

Practitioner to professor: Joys, challenges, and thriving in the transition

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Introduction

Career transitions are common and even expected in today's society, especially for individuals who are midlife and beyond (Crane, O'Hern, & Lawler, 2009). However, it is the transition from practitioner to teaching that provides both joys and challenges. Colleges and universities are now replacing retiring faculty members while meeting accreditation requirements with new faculty members coming from a professional career (Crane et al., 2009). These individuals are employed for a wide variety of reasons from their years of experience to the outstanding practice they have gained in their profession (Crane et al., 2009). However, while these individuals can be successful, there are also challenges along the way.

The topic of career transitions is specifically connected to teacher learning and professional development due to the focus on assisting teachers to become strong in all areas of their position. For university faculty members, this includes being strong in the areas of teaching, service, and research. As Peter stated in Kitchen, Parker, and Gallagher (2008), "he is concerned about the increasing emphasis on scholarly contributions" (p. 157), former practitioners often have a concern when the focus is on research.

Four individuals who have left successful careers outside of teaching have transitioned into faculty roles at a Midwestern university. They have faced many issues yet have found success and fulfillment in their new roles, in addition to challenges. This project is a description of their journey. Relevant literature will be reviewed, then the method described, and the specific participants' stories will be shared. This will end with a discussion of common themes throughout the stories and tips for others on how to thrive in the transition from practitioner to faculty member.

Literature Review

To prepare to construct this article, a literature review was completed. Topical areas include career change to a faculty role, Thriving Theory, midlife career change, practitioner value in the classroom, and relevant studies to the current project.

Career Change to Faculty

For individuals looking at the possibility of moving to a faculty position, there are many things to consider. First, there is the consideration of the requirements to become tenured. These include the

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need to excel in the areas of teaching, scholarship, and service. Rupell (2007) calls the faculty role a balancing act because of the distinct areas in which some level of expectation must be met (as cited in Welk, 2009, p. 167). However, this can be different at different types of institutions. “A research-intensive institution can be anticipated to have expectations different from those of an institution that emphasizes teaching as its primary mission” (Welk, 2009, p. 167). In addition, there are also differences between being a faculty member at a small liberal arts college, a community college, or a regional comprehensive university.

The first expectation is to focus on and excel at teaching as one of the major expectations of faculty is teaching (Welk, 2009). A second requirement is to fulfill scholarship requirements including publishing and other options. “With the work of Boyer (1990), the definition of scholarship was revisited as involving teaching, discovery, application and integration” (as cited in Welk, 2009, p. 167). Yet the phrase ‘publish or perish’ does not incorporate the many definitions of scholarship (Welk, 2009). There is still an expectation for faculty members to publish to achieve tenure as being successful in academics requires publishing in some form (Boyd, Caraway, and Flores-Niemann, 2017).

The final piece of the three-legged requirement is service. “Service in a university also pertains to the ‘service’ on departmental, college, and university committees that promote and accomplish the work of the organization” (Welk, 2009, p. 169). This service can be a variety of options but will hopefully align with the individual faculty member’s goals and desires. For new faculty members who bring in a wealth of experience, their skills or past successes are often not viewed as important, which can be difficult for midlife professionals. This is due to the fact that “when it comes time for tenure or promotion, separate criteria are not typical nor are discipline-related understandings of differences” (Welk, 2009, p. 167). Thus, to achieve tenure, one must focus on all aspects of the faculty position with scholarship being a major challenge.

Transition and Thriving Theories

Nicholson (1990) proposed the transition cycle as a framework for analyzing work-role transitions including the stages of preparation, encounter, adjustment, and stabilization (as cited in Kidd, 1998, p. 279). These transitions “are usually regarded as sources of stress and potential disruption of life-functioning and there is evidence to suggest that geographically dislocating transitions should be regarded as even more potentially disruptive and disconnecting” (Harris, Myhill, & Walker, 2012, p. 16).

Harris et al. (2012) incorporated Nicholson’s work and furthered it by adding thriving qualities. The original cycle with the qualities can be seen in Figure 1 while the Thriving transition cycle stages and qualities can be seen in Table 1. “Thriving is seen as a staged process rather than a static moment, and involves the positive resolution of issues at each stage” (Harris et al., 2012, p. 19). Overall, thriving is transformative, and allows the individual to examine their sense of self, i.e. the challenge is sufficiently confronting to be a cause for change (Harris et al., 2012).



