

Learning Conversations Conference
September 26, 2005

I attended the Learning Conversations Conference at Valencia Community College, Orlando, Florida, September 26-27, 2005. The conference began with an opening session led by Mark Milliron discussing Learning Conversions and Learning Conversations. Milliron identified reform, recoil, and rational exuberance as three elements of the conversions now taking place in learning at all levels and globalization, gaming and grounding as three elements of the conversations about learning taking place around the globe. Milliron reminded us of how differently contemporary teenagers learn than we did as teenagers.

Concurrent sessions I attended on Monday included ones titled Our Learning College: Getting Started, The Teaching/Learning Academy and Adjunct Outreach: Engaging Part-time Faculty. Our Learning College offered helpful suggestions for beginning to make the paradigm shift to learning college and the transformations that are necessary. It was presented by people sharing a variety of perspectives and explaining what worked well and what needed adapting as Valencia made the shift. Also provided were numerous learning college resources.

The luncheon speaker, Dr. John Tagg, discussed the six essential features of the learning paradigm college with the aim of providing a way for colleges to measure their attainment of each of these features and thus their development of a learning college culture. Tagg is author of *The Learning Paradigm College* which expresses his research-based approach to redesigning higher education with student outcomes as the main objective.

The Teaching/Learning Academy presented Valencia's efforts at creating a 3-year academy to prepare new faculty for progression through the tenure-track process, acquainting them with the learning college philosophy and orienting them to the culture of Valencia, leading to the development of an individualized learning plan for each faculty member. Presenters explained how the TLA fit into the overall tenure review process and supported real professional development.

Preparation and support for adjunct faculty was the subject of Adjunct Outreach. Materials about knowing your adjuncts, locating funding for professional development of adjuncts, use of Scenarios online, good

practices for adjuncts, and practices in assessment were presented. The aim of these efforts was to ensure that adjuncts felt like “Associate Faculty” and were provided the opportunity to understand the culture of the college and felt rewarded for their efforts.

Tuesday, September 27, the Valencia faculty and staff joined the Learning Conversation, filling up some sessions beyond capacity and preventing me from attending one concurrent session which I had greatly anticipated. The day began with a motivational presentation by Simon Bailey, founder and president of Imagination Institute, who encouraged us to release our and our students’ brilliance. By embracing our students and engaging them personally and professionally in meaningful growth opportunities, Bailey inspired us to produce students with the confidence to become all they could be.

Later that day, I attended a concurrent session titled, “What is Formation?” This session presented the work of Parker Palmer in his books such as *The Courage to Teach* and *A Hidden Wholeness*, which encourage the formation of a rich inner life. Participants were introduced to trust circles, small groups which meet regularly to talk and mutually support each other in their journeys toward a fuller development of wholeness. Discussion focuses around “guidelines for good talk,” discussion guidelines helpful to the development of supportive trust circles. The discussion closed with each person writing a letter to himself or herself about individual growth and goals to be mailed to each one in the weeks after the conference.

Overall this conference helped me develop a fuller concept of the growth necessary for our development into a learning-centered institution and provided some practical and concrete suggestions for how we might get there. It was one of the most beneficial conferences I have ever attended.

Submitted by Lynn Crabtree
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