SHARING THE KNOWLEDGE:
Methods, problems, and possibilities in knowledge transfer to new faculty

by

Hazel Mary Smith

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I have heard it said that in grad school, you learn as much from your peers as you do from your instructors. Whether or not that is true, I know I have gained strength and wisdom from a very fine group of students – the Rocking Cohort in the MACT program. Of course, my peers also include the terrific expert instructors who allowed themselves to be interviewed for this project. I felt especially inept as I set out on this, my first attempt at doing recorded interviews. Patton states, "The quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer" (p.341), yet in my case whatever quality was obtained came from the intelligence, grace, reflection and communication skills exhibited by the interviewees. They not only gave freely of their time, but also provided assistance and reassurance in the mechanics of the interviews. It is obvious that without their cooperation, this project would never have come to fruition. Thank you "six experts".

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ABSTRACT

The literature generalizes that knowledge, especially tacit knowledge, is best transferred person to person, although explicit knowledge can be transferred through technological mediation. The use of stories is one way of transferring wisdom. The purpose of this project was to identify the knowledge that instructors at a Canadian college considered instrumental in their development as expert instructors. The possibility of using stories as part of a training program to transfer such knowledge to new instructors was explored. Recommendations were then generated.

Six expert instructors at the college were asked what wisdom they possessed that would be useful for a new instructor to have, and they were asked how they had gained such knowledge. They were also invited to relate a story from their teaching experience that might prove helpful to a new faculty member. The expert instructors consistently identified five topics of importance for new instructors:

1. Understanding the realities of classroom interactions with college students.

2. Accepting that there will be "bad" days.

3. The need to preserve professionalism.

4. Maintaining focus.

5. Acknowledging the excellent rewards in a teaching career.

As well, one major theme was identified. Instructors had gained their knowledge informally more than they had done through formal coursework. The following recommendations for administration in postsecondary institutions are made: 1) provide instructors with time for informal knowledge sharing, 2) provide opportunities for storytelling, and 3) consider the use of technology for sharing certain types of explicit knowledge.

In the beginning....

Since stories were central to my research, I wanted to include some stories that emphasized the message I was conveying. The first such story is included here as a metaphor that can be seen to demonstrate an important lesson in knowledge management: wisdom does not diminish when it is shared.

TWO BROTHERS

Two brothers worked together on the family farm. One was married and had a large family. The other was single. At the day's end, the brothers shared everything equally, produce and profit. Then one day the single brother said to himself, "It's not right that we should share equally the produce and the profit. I'm alone and my needs are simple." So each night he took a sack of grain from his bin and crept across the field between their houses, dumping it into his brother's bin.

Meanwhile, the married brother said to himself, "It's not right that we should share the produce and the profit equally. After all, I'm married and I have my wife and children to look after me in years to come. My brother has no one, and no one to take care of his future." So each night he took a sack of grain and dumped it into his single brother's bin. Both men were puzzled for years because their supply of grain never dwindled. Then one dark night the two brothers bumped into each other. Slowly it dawned on them what was happening. They dropped their sacks and embraced one another.

-- Author Unknown. Reprinted in *A 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup for the Soul* from More Sower's Seeds by *Brian Cavanaugh.*

INTRODUCTION

Olds College (OC) is a central Alberta educational institution that offers a wide array of applied and technical programs. It is a hands-on facility that provides students with the skills and knowledge necessary to enter the workforce in their chosen field, and as a result, there is a large and sprawling campus for a relatively small number of students. The variety of programs, including but not restricted to agricultural mechanics, horticulture, advanced farrier, animal health technology, arboriculture, and land resource management, contributes to the unique culture that the college embraces. The people who teach at Olds College come from industry, with expertise in their field and sometimes with science degrees, but few come with teaching experience or education degrees. During their first terms as instructors, they enter into a situation of lesson planning, student evaluation, and course instruction, often without a practical and experiential background in teaching. A prime source of wisdom for them could consequently be experienced instructors.

Hansen, Nohria, & Tierney (1999) state that knowledge management is not new and they provide examples of parents in family businesses passing their wisdom to their children, craftsmen teaching apprentices, and workers exchanging know-how on the job. However, in the last decade knowledge management has become an accepted part of organizational strategies. "There is current interest in the competitive advantage that knowledge may provide for organizations " (Blackler, 1995, p. 1021). Knowledge management within the faculty, and knowledge transfer from experienced instructors to new instructors, can thus be

viewed as issues of importance, both for the new instructors who can gain from such assistance, but also for the college itself that can benefit from a more knowledgeable faculty. As Dixon states, "Gathering knowledge is easy, but sharing it is harder" (2002, p. 1). This study investigated the knowledge that experienced expert instructors at OC thought was important and explored the ways in which they had attained this knowledge. Relevant stories were also collected that may be of use to college administrators and new faculty members. Data were collected through interviews with six experienced instructors from Olds College.

As the college enters its 92nd year as an educational institution, it "faces significant challenges with respect to financial resources... and our 'hands on' learning styles costs money." The college is being forced to cut $2.2 million by the end of 2004. As well, Government funding is uncertain and unstable and the college is unable to "increase revenue quickly enough to meet rapidly rising costs such as energy, insurance, salaries etc." (R. Wilson, personal communication December 10, 2003; Olds College Media Release, 2002).

Besides the present financial challenge, a second concern is that many instructors are reaching retirement age (Human Resources Canada, 2003; I. Morrison, 2003, personal communication; Steele, 2003; Tamburri, 2003; The National, 2003; Finkelstein & Schuster, 2001; Harrigan, 1997). This can be a larger dilemma at a school such as OC in view of the fact that people seem to prefer living in cities while OC needs faculty who are willing to relocate to a rural area.

The first months in a new job are probably difficult in many professions, and the situation is no different for new instructors at OC. Some of the challenges that

they face include being alone in a room with students, rather than with other instructors; having varying schedules, so that formal and informal mentors may be unavailable when needed; and teaching in programs that have different start dates so that they might be well into a teaching term before either the formal orientation takes place or like-minded individuals are met. As well, at Olds College, three types of qualities are needed by its teaching staff. Individuals need to have hands-on experience in their chosen field, whether that is in repairing farm machinery engines or facilitating resource industry leases with landowners; they need theoretical foundations in their chosen field; and they need to have teaching skills. These three attributes do not always dovetail, and thus these unique instructional needs in a time of retiring academia accentuate the fact that OC would be well served to realize a way to capture and transfer knowledge from experienced, expert instructors to new instructors. The quality that was my main interest was teaching skills because that was the attribute that people thought they could discuss through their stories. The research focus for this project was undertaken out of concern and appreciation for a college and a rural community and it was concentrated on methods, problems and possibilities in the area of knowledge transfer from experienced faculty to new faculty, utilizing my special area of interest: *stories*. The following story in many ways epitomizes my study, as it clearly lays out an example of the benefits of knowledge sharing. Embedded in the story is also the concept of knowledge being shared through social communication which in many ways echoes the theme of my research findings – instructors gained their knowledge through informal means such as interactions with other instructors.

THE TITMOUSE AND THE MILK BOTTLE

The United Kingdom has a longstanding milk distribution system in which milkmen in small trucks bring the milk in bottles to the door of each country house. At the beginning of this century, these milk bottles had no top. Birds had easy access to the cream which settled in the top of the bottle. Two different species of British garden birds, the titmouse and the red robins, learned to siphon up cream from the bottles and tap this new, rich food source. Then, between the two world wars, the UK dairy distributors closed access to the food source by placing aluminum seals on the bottles.

By the early 1950s, the entire titmouse population of the UK – about a million birds—had learned how to pierce the aluminum seals. Regaining access to this rich food source provided an important victory for the titmouse family as a whole; it gave them an advantage in the battle for survival. Conversely, the red robins, as a family, never regained access to the cream. Occasionally, an individual robin learns how to pierce the aluminum seals, but the knowledge never passes to the rest of the species.

In short, the titmice went through an extraordinarily successful institutional learning process. The red robins failed, even though individual robins had been as innovative as individual titmice. Moreover, the difference could not be attributed to their ability to communicate. As songbirds, both the titmice and the red robins had the same wide range of means of communication. The explanation could only be found in the *social propagation* process.

The titmice live together as family units to rear their young. Following this rearing, the birds join together in flocks, while robins are territorial and do not "flock". Birds that flock learn faster.

– Summarized from pages 134 & 135, *The Living Company* by Arie de Geus (1997).

PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTION

As stated on page 1 of this paper, knowledge management within the faculty, and knowledge transfer from experienced instructors to new instructors could be viewed as issues of importance at OC, and I wanted to contribute some learning in this area while making reference to stories. As a result, I set out to gather stories from experienced instructors while also learning what wisdom those instructors value and how they gained that wisdom. I began with a literature review studying best practices and I found that stories can be utilized in knowledge transfer. I subsequently developed a research plan to focus on two facets – inductively exploring and characterizing the patterns, practices and/or peculiarities that may have helped instructors develop into expert instructors, and then determining if the instructors' stories could be exploited explicitly and strategically to enhance the knowledge transfer process to new instructors. It appeared to me that the basis for such understandings could be rooted in the Narrative Paradigm Theory of Communication, and it is there that this project begins. This is followed by a literature review, although in the tradition of narrative (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000) there will also be a literature review incorporated in and with the recommendations of this project. After the literature review there is an explanation of the methodology used in the applied research, and subsequently the findings of the research are outlined. The research consisted of interviews with six expert instructors at Olds College, designed to learn what types of knowledge they have that they feel would be useful to new instructors and to learn how they gained that knowledge. Lindlof (1995) states that collecting stories can be a part of a research

project, and I made it a part of this project by asking each instructor to relate a story from his or her teaching career. Therefore, in the Findings section, there are three sections

1. WHAT knowledge experienced instructors possess to make them better teachers,
2. HOW they gained that knowledge, and
3. STORIES from the instructors.

By examining the stories, it could be determined if they contained elements related to the literature review and/or to the knowledge instructors felt would enhance new instructors' abilities. Such possible lessons from their stories are also included in the Findings section, following which, Recommendations and the Conclusion synthesize the various aspects of the project.

EMBEDDED IN THEORY

The foundation of the Narrative Paradigm Theory of Communication (NPT) is that stories are the basis for human communication. Underpinning this theory is the principle that we humans are basically storytelling animals, and that we are rational. We accept a story, the theory hypothesizes, when elements within that story – the probability, consistency, and fidelity, are credible. If we perceive those elements to be credible, the values within the story can be transmitted to others and thus justify action. As Cragan & Shields (1998) so succinctly put it, "...all the great religions of the world use parables (stories) to teach religious values" (p. 150). The Narrative Paradigm Theory was developed by Walter R. Fisher in the 1970s, but Kounalakis, Banks & Daus (1999) have utilized many parts of it in their writings of modern corporate journalism. They state that communications within an

organization must be aligned, complete, accurate, and delivered by a credible messenger, thus mirroring the thesis prescribed by the initiator of NPT. In other words, what Kounalakis et al. say concerning the elements that make organizational communications plausible is comparable to that which Fisher said about communication in general. We judge stories against certain standards; religious parables and organizational communiqués are judged by equivalent standards. In a similar vein, Bruner (1991) states that "narrative 'truth' is judged by its verisimilitude rather than its verifiability" (p. 13), and that narrative accounts provide an interpretation of events, making the distinction between the "reasons" of things happening and simply the "causes" of things happening. He also posits that humans organize their experiences and their memories in the form of a narrative, including, but not limited to, stories, and that this narrative is a culturally transmitted conventional structure. Denning (2000) mirrors this hypothesis with his statement,

> Groups, communities, societies and cultures also preserve collections of typical narrative meanings in their myths, fairy tales, legends, histories and stories. To participate in a group, community, society or culture requires a general knowledge of these accumulated narrative meanings. The cultural stock of meanings are dynamic and are added to by new contributions from members and deleted by lack of use.

Lindloff (1995) builds on work several writers, including Bruner and Fisher who are cited above, to state that the inclination to narrate is a universal trait of humanity, and expands this to conclude that such narrations "encode the information needed by members of society to carry on the most critical activities of social intercourse" (p. 173). Based on the writings of these researchers, it would appear probable that stories are already being used for knowledge transfer in an

informal process at OC and that the depth of understanding that stories contain could well be utilized to transfer knowledge in a more formal and strategic method.

Other business writers have studied and become proponents of the use of stories within corporate culture for many things such as creating vision, introducing culture, describing values, etc. These will be described in the Literature Review section of this paper.

When I look at the situation at OC -- an aging faculty, a relatively distinctive organization and teaching environment, a limited budget -- I see possibilities of utilizing the Narrative Paradigm Theory to assist with knowledge transfer from experienced instructors to new instructors. NPT would tell us that the stories of such instructors are embedded with useful knowledge. Therefore, in this study, expert instructors from OC are asked what information they wish they had before they started teaching, and what knowledge they feel new faculty should be given. They are given time to reflect on whether they received their knowledge in a formal or informal manner. The information garnered from the expert faculty is analyzed to extract common themes and categories. Each instructor is also invited to relate any story from his or her teaching career. The stories, embedded as they are with culture, knowledge, information, and even gossip, are then viewed as a possible learning tool for new instructors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For the purposes of this project, I visualized a river. Unfortunately, the river soon developed too many currents. Building on some of the readings I had completed in my various MACT courses, I saw the concepts of *intellectual capital, social capital, knowledge workers, organizational communications, knowledge management,* and *changing technologies* flowing side-by-side and intermingled with *storytelling.* The river quickly became unnavigable within the confines of a master's project, so I determined to focus on just one tributary of such a river– knowledge transfer from experienced expert instructors to new instructors. While several issues within this tributary are considered, emphasis is placed on the usefulness of stories for such knowledge transfer.

Knowledge Transfer

Much has been written concerning best practices for transferring knowledge that is explicit compared to transferring knowledge that is tacit. Many studies (Hansen, Nohria & Tierney,1999; Denning, 2001; Stewart, 2001; Zack, 1998; Fulmer, 2001; Davenport, 1999) have revealed that while it might be possible to transfer explicit knowledge through books, videos, web pages, and other forms of mediation, it is probably best to transfer tacit knowledge in a face-to-face setting. Davenport & Prusak (2001) advocate, "hire smart people and let them talk to one another" (p. 88). It can be assumed that the knowledge that experienced instructors have is a combination of explicit and tacit. The Olds College Faculty Association (OCFA) has a document that reveals telling statements from newer instructors and teaching assistants. One assistant put this theory very succinctly,

"If you want to get things done then you have to know how to circumvent the system. You need to know who can provide assistance. You need to know **who** can get things done when necessary. You need to network, go to the coffee room, and get to know everyone." This symbiotic relationship between explicit and tacit knowledge will be revisited in the Methodology section of this paper.

Zack (1998) posits that dissimilar groups (such dissimilarity is found in new faculty at OC) need interactive and rich modes of communication. "It's more obvious, too, that companies are made of people, not stones and pipes; and the value of conversation, community, and voice increase, ..." (Stewart, p. 50). In a 1998 study, Nahapiet & Ghoshal found that the roots of intellectual capital were "deeply bedded" in social relations.

