

# Teaching Renewal for Midcareer Faculty: Attending to the Whole Person

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## Abstract

*According to research on the distinct needs of midcareer faculty and the pressures they face in the academy, we offer here an example of a faculty development effort that looks at the renewal of teaching through the lens of renewing the whole person in his/her academic roles. Opportunities for midcareer faculty to focus on renewal in a holistic way are few, so this retreat is open to faculty from diverse institutions and disciplines.*

## Introduction

The idea of creating a teaching retreat that embeds reflection time and self-care in addition to the more typical teaching workshops, comes from the work of Laura Rendón (2009). Rendón makes the case that “we need a refashioned dream of education based on wholeness, consonance, social justice, and liberation” (p. 2). She argues that educators are increasingly unhappy with a system that promotes “competitive testing and learning, grades and report cards, the separation of teacher and learner” and claims that the loss of passion for teaching is a direct result of the loss of a “relationship-centered essence of education” (p.2). Rendón further notes the privilege accorded in higher education to what Palmer (1998) refers to as the “outer landscape” of academic life. The outer landscape is the visible work commonly associated with faculty roles: grant writing, research, teaching, committee work, curriculum development, etc. This outer landscape is juxtaposed with an inner landscape of self, “who we are, what we hold most dear, and our sense of purpose and meaning” (Rendón, 2009, p. 7). Both Palmer (1998) and Rendón (2009) argue that teachers need to be able to honor their inner landscapes in order to teach well and be whole. Without the inner landscape we cannot “ignite our passion for a purpose that gives our lives meaning” (Rendón, 2009, p. 7). And yet the academic culture of higher education continues to make the achievement of wholeness and balance difficult because of the value placed on those outer landscape activities.

Rendón (2009) presents seven entrenched “agreements” operating implicitly in the academic culture, agreements which actively work against any notions of caring, spirituality, and vitality. Her seven agreements are:

1. the agreement to privilege intellectual/rational knowing... as opposed to deep wisdom, wonder, sense of the sacred, intuition and emotions (p.27).
2. the agreement of separation... domains of knowledge and disciplines separate with little to no collaboration...even within the same department (p.33).
3. the agreement of competition... pits students against each other in fiercely competitive environment (p. 36).
4. the agreement of perfection... little room for error, unknowing or imperfection in the classroom (p. 40).
5. the agreement of monoculturalism ...exclusive validation of Western structures of knowledge... monocultural paradigms of knowledge production and comprehension (p. 41).
6. the agreement to privilege outer work... It becomes the standard greeting everywhere: I am so busy (p.44).

7. the agreement to avoid self-examination...How is it that we can spend so much time exhausting ourselves with multiple projects yet not make time for self-reflexivity? (p. 48).

When applied to the classroom environment, Rendón's separation agreement (number 2 above) has several important sub-agreements that relate directly to teaching.

The underlying tenets of the agreement of separation are:

- (a) teaching and learning are linear, and information flows primarily from teacher to student;
- (b) faculty should keep a distance between themselves and their students;
- (c) faculty are the sole experts in the classroom;
- (d) teaching is separated from learning;
- (e) any kind of faculty outreach to students, such as validation, caring, or encouragement is more often than not considered a form of coddling students who are presumed to be adults and should be strong enough to survive a collegiate environment on their own;
- (f) the student studies the subject matter from a distance; and
- (g) the student learns to understand and solve problems employing the perspective of only one discipline. (p. 33)

Rendón (2009) concludes that these agreements in higher education must be replaced by a new agreement: "the agreement to embrace connectedness, collaboration, and transdisciplinarity" (p.36). Lee, Bach & Muthiah (2012) came to a similar conclusion in their study of spiritual development of mid-career faculty:

"In place of the current industrial paradigm, they introduce a metric of sustainability, and "enough" and an underlying ethical foundation that "better" is the result of being healthier, happier, and more connected with one's self and the rest of the world. A renewal paradigm, we believe, will enable midcareer faculty to live a holistic life calling, leading to revitalization of their work and increased benefit to their institutions and the greater good of society"(p.82)."

The reasons for the focus on mid-career are further explored in the literature review below, but suffice it to say that, when examining phases of faculty careers, the midcareer phase stands out as an optimal time for some kind of renewal opportunity (Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981).

