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Intentional Teaching, Intentional Scholarship: Applying Backward Design Principles in a Faculty Writing Group

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Abstract Backward design is a course creation method that encourages teachers to identify their goals for student understanding and measurable objectives for learning from the outset. In this article we explore the application of backward design to the production of scholarly

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articles. Specifically, we report on a writing group program that encourages group goal setting and the acquisition of skills required to achieve these goals. We discuss the relationships between backward design principles and the development of scholarship for publication as well as offer suggestions of best practices for academic writers.

Keywords Backward design · Scholarly writing · Writing groups

In the summer of 2011, the Center for Teaching Excellence at Suffolk University began two new faculty development programs. The first program was a weekly writing group based on Belcher's book *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks* (2009), which guides faculty members through the framing and production of a scholarly article. Writing group participants met weekly to record their research and writing goals in a shared journal and reported on their progress toward these goals throughout the summer. The second program, which ran in May and again in July, was a multi-day Course Design Institute (CDI) in which ten faculty members came together and received training in the backward design approach. Over a four-day period, participants in the Institute drafted course goals and learning objectives, designed assignments and assessments, and planned course activities. The authors of this article participated in both programs and noticed distinct overlaps between the backward design model promoted in the CDI and the methods that were most beneficial to them in the writing group. In the remainder of this article, the authors, four faculty members and a faculty developer, explore their experiences with applying backward design principles to their scholarly production, evaluate the efficacy of their new writing practices, and discuss how they integrate backward design into their individual disciplines and scholarly identities. Although we acknowledge that there is no "cookie cutter" or "one-size-fits-all" approach when applying backward design to scholarly production, we include suggestions for generalizable best practices.

Backward Design for Scholarly Production

Backward design is a method developed by Wiggins and McTighe (2005) that has been primarily used in K-12 curriculum design, but it is now being increasingly utilized in higher education courses and curriculum planning. The backward design model encourages teachers to consider their overall purposes as educators and outline their goals for student understanding and measurable objectives from the outset. In backward design "form follows function," with instructors first focusing on "desired results" before looking at "content, methods, and activities most likely to achieve those results" (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005, pp. 14, 15). In other words, rather than looking to a textbook or other content as the primary material needed to design a course, practitioners of backward design instead begin by articulating the goals and objectives that students will be expected to meet by the end of a term. In *Understanding by Design* Wiggins and McTighe described the use of the backward design method as shifting from an approach in which courses are created "by hope," where instructors "throw some content and activities against the wall and hope some of it sticks," to an approach in which courses are formed "by design," where instructors intentionally plan all aspects of their course in alignment with specific learning goals and objectives (p. 15).

Faculty members who participate in the CDI program at Suffolk are frequently experiencing the backward design approach for the first time and can be reluctant to transition from a content-driven approach to a curriculum development approach that focuses on specific

learning goals and objectives. Instructors who are used to a more traditional model of "sage on the stage" can be hesitant to become a "guide on the side," particularly if they are unfamiliar with the literature on active and student-centered learning. Indeed, backward design provides a foundation for many taxonomies of student-centered learning and course design (Blumberg, 2009; Cullen, Harris & Hill, 2012; Diamond, 2008; Fink, 2003; Wehlburg, 2006), which are also presented as part of the curriculum of the Course Design Institute (CDI) (Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett & Norman, 2010; Fink, 2003). The shift to backward design often reorients professors' pedagogy. Once faculty members start designing their course goals and objectives, they often come to an awareness of the effectiveness and elegance of backward design and embrace the model wholeheartedly; it is not uncommon for faculty members to have transformative experiences when they are exposed to student- and learner-centered course design (e.g., Fink & Fink, 2009). For example, Fink's (2003) concept of a "significant learning experience," which has backward design as its foundation, has been described as "[opening the] door of discovery" and as "career changing" for veteran teachers (Huber 2009, p. 15).

By making learning goals and objectives transparent, teachers using student-centered, backward course design can reinvigorate their classrooms, see increased motivation from students, improve students' confidence in their learning, and witness an increase in student engagement (Davis, 2009; Miners & Nance 2009; Rose & Torosyan, 2009). We have found that applying the principles of backward design to writing goals has similar effects in three distinct areas. First, faculty members identify their purposes as scholars, take note of the themes and ideas that animate their research, and then select projects accordingly. Second, a concrete understanding of the direction of a project and its next steps re-energizes writing group participants, increases their motivation to work on projects (some of which had been sidelined for years), and improves confidence in their abilities to bring projects to completion. Third, project outcomes are grist for faculty reflections on their scholarly agendas and practices.