Several studies indicate that *explicit* knowledge is more easily shared through technological mediation (Fulmer, 2001, p. 11;Wright, 2001 p. 6; Davenport, 1999, cited in Wright, 2001; Stewart, 2001). Incorporating explicit information through a technological medium (a pamphlet, a webpage, or a Yellow Pages directory) can provide relatively quick and easy access to new personnel on such humdrum issues as use of the photocopier, booking AV equipment, reaching emergency services, etc., but can also serve as "a means by which people who are working on similar projects in different parts of an organization can find each other" (Stewart, 2001, p. 163). Archival information can also be incorporated into such a system and centrally located, because "a firm's success depends not only on the skills and knowledge at any given point in time, but on 'memories', the

intangibles of collective business experience, triumphs and failures, culture and vision" (Leonard & Sensiper, 1998, p. 123).

Dixon (2002) states that sometimes retiring employees feel as though they are being raped when they are asked to share their information before they go and he further comments that it is important to let the individual feel that his or her knowledge has not gone into a black hole. It would therefore appear that "capturing" any information from present and retiring faculty would be important. The World Bank had some success with its initiative aptly named *Tacit Knowledge Download* (Fulmer, 2001, p. 11), which utilized Lotus Notes and the web to store a specific exit interview, thus assisting with institutional memory retention.

Storytelling

> Explaining storytelling is like explaining a kitten. We all know about kittens. We have wonderful memories of kittens – children holding kittens, watching kittens play, petting a kitten. Our memories are a meaningful whole. Trying to break them down into pieces is like cutting a kitten in half in order to understand it. Half a kitten isn't really half a kitten. Breaking storytelling down into pieces, parts, and priorities destroys it. There are some truths that we just know, we can't prove it but we know them to be true. Storytelling moves us into the place where we trust what we know, even if it can't be measured, packaged, or validated empirically.
>
> – Simmons (2001, p. xvi, xvii)

Simmons' idea that stories are difficult to explain was especially perplexing to me. When I started my master's project, I was an instructor at Olds College, and several other instructors were completing their master's degrees. They seemed to me to have such clearly defined research projects based on hard science, and I sometimes found it awkward, even embarrassing, to explain that I was interested in *stories*. I couldn't help but feel that others, dealing perhaps with logic, math, chemistry, and soils in a quantitative environment, and being

unfamiliar with the literature I had come to value, would be dismissive about *stories*. My dilemma was encapsulated in a quote from Clandinin & Connelly (2000) when they stated, "Jean remembers trying to shrink into corners of elevators as well-meaning faculty asked her what her study was about, ... as the elevator moved from the main floor to the tenth floor where she could gratefully escape" (p. 125).

Fortunately, however, storytelling has moved into the mainstream of modern business practices. While not universally accepted as a method of knowledge transfer, there is evidence of its utilization. The *Harvard Business Review* provides examples of the use of stories within organizations. Graham (2002) tells of using them at Advanced Cardiovascular Systems to create shared experiences and to help ingrain openness and honesty into the company's culture. At Graham's company, they also tell and retell "vivid stories about the most difficult, defining moments in our company's history" to show that their company faces difficult issues openly (pp 45, 46). In addition, they use stories to introduce new employees to the organization's culture and history. By admitting to the difficult issues, as Graham suggests, organizations appear to be more truthful (McKee, 2003). He hypothesizes that, in the wake of the Enron and WorldCom experiences, people have come to distrust most statistics, but that they will accept a story that displays problems and then describes how such problems are overcome.

Examples of stories being used in the business world to prove people's reliability and trust are provided by Simmons (2001) and Prusak (2001) who also cite occurrences of stories being used for other positive impacts such as demonstrating values and vision. Another illustration of stories being used for vision comes to us from the field of sport. Jackson (2001) describes creating an on-the-spot vision story when he purchased the Harlem Globetrotters in 1992. Having created that vision through the use of a story, he then had to "make the story real" and thus went on to successfully recreate the famous basketball organization (p. 55).

Setting out to fulfill one of its missions by creating a fundamental change in society, The *Trust for Public Lands* felt that stories might be one of the best ways to do that. They therefore published a book of stories (2002): some for healing, some for economics, some for connectedness – attributes that would definitely be seen as important for new instructors. The preface stated that "Everything is held together with stories" (Lopez). Later in the book, the belief is stated "Telling stories is our best hope of reflecting the kinds of world we want to live in and, therefore, gives us a hope of creating it" (Forbes, 2002, p.3). These words could be used by OC to create "...the kind of college we wish to work at and, therefore, gives us hope of creating it".

Not everyone in the Humanities is comfortable with quantifiable information provided by statistics and mathematics, but Becker (1992) discusses other ways to represent knowledge produced by research. While some conventions such as

arrows with statistical coefficients attached might be understood by other 'adepts', he argues that they make communication of other kinds of results difficult or impossible. Accordingly, communicating "complex interdependencies" in stories can be more productive (p. 215). This is verified by Pfeffer & Sutton (1999) who state that "essential knowledge is often transferred between people by stories" (p. 90).

One can assume that with OC's successful 90 year history, there has been a spark, a vision, and some operating values that have contributed to the success. Senge (1990) refers to such values as a *purpose story* that helps people in an organization come to share in a larger sense of purpose, and to unite in a common destiny. It gives them a sense of continuity and identity not achievable in any other way (p. 354). In a later treatise, he states:

> ... knowledge cannot, by definition, be converted into an object and 'given' from one person to another. Knowledge only diffuses when there are learning processes whereby human beings develop new capacities for effective action . . .Whether or not knowing about something [having information] leads to effective action depends upon people's capacity to interpret the information, generate meaningful options for action and implement an action that leads to desired results (1999, p. 421).

Examples of stories being successfully used at Xerox are provided by Blackler (1995), who also cites other studies showing stories' significance, while Stewart (2001) tells that 3M uses storytelling to nourish its innovation culture, and because "Stories are powerful carriers of cultural messages" (p. 186). To this growing list of uses for stories within business organizations, McKee (2003) adds motivation and persuasion. He further suggests that stories are more *interesting,*

and thus more constructive than are statistics, PowerPoint presentations, or rhetoric. Hot off the press, a full 18 months after I was first introduced to and became interested in the concept of storytelling, Walton (2004) posits that storytelling is absolutely essential for leaders because, "Every leader tells a story" (p. 7).

While these examples from international business organizations are certainly relevant, there is also evidence of the increased utilization of storytelling within Alberta, both as a teaching device and as a method of knowledge transfer. The University of Calgary has offered a course *Telling Tales: Story as a Management Tool* in their management certificate program. Two professional storytellers have stated that they are frequently hired to provide workshops for businesses in Alberta (G. deVos, 2002, personal communication; M. Hays, 2003, personal communication). Mount Royal College provides an adult educator storytelling seminar and has had in attendance, not just educators, but sales people and health care professionals as well. The participants have been surprised with the power of stories as a teaching technique and the educators have revealed on their evaluation forms that they intend to use more stories generally and especially to use more stories to teach concepts (M. Hays, 2003, personal communication).

The literature therefore suggests that stories are being used to ingrain openness; to create identity, shared experiences and a common destiny; to show honesty; to illustrate culture and history; to demonstrate reliability and trust; to

assist with healing; to explain economics; to construct connectedness; to encourage innovation; and to carry the message of culture. Such attributes, it can be assumed, would be the very ones that the college would wish to see embodied in knowledge that new faculty gains.

When I set out to interview six expert instructors at Olds College, I wanted to learn what types of knowledge they feel would be important to share with new faculty; I hoped to discover how they had gained that knowledge; and by listening to their stories, to ascertain if their stories contained knowledge that might be useful to new instructors if transferred to them.

METHODOLOGY

In embarking on this research journey, I used as my guide a citation from Eagleton (1983) that had been introduced to me by Lindlof (1995). "It is not a matter of starting from certain theoretical or methodological problems: it is a matter of starting from what we want to *do,* and then seeing which methods and theories will best help us to achieve these ends" (p. 25). To achieve my ends, it was very obvious that a qualitative study would be imperative, as I was interested in "capturing meaning" (Mayan, 2001), and in gaining "expert insight or information" (Lindlof, 1995).

Within this larger framework of qualitative inquiry, I wished to conclude my project with recommendations, and that pointed the way to Action Research. Having received permission from the college administrators to do this study, having interviewed the instructors, and having the desire to share my findings, meant that I was not interested in what is commonly called the helicopter model, "They came and did their study and we never heard from them again" (Gibson & Gibson, 2002). Rather, including recommendations meant that the research was tied directly to action (Neuman, 2003), and it would be my hope that "the theory's implications will have useful application" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 24). This decision also impacted the writing up of the study. Neuman (2003) states that the publication of the formal report in action research is always a secondary goal, and that making people aware of conditions and thus able to act on improving those conditions should be the primary goal (p. 25). It was therefore important that the recommendations could be conveyed to the college in a document succinct

enough to ensure that it will be read, so the Recommendations section became what could be a stand-alone document, making the immediate application of the research obvious and overt because frequently the recommendations section and the executive summary are the only sections that are read by executives (Carey, 2002; Burnett, 1994, pp. 415, 416).

I selected the semi-structured interview as the best choice for this particular qualitative inquiry after studying several interview genres as described by Lindlof (1995, pp. 165 – 194), Patton, (2002, pp. 341-381), and Neuman (2003, pp. 363-402). In addition, I was fortunate enough to be able to attend a five day workshop on qualitative analysis that provided not only further readings and handouts, but also practice in the interviewing process. Moreover, I became aware of the work of Stebbins, whose writings on exploratory research (2001) were thus added to my repertoire. *The Long Interview* (McCracken, 1988) also proved to be invaluable. While McCracken seemed to describe semi-structured interviews, he chose not to call it that. Once again, as had happened in choosing my research topic, my confusion was mirrored by Clandinin & Connelly who stated:

> ...we had to fight against an urge to lose ourselves in the wonders and complexities of the various methods. There was a kind of seductiveness to method that we found compelling, a seductiveness that threatened to wrap us into the ideas and concepts that drove the method. It was difficult to keep before us our research puzzles about experience when the methods seemed so interesting in their own right (2000, p. 128).

My purpose in the research was to elicit information from the instructors in their own words. I did not wish to be handicapped by exploring only those themes that I have identified as important. McCracken states that being too directive in the

interview process will "mean that the project ends up 'capturing' nothing more than the investigator's own logic and categories, so that the reminder[1] of the project takes on a dangerously tautological quality" (p. 21). I rejected the unstructured, interactive interview, with perhaps "only one or more grand tour questions" (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 91), as it did not seem as though it would be as useful to me. I also thought it might make the respondents uncomfortable with such minimal direction from the interviewer. Thus, with the semi-structured interview in mind, I prepared and had approved my list of questions:

1. If you had only one piece of advice, information, or wisdom to pass on to a new faculty member, what would it be?
2. Thinking back to the start of your teaching career here, what do you know now that you wish you'd known then?
3. Are there other bits of wisdom you feel new faculty should have?
4. How did you gain your knowledge? (Possible probe questions: Was it a lonely personal experience? Did you benefit from mentoring? Was it formal, such as by taking classes? Was it informal, such as talking over lunch?)
5. I'm interested in stories, and I wonder if you would share with me any story you have about an incident or incidents in your teaching career that contributed to your expertise as an instructor.
6. Would you be willing to share your knowledge? If so, what methods of knowledge sharing would you be willing to utilize?

Mayan (2001) states that, since qualitative inquiry depends on samples being purposefully selected, it is important to first ask, "Who can give me the most and the best information about my topic?" (p. 9). In seeking understandings from experienced instructors, it was essential to me that the instructors chosen to be

[1] I am assuming this is poor editing and that his original work says *remainder*.

interviewed were indeed instructors of "excellence", and so I started my quest for such instructors by perusing the nomination lists for the *Ian Hall Outstanding Faculty/Staff Member Award*[2] for individuals who "went beyond their duties for the students" at Olds College. This award is given annually by the Students Union, using nominations from the students themselves. Utilizing the lists of nominees for the previous two years, I developed a new list by subdividing the names based on gender and program. As an instructor at the college when I started this study, I was even more than "a central figure who influences the collection, selection, and interpretation of the data" (Finlay, 2002, p. 531) and was truly a researcher positioned "in the midst" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 100), and it meant that I did not simply choose names randomly, but sought instructors about whom I had heard favourable comments from my students, or with whom I had positive interactions regarding student behavior or assignments. With the nomination lists thus narrowed by this criterion, I again honed my list by attempting to represent as many programs and departments as possible.

Patton (1990, p. 46) states that this purposeful sampling is perhaps the main difference between the qualitative method and the random sampling of quantitative methodology. I also selected three males and three females, a selection process acknowledged by Neuman in a method he calls purposive or "judgmental sampling" (2003, p. 47). By not over-utilizing any one instructional program, and by wishing to keep the selection gender-equal, my choices were relatively restricted, and my final list had only eight names – six first choices, with

[2] The award is named after one instructor, who, having won the award seven times, had the award renamed in his honour.

two alternatives, in the event that anyone should refuse my request or be unavailable during the research time period. Each of the first six instructors thus chosen responded favourably, even enthusiastically, to my request for an interview, although two of them were especially reticent and wondered if they had anything to offer. Several also suggested the names of peers whom they felt were excellent instructors and should be interviewed. Had I then contacted those further instructors, I would have been employing what Lindloff (1995) terms a snowball or reputational method, which asks members of the community in question to identify others with whom an interview would be valuable. However, research literature (Morse & Richards, 2002; Stebbins, 2001; Sharma & Vredenburg 1998, Glaser & Strauss, 1967) had advised that theoretical saturation would be reached with six participants. With my list of nominees reduced by choosing equal numbers of males and females and further reduced by ensuring inclusion from several programs as well as relying on my knowledge gained while "in the midst", I contacted each of the six instructors.

During this initial contact - a phone call -I also alerted them that I would be asking them to tell me a story from their teaching career. I attempted to provide sufficient information so that each would understand that the story should be an anecdote from their profession that a new faculty member might find useful, but I tried not to be so directive that the respondent would feel inhibited. If questioned further, I added that the story could be humourous, uplifting, depressing, a description of something that turned out well or turned out poorly, an introduction to the college culture, or an "AHA!" moment of some type. For the uninitiated, an

"AHA!" moment occurs when learning or understanding has been achieved. It is a time when someone can say, "OK. I get it now." One instructor (whose story is related later) chose to tell me of his "AHA!" moment when he realized that lecturing was not the best way to reach college students.

Following the phone call, I gave each participant the information letter, and at the beginning of each interview, the consent form was signed. These two forms are included in the appendices.

I made the request that we conduct the interviews in the participants' teaching spaces and offices to allow me access to the ambience of such places and to allow them easy proximity to their "props" – their books, notes, and equipment. I was also cognizant of the words of Lindlof (1995), "the researcher tries to establish the most comfortable conditions for letting a person talk" and of Bruner (1991), "An individual's working intelligence is never 'solo.' It cannot be understood without taking into account his or her reference books, notes, computer programs and data bases" (p. 3).

I taped the interviews, and also attempted to keep notes showing areas of enthusiasm, reservation, and other visual or auditory cues. Emphasis, an important auditory cue, has remained in the quotes I have used here through the use of bolding. I transcribed the interviews myself, and immersed myself in the data. In this type of analysis, it was important to discover "understanding *from* the data instead of from prior knowledge or theory" (Morse & Richards, 2002). I tried many methods of "working" the data. First, I reread all the transcripts to get a "feel". Glaser & Strauss (1967) advise "jotting categories and properties on the

margins of ... field notes or other recorded data" (p. 72), and this I did although my handwritten notes became very messy, with arrows and squished writing added each time I reread. I tried printing each interview with a different colour of ink; I took basic notes and used headings, then cut and pasted; I utilized graphs, checklists and tables for organization. When thus thoroughly immersed in the data, and with printed copies, interviews on the screen, cut and pasted copies, and handwritten notes, things began to make sense. After I had established key words, I checked such words and their synonyms with the "find" computer function to ensure that I had every possible mention of them, although usually it was the general meaning of the comments, rather than the specific words, that contained substance.