Figure 1. The Thriving Transition Cycle (Harris, Myhill, & Walker, 2012, p. 18).

Midlife Career Change

There are numerous issues to consider when one is going to make a career change midlife or after. Work is always changing, and with individuals changing jobs numerous times through their career, work transitions become very complex (Schlossberg, 2011). With ever changing work also comes ever changing responsibilities.

This transition process is different for any individual. This process begins with a trigger from the presence or absence of something happening (Van Rensburg & Ukpere, 2014). Participants in their study all experienced transition through different triggers and reacted differently to these triggers. In addition, “they all experience a transition period and had to adapt to their new situation thereafter” (Van Rensburg & Ukpere, 2014, p. 735).

Concept	Qualities of those who thrive
Preparation	
Readiness	Purposeful Selective Mastery
Motivation	Confident Proactive
Positive Planning	Self-assured Positively detached
Comprehensibility	Forward focused Clear and ordered
Encounter	
Confidence	Positive self-concepts Capacity to learn

Sense Making	Clarity of purpose Commitment to process
Meaningfulness	Mindful of components Aware of significance
Engagement	Links with others Accessing resources
Adjustment	
Role Development	Awareness of transitions Connectedness
Manageability	Responsive to challenge Attentive to tasks
Support Systems	Identifies support systems Accesses support systems
Personal Development	Identifies pathways Learns from experiences
Stability	
Relationship Building	Independent Capable of intimacy
Environmental Mastery	Competent Controls complex tasks
Trust and Commitment	Willing to be vulnerable Receptive to challenges
Exercise of Discretion	Autonomous planning Strategic insight

Table 1. The Thriving Transition Cycle Stages and Thriving Qualities (Harris, Myhill, & Walker, 2012, p. 18).

Practitioner Value in the Classroom

Anecdotal information has dictated that both prospective and current students in educational leadership and postsecondary education programs prefer faculty who have been practitioners. This is also replicated in the literature. Styron, Maulding, and Hull (2006) found that students preferred professors with strong K-12 experience, but also with a solid theoretical background. Ritter (2007) found that professors who were practitioners “were able to connect research, theory, and practice and share daily administrative experiences and practices” (p. 6). Styron et al. (2006) supported this as well when discussing the richer classroom discussion that is enhanced by practitioner to professors’ real-life experiences.

While faculty members are hearing of the importance of scholarship by administrators, this is not confirmed by students as they “do not seem to place much value on publication or research for their professors” (Styron et al., 2006, p. 299). Due to an increase on the pressure to recruit, a program must have an outstanding reputation. This reputation is directly related to the faculty in the program (Styron et al., 2006). With the reputation built as a practitioner, and due to the statewide focus of educational programs, recruitment should be an asset to faculty members with strong practitioner experience.

Two studies are most relevant to the current discussion. First, a study by Crane et al. (2009) discussed the transition of two women to nursing faculty roles from practitioners. Several themes arose in their study including loneliness vs. autonomy, fear vs. confidence, and responsibility vs. authority (Crane et

al., 2009). However, some of the most important elements of this study were the tips for individuals wishing to make the leap from practitioner to faculty member. Crane et al.'s (2009) tips included:

- You may need to watch and listen at first more than you will speak.
- Realize that you are indeed different than your colleagues in their first career.
- Seek out mentors and be open to those who offer to mentor you.
- Network across the college or university so you don't become pigeon-holed in your own department or discipline.
- Take advantage of your autonomy – you don't have to show up at the office every day.
- Understand that you will encounter a very steep learning curve that may be quite frightening.
- Be open and share struggles with other trusted new faculty members.
- Remind yourself daily of your successes in your past career, and use those successes to jump-start your new career.
- Be cautious about taking on too many responsibilities, particularly in the service arena. Learn to say “no” so you can focus on your priorities.
- Think about balancing your service among university, school, departmental, community, and professional endeavors.
- Be proactive and find out what authority you do and do not have. (pp. 28-29)

This study will discuss faculty members' transition to their positions from practitioners but will change from nursing faculty to those faculty members in a College of Education, specifically, the department of Educational Leadership and Postsecondary Education. In addition, it will double the number of individuals viewed for inclusion.

