

A Reflection on The Concluding Moments of the CollectivEd Conference.

by Lizana Oberholzer

Teacher Educators were introduced to Tom last week at a CollectivED Conference. Tom is a teacher in his mid-forties. He loves teaching - he's been doing it for years. He says that he just wants to stay in the classroom - that is where he belongs. That is what he loves. He is not interested in leadership or moving up the ladder - he just wants to work with his kids and teach them well. He is not keen on gimmicks or strange new ideas. He just wants to teach well.

Tom, like every other teacher, needs to attend twilights - for personal development. He is sceptical about what the next great big thing might be - he's seen it all come and go, making no impact, maybe a glimmer of an impact to start off with, but in many cases very little impact is made. Tom finds himself trapped between his passion for teaching, his wisdom as a teacher, and tensions between the new, the old, the ambitious, the exciting, but he does not want to be part of that. He just wants to teach. He wants to work with others like him to make a difference to the learning and lives of young people. He reflects

on the previous insets he attended as he is trying to find himself a seat. He remembers insets where all staff had to use creative teaching approaches. He remembers a pupil, one of the challenging ones asking what is going on, and whether there was an inset. The pupil reminds him, with great amusement that - he can tell, as he had 3 lessons this morning in which he had to rap. Tom smiled to himself, as his mind drifts off to that inset – they won't see him rapping any time soon! Tom finds himself a seat at the back. He is amused by the scene that plays off in front of him. He listens to the frustrations caused by the IT Support person's lack of support as he stomps around with his ponytail slapping him on the back, shaking his head, stressing that people need to tell him about insets in advance to ensure that he can support them well... The cleaning staff are dismayed too as no one told them there was an inset, and they now need to work late too.

Tom knows that it is best not to get involved in the chaos and observes quietly from the back of the room. He finds himself drifting on



his experienced boat of teacher vulnerability, on the lake of education waiting for more pressure to be applied in the inset, once IT is sorted, and the overload of more requirements and must dos are shared!

But this twilight is different. This time someone pulls Tom's drifting boat to shore by allowing him to talk to colleagues like him. Sharing ideas, sharing practice - having teaching conversations. Tom's fire and spark for teaching slowly flickers to a full blaze. In this collaborative circle of ideas and passion for helping children - he feels like he belongs, can contribute and life has new meaning. These conversations remind him of why he turns up every day - what has meaning and how he can make a difference... He feels as if he can see the light again. Gone is the pressure - it is just great teaching that is left! Great collaborative practice, collaborative professionalism (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018). Life feels safe again in

teaching – and Tom can focus on what really matters.

Tom's story is not an unfamiliar one. The CollectiveED conference allowed many Toms' to dock around tables to discuss great teaching. It allowed teachers to explore new ideas in a safe way, and exciting way - and each learning conversation made a difference, an impact, and it allowed for an opportunity to allow us to be reminded of why we love what we do (Maslow, 1943 as cited in Cameron and Green, 2012). It inspired and encouraged us to learn more. It allowed us to be brave, take risks and reflect on the value coaching and mentoring can bring to our, and our children's lives.

Coaching as a conversational tool, empowered the room, and each individual to creatively share, reflect and dare (Van Nieuwerburgh, 2017).

References:

- Cameron, E., & Green, M. (2012), *Making Sense of Change Management: A complete guide to the models, tools and techniques of organizational change*. 3rd Edition. London: Kogan Page.
- Hargreaves, A and O'Connor, M., (2018), *Collaborative Professionalism: when teaching together means learning for all*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- van Nieuwerburgh, C. (2017), *An Introduction to Coaching Skills: A Practical Guide* (2nd Ed), London: Sage.