While qualitative inquiry generally utilizes some form of data analysis, the specific method I employed would be closely aligned to that prescribed by Strauss & Corbin (1990). They first recommend the breaking of the data into small sections, what they term "fracturing" the data which "allows one to identify some categories, their properties, and dimensional locations" (p. 97). This process is followed by *axial coding,* meaning that the data are put back together in new ways, and which for me became the agonizing process of grouping such key concepts into topics and categories, and then labeling each topic or category. This labeling as part of the analysis is seen as imperative by Strauss & Corbin who consider it to be the vital interpretation stage of the analysis. This axial coding and subsequent labeling for me revolved around questions such as, "Was the use of humour part of relationship-building or part of classroom management, or indeed was

classroom management itself a part of relationship building or vice a versa?" However, simply rereading the interviews time and time again was actually my most important method. Linkages between the interviews showing trends, topics, and subjects became more obvious to me with each rereading, and thus, while time consuming, in the final analysis, this rereading of transcripts in their entirety was more advantageous than the breakdown into minutia. Glaser & Strauss (1967) stress the importance of looking for emergent categories, listing the categories, pruning the list and also adding to it, all of which I did continually. During this time I read some lines from a book of fiction, and they seemed particularly apt:

> Try as I may, I can never find a way to arrange my material; and just at the point when I seem about to manage it, damn me if something new doesn't turn up, and throw the whole thing off the road, horses and all (Wilson, 2003, p. 88).

In qualitative research, certain words carry meanings distinct to their genre. Two such words are *topic* and *theme.* A *topic* forms through categorization; it does not have to go through all the data all the time, but rather comes about through linkages and connections. On the other hand, a *theme* goes right through the data set, although it appears in different ways. In a lecture in May, 2003, Dr. J. Morse liked a *theme* in qualitative research to the theme in the opera, where it goes all the way through, but sometimes softly, sometimes played by the flute, sometimes sung (Ext. 501*).* The one major theme of my research that permeated all interviews and that started to reveal itself very early in the process was: instructors gained much of their knowledge through interactions with other

instructors, and such interactions had been invaluable learning tools for them. I also quickly became aware that each instructor had felt that he or she had gained knowledge through experience, through making mistakes, and through trial and error. Formal courses and instruction, while beneficial, were never viewed as being as useful as the more informal methods. This theme will be discussed more fully later in the paper, as will the various topics that emerged.

The other concept that came with me as I entered into my analysis was that I had loved hearing the instructor stories and that each story could be a very valuable learning tool in a new instructor's toolkit. Finally, I was aware that each instructor, even if they claimed to be non-storytellers, told me, unasked, at least one story or anecdote that they had told their students during their teaching career, or how they used stories and anecdotes in their teaching, sometimes to impart contextual information, sometimes to show students that they themselves had goofed and mistakes were OK, sometimes as a technique to create interest or change the pace. This was quite peripheral to my research, but it was noticeable to me because of my interest in the use of stories.

To bring the raw data and analysis into readable form, I used the narrative approach that allowed me to repeat verbatim the instructors' words, but to add depth with my own voice. Many times I found the instructors' words so rich and so passionate that further interpretation on my part would add nothing. The narrative style also works extremely well in the more informal academic style that had been introduced to me during the course of my degree. While I had learned that it is still necessary for academic writing to be based on sound research and to show

fullness of form, my readings showed me that it did not have to be as formal and stilted as was required when I completed my first degree many years ago. The research papers that I read were no longer passive, nor were they written in the third person. Wolcott (2001) advocates first-person narration as imperative in qualitative research (p. 21), and Stebbins (2001) posits that it is necessary to "write imaginatively and interestingly, even employing from time to time some of the conventions of creative writing" because such writing will "enhance understanding...and make written text ever more appealing to both the scientific community and the general public" (p. 42). I found Patton's (2002) writing to be so engaging and accessible that I wished to emulate him, and to make my project just as readable so that it would be available in an easy-to-grasp form should any college wish to benefit from its conclusions. Gibbon's (2002) citation of hooks "the desire to write in a way that makes my ideas accessible to the world beyond academy" (p. 549) meant that I allowed my own voice to be used in this project, and to intermingle applicable stories that might illustrate a point. The reader already had occasion to enjoy two short stories in this document.

I have many times read research about which I had no inherent knowledge, and so had nothing with which to judge data as being accurate, using what one of my interviewees called "that common sense factor". However, in my own research, I had the definite advantage of having been an instructor at the college, a tenure that I consider to have been successful; I have definite memories of being a new instructor; and I too could dispense advice to new instructors to help them in their first years. It was nice for me that everything that was told to me "rang true" in

my ears. It is also probably correct that the instructors saw me as "one of them" and not an outsider, and thus I frequently heard comments such as, "I guess you know that too Hazel," and "Maybe you've personally had that experience where..."

Tacit Or Explicit Knowledge?

During the interviews, I found it surprising that some people concentrated on more explicit knowledge, while others rarely mentioned it. However, when I raised the difference in the two, the other was quickly acknowledged. One interviewee, who had previously mentioned only tacit knowledge traits, answered this way when I raised the more explicit items, "I mean those are all skills you've gotta have if you're going to survive. Seriously."

Originally, I had felt that it would be relatively easy to categorize the "knowledge" that instructors had into explicit and tacit types of knowledge, and that such delineation would be a component of the Findings section of this paper. However, I found I was frequently unable to classify different types of knowledge as either explicit or tacit. For instance, "I'm tough on timelines," one respondent told me. That would appear to be a fairly simple, explicit suggestion that could be passed on to a new instructor. But with further questioning, this instructor quickly and freely admitted that she broke her own rule many times under different circumstances. Another instructor, who also claimed to be very strict with timelines, added this codicil, "If I buy their story, I'll make all kinds of deals with people. Any kind of deal. I don't really care." So, a very simple and explicit suggestion proved to be not simple and explicit at all, because when I asked the instructors how and when they know to make allowances and exceptions, I got no

firm and fast rules. It seems the matters of experience, trust, intuition, etc., come into play, and those are not easily passed on in an explicit statement. I asked one instructor, after such a discussion, "...how would you explain when to accept the student's word, when would you explain that it's OK to have assignments late if certain conditions are met, when are you being taken and when are you being too firm?" The answer: "Wow! That's really tricky. I think that is something that evolves for the individual." Many instructors spoke of wishing they could convey information such as, "Make your exams fair," although could not give explicit advice on how to do that. There were suggestions, such as frequent opportunities for evaluation and ensuring that content was adequately covered in class, but there were certainly no firm guidelines to help create excellent evaluation tools. Instructors had often taken courses on creating evaluation tools and found such courses to be helpful, but relied on experience to truly assist them in the evaluation process.

When I asked about classroom management techniques (and techniques here would imply *explicit),* one interviewee responded, "I don't think it's something they can teach you; you just instinctively know after a while where the problems are going to surface."

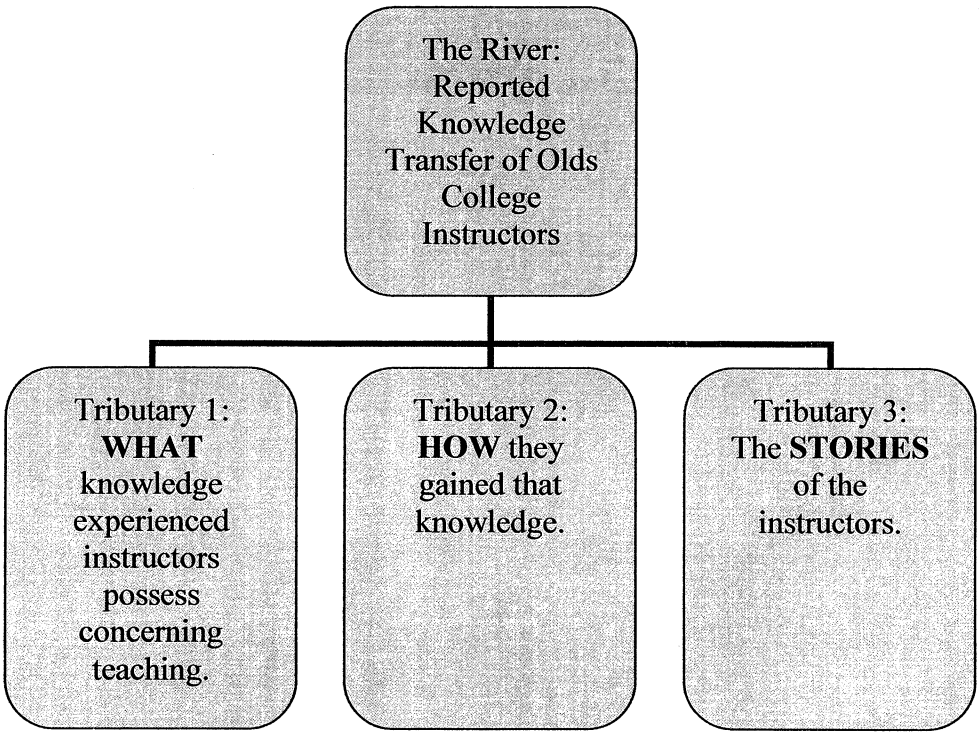
Thus, I was stymied in my attempts to categorize knowledge, but advice from one of my own professors stood me in good stead when he emailed me, listing areas that are usually considered explicit knowledge, then adding how tacit knowledge frequently enhances explicit knowledge, "Most veterans know some people or some shortcuts that are not publicized for one reason or another.

Gossip, a form of tacit knowledge, is also something that can transcend the usual categories of jobs in an organization" (Einsiedel, 2003, personal communication). This is very clearly associated with the words, quoted earlier, from an OC instructional assistant who said, "If you want to get things done then you have to know how to circumvent the system. You need to know who can provide assistance. You need to know **who** can get things done when necessary. You need to network, go to the coffee room, and get to know everyone." I therefore felt that the inability to classify every suggestion into tacit or explicit did not in any way devalue the richness of the research because there was so much knowledge and information from the expert instructors to delve into.

FINDINGS

In the Literature Review section of this paper, I compared my research to a river, with many tributaries and currents. Similarly, the river metaphor can again be utilized in this section, with the findings from my research described as three tributaries.

Figure 1: Diagram of the concept of the tributaries.



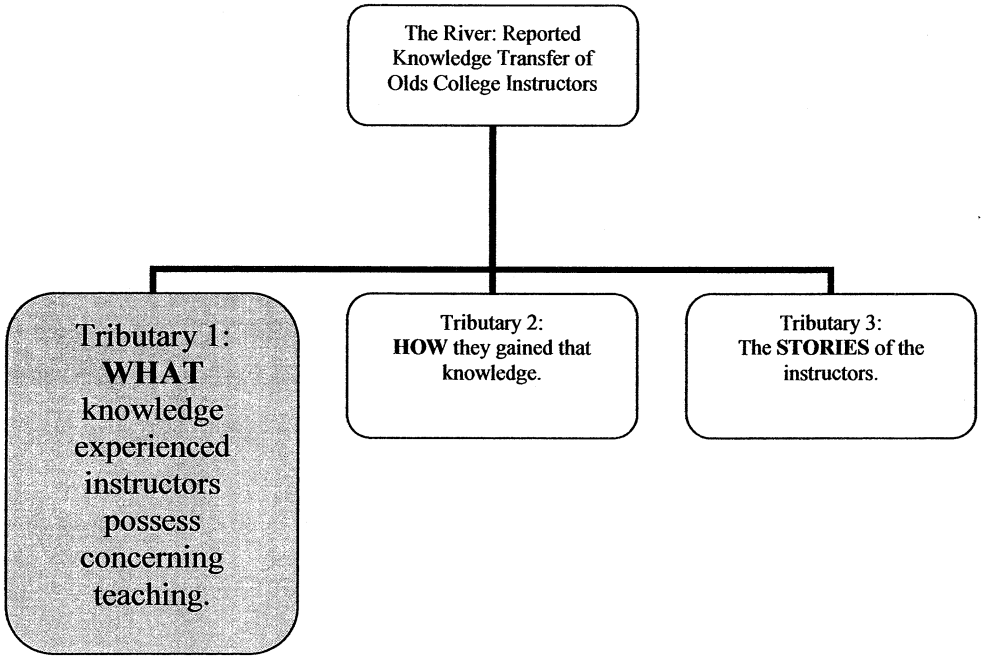
The first tributary is the interpretation and analysis of the various learnings that expert instructors recognize as important to them and that could be transferred to new instructors. Each of these was a topic (explained previously as "A *topic* forms through categorization; it does not have to go through all the data all the time, but rather comes about through linkages and connections") that emerged from the data This interpretation is in the next segment of this paper.

Following that is the second tributary, detailing the prime ways the expert instructors gained their knowledge. This second tributary is in fact the *theme* that emerged from the data—theme having been described earlier as "going right through the data set".

The third tributary contains the stories themselves. These stories can be mined for the wisdom they contain, but they can also be utilized as concrete examples of the specific learnings enunciated as being important by the instructors. Originally, I had intended to include most of the stories in the Appendix, but that seemed to relegate them to a subsidiary role, when they are so rich and complex and deserving to be included within the main body of the report. Since their possible use as a knowledge transfer medium is dependent on the information they contain, it seemed more correct to include them, and their analysis, as the third tributary in the composition of the river.

The Knowledge (Tributary 1)

Figure 2: Diagram of the concept of the tributaries, emphasizing Tributary 1.



Lindlof (1995) states that it is only near the end of the project that the researcher learns what it is all about, a premise that concurs with the general understanding in qualitative research that saturation is reached when no new information is being offered. "Qualitative methods of all varieties share a commitment to allowing categories to emerge from the data" (Morse & Richards, 2002). I therefore allowed the following categories to "emerge" from the data. This is not a passive exercise and consisted of "piecing together data, of making the invisible obvious, of recognizing the significant from the insignificant..." (Mayan, 2002). In qualitative research, the more homogeneous the data, the easier it is to reach saturation. Perhaps because the group of people I interviewed was fairly homogeneous (all from rural Alberta, all instructors at the same college, all winners

of an expert teacher award), each category was replicated through all the interviews.

1. Reaching the Students

The students at OC are not university students, and most of the instructors I interviewed wished they had internalized this fact earlier in their careers. Some instructors came directly from university and some from industry, but few had experience with a college or with college students, and had not considered how this difference should impact their teaching. While some college students might be quite capable of succeeding at a university, they have purposively selected the more hands-on facility as the best type of learning institution for them. One instructor explained:

> I made assumptions that were wrong and that made it difficult to communicate with them because their vision of where they were going and my vision of where they were going wasn't the same so I don't think I chose necessarily the right kind of illustrations or examples. . . .