Kitchen et al. (2008) is the second relevant study and it discussed a self-study group in education faculty. Similar to the present study, it involved new faculty members in education. This study group focused on their practice over the course of a year through ten meetings. As Kitchen et al. (2008) stated, “such communities of practice are also often committed to the scholarship of practice. For our group, the combination of collegial support and enhancement of our scholarship makes the pursuit of self-study attractive for faculty concerned about the tenure process” (p. 166). Not only did a focus on practice stem from this group, but knowledge of practice and purpose for teaching was also a result.

Methods

Purpose

This study looks to describe the challenges and successes of four individuals who have transitioned from practitioners to faculty members. This will allow for thriving qualities as determined in the field of education, a follow-up to Harris et al. (2012). Additionally, it will detail further tips on the process to move from practitioner to faculty as found in Crane et al. (2009).

Research Question

The research questions are as follows:

- 1) What are the experiences of someone who makes a career switch to a full-time higher education faculty position after being a successful practitioner?
- 2) Building on Harris, Myhill, and Walker (2012), what are the qualities of those who thrive in the transition from practitioner to faculty member?

Participants

The authors / participants in this study include two men and two women. Further characteristics can be found in Table 2. These participants were chosen due to the connection that all four have working in the same department. In addition, all four participants were employed in the same state prior to employment at this university. Finally, all four participants had a minimum of 18 years of practical experience prior to being employed as a full-time faculty member.

Gender	Age	# of Years in the field	# of Years as a Faculty Member	Previous Highest Position
Female	62	35	5	Superintendent of Schools
Male	63	35	4	Superintendent of Schools
Female	62	33	3	Director of Human Resources / Central Office Administrator
Male	46	18	2	Residence Life Coordinator / Conference Coordinator

Table 2: Select Information on Study Participants

Design Consideration

This study was completed utilizing a self-study research approach with the authors included based on their shared experiences. While self-study research is typically done on teacher practice, this method is appropriate for the current study due to several important links. First, “self-study researchers use their experiences as teacher educators as a resource for their research” (Samaras & Freese, 2006, p. 29). In this way, the researchers used self-study to view their previous perspectives in the field and how it has informed and impacted their current practice as a faculty member. Second, the methodology included two of the three features suggested by Feldman, Paugh, and Mills (2004) as it “would bring to the forefront the importance of self [and] it would urge those who engage in self-study to be critical of themselves and their roles as researchers and teacher educators” (p. 959). Third, self-study utilizes “the characteristic qualitative research tools of observation, interview, and artifact collection” (Cole & Knowles, 1998, as cited in Samaras & Freese, 2006, p. 32) and “self-study researchers use a wide variety of qualitative methods [and] there has been a focus on the use of life history and narrative forms of inquiry among the practitioners” (Feldman et al., 2004, p. 948). By telling the researchers’ stories and using their own experiences, the researchers utilized an autobiographical approach, in addition to interviews of each other. Finally, “when practitioners engage in research, they can relate to the subject of their research in a variety of ways” (Feldman et al., 2004, p. 949) and “when self is the object of the study, then it is clear that the focus of inquiry is on one’s self” (Feldman et al., 2004, p. 953). The researchers’ use of the self-study approach allowed them to be deeply embedded in their research subject, which was themselves.

Utilizing Autobiographies

After a preliminary discussion of the researchers’ goals for this project, it was determined that autobiographical stories would be the most appropriate way to capture the experiences of the participants. A central question that researchers may consider when using stories is “what does the story tell and what purpose does it serve?” (Loughran, 2010, p. 223). The researchers focused on the stories in the goal of explaining their experiences coming from being a practitioner. The purpose was hoped to describe experiences that others transitioning to the world of academia so that they could

learn and have their experiences normalized. In addition, it was hoped that this study would include a balance between biography and history, as Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) suggest.

The researchers followed many of Bullough and Pinnegar's (2001) guidelines for autobiographical self-study. While all of the nine guidelines were considered that specifically discussed autobiographies in self-study research, the researchers particularly focused on two of them. First, guideline one states that "autobiographical self-studies should ring true and enable connection" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 17). The researchers believe that their story is not a singular occurrence and that others can connect to our thoughts, experiences, and feelings. Second, guideline four stated that "biographical and autobiographical self-studies in teacher education are about the problems and issues that make someone an educator" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 17). We specifically wanted to discuss the challenges inherent in the transition from practitioner to a faculty role. Finally, it was the pattern of experience that the researchers sought through this autobiographical method that "allows a reinterpretation of the lives and experience of both the writer and the reader" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 16).