### **Review of the Literature on Mid-career Faculty**

The Graylyn Teaching Renewal Retreat for Mid-Career Faculty was launched in June 2011, led by the Teaching and Learning Center at Wake Forest University in partnership with other schools in the region. It is named for the location of the retreat, the Graylyn Inn and Conference Center. The retreat took shape in response to the desire to more intentionally engage mid-career faculty at our respective institutions, and its development was guided by the emerging research on the career needs of faculty at this stage in their professional lives (Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981; Baldwin, DeZhure, Shaw & Moretto, 2008; Lee, Bach & Mutiah, 2013; Levinson, 1986). Furthermore, most universities offer support for graduate students, new faculty, for faculty nearing retirement, but offer less targeted support for those in the later career stages prior to thinking about retirement (Zeig & Baldwin, 2012, pp. 74-75).

In Lee, Bach and Muthiah (2012), 'midcareer' faculty are defined as those who are beyond the tenure milestone, but not yet making concrete retirement plans. Hall (1986) provides a more formal, career-focused definition of midcareer as "...the period during one's work in an occupational career role after one feels established and has achieved mastery, and prior to the commencement of the disengagement process" (p. 127). Both of these definitions describe

our target population, but since we do not limit participation to only tenure track faculty, the second is more applicable.

There is a long-running conversation in the literature on providing midcareer faculty with intentional and appropriate career-stage support. Decades ago Baldwin & Blackburn (1981) argued that “By providing opportunities for meaningful career growth, colleges and universities can prevent the lowered aspirations and occupational disengagement characteristic of ‘stuck’ professionals” (p. 608). The neglect of faculty in the midcareer phase was pointedly cited by Baldwin, DeZhure, Shaw and Moretto (2008), “Mid-career faculty encounter high expectations that grow substantially in the post-tenure years. . . . Despite their increasing responsibilities, mid-career faculty often feel neglected or taken for granted as department chairs and institutions focus their attentions on early-career and star faculty” (p. 49-50). Levinson (1986,1996) argued that the middle career years are characterized by an alternation “between stable periods of achievement and advancement and transitional periods often characterized by questioning, reassessment, redirection, and renewal” (cited in Baldwin et al, 2005, p. 98). The researchers also point out that the midcareer phase is a rather long period that stretches from the time faculty receive tenure until they begin to consider retirement, so it is in the institutions’ best interests to consider investing resources in support of this career phase.

This career research dovetails with the research on the life cycles of adults. In Erikson’s (1969) model of adult development, faculty in the midcareer age range would find their core tasks navigating between the poles of generativity and stagnation. Karpiak (1997), in her study of mid-life university professors, connects the threads on adult life cycles and university careers. She defines generativity as “the caring and commitment toward the next generation” and stagnation as “the sense of doubt and malaise concerning one’s contribution” (p.23). In her study she used the four constructs of Meaning, Malaise, Marginality and Mattering to examine how institutional context and environment can impact a faculty member’s movement between Erikson’s two poles. She discovered that caring, in both the personal and professional contexts, was the defining desire among these mid-life faculty. This desire for caring also included “. . . a more human quality of relationship on the part of the university administrators toward their faculty” (p. 25). Her finding is consonant with Erikson’s belief that caring is a critical factor in navigating the developmental tasks of middle adulthood (as cited in Karpiak, p. 25; 1969, p. 395). It is the presence of caring, broadly construed, that keeps malaise and stagnation in check.

Older faculty often report feeling devalued in systems that are highly competitive, they struggle to stay motivated and engaged, and they may neglect other important areas of well-being such as rest, family time, and physical activity due to taking on more administrative roles and duties (Lee et al, 2012, p. 70). Many faculty report that the path to full professor is unclear, and their own goals and priorities are shifting from individual concerns around getting tenure to departmental and institutional concerns, but often this shift is without clear expectations for performance and success (Baldwin, DeZhure, Shaw & Moretto, 2008, p. 52).