In the following reflections, we draw upon our shared experiences of both the CDI curriculum of backward design and our writing group participation. In particular, we discuss the utility of backward design for the practice of scholarly writing in order to show how the principles of backward design can lead to becoming more productive scholars. Our combined reflections, originating in the shared discourse of backward design, form a collective and cumulative narrative of our experience and learning. We have found that the intentional creation of goals and objectives has helped each of us to re-imagine our scholarly identities and practices as much as it has helped us to re-design our courses.

Big Rocks: Monika's Narrative

Having earned a Certificate in Education in the United Kingdom, I was familiar with backward design when I enrolled in the CDI to create a new course. Simultaneously joining the writing group made me realize that I should apply the backward design method not just to the classes I teach but also to my own scholarly work. Reflecting on this change, I realize that the writing group became my personal post-graduate course, with my research forming a syllabus.

While attending the writing group, I consciously applied backward design to my research and laid out my objectives for my short-term goal, getting tenure, which, at the time, was three years away. I made a list of "big rocks" needed, adding the "little rocks" thereafter. In the CDI, the big rocks are defined as items that we care very deeply about when teaching, or components of our course that we would not want to lose if we fill the course first with sand

and smaller stones (i.e. worrying about content rather than outcomes). A video explaining the concept of "big rocks," which is based on Covey's *Seven Habits for Highly Effective People* (2004), can be viewed at [http://youtu.be/j6m9WnNdpSw]. Identifying my larger goals led me to my aims, which correspond to the course goals created in the Institute. These included publication outlet considerations and content and size of research projects.

I then added "little rocks," meaning shorter pieces that help me stay current in my field and that fit in between my work on larger goals. For instance, since I have to read a certain book for an article manuscript, why not write a review about it to add to my vita? Writing smaller articles, which represent part of the research on which a larger piece is dependent, began to shift my attitude toward writing from "finding time" to "allotting time" to write (Silvia 2007, p. 12). I became aware that if I did not allot the time to complete the shorter article, I would delay the larger one as well. Boice (2000) noted that "regular productivity" is best achieved when one steps away from the approach of only writing when "one is in the mood" and instead turns writing into an integral portion of one's schedule (p. 75). In a general sense, I am guided by Boice's (1990) "Priority Principle" as opposed to "The Law of Delay," as I map out my specific productivity schedule beforehand and stick with it, no matter what (p. 77).

During the second year of my three-year plan, I began to view each academic year as one course (as though I were still enrolled in a university myself). I created an annual calendar overview—my productivity path—blocking out anticipated advising periods, class load, and other specific events, including vacation. I then considered which projects I was working on and how they could fit into the calendar year most efficiently, asking myself which projects I could work on simultaneously without feeling overwhelmed; which were time-sensitive; and, equally important, which work would ultimately hinder my progress. Taking time to plan in advance prevented me from having disruptions impact my scholarly work (Boice, 1990).

Looking back, I realize that this method streamlined my approach to scholarly work: I wrote various book and film reviews parallel to original articles that demonstrate my own research. In addition, to tackle my biggest research project, I applied and received approval for a research assistant. I also took every opportunity possible and committed myself to attending "Writing Lockdowns"—a one-day event offered several times each semester at my University when faculty members gather in a quiet room and work on their own research. During each Lockdown, I have completed either an article or a conference presentation that later has been published and/or presented. This demonstrated for me the idea that having scheduled writing time, as opposed to writing when feeling inspired, boosts one's output (Boice 1990, pp. 81–84). The same applies to creating a new course; time must be set aside to thoroughly develop a new class following backward design principles. The Course Design Institute at Suffolk permitted this, running a program over four consecutive days, at the end of which I had created a complete "road map" for the new capstone course in the film concentration, including what I aimed to achieve over the course of one semester and also during each class period.

Also, having begun to streamline my scholarly work, I realized the possibilities of connecting my service to the University with publications as well. I am one of the co-founders and organizers of the University's Cinema Series, during which we host people from the industry for an evening of conversation in front of a public audience. For the past two years, I was able to add to guests' contracts a clause that allowed me to interview them for later publication. I can also add this material to my film theory and production classes. The symbiotic relationship between teaching, research, and service has become even more obvious and vital to me.