In the years I spent teaching technical communications, the most important point that I tried to pass on was, "Consider your audience!" The instructor quoted above had learned that the hard way, and his response was reiterated by all of the instructors, who said that, to reach these students, something other than lectures needed to be used in teaching. This sentiment of avoiding the lecture is difficult for new instructors because, "Most of us came out of the university system where you were bombarded with just tons of information and then we start off teaching the same way. You know--sit them down. Lecture for an hour. . . .." Instead of this delivery method, advice was given such as, "I can lecture for the 50 minutes but it's

not nearly as effective as if part of the time, or in some cases the whole class, they're actually working on something and they're learning as they're doing," and "You need to be able to interact. You need to encourage the students to participate in a discussion about the subject so that they stay interested, so that they feel that they are participating." Some remembered their early days of lecturing with discomfort. "I was lecturing a great deal, and that is **not** a positive way for students to learn. They must have some lecture but you need to mix that with some hands-on doing, the application of that thought or idea, some practical work, so with my lecturing, I look back and think, *Oh my, it must have been a very boring class....*" This focus on lecturing or content was also recalled with dismay by another instructor. "I felt that as a young instructor, I wasn't doing a good job unless I was throwing all kinds of content at the students, but you have to realize that if you become so content focused, the actual learning process sometimes, I think, becomes hindered." These thoughts show how the expert instructors struggled in trying to blend the content of the courses with the unique learning needs of the students, and how they came to know that the characteristics that brought their students to them in the college situation were also the characteristics that dictated the course delivery methods.

I attended a conference once where a speaker used the phrase, "A lecture is the best way of getting information from the instructor's notes into the student's notes without passing through the brains of either of them." That axiom was one that I repeated to most of the instructors after they told me how they had learned to minimalize lecturing.

The other point that was stressed concerning teaching at a college rather than a university level was the importance of making the content relevant. The instructors found that students were not accepting of coursework for which they could see no immediate benefit and relevance. This means that instructors not only have to work to maintain relevancy in their classes, but must also be emphatic about ensuring that the students understand the relevancy and must also continually identify the correlations between the coursework and future careers.

2. There Will Be Bad Days!

The expert instructors had all had their share of bad experiences in the classroom. They wished new instructors could be warned about this fact. "It happens to everybody," one instructor stated. Simple awareness and acceptance was seen as paramount. In fact, one instructor prefaced her anecdote with, "Just know that this happened." One multi-award winner, a veteran of over 30 years of teaching, commented, "I had a group like that this last term. It was hard work going in there . . . ." A new instructor in the throes of a bad classroom situation could probably take comfort in knowing that this particular instructor, revered by staff and students alike, still has classes that cause him distress. The instructors frequently described difficult situations, and sometimes explained that they were not always proud of the way they had handled the situation.

Inevitably, after an instructor had told me an anecdote of conflict in the classroom, I would say something similar to this quote which is copied from my interview on September 18, 2003:

> I think one of the big things is just for a new faculty member to know that there's hope. There's light at the end of the tunnel.

> When they come back after an awful day and things are going wrong, they can think, 'Hey, and that guy made it on to the Ian Hall list!'

A sub-topic in this section would be: *don't expect perfection from yourself.* Striving to maintain the persona of an *ideal* instructor was referred to in many ways by the experts. "Relax and accept mistakes," was one expression of this idea. One instructor expanded on the above quote with his advice. "This is going to be harder than you expected. And you are going to fail more than you expected. And that's OK." Another suggested, "Teaching's going to be a tough job." An ideal instructor would probably know everything, but new instructors were cautioned that such a state of being is not only impossible, it is not even desirable. Admitting to one's own mistakes can create a more positive atmosphere for the students and can provide learning opportunities for the instructor, and acknowledging and utilizing students' abilities can enhance the learning experience. One faculty member spoke of how she had learned very early that her students accepted her mistakes and some seemed more willing to take risks and tolerate their own mistakes when she confessed to her own "goof ups".

Admitting to mistakes is one thing, but another component is admitting to a gap in knowledge. The interviews are sprinkled with comments such as, "So if someone asks you a question you don't know the answer to it, you can tell them that you don't know and that you'll find out and then in the next class you tell them what you found." "Part of it is if you don't know the answer say you don't know it, then find out." "Willingness to admit when you don't know the answer and willingness to find the answer." "But never be afraid to admit that you don't know."

"And you have to be willing to just say, "Well, I don't know the answer to that but I'll try to find it." With these many reiterations of this topic, new instructors would be wise to remember that it is not a negative thing when they have to concede that they don't know something, and in fact that expert instructors recommend this admittance as an important part of a teaching career.

Along with this acceptance of knowing that a new instructor cannot have all the answers is the implication that sometimes the students are going to know more than the instructor does. This body of knowledge can and should be integrated into the classroom. While all the instructors stated that they utilized student knowledge when they became aware of it, others explicitly sought it. "...recognizing that in a class of 40-50 students, there's somebody out there that has more experience on any one topic than the instructor has." "Use the students. Ask them. Even when you do know, ask for the input from students who have worked in the area." This is perhaps quite dissimilar from a university situation, where the body of knowledge that professors have is of quite a different nature and where it might be unusual for the instructor to have less knowledge in the subject matter than some of the students do.

The relationship between students and instructor is enhanced with the acceptance of making mistakes and with calling on the students' knowledge for verification and substantiation. However, words such as *respect* and *honesty* were frequently used during the interviews. Showing the students respect and treating them with honesty were stated as being important attributes for faculty members to

have. The instructors all felt that admitting to one's mistakes and calling on students contributed to those positive aspects of respect and honesty.

An instructor mentioned "spending hours, hours and hours on prep every evening" and the other instructors also stated how the desire to be that perfect instructor is compounded during the first year with the feeling of being overwhelmed. Each spoke of the extended hours of lesson preparation that they put in during the first year of teaching, and of working so hard to meet the goals of the course as well as everyone's expectations. "Oh dear! If they'd told me this is what it's all about!" lamented one instructor, while another echoed this by stating, "You will be overwhelmed that first year. As a new teacher there's so much to learn." If one were to step back and realistically examine the first few years of teaching at a college, it would probably be obvious that the workload is overwhelming. The subject matter has to be solid enough in the instructor's mind to be taught to others; the content has to chunked into appropriate time allotments, evaluation tools need to be created and used; students' names have to be learned, as do the names of other faculty, administrators, and secretarial help; resource materials have to be located; textbooks have to be ordered; and teaching tools such as AV equipment need to be found, learned, and sometimes transported – all in a new environment that might be spread over several buildings. Those interviewed hoped that the first year of teaching might be a little easier if a new instructor were to be forearmed with the knowledge that it is alright to accept and admit mistakes, that it is important to call on knowledgeable students, and that everyone has feelings of being overwhelmed at first.

3. Professionalism

Professionalism was an attribute in teaching that was continually stressed by the expert instructors. This professionalism can be shown by knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, the subject area; by being prepared, organized and on time for each class; by keeping to the start and end times of classes; by displaying good communication skills; and by setting an example in cleanliness, clothing and attire. However, professionalism was also connected to the relationships established with the students. The experts interviewed had quite frequently observed new instructors who felt that they should be friends or "buddies" with their students. While there was nothing inherently incorrect in this, caution was advanced that laxness in the professional relationship should not be tolerated. A new instructor needs to remember that in the final analysis:

> You're the one that has to maintain discipline, you're the one who does the evaluation of the students, you're the one that sets the standards and expectations and tries to get people to match those, you're the one who tries to encourage people, and that might be hard to do. . . .

Because the expert instructors had each observed new instructors attempting friendships with the students, they were explicit in their warnings, as such friendships can, "get you into a lot of trouble," or "will backfire on you." One instructor urged new instructors to remember, "You don't **need** any of them for friends." These words of caution echo the sentiment expressed in a *Harvard Business Review* interview with Judith Martin (known to most as Miss Manners) when she stated, "your colleagues aren't your friends--and they never were" (Coutu, p. 44).

Creating friendships within the classroom can also cause problems if students sense an atmosphere of favouritism. Students need to know they have, and will respond positively to, an environment where everyone is treated equally.

Instructors used humour in their professional capacities as they all felt it was important to have periods of lightness or even laughter. However, they stressed that the humour should never involve a put-down of the student nor should it impinge on sarcasm. The humour they spoke of was usually a more modest brand than telling jokes; it was frequently used to make criticism more palatable, "make the point without people being overly sensitive to what you've said". Individuals also recognized the fact that utilizing one's own brand of humour was paramount. Some instructors could tell the occasional joke; another one lamented "I can never remember the punch line."

An additional aspect of professionalism is shown by cooperation between departments. The instructors reiterated how important it is to keep the lines of communication open with other departments, both for working together on problem issues and to share learning.

4. The Focus

The instructors I interviewed recommended that new instructors remember why they were there, and not let distractions interfere. One spoke of "politics", one of "administrivia", one of "the system", but whatever they saw as the diversion, they recommended, "... you have to stay really focused on why you are doing this and that's because of the relationship you have with the student and the learning itself, right?" "And I guess another piece of advice I would give to new instructors would

be to focus on their teaching." In various ways, they cautioned new instructors to concentrate on providing a positive learning atmosphere for the students, putting their time and efforts into student-centred activities, rather than the countless other interruptions that always make a play for instructors' time. Perhaps this advice can best be summed up with this instructor's remark, "remember that the students' interests are uppermost."

Sometimes distraction came about through meetings and political situations that appeared to be time-wasters; sometimes the distraction could be more covert, such as an interfering administrator or colleague.

While these outside influences could negatively impact the teaching situation, the classroom atmosphere could also become untenable from within. New instructors were warned to be pro-active, and to deal with situations as soon as they became aware of them. "And the mistake that a rookie is likely to make is to avoid the confrontation but in fact that's worse. It only makes it worse," and "Don't let things fester if there's an issue, let's get it out on the table, discuss it with the group if you feel comfortable in doing that, or pull two or three people together to get a little bit of feedback as to what is going on..." and "because it's **so** easy to fix at the beginning and it's **so** hard to fix once the cancer spreads into the class. . . ." Perhaps avoiding conflict is human nature, and with everything else that a new instructor is experiencing, he or she might want to avoid candidly facing a difficult classroom situation, but the experienced instructors certainly stressed that these situations must be brought into the open in a timely fashion.

They also felt that new instructors should be aware of some of the common causes for problem classes, and student leadership was mentioned time and again. Sometimes it takes only one student, but frequently there will be two or three, who set the tone for the class. "... unfortunately we've had occasions where we've had staff that have gotten into a group like that right when they first started and many of them didn't survive the experience at the college because it was so unpleasant for them." These words certainly serve as a warning bell – a couple of students can negatively impact the classroom atmosphere with dire results.

Usually students in the college system are passionate about their subject matter. They frequently, however, have no interest in taking courses from outside their area of interest. Teaching a whole class of farrier students a course in Technical Writing (as I frequently did) can be a very challenging situation. All the expert instructors had been in this situation, and several suggested enlisting assistance from the students' coordinator, "But if there's a student that is causing difficulties in more than one class automatically we have a talk with the coordinator and set up a plan." This can create a situation that exemplifies a worthy partnership between departments, one that a new instructor would be wise to emulate. They also recommended calling on the learning assistant coordinator, the nurse, or the psychologist when such seemed warranted.

The instructors advocated explicitly stating expectations for the course and for dealing with behavior that was inappropriate for the particular classroom structure. One instructor explained it this way:

> There needs to be a learning environment. And so if class is noisy or not noisy may not be a problem, depending on what we're doing,

> but if it interferes with that, if it's a lecture and there's people talking, **absolutely** not acceptable. And I just explain that **once**. And the second time I explain that they have to leave. And then I have a talk with them, and I explain that if it happens again, you're going to have to withdraw from the course, and I think that I've only kicked out two students in about five years since I started being very specific about it. And mostly, **mostly**, I don't even end up with sour students.

One program has actually published a booklet that outlines "Consequences of behavior in the classroom", and instructors from the other programs talked of using handouts with explicit behavior guidelines printed on them, and then taking the time to review the guidelines with the class on more than one occasion. Behavior guidelines included more than just classroom behavior, as shown in this instructor's musings:

> Another piece of advice as an instructor would be to explain what you would expect from the class. The very first day of class we hand out the course outline and I think some instructors figure well then that by handing out the course outline that explains what they expect of the class but I guess I'm thinking more, not just what material we're going to cover, but expect people to show up everyday, expect them to be on time, and so on and sometimes you have to explain those things more than once.

People coming from a business environment would probably find this necessity of explicit instructions, perhaps even in writing, to be overkill. However, dealing with students cannot be seen as the same thing as dealing with peers and associates in the business world, so the advice to be completely unequivocal in expectations would serve an instructor in good stead.

Professionalism also involves keeping adequate records of situations that develop in the classroom. Instructors stressed that relying on memory and therefore keeping incomplete documentation concerning student achievement,

behavior, and problems, left an instructor with no recourse if ever formally queried about such issues.

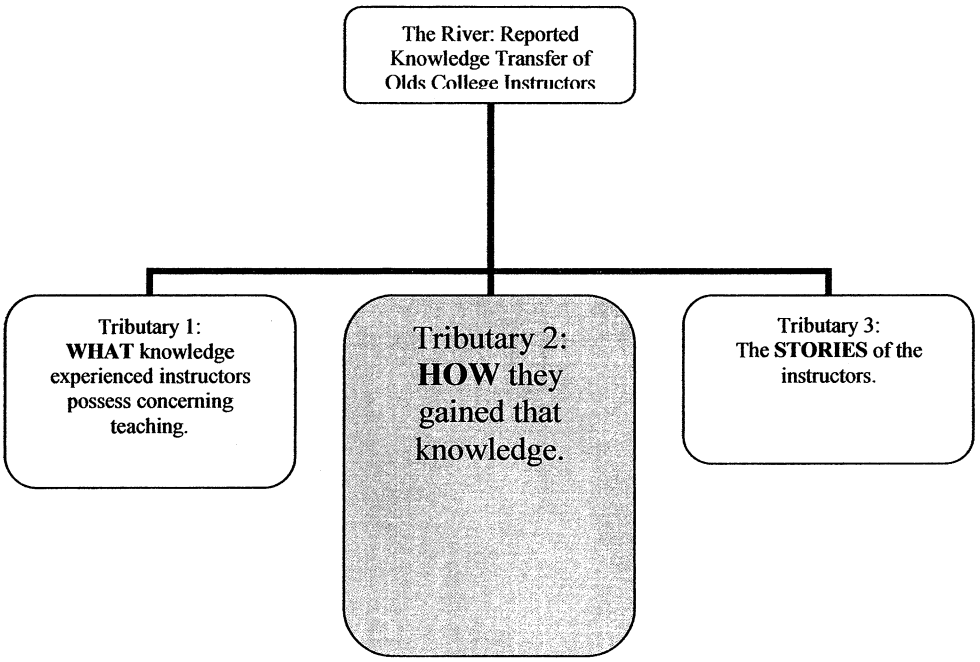
5. The Reward

This awareness that there will be problem days and problem classes, that "other stuff" will vie for an instructor's time, and that it is so important to really understand the students, also came with the enthusiastic acknowledgement from all of the instructors I interviewed that they loved to teach and had found great satisfaction in their careers. Perhaps, this more than anything, would serve as good knowledge for new faculty members. While the intrinsic rewards are infrequent, they are there; sometimes when the rewards come, they are truly remarkable.

The instructors' success stories and love of teaching is tempered with the knowledge that not everyone is cut out for such a career. The instructors stated that if new faculty could not find enthusiasm for their subject or for teaching, if they continually had problems in dealing with the students or in organization, they should probably look elsewhere for a profession.

Gaining The Knowledge (Tributary 2)

Figure 3: Diagram of the concept of the tributaries, emphasizing Tributary 2.