In response to all of the concerns for midcareer faculty outlined above, the Graylyn Retreat emerged as an opportunity to facilitate time for self-reflection in order to address these needs: 1) to assist faculty with re-visioning the rest of their careers, especially around their teaching roles; 2) to examine the ways in which privileging the outer work may be impacting their feelings and motivation for the work of teaching, and 3) to validate the need for wholeness and share the emotions that are normal to midcareer questioning, reordering, or even changing goals (Baldwin et al, pp. 51-52).

## **Method**

### **The Graylyn Teaching Renewal Retreat Design**

The retreat has several component parts that facilitate renewal: 1) working groups to provide peer support and sharing of ideas, 2) shared book reading and discussions to build a research-based understanding of learning, 3) workshops targeted at building the teaching self-efficacy of the faculty participants, 4) time for self reflection, 5) yoga, tai chi, walks, and meditation for wellness, 6) personal coaching for turning reflection into action, and, 7) a beautiful facility that makes participants feel valued. Lastly, as a bookend around these parts, there is 8) a legacy reflection workshop that opens the retreat on the first day and closes it on the final morning in order to connect teaching roles with the other aspects of the participants' academic careers. In the reflections on legacy, faculty are asked to reflect on their larger career goals beyond teaching; to think about what kind of legacy they want to build in their careers for themselves, their institutions and their students. (See Appendix A for the 2013 daily agenda.)

For faculty to do the deep reflective work required for true renewal, feeling that they are cared for is critical. So the main challenge in creating the retreat design was to keep caring in the forefront and yet still offer critical instructional support. Caring takes many different forms in the retreat: opportunities for 1) self-caring in meditation, walking, yoga, etc.; 2) peer caring/support through the working groups; 3) professional caring from the facilitators in the form of workshops and professional coaching; and even 4) implicit institutional caring in being supported to attend this retreat. As one participant said, "I can't believe my school would pay for me to be in such a lovely place".

Participation in the retreat is entirely voluntary and applications are accepted in the order in which they are received. Over the first three years participants from a variety of institutions attended: small private liberal arts colleges, and larger state and private universities. The number of participants has ranged from 20 to 30 in each of the three years, with a total of 79 participants. The retreat is run by a group of 4 faculty developers who plan the retreat and serve as workshop and group facilitators.

## **Findings/Discussion**

### **Analysis and Discussion**

Now we will examine more closely the eight core elements of the retreat and using participant responses, show how they work together to provide a holistic renewal experience for the faculty participants. With a firm foundation of caring we open the pathways to renewal by using reflection as the tool to challenge the seven agreements (Rendón, 2009). It must be at the heart of everything we do so that the participants can unpack and examine the assumptions driving their work, and perhaps causing their problems.

#### **1) Working groups to provide peer support and sharing of ideas**

The core activity of the retreat takes place in what we have named 'working groups'. The participants are divided into working groups of 6-8, intentionally diversified by institution, discipline, and gender, and they meet in these groups every day of the retreat. The work of the groups is centered around each group member's 'case study', which is written in advance as part of the application. The initial working group meeting involves ice-breaking activities, personal reflection work, and then the scheduling of the discussions of each member's case. The instructions for writing the case study, which should reflect a problem/issue/idea that they are wrestling with in their teaching, are given in the application:

### **Case Study Description**

The working groups are peer-mentoring sessions where you will spend time with colleagues discussing a specific teaching project or challenge that you write up as a case study. Please describe in some detail, an issue, idea, problem, or project related to your teaching that you would like address during the retreat with your colleagues. Be sure to give enough contextual and background information so that those from other institutions can fully understand the issue.

Each case gets a designated time slot for the entire group to brainstorm with the author of the case, sharing ideas and strategies. The final group meeting is again a personal reflection where participants craft a plan for re-entry to their home institutions. While each participant is in charge of the discussion of his/her case, there is also a facilitator [the retreat organizers and presenters] to keep them on track and where appropriate, to offer additional resources.

