, p. 152), there seems to be a growing recognition that it is important to address the needs of individual teachers working with their specific classroom contexts (Fullan, 2008). Relational teacher development is a way of thinking about professional development that nurtures teacher experiences that lead to growth (Dewey, 1938), respects knowing in relationship (Hollingsworth, Dybdahl, & Minarik, 1993), and fosters helping relationships (Rogers, 1961). By attending to the needs of individual teachers, relational teacher development can make a significant contribution to the continuum of professional development. By attending to teachers beliefs and behaviors (Fullan, 2008), it can contribute to curriculum implementation, student learning and school improvement in a time of complexity and change.

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