Process

The process involved the researchers writing their own story first. This story was described to be a life story of the participant involving their college experience, previous career path, and the way at which the individual arrived at a full-time faculty position. After each story had been written, the researchers went back and asked follow-up questions of each other to fill in any parts of their career journey not understood through the initial writing of the story. This occurred in group meetings over the course of several months. Finally, each story was reworked to include this additional information. A final review of the stories by the group provided an examination of the similarities and differences, resulting in the thriving qualities that were demonstrated.

Role of the Critical Friend

After the stories had been created, re-written with feedback incorporated, and confirmed, they were sent on to a critical friend to review. This critical friend also followed a similar path from practitioner to professor but has been in the field for a great deal longer and had already achieved tenure status. This critical friend reviewed the stories and provided additional questions to understand the essence of the researchers' experiences. After the critical friend had reviewed them and offered feedback, "these narratives were returned to the group process and from them common themes were elicited" (Feldman et al., 2004, p. 969). The researchers agree with Schuck and Russell (2005) when they stated that "trust, support, and flexibility are essential elements of a critical friendship" (p. 112). The critical friend provided excellent support and challenge in this project, so that different and relevant perspectives could be part of this study (Schuck and Russell, 2005).

Data Analysis

After the return of the stories from the critical friend, several meetings were then held to discuss themes and tips to others on going through the process. As Feldman et al. (2004) described, the researchers discussed their "practice through themes relevant to the group" (p. 969). After the themes were discussed and confirmed, the final discussion was completed on thriving qualities that were central to the researchers' experience.

Dr. Denise Schares

Dr. Schares is entering her sixth year as an Assistant Professor in the Educational Leadership Department, joining the faculty after retiring as a superintendent with 35 years' experience in public

school systems. Dr. Schares first went to college to become a dietician, following in her mother's footsteps. A few semesters of organic chemistry convinced her that another field might be more aligned with her passion. Home Economics education was of interest and she soon graduated with a degree in education and began her teaching career at an inner-city high school near her hometown. What followed was 15 years of teaching, one year at the department of education and nineteen years in administration. During those years, Dr. Schares completed a master's degree in educational psychology and a doctorate degree in curriculum and instruction. As her administrative career progressed, she returned to college to become licensed as a school principal and superintendent.

During Dr. Schares' time in the public-school system one of the passions that she discovered was that of supporting others as they discovered the joys of teaching leading and serving in the public-school system. Mentoring new teachers and administrators, teaching graduate courses for alternative licensure students, presenting at state and national conferences in the areas of cultural competency, adult learning and effective instructional strategies are activities that Dr. Schares engaged in throughout her career. When the opportunity to retire and return to teaching in the higher education system presented itself, Dr. Schares joined the faculty in educational leadership. Having experienced a variety of educational leaders who left lasting impressions, both positive and negative, Dr. Schares was excited to be a part of the advanced education of aspiring leaders across the state. The transition into higher education was both exciting and daunting. A whole new set of politics were at play. Having been a primary decision maker and familiar with the policies and practices of school districts, the move to higher education brought with it a steep learning curve. Now referred to as a junior faculty member, faced with a new set of structures, expectations and a focus not only on teaching and service, natural passions of Dr. Schares, but also a heavy focus on publishing and scholarship, the work became a challenge. The students, colleagues and the day to day opportunities to teach and support others bring great joy to Dr. Schares. Most days she knows that she made the right decision to transition to higher education. On the days that the pressure for tenure and the multiple layers of hierarchy become a bit overwhelming, Dr. Schares reflects on the work and the opportunity she has to truly make a difference to others. She works to keep this favorite quote in mind; "Passion for life emerges from clarity surrounding our purpose;" and to remember that perhaps that greatest gift we can share with others is helping them find their clarity of purpose while continuing to seek our own clarity of purpose.

It appears that Dr. Schares is at a crossroads in her life and career. She has accomplished many of the things of which she once only dreamed. She has raised a healthy, happy family, enjoys spending time with her husband of 40 years, has work that she is passionate about and finds time to enjoy hobbies and simple relaxation. What might the future bring? Only time will tell but one thing is certain, the opportunities to support others and to contribute to the field of education will continue to be priorities no matter the direction they take.

