Keeping the magic: New educator award winners discuss creativity and challenges in mid-career

Joy Beatty
*University of Michigan - Dearborn*

Amy L. Kenworthy
*Bond University, akenwort@bond.edu.au*

Jennifer S.A. Leigh
*Nazareth College*

Suzanne de Janasz
*University of Mary Washington*

Charles J. Fornaciari
*Florida Gulf Coast University*

See next page for additional authors

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Keeping the magic: New Educator Award winners discuss creativity and challenges in mid-career

Joy Beatty, Jennifer Leigh, Amy Kenworthy, Charles Forniciari, Suzanne de Janasz, Jane Wheeler, Kirsty Spence

ABSTRACT

The New Educator Award recognizes early career teachers who have demonstrated excellence and creativity in their teaching practice, pedagogical research, and service to OBTS. In this session seven NEA winners discuss keeping magic in their teaching practice. Having moved from “new” to mid-career, the session addresses two questions: (1) what is the current career challenge you face? And (2) what attitudes, behaviors, or practices allow you to keep the magic (stay energized) in your career? The session encourages inquiry and dialogue with panelists and audience members about mid-career opportunities and challenges.

Word Count: 91

Keywords: career development, midcareer, creativity
PLANNING DETAILS

Proposed audience: Teachers at all career stages interested in career development questions
Maximum number of participants: No limit
Type of session: Inquiry and dialogue
Special requirements: Standard AV setup
Length: 90 minutes
Proposal level: Teacher development

INTRODUCTION

The criteria for the New Educator Award is that a teacher is early in his or her career (up to five years after receiving a doctoral degree) and is an emerging voice within OBTS. To win this award, these teachers have demonstrated creativity and promise for new ways of thinking about and practicing management education. As of 2009 there have been eleven New Educator Award winners, spanning 1999 through 2009.

NEA winners vary in age and experience and teach in a range of institutional contexts. The earliest winners completed their doctoral studies in the mid-1990s. Most have tenure or will soon be completing the tenure process. The group is now in the “mid-career” stage. True to the intent of the New Educator award, members of this group have pursued an array of career opportunities to continue making their contributions to the field. This includes outstanding research and scholarship, with activities such as directing research centers and holding endowed chairs. They demonstrate continued teaching excellence, for example with Fulbright scholarships, teaching awards, pedagogical publications, and text-book authoring. Many continue with innovative pedagogies such as service-learning. Some hold administrative roles, such as department chair and director. They hold service roles including elected leadership
positions in academy divisions, journal associate editorships and editorial board membership, and special issue editors. Additionally, some have faced other challenges such as changing institutional affiliations.

Now in mid-career, the group’s experiences represent common stages and issues of academic careers: the promotion and tenure process, increased service responsibilities, raising a family and establishing work life balance, and finding one’s voice in the field. However the changing academic landscape has also expanded the scope of our roles, so we face perhaps a broader set of challenges and opportunities. For example, there are increasing calls for us to become efficient and flexible, with financial and managerial priorities, and to think of academia in a more corporate model (Ernst 2002). Demands for wider faculty involvement are growing, to apply our knowledge to practical areas and participate in local communities (Austin 2002). Teaching requires careful work too, with an increased focus on accountability for student learning. We are required to do more “non-core work” (McInnis 1996) around assessment and appraisal, and providing data for institutional profiles. Given this changing landscape, how are we understanding and making meaning about ourselves, teaching, our careers, and higher education? And how do we maintain our excitement for this career?

It seems that our institutions, the broader academy, and sometimes even we ourselves have normative expectations about career success. These pressures complicate our career decision-making, much as they would for any midcareer professional. Many career paths are available, and teachers need to find roles that are consistent with their identity (Baruch and Hall 2004). Developing and nurturing one’s identity requires honoring one’s dreams – and sometimes also confronting the monsters under the bed. As Palmer (1998, pp. 30-31) says:

“The teacher within is not the voice of conscience but of identity and integrity. It speaks not of what ought to be but of what is real for us, what is true. It says things like, “This is what fits you and this is what doesn’t”; “This is who you are and this is who you are not”’; “This is what gives you life and this is what kills your spirit…”
Our paths and experiences illustrate the diversity available in academic careers. We have leveraged our differences to pursue authentic paths and make our personal contributions, being successful by our own rules. Examining the experiences of NEA winners spanning a roughly ten year range gives us a snapshot of mid-career experiences. From this platform, we reflect upon the many choices and tradeoffs that characterize mid-career. The panelists look forward to discussing these questions not only among ourselves, but with a group of engaged participants.

SESSION DESCRIPTION

We are requesting a 90 minute block for this session as follows:

- Introduction and framing: 5 minutes
- Panelist presentations of core ideas: 30 minutes
- Breakout discussions: 30 minutes
- Open discussion, audience commentary: 25 minutes

Note that all NEA winners were invited to participate in this panel discussion. Seven of the eleven winners have indicated that they will participate (the others are not planning to attend OBTC this year).

Panelists will be asked to prepare responses to two questions:

1. As a mid-career academic, what is a major dilemma or challenge you’ve faced as you develop your career? For example, these may be framed around a career choice, a new opportunity, or the interface between work and family.
2. What is the one teaching question that energizes your practice? In other words, what makes your work “magic”? You may have several questions, so please present just one. It could be your practice of teaching, research, service, or the larger academic life.

The objective of our discussion is “filling the pool” with mid-career experiences and having a shared discussion among panelists and participants about keeping the magic in our careers. It is not about telling our complete career narratives of how we got where we are (alas this would require a much longer session!), nor is it directly about advice-giving (although advice will undoubtedly be shared). We expect participants to join the discussion, consistent with the interactive and participative format of OBTC sessions.

Panelists’ responses to the two questions will be collected prior to the conference. Based on these responses, the session organizers will do an initial sort and suggest some of the common themes (for example: balancing teaching and research, work-life challenges, navigating political challenges of the academic environment). For the first 30 minutes, individual panelists will have about 4 minutes to offer their personal experience, or more time if they present in groups. For example, some of the NEA winners who have changed institutions pre-tenure might pair up to comment on this experience; others who have started families during the time period may want to speak as a group.

Next, we will ask the panelists and participants to break into smaller groups to discuss mid-career questions and challenges for 30 minutes. If our audience is large, we can ask participants to create buzz groups of 3-4 people near them. If the group is medium-sized, we can ask participants to move to the themed groups that are most interesting to them. If the group is small, we might have a single large group discussion. For the final 25 minutes of the session, we will reconvene as a single group to consider insights and career take-aways.
APPLICATION TO CONFERENCE THEME AND SUB-THEME(S)

Our session fits with three conference subthemes roots of OBTC, leveraging difference, and where’s the magic? Regarding the roots of OBTC, the New Educator Award is one of five awards granted by the Society each year. OBTS members may be more familiar with the Bradford Award winners (aka, the OBTS lifetime achievement award) because of the long time contributions these winners have made. The newer entrants recognized by the NEA are less well-known. Featuring this award familiarizes new teachers to this element of OBTS culture, and serves as a reminder for returning members of the range of ways that the Society honors teaching. For the second theme of leveraging difference, our session illustrates the diversity of mid-career experiences and the importance of maintaining authenticity. By sharing our personal experiences and perspectives, and reviewing the range of differences within our group, participants can consider ways that difference is leveraged. For the final theme of where’s the magic, our receipt of the NEA suggests we had magic as new teachers; our discussion of keeping the magic will center on creative and innovative ideas that keep us engaged in our careers into our mid-career stage.

REFERENCES