As was mentioned in the Methodology segment of this paper, the trend indicating how instructors had gained the knowledge to make them "experts" was obvious by the second interview. Overwhelmingly, when asked to compare formal learning situations to informal learning situations, the instructors told me that they had learned the most through informal learning situations. "I think those are necessary but as far as actually impacting my teaching it's the informal. Yeah." "I would think informal. The formal simply cements that. You say, 'Oh yeah. I did that. It worked well.' It kind of puts some flesh on what you're doing but there's nothing that replaces or beats being in the trenches and (chuckles) finding it out." This information mirrors that of Clutterbuck (1998) who writes of a conference

where 250 human resource professionals said overwhelmingly that they learned most frequently from their peers.

Five of the six instructors had taken some kind of instructor education. This education ranged from university degrees and post-degree diplomas in education to "all" or "many" of the ISWS (Instructor Skills Workshop) courses now offered through OC but previously offered in conjunction with Vancouver Community College. The instructors did not negate this education. They generally found such learning to be helpful. Descriptors including "inspirational", "valuable", "good", "supportive", and "positive" were used to portray their formal classes. But not one hesitated when I asked if their formal or informal learning had been the most useful. In fact, when I first asked them how they got their knowledge, they always mentioned informal ways to begin with, and only delved into formal courses when I raised the issue. Using the narrative in this paper gives me the sanction to use the instructor's own words, and their words are so genuine and sincere that I found I could not restate nor summarize any better than by using their words, although I did group them according to issue.

1) The instructors told me that they learned through discussing and sharing in the coffeeroom:

- The coffeeroom is important and I like to hear people talking...
- . . . .there was all kinds of sharing of information at the staff coffee time and at lunch time. . . .
- We did a lot of talking in the coffeeroom. There were two other instructors that were new when I came and they're still here. And there was an experienced group that was around that came for coffee.
- . . . .through the coffee room...oh yeah!

- We'd have coffee, we'd actually have coffee together, we'd have lunch together, so that I could share with other instructors so there was transfer of knowledge there. . . .

- I think some of the best information just comes out of the coffee room. Or somebody throws something out. . . .

- You discuss it. You find out what happened, how you deal with these failures, or how somebody else does. . . .

2) Emotions such as trust and admiration figured in their learning:

- . . . .so if something happened in the classroom in the morning then you went for coffee and you'd talk about it while it was still . . . you're still uh . . . really emotional. . . .

- I've also been really really fortunate that I've had a lot of really strong mentors over the years. Like people that I've admired as instructors that I've been able to talk to and they became role models.

- I would think between the, you know, between the life experience of saying, "Ooooh, that didn't work!" or "Boy that did work!" or being a role model and watching other people and what works and what doesn't work I would say **by far** I learned more through that.

3) Talking with others was certainly important, but learning as a "lonely personal experience" (see my probe question on page 20) was also significant:

- . . . .and trial and error. Yeah. Yeah. You've got to go try stuff.
- And I learned that through the school of hard knocks. (Laughter.) Umhm. (Assertive affirmation.) Yes I did. Yes, I certainly did.

- A lot of what most of us have learned was probably by trial and error, what worked, what hasn't worked.

- The school of hard knocks.

- I've had classes that were so far out of control when I finally figured out the problem that you vowed you'd never let it happen again. Yeah. That's the way a lot of us have learned. I don't think that's something they can teach you even if you go through education.

- Oh definitely the practical! Being here.
- Through mistakes. (Laughter.) Seriously. Being the best lessons. The absolute best lessons I would say is from the mistakes I've made.
- I would say a huge part of it was trial and error. Huge.

The instructors spoke of the rich learning experiences they had gained from other instructors. They spoke of informal mentoring and of role models. They spoke of being new instructors who would not have survived without the guidance of experienced faculty. One instructor spoke of spending 12 hour days in preparation and then experiencing the rigors of teaching and of how he would "collapse" in the coffee room for 45 minutes,

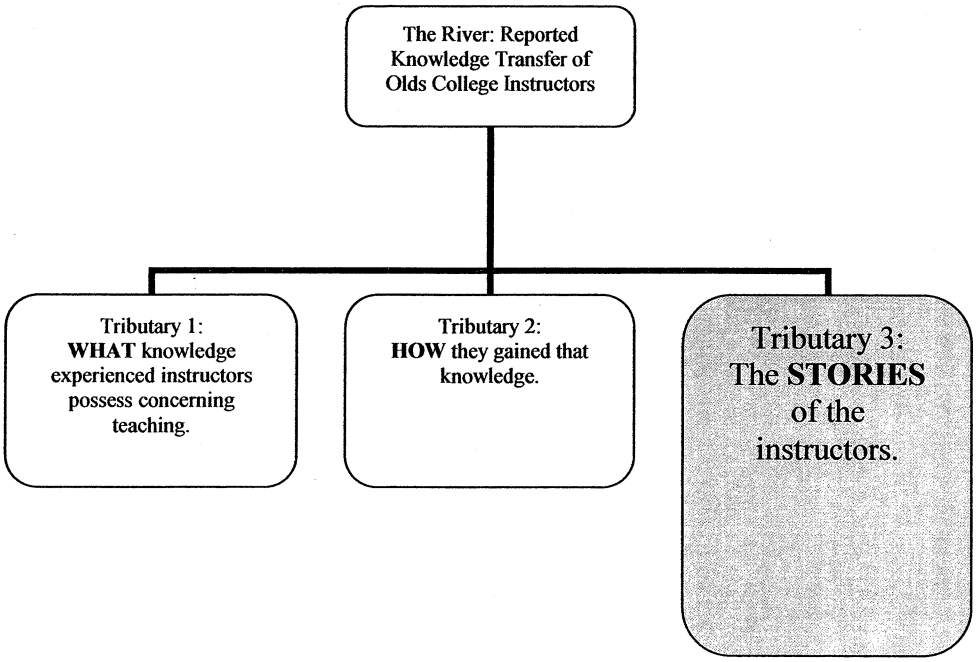
> and then we would talk about everything, including how things went, you know. And techniques, and we were trusting enough so that we could admit all our, maybe not all, but many of our failures and things that didn't work or stupid things I've said or you know, I won't try that again, or whatever. It was really important . . .it also helped . . . to maintain . . .a certain social cohesiveness. . . .

Most of the instructors had benefited from informal mentoring situations, and some of them now volunteer as formal mentors. The formal mentoring only takes place in one program, and the two instructors taking part felt that it was a very worthwhile project. All the instructors felt that they were helpful in informal mentoring.

While these informal learning situations were the most valuable, homage was also paid to the formal courses. Most particularly, those courses concerned with creating evaluation tools were cited as being the most important.

The Stories (Tributary 3)

Figure 4: Diagram of the concept of the tributaries, emphasizing Tributary 3.



Each instructor was also asked to relate a story, and several other anecdotes were usually contributed throughout the interviews. Rather than including such accounts randomly, I chose to insert them to illustrate how each of the topics in the last section could be exemplified through a story. The stories are included more-or-less intact, edited for length and clarity only when necessary. Sometimes I chose not to edit, because I felt certain things added clarity for outsiders. The phrasing and vocabulary are very individualistic, and when I reread the words, I can see each instructor; I can see they way they were sitting when they said the words, I can remember their facial expressions and their body language. I hope some of these wonderful nuances are passed on to the reader.

1. Reaching the Students: (Including delivery method and relevance). This was my favourite story of all the ones offered, perhaps because when I was an instructor I always claimed that the best thing that could happen for my students was that I had to attend a course or conference. I always returned with a renewed sense of making my coursework and lectures relevant and interesting, and a renewed knowledge of how long two hours can seem if you are sitting down and listening to a lecture.

> Well, here goes one of my AHA! moments. A few years ago I was cleaning out the back room here and I had all my old notes from university when I did my undergraduate degree. I pulled this book out, this notebook out, and I'm looking through it. I don't remember the course. I don't remember **one solitary** thing. Like normally when you open up a book that you took a whole course in you can picture the instructor or the professor, you can picture the room. Nothing. Blank. And I had page after page after page of notes. And **nothing** was **ever** used. Nothing did I ever remember. And you know, I don't remember the course . . .don't remember where it was . . .don't remember anything about it. Total blank. And at that moment I thought, "You know this is what we do to students. We write and they write. We talk. Blah blah blah blah. And it means nothing." You know 10 minutes after they walk out of the classroom they've forgotten. And so that is when I decided you gotta **pick your points** carefully. This is what the students need to know to do the job. These are the foundation principles in this subject matter. That's what you have to go over and over and over until it's so drilled into their head they'll never forget it. And I can remember that, even from courses that I took when I was a student, even at college before I did my first degree, I can remember instructors – certain points that they just drummed into our heads and I never forgot them and they pop back. So that's one thing I would pass on. That was certainly an eye opener for me when I was going through this **whole** notebook, **huge** notebook, **all** my writing. I looked at it and thought, "That can't be my writing. None of this makes any sense at all to me." But it was my writing. I had jotted it down. I must have passed the course somehow. But nothing.
> Yeah. Yeah, it was one of the great AHA! moments for me.
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> I remember one student who was taking my range management course. Good student. Nice kid but always liked to give me a little bit

> of a hard time in terms of why they were taking it, "Why do we have to know this stuff?" and "We're never going to use it," and so on. And he went out and got a good job for a company in reclamation and one day I get a phone call from him. He said "How did we do those stocking rates? We just had a fire get away from our pump station and burned out more than 200 acres of land and we have to pay compensation. The compensation will be based on how many cattle this rancher could have run on this land had it not been burned." And I said, "Well, you did this in class," and he said, "Yeah, but I never thought we'd use it." So I led him through the process. This is a story I always tell a class of land agents now. It's a little example that can help them understand how important this subject matter is and why we're going over it. Always pointing out that our course material was guided by industry. We didn't just dream this stuff up. Industry has more or less put their stamp on it. So, while I use this story with my students, I think a new faculty member could learn from it too.

2. **There Will Be Bad Days!** I could certainly add my own personal stories about bad days in the classroom, however those offered by the instructors convey the message well! The anecdotes ranged from humourous to poignant, but they all came with the acknowledgement that bad days happen.

> Well, I . . .I don't know if it's a story . . .it's not necessarily something that I would recommend. (Laughter.) I **still** have people remembering it. I don't know where I saw somebody . . .Agritrade or somewhere, and he still remembered this thing that happened in the classroom, so I don't know whether you want this . . .it's maybe not something you even **want** to put in. . . .
> I had a class where there were some people in there who would just not quit talking. They weren't trying to be malicious or mean or disrupt the class, they just could not help themselves. If I was lecturing they just had to talk and maybe some of what they were talking about came from the class. Maybe I would make a comment and that would trigger something and it was related but. . . .
> And so without even thinking one day, I just reached down, I picked up the garbage can and I threw it halfway down the room and it hit the floor. And after that I didn't have that problem with talking. It was something that I did that got their attention. And everybody else's attention in the classroom. The people still even mention it so I guess it's not something I'm really proud of and yet . . .it was a dramatic thing . . .maybe partly because this was out of character and because they didn't expect it from me. If I'd stopped to think about it I wouldn't have done that (laugh) but it was just something that happened. . . .

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Well, I have one depressing one. It was a low point in my life. It was my first year teaching in about the third month, and the course load that I'd been given was huge. I had about eight courses, all of which were new to me, and three of which were really not in my area of expertise and ONE of them I never even studied, so I kind of limped through that, although it became my favourite over time. I had the same group in September, October, and then again in November, December, and I discovered that the materials I had been given to work with were not effective, so I was doing three hours of new material a day, from scratch, every night, and then going in to class and sometimes I just didn't get it all done and then I would borrow from the stuff that the last instructor had left, which I didn't really like, and so I was really just making it up in class. I was kind of following this thing and they were doing notes and that. But I was making it up in class and sometimes I'd read something from the notes, and after having said it, I'd think, "That's not quite right," and so I'd say, "Well, maybe not quite like that," and I was really...I mean, I was maxed out in terms of what I could do and ohhhhhh. You know, I'd moved from another province, we didn't have any friends here, we had no family support, had little kids at home, and I was working 12 to 14 hours a day, trying to keep up. And in the middle of this class, I had a so called mature learner, he really wasn't a bad guy all in all, but he was having difficulty in his life, and after I had contradicted myself, probably for the second or third time on some point, he exploded. And he was sitting up at the front, and he just went, something, in direct quotes, to the effect of, "What the %^**& are you talking about? I can't believe it! You're so bloody disorganized! I don't know where the hell we're going with this class, I don't know what this is about, this is so. . . ." And he went on for 15 seconds. And I let him talk. And I was **absolutely** stunned, eh. I mean I knew that people could be feeling this because I'd felt it myself, but that somebody would actually say this . . .and so there I was. It was like a dreamscape, you know, I just felt like I was . . . floating. It kind of came to an end. And, I was in enough of a shock, that I could actually respond to him when I said, "OK, you're having difficulty with the way things are going here. I admit certainly that this is not the way I would like it. Is there anybody else that feels this way? Is this the general feeling in this class, that you don't feel like you're learning anything and it's going nowhere and it's confusing, and all the rest of it? Are there others?" And most of the class was extremely embarrassed. And so there wasn't much, I mean, one or two people said something along the line of, "Sometimes it's a little confusing but, I don't know, most of the time it's not so bad," or something like that, you know? There was 20 minutes left in the class, I was totally off focus, so I said, "I'm quitting class here today. And I'll tell you what I will do. I'll go back to my office. I will create. . . ." This was about the third

> week into the course, eh, or something like that, "I will create an outline for the remainder of the course, for the remaining four weeks of the course, and indicating what we're going to cover and what the reasons are for it, and I will give that to you tomorrow and the best I can say is I'll do my best to stick to that, and hopefully that will clear up your sense of that we're drifting and whatever." (He is crying at this point.) Yeah, whatever. So I left that class and I walked back to my office, and it was the last office in a row, and I closed the door there. I closed the door. (Sigh. Big pause. He is trying to compose himself.) Ohhh, I didn't know what to do. I just put my head down and just cried.

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I remember many coffeeroom discussions with other instructors where the issue of cheating would inevitably surface. It always caused a lot of angst, and the following story demonstrates that plagiarism and cheating are concerns that plague teachers and that need to be dealt with.

> I found this to be very difficult. I guess dishonestly or cheating in the classroom environment is something that I find particularly hard to deal with. I know that's my duty and I must do that. Despite having the cheating policy and the course outline and chatting to students about it, now and then, with technology, we will still have students that try to do this. So each year we may have to call them in and discuss the issue and they deny the facts and so on. In one particular case the student denied that she had given her work to the other student and continued to deny that. The work was absolutely identical. The typos and everything. So we knew from that, that certainly this cheating had gone on. I held the students here until one of them did finally did fess up. And I felt that was important, that we get to the bottom of it. These two students cheated again, later in the year, **ten days** before graduation when they would be leaving. They had all their course work; their grade point average was good. **How** was I going to deal with this problem for graduation? Called them in, as tough as it was on me, and said, "OK, you were warned, in writing, that if you cheated again, you would have to be withdrawn from this class," and yes, I did it.
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> And that was a very, very difficult thing for me to do because that spoiled their chances of grad. The student that had asked her classmate for the materials, I really never did hear from her again and she was not too serious about her work, but the student that got caught up into this phoned me back in the fall to see if she could take the course again. And of course she was living quite some distance away,

but it was still upsetting her, and "What could I do to make it right to get the coursework?" I had to say to her, "You have to take the whole course again." She never did register in the course, but that upset me again, thinking, "Oh, how this must be just haunting this poor girl because she didn't get her certificate because she'd been involved in the cheating situation."