Dr. Kim Huckstadt

Dr. Huckstadt is beginning his fifth year of teaching in higher education. Prior to joining the Educational Leadership Department as a full-time tenure track assistant professor, his teaching experience in higher education was limited to serving as an adjunct professor for two different universities (one in Iowa and one in Illinois). An innate desire to teach aspiring educational leaders, combined with these opportunities to serve as an adjunct professor, led him to pursue a doctoral degree at the age of 54.

Dr. Huckstadt has shared with many colleagues and friends that, as a young man, he never seriously considered any career path other than education. This was largely due to the influence of his father, a

U.S. Navy veteran who attended college on the *GI Bill* in the 1950's to become the first (and only) in his family to earn a college degree. He went on to have a very successful 34-year teaching and hall of fame coaching career. For Dr. Huckstadt, it was not a matter of whether he would enter the field of teaching and coaching but what subject area would he teach and what would he coach? After a short test run as a psychology major, Dr. Huckstadt found the right fit in the Biological Sciences.

While there was no preconceived plan, in retrospect, there is a clear career progression in Dr. Huckstadt's career path from teacher/coach (10 years) to building level leadership (12 years) and, finally, to district level leadership (13 years). He points to encouragement of leaders he worked with as well as a three-year mission trip that allowed him to teach in the deep south (Lake Charles, Louisiana) as the primary influences that helped to crystalize his desire to seek leadership roles and responsibilities in education. One unique aspect of Dr. Huckstadt's career is that he served in all of these capacities within the same school district. He has shared on numerous occasions that he truly enjoyed every aspect of his educational career. Each have been filled with challenges and the corresponding intangible rewards. He believes that "It is always about the people we meet and experiences we have shared."

As Dr. Huckstadt closed the book on a 35-year career in PreK-12 education, he thought he would pursue opportunities to serve as an adjunct professor in educational leadership. When contacted by a search committee representative of a respected university about a potential full-time, tenure track position in educational leadership that looked to be a "good fit" for his experience and background, his interest was piqued and the anticipation of assuming such a role grew. Following a formal interview process, he was offered and accepted the opportunity to become a full-time tenure-track Assistant Professor. While "tenure" was a familiar term, Dr. Huckstadt fully discloses that he had a very limited understanding of what was required to achieve tenured status.

When preparing for the career shift after 35 years in PreK-12 education, Dr. Huckstadt's primary focus was on returning to teaching and utilizing his educational background and practitioner's experience to further his personal mission of helping to prepare the "next generation of school leaders." From day one in higher education, preparing for classes, engaging students, mentoring future leaders and fulfilling departmental obligations have been his highest priorities. He has openly indicated that at age 62, "tenure" has a different meaning than it may have had at an earlier stage of his career.

Dr. Huckstadt served as a school superintendent for 13 years prior to coming to higher education. It is a position that is held and retained "at the pleasure" of an elected board of directors. The concept of tenure, which is largely associated with academic freedom and job security in higher education, is a foreign concept to those in district-level leadership positions (Boyd et al., 2017). In an "at will" employment environment there are limited protections and no guaranteed contract extensions. Some argue that tomorrow's "tenure" is earned today.

Even though a lack of understanding of the requirements for tenure have contributed to the transitional challenge, the merit of a tenure-based system is not at the heart of Dr. Huckstadt's struggle with the career transition to higher education. If one equates the concept of tenure with "earned credibility" within one's profession or field of work, then almost every profession or vocation has a manner in which "credibility" is earned, usually over an extended period of time. In some cases, the rules and standards for earning credibility (or tenure) are clearly delineated. However, there are often unwritten rules that are driven by the culture of a workplace or institution. The same can be said for Pre-K-12 education and almost every other work or social setting. Most of the cultural nuances and

norms can only be learned by being a part of an organization for an extended period of time. If an individual hopes to grow and thrive in any work environment, they must learn the written rules, carry out their assigned responsibilities and invest the energy to learn the unwritten rules and cultural nuances. In higher education, if one is able to navigate these complexities and demonstrate to their peers that they have successfully fulfilled their responsibilities, after a maximum of six years they may be rewarded with tenure. While the acknowledgement from peers means a great deal, when one is hired because they have already earned credibility in their field after 35 years of practice, it can sometimes be perceived as devaluing the practitioner perspective. Perhaps “the system” (not to mention students) would be better served if there was flexibility to acknowledge that there are many ways to earn credibility within the profession.