The efficacy of these working groups in creating the feeling of caring and promoting reflection are evidenced in the fact that they are the most commonly cited benefit of the retreat, with 57 out of 70 participants citing them as the most valuable component of the retreat. Participants mention the safe feeling created by sharing with faculty from other institutions and disciplines, and the amount of caring that their peers bring to the work of the group, as well as the benefits of speaking to faculty from different disciplines and institutions:

- *“Deep exchanges with colleagues renewed my sense of professional and personal union.”*
- *“The ideas of the educators in my working group inspired me so much.”*
- *“It was reassuring to connect with other teachers who are struggling with the same issues and it felt like a safe space to explore”.*
- *“you create an atmosphere that encourages honest sharing, and collaboration.”*

### **2) Book reading and discussions to build a research-based understanding of learning**

### **3) Workshops targeted at building the teaching self-efficacy of the faculty participants**

The workshops and book reading/discussion also promote reflection but are more directly focused on teaching and building up the self-efficacy of the participants. All participants who are accepted are asked to read *How Learning Works* (Ambrose et al, 2010) prior to arrival. The facilitators in the working group reference the book, as appropriate, during the peer-to-peer discussions to help connect the struggles and ideas that the faculty are sharing with the research on teaching and learning, and some of the workshops use the book as a foundation.

During the formally designated book discussion sessions, the larger group breaks into small discussion groups with a facilitator for each. In the 2013 retreat, participants were given a choice of an indoor, traditional, seminar-style book discussion, or a walking discussion based on a model of consultation called *Pedometers & Pedagogy*, developed at Wake Forest University. This group walks the grounds of the facility in pairs, and each pair shares an idea or takeaway they found valuable in the book. After 10 minutes of chatting while walking, the pairs switch and the process of sharing begins again. The pairs switch every 10 minutes or so to allow for maximum exposure to everyone’s ideas. The walking discussion is an example of a combined wellness and professional development activity based on the rejection of the separation of intellect/body/emotion paradigm.

The need for the workshops to be experiential and interactive is emphasized, and they must address a teaching topic of concern to midcareer faculty. For example: self-efficacy around technology, examining one’s own motivational landscape around teaching, using contemplative pedagogies, connecting with today’s students. The workshops, in contrast to the working groups, are facilitated with the entire group. This provides variety in the format and allows participants to engage with those who are not in their small working groups, thus

creating broader connections and networks among the participants. The value of the workshops shows up in the participant comments:

- *“The presentations really helped me pay attention to the powerful impact of my teaching on my students and to realize that it is not something I can be perfunctory about.”*
- *“Excellent presentations with specific goals were presented with detailed planning that facilitated discussions, and camaraderie.”*

#### **4) Time for self reflection, &**

#### **5) Yoga, tai chi, walks, and meditation for wellness**

In order to promote the deep reflection we want to sustain throughout the retreat, the pace and format of the activities must be aligned. This means that in contrast to the usual frenetic pace of teaching conferences, we have to formally build in time for reflection, processing and rest. In our experience, pacing is one the hardest principles to get right because we must balance the need for a slower pace and reflection time with making the conference as a whole feel valuable. We also know that for some later career faculty, it is important to still provide those how-to workshops to build self-efficacy, an important component of renewal. The difficulty is further compounded by individual participant preferences; what feels relaxing to one person makes another feel like they are wasting their time. The way we adjusted the balance of active working time with reflection time was to offer optional sessions. All of the wellness activities such as yoga, meditations, walking and tai chi were optional. The comments on the pacing, scheduling of sessions, and opportunities for reflection were all positive:

- *“Pacing was spectacular”*
- *“all pieces worked well together, including the breaks and opportunities*
- *or walks, naps and informal exchanges.”*
- *“Meditation has proven to be productive and dealt with my well-being.”*
- *“understanding the significance of finding balance in my personal life to be a more effective teacher; and freeing the spirit daily through meditation and self-reflection.”*

#### **6) Professional coaching for turning reflection into action**

The opportunity for coaching was added in 2012 and received such high praise it has now become an integral, though still optional, part of the retreat. The coaching is offered to groups of up to 5 participants in each session. The professional coach who runs them focuses the conversations on the fulfillment of personal and professional potential. The participants are offered the opportunity to sign up for a group coaching session during the opening lunch of the retreat on the first day. In 2013, most of the 20 participants took advantage of the coaching. Their comments on the experience sum up the value that the coaching brings to the retreat experience:

- *“The coaching session really focused the conference for me.”*
- *“The coaching session was the most valuable. There was no prescribed format and good, useful ideas evolved.”*
- *“The personal coaching was session was an excellent capstone for me. It came at the right time of the retreat and helped me coalesce several professional elements that are related to teaching (for me) in terms of curriculum and program building.”*