So, that's nothing earth shattering, but a very, very difficult job as an instructor to say, "Sorry, so sad. You overstepped just once too often," and that following through, but I felt I needed to do that, because that was part of the job. Initially you know, I felt badly, and wondered how can we fix this but I did come to terms with it. No, that is my job, that's what I am required to do and these students **had** been warned, so I did come to terms with that. It bothered me, sure, to think that you would do that and put your own future, your own record in jeopardy. I still remember that because it was sort of a traumatic experience at the time. In this problem we were tested.

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This was really a turning point for me in my first year teaching because I really did come in thinking, "OK I'm not going to make mistakes and I can't really make mistakes!" I really had that mindset! I was teaching Language Arts 8 & 9, English 13 & 23, and Social 10, 20, 30, as a first year teacher in a small rural school. It was my first report card in November, my **first** report card, and one of my social 20 students came and said that he felt his mark had been miscalculated. I remember thinking, "Oh my goodness!" I looked, and sure enough I had miscalculated the **entire** Social 20 class on their report card -- my first report card!

Remember, I was a first year teacher, and I had been thinking, "I've got to do everything right!" -- spending hours, hours and hours on prep every evening and I remember being horrified that these kids (because of course they're grade 11 and I was 22) that there would be absolutely no respect shown me and that they would all be discipline problems. I went in, I told them that I'd goofed up that I would be recalculating their marks and it was phenomenal. That was a huge learning moment for me because they were soooo good -- they were so forgiving and we had a great year- they were the best group. It was at that moment that I learned this and I would say that since then, I've always brought this into my teaching: I'm very comfortable with telling my mistakes to my students because it's actually ended up always having a positive impact, not a negative impact, because they feel more comfortable that they can make mistakes. And boy, like I say, that was November of my very first year teaching. I learned that one quick. So that was a big one, yeah, a big one.

3. **Professionalism** (including working with other departments). The following story demonstrates that instructors have to be able to think on their feet, and also emphasizes how important it is to work with other departments at the college.

> A little story when you're saying that you have to be able to react. One day, toward the end of a class, getting this crumpled up little note put on the counter, just as the students were working away and this little note saying, "These girls that sit beside me are out to get me. They're being very mean to me." Just an upsetting kind of note because you were unaware that there was anything happening. And where did this come from because you weren't aware of it at all? And, I've forgotten the details of the message but enough to say to me, "Oh my goodness. How are we ever going to deal with this or handle it...?" because of some of the further comments. And it turned out that this student was having medical problems. And no, the other students had nothing to do with her whatsoever, but she had these voices that were happening and people were out to get her and one thing and another. She remained in the class for another three weeks or so and then unfortunately I believe withdrew herself. But it was something that took you back because you think, "Oh, what is this?" and so you do have to be able to act on your feet. I just approached that young lady and said, "Yes, we will be having a look at this for you," and gave her some feedback, that I wasn't ignoring it and in turn caught up with these other folks because they were most unlikely candidates for this problem situation and chatting with them. Through sharing some information we realized that there were medical problems and things going on there. And we were working with, you know, our college nurse etc. on it. . . .

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While the above instructor mentioned working with the college nurse, instructors can learn from other departments with subject matter different from their own. Two stories explain how instructors learned this for themselves.

> I've learned a lot of things from other departments' happenings. Think about the trades and tech people. They do a lot of innovative things when they're in the classroom. I remember talking to one instructor and he gave me what I thought was a really great idea. He was having a bit of a discipline problem class so he brought in a stack of drop forms and they were filled out. He said, "All I have to do is put your name on it and you're **gone**. So, who'd like to be first?" Never another problem. So I thought, "Well, that's interesting and I tried it once with a

group I was having difficulty controlling. I just brought in a stack of them, and I said, "I've got enough here for everybody!"

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Well, the idea of working with other faculty and working as a unit comes to mind. A situation I ran into years ago when I was a much younger man was when I had a group of students and they were **exceptionally** bad . . .they just wouldn't shut up, and wouldn't pay attention at all. There was actually a row of tables in the middle that were blank and half the class, almost exactly half the class, sat in the front and they listened, and the other half sat in the back and just goofed around and were just obnoxious no matter what I tried to do. So one day, I'd had it and I said, "Well, you folks are obviously not interested in what I'm saying, so let's just knock it off and I'll leave." And one of the girls in the front said, "Well, ***we are*** interested." And so I thought, "Well, great." (Transcription note: This was a sarcastic "Great.") So I said, "OK." So I went to this row of tables that was blank, and I said, "Everybody from here on back get out and don't come back." And so they left. And I said, "Don't come back until your coordinator has come and talked to me." That's what I said.

So they went down to their coordinator and said, "We're in trouble with one of our instructors. You have to go talk to him." Well, she'd already heard from the other group what had happened and she said, "I'm not going to go and talk to him. If you don't know how to behave yourselves, stay out. You can figure out how you're going to graduate."

And she left them out for almost a week. And finally she came to talk to me. That gave me a chuckle. And when they came back into class they were a greatly improved group. BUT, the thing was, it wasn't just me. They realized that their own coordinator was not going to tolerate this kind of nonsense. And it worked great. So, working together like that, talking to other instructors, finding out, usually, that if you're having problems in the classroom whether it's with the facility, whether it's with the timetable, whether it's with the students, you find out that other people are going through the same thing and you get some resolution.

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Instructors at the college are frequently cautioned to record information concerning student behavior, attitude, and problems. Usually, this is seen as a way to ensure having something substantive if ever queried in what is termed an "appeal" by the student. The instructor who related the following story added to

this dimension by musing that if a student passes because of an instructor's negligence in recording certain things, it could lead to a situation where a non-deserving student graduates and makes the college and the program look ineffectual.

> What came to my mind right off the bat was a particular student that we had here that had an **extreme** effect on this program as far as tightening it up and filling in the loopholes. And it was this student that taught me the importance of documentation. She was a thorn in my personal side for the whole two years she was here and everyone else's in this department and everyone else's in the entire college. She was famous. Because she was always, always trying to cover up her inadequacies, her lack of ability, her unwillingness to be committed.
> A lot of what we do in this program is based on self-directed learning. The students are given direction, but they are expected to go and do what needs to be done without being told. And they are evaluated on their ability to be a self-starter and self-initiated, to know what animals need to be wormed this day, and what animals need to be brought in the barn this night, and what animals need to be watched closely, and what needs to be repaired, and so on and so forth, and part of what those courses are all about is teaching those skills.
> Well this particular person had absolutely none of that, and yet she tried to cover up the fact that she didn't do her part or she didn't show any of these characteristics by blaming other people for her inadequacies. And she didn't complete the requirements of the course, but I had to let her go through because I didn't have it written down that she had to do this. I had only spoken to her verbally. There was many, many instances in the management practicum class in which she was not pulling her weight, she was not doing things that she was supposed to do, she was shirking her responsibilities. And the students would come to me and they would say, "Well, she didn't do this and she didn't do this and how come she isn't getting any repercussions because of that?" and I would say, "OK, give me something in writing. You know, sign something that says that so and so. . . ." Nothing. Never happened. I was never able to catch her because I was not there because this was a self-directed course. The students would complain but they would not put their complaints in writing. And not just in the animal classes, but some of the others, the Liberal Arts classes too, she would pull the same stunt. And she managed to get through the program and I was so distraught because this student graduated from this program. I didn't think she had any right to, because she wasn't knowledgeable enough and she wasn't

capable of doing a lot of the hands-on activity, but because I hadn't made a lot of effort to make sure everything was in writing, there was very little I could do. She was the appeal queen here; I think she had two while she was here. And one of them was one of the worst situations I have ever had in my entire life.

Part of our program is work experience in which they have to go out and work for someone or in that case it was three months and then those persons evaluate that student and then they either pass or fail based on the evaluation. Well, she went out and did a horrible job. And of course, they fired her before they even got to the point of evaluating her. And so she failed that course and she appealed it. And she brought a **lawyer** with her and um (sigh). That was Halloween day and my children at that time were still young enough that they still enjoyed going out on Halloween. And, that appeal started at 4 o'clock in the afternoon and it lasted until 10 or 11 o'clock that night. It was **just horrible**. And this lawyer was trying to wheedle away around, "Well because it wasn't written down, how was she supposed to know, and how was this person supposed to evaluate her and. . . .!!!" Aaaahhhh! It was just awful. We won that appeal, but it was just a terrible experience and I vowed that this would never happen again and so somehow that has been a positive learning experience for me because now the whole department is almost anal about writing everything down. And we have now the Policy and Procedure Manual that has a rule or a guideline for almost any incident that could occur in our program. And so we have to thank this particular student for this manual and I think that even though it seemed like a bad thing at the time perhaps we all learned a tremendous amount from it and I think that our department is the better for having been through that. So that's my story and I think that there was a very, very positive outcome of that because we learned a tremendous amount in this department and **boy** did it tighten us up and I think that it has really improved the department.

What really bothered me at the time was that there was a student out there saying, "I graduated from Olds College," and I didn't want clients thinking, "That's what they're turning out." And I went to the Dean at that time and I said, "What can we do? We can't let this person graduate." And he told me, "You just have to let it go. There's always going to be situations in this world when you **cannot** fix it or change it. You're just going to have to let it go. And she will make her bed in the world somewhere. And certainly there might be a little bit of negativity towards Olds College but probably not very much." And as it turned out, he was right. There wasn't much of a repercussion against the college based on that one student. I think most people realized that not every single graduate is going to be a top-notch super-duper graduate.

But it just really bothered me at the time and I've matured now past that to the point where now, you know, I do my best and I feel that I've done my best and I feel that our department has done our best and that we're not going to win every single time.

4. **The Focus** Even as an experienced instructor, it is easy to get dragged into committee work and office politics, but a new instructor is perhaps especially vulnerable.

As a first year teacher I was moving from one classroom to another. I had a home base but I had to go and teach in another room. I needed to carry textbooks over and so I left my keys in my desk in my classroom because I had my nowhere to carry them because I was carrying all these books. I came back and my keys were gone and so...oh yeah! I started asking the students that were in the classroom and they said Mr. So and So, who happened to be the principal of the school, had taken them. This was early in the year of my first teaching job and so I go down to the principal's office and I said "Have you got my keys?" and he said, "Yes, and you're not to leave them again!" and so here I am, so young and fresh out of university, saying "You know you've put me in a really precarious situation because I've been asking the students because I thought they might have taken them." We (the principal and I) kind of started off on the wrong foot that year. The learning that came out of that one is that sometimes as a beginning instructor you're going to get yourself in situations that are power situations. As a first year teacher, I had so much on my plate, and it would have been nice had he just come and told me, "I've got your keys because I didn't feel comfortable leaving them in your desk," but no, he took them away to see if I would actually notice they were gone. So that's the kind of stuff that wears you down as a beginning instructor because you're really needing constant affirmation and then to have to deal with the power issues of other individuals -- that can be incredibly tiring so you've just kind of got to think, "You know what? Is that really my issue? I've got to stay focused on what I'm doing here. Is that what I'm here for – power issues, or to teach?"

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I was having real problems with this one class one time. Partway through the course, I think it was probably about a quarter of the way in, I asked them to do a course instructor evaluation but I asked them to do it a little bit different. I asked them to describe what their expectations were of this class and of me as the instructor. I typed up all those expectations -- every response that everybody gave me -- duplicated it and handed it out so they could look through it and see

> how, "Yes that's what I said." But then they could look at all the things the other people had said. Then at the bottom, I put down what my expectations were -- what they could expect from me and what the expectations of them were. And I found that to be fairly effective for that class. We're talking about one of those classes where it doesn't seem to be going as well as you'd hope from day to day. Sometimes the expectations of the class and the instructor are matching up but if they're not, even if you can't force those expectations to be the same, you can get them out so that everybody can see them. So I guess that would be one piece of advice would be explain your expectations. You might have to do it more than one time...

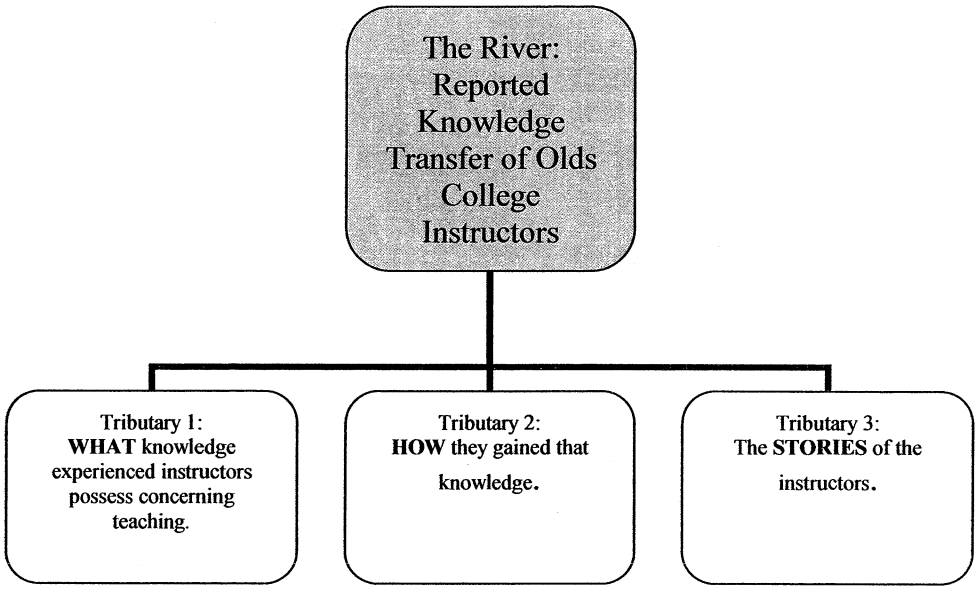
5. The Reward. Obviously, the happiest stories are included here. Every expert I interviewed told me, in words, tone, and eye sparkle, that he or she loved the job of teaching. Two people chose to tell me of incidents that happened that they saw as providing intrinsic reward in their careers.

> I had a student who came from an abusive marriage who used to say how her husband would take her shoes in the morning so she couldn't go anywhere. So anyway she finally ended up out of the marriage and came into my classroom and she would constantly, anytime she'd open her mouth, she'd say "I need to ask a stupid question," and I would say, "There are no stupid questions but I may give you a really stupid answer." I just would repetitively say "There are no stupid questions." She phoned me, I don't know how many years after she'd been in my classroom, and she was finishing her degree in education! She phoned me. She tracked me down to tell me. She said, "Remember when I used to say: I have to ask you a stupid question?" She remembered that so that was one of those really, I guess you'd say one of the huge rewards of teaching, yeah, the **huge** rewards of teaching, because this woman had totally turned her life around in terms of coming out of that abusive marriage and then ending up better. She's now teaching somewhere. Obviously it's an incredibly rewarding story.

Remember the story on (pages 52 & 53) from the instructor whom we left in tears in his room after he was berated by a student? This is the conclusion of his story following his words "Ohhh, I didn't know what to do. I just put my head down and just cried. . . ."