Dr. Susan Alborn-Yilek

Dr. Susan Alborn-Yilek, or “Dr. Sue” as most students and colleagues refer to her, is a 28-year veteran of the Iowa public school system, with nine of those years serving two small rural schools as English/journalism teacher, fourteen years as a secondary school principal in three different districts -- two rural and one suburban -- and five years as a human resource director at a large suburban district. Her personal motto, “Go for Greatness,” reflects the gusto with which she engaged in every position and approach she took with every student and adult she mentored. Despite her love for being a principal, Dr. Sue left the principalship for a job as graduate program coordinator within the School of Education at a nearby university in Wisconsin as this job allowed her the flexibility she needed to finish a PhD program in educational leadership she had begun a decade earlier. She yearned to finish this terminal degree as a salute to her parents who had never been able to afford college. After five years in this position and despite the many friendships and rewarding work there, she welcomed a return to Iowa and PreK-12 when she was offered the role of director of human resources. Here she stayed for five years prior to joining the Educational Leadership faculty at the university where she is currently employed.

Now entering her fourth year as an Assistant Professor, Dr. Sue often finds herself comparing her past PreK-12 experiences to current higher education experiences. She had confidence in her work as a PreK-12 school leader, understanding well the Iowa educational system. She had a wide range of individuals in her professional network and, together, they solved problems, celebrated each other’s victories and lent a shoulder to those going through tough times. Power players changed over time but, overall, the system remained the same and, for the most part, she was able to successfully navigate it in ways to benefit her students and staff. Providing school leadership was what she did and, from this chapter in her life, she gained immeasurably as a human and took great pride in helping others achieve.

Higher education proved to be a much different platform. Dr. Sue immediately embraced the teaching aspect of her job as she now had the opportunity to wrap her arms around aspiring principals and superintendents and help usher them into the world of school administration, the world she had come to know and love. However, there were other aspects of the job that left her feeling vulnerable. Despite the knowledge and experience she brought to the position, she was offered a contract as an “assistant” professor, a probationary status on which she would remain for a minimum of six years. During this time, in addition to providing excellent teaching, she would be expected to demonstrate her scholarship capacity. She soon learned her days would be filled with collecting and analyzing data, writing and publishing research reports, and presenting at state and national conferences. Though all of this filled her with anticipation and excitement, a small stomach cramp presented itself almost daily. How would she fare? Promotion depended on this outcome.

Dr. Sue also learned her professional network would now need to include equal numbers of individuals working in higher education and this new system featured different players on a much larger stage. Competition among higher education institutions was alive and entities scramble to sustain -- and grow -- student enrollment. Unlike PreK-12 school systems where enrollment equaled existing neighborhood populations, graduate enrollment was dependent on quality and value. As higher education faculty who had no control over the costs of tuition, Dr. Sue and her colleagues found themselves in a 24/7 active recruitment mode, telling their story and describing why their program may be of greater benefit to prospective candidates than others. This recruitment also required describing why their institution is the most suited for students due to its focus as a Midwestern Comprehensive institution or a Masters College and University: Larger Program according to Carnegie Classifications.

Despite these challenges, Dr. Sue remains positive, open-minded and committed to providing the best educational experience for her students. She understands the important role PreK-12 school leaders play and any trepidation she may feel about her own tenure and promotion is quickly overshadowed by the demands of her day-to-day and that is to seize every opportunity that will best prepare her aspiring principals and superintendents for high-impact leadership.

As she anticipates the future, Dr. Sue feels good about the career and family goals she has accomplished. Whether she continues at the university or retires will be a decision to be made in the near future. Either way she is grateful for the opportunity to have worked at the university supporting aspiring school leaders.

Dr. David Schmid

Dr. Schmid is the unique one in this case as he teaches in the Educational Leadership Department, but teaches in the Postsecondary Education: Student Affairs program. Thus, his story is one of a different area of teaching, but also one that does not include a view of what his job could have been from an early age. Dr. Schmid went to college originally interested in being an accountant. At this point, the field of student affairs was not even a thought in his mind. He moved into his residence hall and was immediately acquainted with his resident assistant (RA). As he continued to focus on his accounting degree, he was increasingly aware of what his RA did and also became interested in becoming one. He applied and was thankfully hired to be a RA during his sophomore year.

