



Recreating Teaching Space

I discovered something rather important this week: I'm in the wrong job! That's right, for the past 25 years, I have lived under the false assumption that being a teacher was the ideal career for me. Now, I wasn't one of those who dreamed of being a teacher from the earliest moments of childhood. In fact, I had tried a few other things before landing on the doorstep of Toronto's Faculty of Education. Summers as a bank teller, a year or so as a customer service representative for a national telephone company. I had even walked around a couple of seminars. But, teaching is where I ended up, and teaching is what has kept me going for nearly a quarter of a century.

Until this week, that is, when I, along with my grade eight students, participated in the annual career interest survey provided by the local secondary school guidance department. You may have completed one or two of these surveys yourself over the years. You answer 'yes' or 'no' to a wide variety of questions, make note of those to which you responded positively and, voila, you are presented with a personality profile, a description of six different personality types and – in this particular inventory – a list of career possibilities that you may wish to consider.

Well, I wasn't surprised with the results. In inventories of this type, I generally score highest in the artistic/creative personality type, with equal standing in the thinking/research domain. My lowest scores tend to come in the domain that requires a great deal of order and organization, attention to detail, and a passion for following rules.

In this particular inventory, I ended up scoring a revealing one out of ten in personality dimension C: The Organizer/Conventional. No big surprise. Where the big shock came, however, was when I began exploring the list of careers that might be attractive to those who have strength in this area. There, nestled in amongst professions like bank teller, computer operator, accountant, and time study analyst was – you guessed it – teacher!

I sat in my comfortable 'director's chair' at the front of the classroom, a look of obvious dismay on my face. Looking up at the class

I said, "I hate to tell you this, folks, but I'm in the wrong job!" (I half-considered walking out of the room to emphasize my point, but the message from a recent workshop on liability and student supervision was still ringing in my ears.)

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not about to leave the profession. In fact, I am still as committed to the work that I do as I was when I walked into my first classroom in 1984. But this week it struck me that there are many things about life in the classroom that I still find challenging:

While I try to 'divine' the world for lesson ideas pretty well everywhere I go, my best and most detailed 'lesson plans' are written after a lesson is taught.

I still find it frustrating to deal with the economy of the classroom: the collection of pizza money, permission forms for a myriad of school activities, notes from parents, homework books, and tracking agendas.

I despise the fact that students, especially older students, are required to form a straight and quiet line before being allowed to move anywhere in the school.

I continue to question the value of academic awards.

These are just some examples of practices and approaches which are not part of my way of thinking about school, but which have been part of the fabric of every school in which I have taught.

For the past three years, I have been working on an alternative, arts-based Grade 7 and 8 program that might better engage some of those students who find themselves hanging out at the edges of this place we call school. By using the languages of visual arts, music, drama, and dance, I have been hoping to draw the circle a little wider to include those students who are attracted to a different style of learning.

But here's the new insight that took up residence in my mind this week. While designing a program that might involve students with a more artistic and intuitive approach to the

world, I realized that I have also been working, perhaps subconsciously, to create a different type of workspace for me as teacher.

Much has been written over the last decade about multiple intelligences, learning styles, student-centered learning, and individualized instructional paths. There is no doubt that these are helping us to redefine educational spaces for our students. But what about the adults who come to work in these spaces everyday? What about those among us who, despite their love of and passion for what they do, struggle to fit into the traditional school? Is there hope that we will ever be free from looking over our shoulder to see if our masquerade has been detected?

I feel better now. I've come clean. |

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