"How am I going to survive this?" And I realized, you know, he was totally right. I mean, it wasn't right for him to do that and I thought that was sort of another issue but I just felt that it was completely my fault and I brought this on and I just wasn't up to the task. But . . .I, I got it together, and I had a break, and then I sat down and I started organizing the course and I looked through all the materials I thought I was supposed to cover, and worked through it and decided, "Well you know, I'm not doing this. This is stupid," and threw it out, and "I'm not doing that and there's nothing here on this, we need to do something on this." And I created a good, sequential, time oriented, chronological pattern of what I was going to do. And put it away. And then there was a meeting, we had some kind of a meeting that day, and it was over at the library building, and it was about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, so this class had happened say 10 in the morning, or 11 or something like that, and at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. (Pause. Emotional time.) There's a knock on the door and there was a group of five students that showed up from that class, and they were actually kind of young, sort of the rowdy guys. They weren't bad kids, but they were the ones, in terms of keeping track of the class and control of it, they were the ones I'd be most likely to have to say, "You know it's time to listen up," or whatever. And they came to the door and asked to see me and called me out. It was such, such a meaningful experience for me. And basically said that the person that had exploded in class, that that was his problem and his opinion, that the rest of the class didn't feel that, and that I shouldn't feel that there was any problem whatsoever. And then, then it was fine. That guy -- they had gone to talk to him themselves, and as far as they were concerned, I was one of the best teachers they had. And I learned so much from that. I learned so much. I learned that you've got to be organized. That people have their own problems. This guy was going through a divorce. His family was separated. He was about 37. He was commuting to school. He was holding a job in the evenings. He wasn't doing well academically. He had all kinds of problems. And this was just kind of the last straw. That the guys at the back of the class, who I thought were the problem in the class, weren't a problem at all. They were just something that you had to manage, but in fact they were the good energy in the class. And that, basically, students will forgive you for just about anything if you maintain a positive attitude, and if they believe that you are trying to make their education more successful and that you are trying to give them a better education. 90% of them will forgive you for just about anything. And that was maybe the one most important lesson that I learned. Three things. That people have their own problems. That organization is extremely important. And that most of them are pretty good if they believe that you're on their side.

Confluence (The River)



In the Literature Review it was stated that stories can be used for such attributes as to ingrain openness; to create identity, shared experiences, and a common destiny; to show honesty; to illustrate culture and history; to demonstrate reliability and trust; to assist with healing; to explain economics; to construct connectedness; to encourage innovation; and to carry the message of culture. The stories I have recounted could be used to illustrate such attributes, but more specifically, as shown above, to illustrate the precise knowledge that the instructors considered important. Approaching this from a different angle, the following list was generated from the stories, showing what information embedded in them could be transferred to new instructors.

- Sometimes situations develop in class that really have nothing to do with your class, not with the content, not with you, not with your teaching style. They really only have to do with the student.

- In extreme situations, make sure you deal with the college nurse and/or college psychologist.
- You have to be able to think and react on your feet.
- Make sure you let a student know immediately that you understand his/her concern and that you are looking into it.
- You can learn from other departments, even if they are entirely different from yours.
- Sometimes you need innovative ways to deal with classroom management.
- As a new instructor, you will probably be warned to record instances in your classroom that might have repercussions, and so that you will have something in writing in case of an appeal. It is done with your protection in mind.
- Remember the words of the old adage, *every cloud has a silver lining.*
- Sometimes you have to let things go. You will have negative experiences, but you just have to put them behind you and continue.
- Not every job that is your responsibility is going to be easy, but some have to be done. Remember, the students are in charge of their own lives, and you can't cover things up for their benefit.
- Cheating is a concern, and it is a serious problem. You might want to have thought out ramifications in advance.
- Give the students the self-confidence they need to be self-directed learners.
- Make your materials relevant to your students and their needs.
- Keep the lines of communication open.
- Everyone, even an experienced expert instructor, has difficult classes sometimes.
- Make your classroom expectations explicit.
- Learn what your students' expectations are.
- Things happens!
- Do what you are comfortable with.
- Remember to stay focused on your teaching, and not on politics and power struggles.
- Always admit your mistakes to your students. It will be a positive experience.
- Don't squeeze too much content into your classes.
- Sometimes you do something without thinking that you would never do if you thought first and it might turn out OK.
- Sometimes doing the unexpected will produce good results.
- Take advantage of teaching moments, no matter how they come about.
- Try to cooperate with other departments.
- Try the unexpected.
- As an instructor, you need to set the rules for your classroom. There will always be someone in the class who wants to learn. Remember them and do your best for them.
- Don't let troublemakers destroy the learning opportunities for those who want to learn.

- Often, if you're having trouble with a class, other instructors are having problems with the same class and you can work together to help solve the problem.

In experiencing the river that you have been thrust into through this project, the literature review set the tone by showing that stories can be used to transfer knowledge. We then looked at the knowledge that experienced instructors at Olds College have, and learned that they had gained that knowledge through informal means. The applied research also proved that instructors have stories to tell, as more than one story per instructor was easily gathered. When the stories were analyzed, it was found that they contained much knowledge, some of which related to important aspects that instructors had felt was important. This further analysis of the stories seems to put me on firm ground when I recommend the strategic and enhanced use of stories for knowledge transfer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Because this is an action research paper, the recommendations will be given to the Olds College senior administration, and that requires a certain amount of redundancy involving the reuse of certain quotes; however the few quotes reemployed in this section are short, are worth repeating, and are used to emphasize a point.

Two definitions from qualitative research were delineated earlier when it was stated that a *topic* forms through categorization; it does not have to go through all the data all the time, but rather comes about through linkages and connections, while a *theme* goes right through the data set, although it appears in different ways. The next section of this paper expands on the one major theme of my research (discussed above as Tributary 2) that permeated all interviews and that started to reveal itself very early in the process: every single expert instructor I interviewed told me that the knowledge he or she possessed on the subject of teaching had been gained through informal rather than formal means.

When I asked, "How did you gain your knowledge?" the instructors overwhelming said that they had gained their knowledge from discussions in the coffee room, through trial and error, and through their own mistakes. The evidence indicating that the informal knowledge sharing was superior to these formal classes was so intense that it almost makes my first recommendation extremely easy to advance.

#1. Provide opportunity for informal knowledge sharing. Instructors need time and place for informal gatherings. The instructors spoke of how they

benefited from a college with a coffee room where experienced instructors listened to them and provided advice – a room where it was possible to share knowledge, but where they also received and provided support – a room where they could feel free in confessing their failures and mistakes – a room where they could share their successes and their good ideas. Long-term instructors at the college spoke to the fact that there used to be much more of this on campus in the past than there is now. They point to larger class sizes and more courses as being hindrances to such sharing. "If I started teaching now I think it would be more of a struggle than when I started teaching". One esteemed veteran stated emphatically that he does not believe he would survive as a new instructor in today's climate. This assessment on his part suggests that the college could be losing valuable future instructors because of inadequacies today. Some buildings and programs on campus provide the necessary time for this ultimate knowledge-sharing atmosphere; others do not. One program makes the effort to provide such support. They mentor. They have a system of drop in observations of each other's classrooms. They discuss student issues at meetings. At the other end of the spectrum, one instructor thoughtfully lamented that there was no real gathering place in her building for faculty. While there was a staff room, it was not seen as an area for gathering and for sharing ideas. It was infrequently used for lunch. Compare that to this instructor from James Murray, "I only live a few blocks from here but I bring my lunch because I don't want to miss anything." Since, overwhelmingly, the expert instructors at this college say that they have gained most of their teaching knowledge through informal interactions with other

instructors, then the college is negligent in not providing the time, the place, and the resources for such informal gatherings and knowledge transfer. One instructor told me in a situation outside of my research, "That $7000 that the college saved when they stopped paying for coffee was the most expensive ever. People used to meet in the coffee room to share ideas. Now they don't."

Stewart (2001) spoke to this situation when he stated emphatically, "It is worth mentioning here, however, the piece of hardware that has been documented to be the most effective means of sharing knowledge. It is called a coffeepot. Coffeepots are cross-functional and nonhierarchical. They encourage informal discussion. Serendipitous things happen around them" (p. 90).

And so, my recommendation to OC administration is that steps be taken to provide a "coffeepot" for their faculty. It is not necessary that there be coffee in this coffeepot, but that it exists in essence in a room, in time to share, and in a safe place to share.

While there is a budget, and a very important budget, for instructors to take formal courses, equal time, money and energy must be put into providing a coffeepot. In the Olds College Vision and Mission Statement it is affirmed that "At Olds College we value continuous improvement of instruction." This value could be represented clearly by providing instructors sufficient opportunities to share knowledge and thus improve their instruction. It was interesting for me to note that the expert instructors did not even mention their formal courses as having constituted learning until I raised the matter of such. This does not mean,

however, that they negated the formal courses. When I mentioned formal courses, they termed such structured teacher training (ISWS as well as workshops and university courses) as "inspirational", "valuable", "good" "supportive", and "positive". But these good, valuable, and inspirational courses were seen as secondary methods of learning.

This raises the question of knowledge sharing on a college-wide basis. As early as 1992, Burt was finding that social capital was important in an organization, and that it was important that players have social ties outside their own areas of expertise. Thus, while my first recommendation is clearly aimed at the grassroots level – at establishing and maintaining ties within buildings and programs, it would appear to be important to bridge to other buildings and programs as well. One instructor lamented that she did not have the time to do that. She also said that she would not be willing to take such time in the evening for a "formal" gathering, but that she wished she had time during the day to drop over to other buildings and get to know other instructors. This is born out in the literature. "It's more obvious, too, that companies are made of people, not stones and pipes; and the value of conversation, community, and voice increase, ..." (Stewart, p. 50). In a 1998 study, Nahapiet & Ghoshal found that the roots of intellectual capital were "deeply bedded" in social relations (p. 244). As well, they state that the existence of pleasant coworkers helps an organization to retain its employees. This would seem to point out that by benefiting instructors with time to share knowledge, the college will also gain by more informed instructors, and will also benefit from increased intellectual capital and with a better ability to retain faculty. Davenport &

Prusak (2001) advocate, "hire smart people and let them talk to one another." Nonaka (1996) theorized that knowledge sharing can actually create knowledge, an hypothesis that Nahapiet & Ghoshal identified after studying the work of several other researchers. All the OC instructors felt that the knowledge sharing should be close to home – that the program areas should look after their own. They were, however, willing to share outside of their program areas if that was deemed important.

Meetings, while more structured than simply talking in the staff room, are considered for the purposes of this paper to be informal, and were seen by some instructors as very useful. "...in this program, every time we have a department meeting, on the agenda, is behavioral issues. **Every single time.**" (Instructor's emphasis.) Compare that to an instructor in another program who said,

> And another time when you used to be able to share some things was at department meetings where what I would call classroom educational issues would come up and people would talk about them. And we don't do that any more. Department meetings are very less frequent I think in the departments and it's all administrative kind of stuff. It's almost **never** anything about what's going on in the classroom.

Therefore, encouragement to get student issues back on the agenda of department meetings would be another important way to provide opportunity for knowledge sharing.

Another key subset of this "coffeepot" recommendation deals with new instructors. The expert instructors all remembered the feeling of being overwhelmed in their first years, a feeling that I remember well, and they also spoke of seeing this in other new instructors. They told me of observing new

instructors flounder and sometimes leave the college because of the burden of the first year. They spoke of the need to extend concessions to new instructors – to provide them with extra preparation time and smaller classes. They spoke of the need to assist such instructors with information and wisdom that would set them on the road to becoming expert instructors in their own right. "Unfortunately we've had occasions where we've had staff that. . . didn't survive the experience because it was so unpleasant for them."

It would appear to be especially important, then, that new faculty be given the time and resources to enable them to be the benefactors of knowledge conveyed to them in social situations. As well as time for sharing, new instructors need time to develop into expert instructors. It was stated again and again that trial and error was an imperative part of learning to be a good instructor. Therefore, new instructors must also be what one interviewee termed "cut some slack" by knowing that they will be supported when their inevitable mistakes occur. Stewart (2000) states, "An asset might be . . .a collection of painfully learned lessons" (p. 66).

The concept of mentoring, both formal and informal, was mentioned in several instances as being important, and this is born out in the literature. Cembrowski (1996) found in her study of a post-secondary institution that management staff felt that mentorship was in the top three positive factors that assisted them to progress in their careers. Clutterbuck (1998) posits that "Mentoring is one of the most powerful developmental approaches available to individuals and organizations" (p. 88). Lam (2000), in speaking of tacit skills,

states, "they can only be revealed through practice and work performance" (p. 503). Pfeffer & Sutton (1999) affirm that essential knowledge is often transferred "by watching one another work" (p. 90). Stephenson (2000) considers mentoring as one form of intrinsic reward for employees, who he believes, will feel valued and thus remain longer in the job if assigned a mentor (p. 22). He also states, "Mentoring can tap into the highest intellectual capital available" (p. 159). It would therefore appear that instructors' belief that mentoring is useful is corroborated in the literature. It might be prudent for the college to help facilitate a mentoring system.

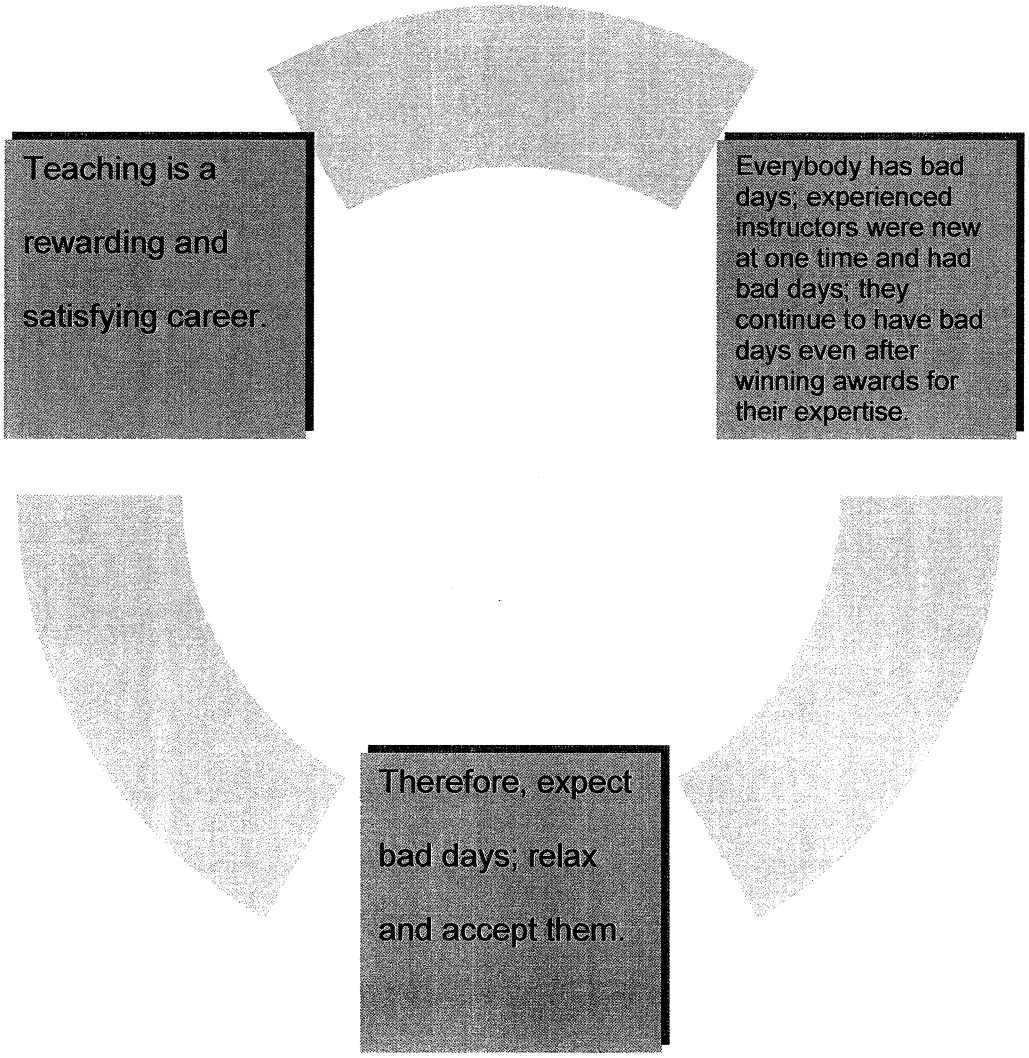
My particular interest in stories leads to my second recommendation:

#2. Provide opportunity for telling a story. The literature search led me to accept as true that tacit information is very difficult to convey through any method other than face-to-face. Yet, every instructor told me of gut-wrenching situations in their careers. I had tears from some when they recalled the very difficult circumstances in which they had found themselves while involved in their occupations. They all stressed how they wished they had been forewarned that there would be bad days, as even the expert instructors have them, but that in the end, being an instructor is a very satisfying life to choose. In speaking with the instructors, and in my literature review, I have come to believe that this could be conveyed during orientation with a story - a story from an expert instructor that shows the depths of despair that they have felt, yet then ends with accomplishment. McKee (2003) hypothesizes that, in the wake of the Enron and WorldCom experiences, people have come to distrust most statistics, but that they

will accept a story that displays problems and then describes how such problems are overcome.