During his RA experience, he met his supervisor. At this point, he realized that you could actually work a full-time job doing something like this. What a surprise! He found that he loved his work and thus sought information on how to become a residence life coordinator. This involved obtaining a master's degree in student affairs; so he applied to several graduate schools and was accepted, in addition to accepting a position in the housing department at his graduate school.

During his studies in his master's program, he became aware of how exciting learning could be. While he obtained good grades in high school and his undergraduate degree, he was just going through the paces. However, with his advisor and mentor, Dr. Marcia Dickman, he was able to understand how everything connected and he truly learned the material, in addition to how to apply it. It was then again where he was able to look at what his mentor did for him and thus think about how he could eventually teach one day in the future. However, he graduated with his degree and started to work an entry level position in housing.

He continued to work hard at this position but knew that he wanted to obtain his doctoral degree. Thus, he went back and through several school switches, and many years, he finally obtained his doctorate degree. He began teaching as an adjunct when he was All But Dissertation (ABD) and continued for many years both working his full-time position and serving as an adjunct. When a position came open at the institution he loved, he applied, was offered, and accepted a job as a full-time faculty member.

The transition to faculty member has had both its joys and its challenges. Coming from student affairs where one is always on call and may need to respond to a situation at 3 am, being a faculty member is a complete joy! However, having students constantly need you, an expectation that is inherent in student affairs, is not the same as a faculty member. After having an office that faced an entry door with constant interaction, now his office is on the top floor and away from traffic areas. The only individuals who are by his office are those that intend to be for a meeting. This was perhaps the hardest change as he is an extrovert who thrives on constant human interaction. While this allows him to be much more productive, it is difficult to build the same relationships with students as were built prior to being a faculty member. An additional challenge is the evaluation and promotion process. Prior to entering the faculty world, an individual was evaluated on a single job. Now as a professor, there must be a focus on service, scholarship, and teaching. This is somewhat difficult as teaching provides a satisfaction due to immediate feedback and service continues to provide human interaction. Scholarship, while important, is the largest area of struggle for Dr. Schmid as it does not come naturally. However, he realizes that to obtain tenure, it is something that must be completed successfully.

As he starts his third year of full-time teaching, he realizes the strange road that has taken him to where he is now. Each step of the way he was afforded the opportunity to learn from a mentor and see the impact a mentor could make on students. This type of career knowledge was not anything that was in books but was something that was learned through experience. It is his hope that in the future he can obtain tenure and find a focus for his scholarship pieces. He began to focus with this piece and others in process; yet he knows that he will always enjoy and reap rewards from the teaching aspect of this position.

Discussion

Common Themes

Many themes emerged as our stories were told. These included initial focus, joys, and challenges. In regard to initial focus, two of the faculty members went through early life without any hope in or focus on the field of education, with their career goals lying in being an accountant and a dietician. However, the other two individuals knew that education was going to be their field for a long time to come.

The joys of being a faculty member for this case is very simple. Supporting others and making an impact on their lives is paramount to what we do. Whether this is the students with whom we work, the individuals that our students will impact through their work in a school or university setting, or the colleagues with whom we work, that support is number one. What wasn't discussed in the stories is the office camaraderie and support that is evident every day in our interactions. This echoes Kitchen et al. (2008) as they discussed the cohesion of the faculty group because of being able to relate to others' experiences. While each of us has a job to do and endless to do lists, there is still the time made for teamwork on various projects, a listening ear if an issue is challenging one of us, or a hearty laugh to keep everyone in good spirits. This office culture is not readily found and is one that is so appreciated by all of us.

Regarding challenges that we have faced, it was clear for all four that the area of teaching is a passion, with a lesser focus on scholarship and research. Whether this is due to all four individuals having been strong practitioners before becoming faculty members or whether the research agenda is pushed to achieve tenure remains to be seen. This may also be due to the heavy practitioner focus in the graduate programs in which we teach. The practitioners are consistently focused on students, thus, why wouldn't that be modeled by the faculty members? Focusing on teaching and student support leaves less time for production in the area of scholarship. This was similar to Peter in Kitchen et al. (2008) who discussed being "a dedicated practitioner who loves working with teacher candidates. He sees his 'impact' as occurring through his teaching; course evaluations and other feedback are the best evidence of his impacts. Nevertheless, he is concerned about the increasing emphasis on scholarly contributions" (p. 157).

