

Carmen Powers Legacy Lecture Series

May, 2020

Let me begin by saying how honored I am to have been nominated for the Carmen Powers Legacy Lecture Series. Until Covid-19 hit, I felt quite excited about sharing my reflection on the past 49 years at MCC and passing on whatever bits of knowledge I might have obtained over the years. This most recent crisis has reinforced some of my strong beliefs about teaching and learning, has confirmed my belief in my colleagues-- the faculty and staff at MCC but has left me in a quandary regarding how to discuss the development of trust and connection with students which I see as being essential in the teaching experience. This is, in no way, meant to be critical of the options online learning brings to many students and the creative ways faculty reach students online but I am finding it difficult to maintain that most important connection without seeing my students face-to-face.

For me, it feels like the first year of teaching and wondering if I made a terrible career decision. Maybe I should have taken that job working in a flower shop! During this time I have come to appreciate more than ever the ability to see and talk with students on a day-to-day basis. Stephen Brookfield, in *The Skillful Teacher* discusses the "imposter syndrome" where a teacher feels as if she does not deserve to be taken seriously and is doing her best to muddle through the semester. Unfortunately, this clearly describes me as I attempt to share my thoughts with you while, on a personal level, attempting to bungle my way through the semester.

Covid-19 validated my belief in colleagues and support staff who mobilized so quickly to help each other and to find ways to reach and help our students. I've seen over and over again, the power and efficacy of our faculty and staff who work at MCC for their students and are committed to helping them achieve their goals. Their quick response to this crisis and the willingness of individuals to give, so unselfishly, of their time to colleagues and to students only reinforced what I already knew. I have been so proud to work among you. If anyone had any doubt about the value and merits of faculty and staff at MCC, they need look no further. You are the best!!

Many things have changed over the 49 years that I have worked at MCC—changes in administration—some leaders who respected our abilities, sought our advice and bolstered our ability to do our job and some who felt or feel that they know better what is best for us and our students. What has not changed is the important interaction we continue to have with administrators as we work together to foster growth in our students, be creative and provide them with what is essential to their development—most of all to foster critical reflection.

I don't believe our students themselves have changed over the years—their need and aspiration for education, careers and employment remain lifelong goals but the circumstances around which they live, their life stressors, the lack of a good academic foundation for some and their need to develop a sense of resiliency have intervened in their struggle to meet their goals. I think of how much I miss seeing their faces in the morning—even those who have been working all night and drag themselves into class only to fall asleep half way through. I don't believe that we, as their educators, think of learning as simply the acquiring of knowledge. It is much more than that—it is about trust and nurturance—it is about caring for our students and letting them know how very important they are to us, to their families and to the community.

We, the faculty and staff, are the fortunate ones---to have the privilege of working on a daily basis with these wonderful students who come searching for a better life, a better job, a new career, a sense of pride in their accomplishments, a change in their lives. They look to us for that connection—someone who believes in them and has the unique opportunity to foster their growth and development.

If I were to pass on any one thing I have learned over my 49 years at Monroe Community College, it is the important role we play as educators to make those connections with our students and how fortunate we are to have chosen such a noble profession.

I, for one, am most grateful for having had this opportunity and I am most grateful to all of you for your support and friendship. Thank you.

Joan C.Mullaney, Ed.D.