My final question to each instructor was, *Would you be willing to share your knowledge?* The results were resoundingly affirmative. "For sure, for sure," "Oh sure, yeah," "Oh yes, I guess I've always viewed that as part of my responsibility," "Oh **very** willing," "Yeah!" "Sure. Yes. Absolutely," I always asked, "What methods of knowledge sharing would you be willing to utilize?" and the underlying response was that the instructors would help in whatever way was appropriate. Most mentioned one-on-one within their program, but when probed, stated that they would be more than willing to speak at orientation or meetings. Most agreed that it would be difficult to write things down. I was able to tell them that this response matched what the literature states – that much tacit knowledge is difficult to write down and is best transferred in a face-to-face situation. It would seem that a *story* from an experienced instructor at orientation could show several things:

Figure 5: Diagram detailing a positive cycle through the use of stories at OC.



Reflect on the new instructors mentioned above, who did not survive the college teaching experience "because it was so unpleasant for them" and consider being able to succinctly tell them these three basic points as encapsulated in the green boxes in the above diagram. There is the confirmation that they will have bad days, and that all instructors have bad days. But just as important as that

confirmation is the affirmation that teaching is a very rewarding career. The voice of experience is therefore to relax and accept those bad days, that those bad days can even provide positive learning experiences. The diagram is not a timeline that starts with bad days and ends with a positive outcome; it is a circle, since all the instructors admitted that bad days do not just occur at the beginning of their careers. The experienced instructors felt that if they could pass this nugget of information on, it would assist new instructors, as evidenced by the citations used earlier. "Just know that this happened." "Relax and accept mistakes." "You are going to fail more than you expected. And that's OK." However, the climax of the "story" illustrated above is happy, "Teaching is a rewarding and satisfying career". This reliance on a happy ending is a point advocated by both Denning (2001) and Walton (2004) as necessary for stories used in the corporate world.

The employment of stories is suggested in the literature as being one way of sharing elements of our tacit understandings (Denning, 2001; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995, quoted in Wright, p. 3 Teaching Note 3). It is also recommended by a plethora of writers cited in the Literature Review section of this paper, including Pfeffer & Sutton (1999) who state that "essential knowledge is often transferred between people by stories" (p. 90). It was suggested in the literature that stories can be used to ingrain openness; to create identity, shared experiences and a common destiny; to show honesty; to illustrate culture and history; to demonstrate reliability and trust; to assist with healing; to explain economics; to construct connectedness; to encourage innovation; and to carry the message of culture. Such attributes, it can be assumed, would be the very ones

that the college would wish to see embodied in knowledge that new faculty gains, and perhaps the reason that Prusak (2000), when asked, "What are the alternatives to telling stories?" replied, "There aren't any." I do not necessarily concur with Prusak that there are no alternatives to telling stories, but perhaps the literature and this study have indicated that stories are a very commendable medium for transferring knowledge. Time and again, my respondents referred to tacit knowledge with vocabulary such as intuition. The chemist/philosopher Polanyi was suggesting as early as 1950 (Cash, 1996) that we know much more than we can tell or describe. By 1966, he was using the metaphor of a stereoscopic photograph to explain that "tacit inferences drawn from clues are not explicit" and that such inferences will not be shaken by argument. Just as a stereoscopic photograph (I prefer to visualize binoculars in this context) results in a fusion of clues giving us a single picture, so too does he posit that tacit knowledge is "not a deduction but an integration". It is this kind of inductive knowledge that Nonaka (1996) alleges can create knowledge -- but only through socialization. Telling stories is perhaps the most social of all events, harkening back to our ancestors, where "Storytelling is a recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savages, for whom such mysterious powers existed" (Weber, cited in Frank, 2001). It could be concluded that the tacit knowledge that experienced instructors possess could be transferred to new instructors through the medium of a story. Senge (1990, p. 351) discussed leadership in the context of stories, and cited words from Heinrich Zimmer's 1948 book *The King and the*

Corpse that seem to parallel the OC situation so closely that I chose to utilize his words reflecting this, but substituting in elements from Olds College:

> Let us imagine that Olds College is Arthurian England, and each new faculty member is a knight. A good story will first unite them in the circle of the Round Table, and then scatter them forth on the paths of their different programs. Though the knights travel their separate paths in different programs, they are united in a common bond, and their paths, though predestined for each one of them alone, will meet, cross, and intertwine...

#3. Consider the use of technology for capturing and sharing certain types of explicit knowledge

Finally, in the era in which we are presently living, the possibility of utilizing technology for knowledge transfer must be considered. Santosus (2001) found that employees at Northrop Grumman (NG) were willing to share their knowledge in an automated system. On the surface, their situation seemed not unlike that at Olds College, as they were losing much of their intellectual capital, albeit through layoffs, not retirement. NG was able to institute an electronic depository for knowledge that was actually used by employees. The workforce was willing to use the system, both to deposit knowledge and access it, as long as it was easy to do so. The World Bank had some success with its initiative aptly named *Tacit Knowledge Download* (Fulmer, 2001, p. 11), which utilized Lotus Notes and the web to store a specific exit interview. While this was a valuable way of capturing knowledge from a retiring employee, its cost would be seen as prohibitive[3] at most educational institutions.

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[3] The cost was extreme in both time and money: several hours of interviews, $500 for transcription, and two people spending five days on editing, all for a single exit interview.

Many of the instructors stated that much of their knowledge couldn't be written down, "I think really you know, the meat in terms of teaching, I think that it needs to come from a **person** right? I think it really does." This concurred with the literature review that showed that tacit knowledge is very difficult to transfer through a technological medium. However, it is possible to have more explicit knowledge available on a webpage or in other printed form. The explicit skills were termed as important because "Yeah, there's no doubt that's the survival," and several instructors spoke of feeling like idiots for constantly asking questions about message accessing, photocopy equipment, projectors, etc. They said they would love to have such information written down so that "you don't look like such a **dope**, standing in front of somewhere not being able to do anything or having to go get someone else to show you how to work the machine." If the college ensures that such explicit information is readily available through technological mediation, both new instructors and their mentors can use their time together for recognizing and developing the much more subtle tacit skills. It was mentioned in the Literature Review section that incorporating explicit information through a pamphlet, a webpage, or a Yellow Pages directory, can provide relatively quick and easy access to new personnel on such issues as use of the photocopier, booking AV equipment, reaching emergency services, etc., but it can also serve as "a means by which people who are working on similar projects in different parts of an organization can find each other" (Stewart, 2001, p. 163).

CONCLUSION

The three recommendations outlined above:

#1. Provide opportunity for informal knowledge sharing,

#2. Provide opportunity for telling a story, and

#3. Consider the use of technology for capturing and sharing certain types of explicit knowledge,

flow from the previously stated theme that instructors gained their knowledge through informal social situations. There is probably nothing earth shattering about the three recommendations, but hopefully they will serve as a starting point for discussion and perhaps change in enhancing knowledge transfer at the college. Stebbins (2001), in discussing exploration, refers to a researcher who is an "enthusiastic pioneer" (p. 13) and I believe that I certainly brought the required enthusiasm to this project. At the beginning, when the project was still nothing more than an idea, I was excited about knowledge transfer, and excited about stories. At the end of this long process, I find I am still excited about these two things. Although action research does not intend to be generalizable beyond the specific setting in which it was conducted (Patton, 2002, p 221), there is still the understanding that sometimes the findings can be transferred to other settings. I hope that some of what I have learned here can be used outside the realm of OC. I have friends whose sons and daughters are graduating with B.Ed degrees, and I wonder if anything I learned could be useful to them. My husband and I each serve on boards, and I speculate that orientation and ongoing learning for such positions might benefit from my findings. These hopes and wishes, however, point to the lack of reliability in this study. It must be recognized that such reliability has

not been pursued and should not be expected. Lindlof (1995) posits that "little is gained from trying to achieve reliability" and even that "the move to generalize in the traditional sense is neither warranted nor particularly desirable" (p. 238). Mayan (2001) states, " In quantitative inquiry, reliability is generally concerned with replication. . . The idea of replication, however, contradicts some of the basic tenants in qualitative inquiry and should not be applied to qualitative inquiry" (p. 26). Qualitative researchers can attempt to increase reliability through using multiple sources and even multiple researchers, and this was not done in this study. However, qualitative researchers try to base their studies on dependable data, and this was accomplished in this study. It must be accepted that results might have been different if more interviews had been conducted, if a different learning institution had been studied, or if someone else had conducted the interviews, and Neuman (2003) states that this is acceptable as "different researchers or researchers using alternative measures will get distinctive results. This is because they see data collection as an interactive process in which particular researchers operate in a evolving setting and the setting's context dictates using a unique mix of measures that cannot be repeated" (p. 185). As well, I made a recommendation to incorporate technology for transferring more explicit knowledge, and I did so partially on the basis of the literature review and partially as a way for experienced and novice instructors to have more time together for sharing tacit knowledge. Another study would probably have to be done before this recommendation could be seen as absolutely valid. I am proud of my research and the findings, although I appreciate the fact that as a beginner researcher I

probably made some mistakes along the way, however, I am confident that no errors impact the authority of the findings. I have come to be a firm believer in the qualitative methods associated with such research, and look forward to future good I can do employing such knowledge. One instructor's words remain in my mind, and I find myself pondering them:

> It seems to me it's like an **art** if you're a successful teacher. It's similar to someone who is a successful painter. I don't think that a lot of those people who are good at painting can explain to somebody else how to do that. It's just that they do this and other people come along and say, "Oh, that's really nice. I like that." They did it for themselves and now they get satisfaction and they are feeing like they're making improvements with everything and I guess that's sort of how I felt about teaching...

Making improvements was important to the expert instructors, and I hope that this study can perhaps in some way assist in making improvements for new faculty at OC, and perhaps beyond. That is the basis for Action Research and it would appear to me to be an admirable pursuit.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INFORMATION LETTER

INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

I am completing an applied research project in partial fulfillment for a degree of Master of Arts in Communications and Technology at the University of Alberta. I am interested in the topic of the transfer of knowledge from experienced, expert faculty to new faculty at Olds College. Such knowledge transfer could perhaps assist in an even stronger educational institution. Olds College has a distinctive and proud 90 year history, and I wish to contribute in some small way to a future that continues to be significant. I am especially interested in hearing stories from expert teachers that illustrate some aspect in their teaching careers that they feel have made them better instructors.

As a nominee for the *instructor of excellence award,* I would value the information that you could provide concerning the types of knowledge you feel new instructors should obtain.

The interview will be tape-recorded and transcribed so that I will have an accurate representation of what is said. I will provide a copy of the transcription of your interview to you. I intend to interview six *expert instructors,* and each of you will remain totally anonymous in my transcriptions and in the final paper. The purpose of this collection of information is so that I can analyze the types of information you and other expert teachers feel you have to contribute to new instructors. I intend to recommend knowledge-transfer methods for the college.

I have received approval to do this study by the administrators at Olds College, and the Ethics Review Committee at the University of Alberta has also approved my methods. While I would greatly value your comments, you are not required to participate. If you do not wish to take part, you have my full understanding and compliance. You may withdraw from the interview at any time, and you may withdraw your comments at any time in the process,. I will have a consent form for you to sign before the interview.

Although I am new to the research game, it is my understanding that semi-structured interviews usually last a maximum of two hours. I might also need to phone you for further information as I am analyzing the data.

I hope you will be agreeable to being interviewed, but if you choose not to be, I reiterate that such a decision will receive my full understanding.

Sincerely,

Hazel Smith

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Investigator/researcher:
Hazel Smith
507-7961 (Olds College) 556-6858 (residence – preferred phone number over the summer)
smithhazel@hotmail.com

Project Advisor: Dr. Marco Adria, marco.adria@ualberta.ca
Chair of Review Ethics Committee: Dr. Bert Einsiedel, bert.einsiedel@ualberta.ca

Purpose of the Study:

I hope to learn how knowledge management strategies could be utilized in the capture of knowledge from established, expert instructors such as you, to provide a more permanent and readily available source of knowledge for new faculty at Olds College. I hope to incorporate the idea of *storytelling* into the knowledge-transfer process.

Methodology:

I chose your name from the list of instructors who have been nominated by the student association for the *Ian Hall Outstanding Faculty/Staff Member Award.* I will use a semi-structured interview to establish what knowledge you have about teaching that could be transferred to new faculty. Following analysis of the data that I collect from all of the participants, I will conduct a literature review to learn what methods of knowledge transfer could best be utilized at Olds College. I will also do a review of orientation materials in use at other colleges.

Confidentiality:

All information collected will be coded to protect your anonymity and any identifying indicators will be removed prior to publication. It is my intent to tape record the interviews if you give me permission. Transcripts or notes and recordings will be stored in my home office in locked file cabinets or on a secured computer. Files will be kept for five years, in compliance with University of Alberta requirements. When it is determined that it is no longer necessary to retain the files regarding this case, they will be destroyed. As the researcher, I will be the only person to have access.

Such anonymity and confidentiality will continue to be utilized if publication is sought outside of the specific requirements of this master's project.

Time Commitment

You will be asked to commit to a two-hour block of time for the interview. Some interviews might be shorter, and longer interviews and/or second interviews will only be conducted with your explicit consent.

Withdrawal from Study:

You are free to withdraw from the research study at any time without any adverse consequences. There are no known risks or personal benefits from participation in this study. If you wish to withdraw at any time during the study, the records associated with your interview will be destroyed at the time that you provide notification of wishing to withdraw.

When you have read the letter above, please read the following paragraph and sign your approval.

Participant Informed Consent:
I acknowledge that the research procedures have been explained to me, and that any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. In addition, I know that I may contact the person designated on this form if I have further questions either now or in the future. I have been assured that the personal records relating to this study will be kept anonymous. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time and I will not be asked to provide a reason.

Date _____

Printed Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Printed Name of Investigator: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____