In addition, the hierarchy and politics of the university setting continue to be waters that need to be charted and navigated. While politics are inherent in any employment setting, understanding the layers of politics involved with numerous stakeholders is overwhelming even to the most prepared individual. As an example, our department is currently undergoing the process to combine with one or two other departments. There are concerns about how the various departments have differed in promotion expectations. With the four of us still in the tenure pipeline, how will these new rules be applied?

A challenge also continues to be the ambiguity in our positions as it relates to coordinating programs and advising doctoral students. Previously, the work was well-known, and expectations established; however, in these new positions, many questions about procedures and protocols presented themselves. We have worked so hard to offer sound advice to the students in our own programs. However, when this is extended to working with doctoral students, there are requirements for students that remain unclear to us. This can also be exacerbated by the amount of work expected across a lean department and the number of programs we advise. The work involves visits to our students in different locales, which can be a struggle for time management, simply due to the geographical considerations for the wide areas we serve.

Two challenges exist in the area of recruitment - the time it takes and the faculty credentials. Because the university has an expectation that program enrollment numbers are sustained or in growth mode, faculty feel pressure to actively engage in recruitment activities. This takes time away from their teaching, scholarship and service. Second, current and past students have shared a desire to participate in courses taught by individuals with experience in the field. This desire also surfaced in the research cited earlier by Styron et al. (2006).

Finding such individuals who also meet the university requirement of having obtained a terminal degree limits the available pool when hiring new faculty members. Thus, should a graduate program in education utilize individuals who have a strong practical background, or a strong background in the production of research?

Implications

Due to the limited availability of prospective faculty with both scholarship and practitioner experience, universities may need to consider alternative classifications and evaluation criteria for Educational Leadership faculty. It seems those interested in these positions either have a high degree of practitioner experience and a greater desire to spend their time preparing and supporting future leaders

or a high degree of scholarship with little practical experience. This mixed message that faculty members receive can be frustrating as our students appreciate the practical experience that is provided from a faculty member who was a practitioner while the university setting pushes scholarship to receive tenured status.

One option may be a tenure track position with a clinical focus. According to Boyd et al. (2017), this “is often more flexible and does not have the same standard expectations for research and teaching” (p. 11). With this type of position, an Educational Leadership faculty candidate with those credentials could be hired with tenure status due to the practical experience they bring and not subjected to the publish or perish process. Student recruitment would be less challenging due to students connecting with their faculty members; even having the possibility of having been previous colleagues with these individuals. In addition, the recruitment of faculty members would be weighted more on the practitioner side, giving a focus to the search process, and ideally expanding the pool of applicants. PreK-12 systems often compensate school administrators at a higher level than universities pay faculty members. This may cause a concern during the recruiting process. However, as discussed earlier, the passion for helping others to succeed is an intrinsic motivator for many of these individuals.

Response to Research Questions

The first research question asked, “What are the experiences of someone who makes a career switch to a full-time higher education faculty position after being a successful practitioner?” Through the stories and previous discussion, this question has been answered. The second research question asked, “Building on Harris, Myhill, and Walker (2012), what are the qualities of those who thrive in the transition from practitioner to faculty member?” As a follow-up to their thriving qualities, we added our own thriving qualities for faculty members in Education Leadership. These qualities were taken based on our stories and experiences as a faculty member. This is as a result of the pressures and positive results that can stem from being a faculty member after years as a practitioner. These qualities can be found in Table 3.

In addition to the qualities for thriving, we also created a follow up to Crane et al.’s (2009) tips for individuals wishing to make a career change to faculty member from being a practitioner. The tips are as follows:

- First and foremost, we are here to serve students. Remember this all the time!
- Find the areas about which you are passionate and run with them - they may be what gets you through the hardest parts of your day.
- Ask questions early and often about what scholarship and service mean. It is better to have too much information than not enough.
- Build the team of individuals with whom you work on a daily basis. Be open to new relationships, networks, and make yourself vulnerable.
- Determine for yourself the way that you will organize your time; remember that you generally have control, but that things will pop up in which you need to be involved.
- Have fun! And when it no longer becomes fun, ask yourself why you are doing what you are doing and make changes.
- Assist in the transition of other new faculty members. Share with them your experiences and tips as they navigate the new political system.
- Join organized efforts designed to orient and support the transition to faculty life
- Use your skills learned as a practitioner and share them regularly. This is from what your students gain a great deal of knowledge - your experience!

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