#### **7) A beautiful facility where participants feel valued.**

Selecting the right kind of setting for the retreat has also emerged as one of the essential ingredients to the feelings of being cared for and valued. Several locations and settings were

considered but Graylyn was the only one that offered the physical setting and staff attention to guests that would align with the goals of reflection and underscore the caring. The service, personal attention, food, and beautiful and extensive grounds meet both the physical and emotional needs of the participants. The impact of setting is often overlooked in conference planning due to the more obvious and pressing concerns around the location, size and cost of facility, but we discovered from our participants' comments that it can be one of the integral components in renewal work.

- *"The setting is really wonderful and does support the intended outcomes!"*
- *"The location of the retreat was exquisite...the staff of Graylyn was exceedingly friendly, and the food and the physically beautiful environment supported the "retreat" feel."*
- *"Thirdly, the pure fact of a retreat helped me feel re-energized...and the great environment we were in here at the Graylyn Center."*
- *"Being able to get away to this relaxing environment and stop to reflect and take in nature."*

### **8) Legacy reflection workshops**

Designed and implemented by facilitator Kate Brinko of Appalachian State, the opening and closing reflections on career and legacy provided the perfect framework to support the personal and teaching development activities of the retreat. Asking faculty to reflect on careers and lives at the mid-life stage of Erickson's stages of identity development, normalizes the need for reflection and realignment in one's academic career. Participants are introduced to a legacy schema that uses a matrix of personal/impersonal and tangible/intangible legacies with examples provided for each quadrant. They then do a reflection on the personal and professional legacies they want to leave. These reflections add a layer of depth throughout the retreat to the conversations and reflections in the smaller groups. To increase the likelihood that these reflections will be integrated and acted upon when the participants return to their lives and home institutions, the first day reflections are revisited on the final day and incorporated into the teaching renewal reflections. Participants articulated this link explicitly:

- *" Gaining a new perspective by thinking about teaching (and its relation to broader professional development) for three days in a focused, organized way is probably the most valuable takeaway. I now have a three-year plan for professional development related to teaching, more ideas than I can probably implement (but I will try!), and a sense of renewal (that I had no idea I needed but will surely benefit me and my students). "*
- *"My takeaway is to be mindful of living in them moment and live with a purpose for my legacy."*
- *[Most valuable part of the retreat?]-"The discussions around legacy."*
- *"Much of the retreat focused on teaching, but the coaching got me to re-commit to "legacy".*

### **Practical implications:**

#### **Conclusion: Are We There Yet?**

In sum, we believe the retreat, in each of its component parts and as a whole event, provides a structure that allows us to address the needs of midcareer faculty and challenge the agreements of academic culture detailed earlier in this article (Rendón, 2009). By framing this teaching renewal as a larger conversation about how we feel about what we do in this outer part of our lives, and how it affects our inner lives, we directly push back against the

agreement to privilege intellectual/rational knowing over “wonder, intuition and emotions”. (Rendón, 2009, pp. 26-32).

In bringing the participants together to collaborate across institutional types and disciplines to validate their shared struggles, we very directly challenge the agreements of separation and competition. By virtue of this sharing we normalize the experience of struggle at various points in a career, which negates the agreement of perfection and allows faculty to embrace their role as seekers rather than knowers. Through the infusion of contemplative practices and non-Western traditions of self-care and self-knowing, we break with the tradition of Western monoculturalism while also privileging the inner work over the outer, thereby creating validated time and space for self-examination, and so challenging Rendón’s final three agreements. We believe we have achieved Rendón’s new agreement: “the agreement to embrace connectedness, collaboration, and transdisciplinarity” (p.36). The evidence is here, in the stories our participants tell us:

- *“The opportunity to reignite the mind, body, and spirit. This retreat brought all three elements together in a way that stimulated me to revisit my thoughts on teaching and learning; understanding the significance of finding balance...”*
- *“I’ve been to several conferences on teaching and generally come away from each with several good ideas that I can use to tweak my teaching for the better. This is the only conference I’ve been to that renewed my teaching—that gave me a re-energized and transformed vision for what I can be doing as a teacher”*
- *“It was a great, life-changing experience. One of the best conferences I have ever attended on any topic!”*
- *“This is a place where you feel safe to express your career and even personal concerns and get time-proven advice and techniques and walk away feeling energized and renewed and anxious to try again with a positive outlook and effective tools and cool ideas. Thank you! Thank you! Thank You!”*
- *“Overall this was a wonderful, enriching and transformational experience.”*
- *“This was a fantastic retreat! The deep exchanges with colleagues renewed my sense of professional and personal union and gave me important tools and new concepts which I can use to move towards realizing my sense of purpose.”*
- *“Excellent sessions: legacy, motivation, contemplative, vocation, working groups. Realizing that there needs to be balance between personal and professional. Changes or change in one can greatly affect the other. It helped me determine where I need to focus my energies when I return to work.”*

While these comments certainly indicate that we are on the right path to achieving Rendón’s new agreement, there remains work to be done. In the next phase of researching effective practices in working with mid and later career faculty, we look to obtain evidence of changed practices (teaching or career planning) from those who have attended in years past, while continuing to listen to the lessons offered by each year’s cohort at Graylyn. We must also consider ways of challenging our institutions to do better, to care more, and to provide opportunities to mid and late faculty for personal/teaching/career renewal as a matter of course. As Zeig & Baldwin (2012) argue, “Colleges and universities cannot afford to waste any of their valuable human resources. Policies, programs, and services designed to support

the work and careers of late-career faculty can enrich the academic community by maintaining professors' vitality all the way to retirement" (p. 87). Empowering the faculty to recognize the need for this support is the first step in that conversation.

### Appendix A: Daily Agenda 2013

Monday	Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday	
	7:00 – 9:00 Breakfast Buffet	7:30 – 8:15 Tai Chi (White Garden) OR Walk (Meet in Manor Lobby)	7:00 – 9:00 Breakfast Buffet	7:30 – 8:15 Tai Chi (White Garden) OR Walk (Meet in Manor Lobby)	7:00 – 9:00 Breakfast Buffet	7:30 – 8:15 Tai Chi (White Garden) OR Walk (Meet in Manor Lobby)
	9:00 – 10:30 Working Groups		9:00 – 10:30 Working Groups		9:00 – 10:00 Working Groups	
	10:30 – 10:45 Break		10:30 – 10:45 Break		10:00 – 11:30 Conference Wrap Up Legacies of Our Lives <i>Seminar Room</i>	
	10:45 – 12:00 Motivating Ourselves <i>Seminar Room</i>		10:45 – 12:00 Contemplative Practices in the Classroom <i>Seminar Room</i>			
12:00 – 1:20 Lunch and Welcome <i>Provost XXX University</i>	12:00 – 1:00 Lunch Buffet	12:00 – 1:15 Coaching Session 1 (Bring your lunch) <i>Butler's Room</i>	12:00 – 1:00 Lunch Buffet	12:00 – 1:15 Coaching Session 3 (Bring your lunch) <i>Butler's Room</i>		
	1:00 – 2:00 Break		1:00 – 2:00 Break			
1:30 – 3:15 The Legacies of Our Lives <i>Seminar Room</i>	2:00 – 3:15 Breaking the Technology Barrier (Bring your laptops) <i>Seminar Room</i>		2:00 – 3:15 Teaching as Vocation <i>Seminar Room</i>			
3:15 – 3:30 Break	3:15 – 3:30 Break		3:15 – 3:30 Break			
3:30 – 5:00 Working Groups	3:30 – 5:00 Working Groups		3:30 – 5:00 Book Discussion: How Learning Works <i>Seminar Room</i>			
5:00 – 6:00 Room Check-In	5:00 – 6:15 Coaching Session 2 <i>Butler's Room</i>	5:30 – 6:15 Evening Meditation <i>Persian Card Room</i>	5:00 – 6:15 Coaching Session 4 <i>Butler's Room</i>	5:30 – 6:15 Evening Meditation <i>Persian Card Room</i>		
6:00 – 6:30 Cocktail Reception	6:15 – 6:30 Break		6:15 – 6:30 Break			
6:30 Dinner at Graylyn	6:30 Dinner Buffet at Graylyn		6:30 Dinner "On Your Own"			

\*Blue and Green shaded activities are optional

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