Given that I approached each academic year as my own course, I viewed our weekly writing group meetings as my class time. The writing group follows the Agraphia Model, as discussed by Silvia (2007, pp. 50–57). Every week, each member of the faculty writing group sets concrete goals as to the progress of their work for the upcoming seven days. We focus our conversation on writing, and we support each other by celebrating successes and offering advice when someone struggles. Kathryn, our facilitator, takes all of us on a guided tour of our publication schedules, keeps us on track, and keeps us excited. When I set new goals, I ask how they are connected with my big and little rocks. For instance, during one week I would aim to finish the data analysis for an article while during another I focused on revising a book review and submitting it before the next group meeting. Doing so permitted me to be selective and increase efficiency; I had made the decision about what my focus should be and could now single-mindedly complete these tasks. I already knew that they would fit into my overall productivity path.

Utilizing the big rocks approach in both my teaching and research has enabled me to remain focused and feel accomplished. The writing group keeps me on track and provides an invaluable support system—Kathryn even sends out two reminder e-mails of our goals each week, forcing me not to ignore them. My colleague Frank summarized the practice in one of our writing group meetings, saying "the scheduled writer wins the race." I hope to accomplish my goal of receiving tenure in a year's time.

Best Practice # 1: Streamline your writing productivity by knowing your specific goals and how they are informed by your "big rocks" and "little rocks."

Best Practice # 2: Allot time for your writing just as you do for your teaching and service.

Best Practice # 3: Create an annual research calendar overview to plan your scholarly productivity and to remain on track.

Unconscious Incompetence: Patricia's Narrative

In spring 2007, I happily accepted a tenure-track position in the Department of History at Suffolk University and did so with confidence in my teaching and research. During the previous two decades I had administered and taught in a degree program at the University of Massachusetts Boston, and in 2007 I completed a doctoral program in history and began my career as a full-time faculty member. Although I was a mid-life professional, the challenges of faculty life compelled me to re-evaluate my practice and to embark on new learning. This process was neither seamless nor without challenges, but my participation in the CDI and writing group excited me. I learned to assess my skills with accuracy, to learn and integrate new ideas and methods for productivity, and to draw sustenance from colleagues who shared my passion for intentional scholarship.

My first three years as an assistant professor tested my self-confidence as I struggled to manage the seemingly competing demands of teaching, scholarship, and service. Having framed my challenge in these terms, I identified better time management as the obvious solution. Thus I consulted senior colleagues and a growing literature for new faculty in search of a magic bullet that would restore equilibrium in my work life. With hindsight, I see that I misconstrued my skill deficit because I did not understand what I did not know. Put differently, I was mired in a state of "unconscious incompetence" or what scholars of teaching and learning describe as the first of four stages of learning, wherein the learner is unaware of her incompetence or, alternatively, its origins, and unfamiliar with the ideas and skills required to achieve competency (Ambrose, et al. 2010, p. 117). Consequently I was rudderless in my pursuit of an integrated and manageable scholarly life. How I achieved greater competency as a learner and as a scholar is the focus of my story.

My effectiveness as a faculty member improved markedly in 2011 when I began participating in professional development workshops at the Center for Teaching Excellence. While participating in the Center's Course Design Institute I learned the fundamentals of backward design, an approach to course development that challenged my reflexive emphasis on content coverage. Specifically, I developed a framework for identifying my motives, goals, and preparedness for teaching. Likewise, I learned how to assess students' aspirations and readiness for learning. I began reflecting on my teaching practices and approaches to improving them. Research by Ambrose, et al. (2010) identified these cognitive assessments (or what they term metacognition) as the basis for effective and fulfilling teaching (pp. 190–191, 217, 222).

My adoption of backward design enabled me to specify the essential knowledge to be shared with my students, articulate the desired learning outcomes, and develop assignments that would guide student learning. These assessment tools enable students to learn concepts and skills in succession, to integrate them, and to apply them simultaneously to a given problem (Ambrose, et al. 2010, pp. 95, 192–193, 215–217). Rooting my practice in backward design ensures that my courses are well-purposed and that student learning can be evaluated along various dimensions.

The language and methods of backward design – and its implicit commitment to intentional practice – now also inform my scholarly production. My writing process incorporates the sequencing of thinking and doing that is integral to backward design and successful teaching. According to Ambrose, et al. (2010), these steps include setting goals, assessing one's readiness for the project (as measured by existing content knowledge and skill development), planning an approach to task completion that accounts for circumstances in the work environment, evaluating one's progress and making changes as needed, and engaging in "continuous self-assessment" (pp. 192–193, 199, 207, 210, 220–222). These analytical steps are also integral to producing a well-reasoned and well-written manuscript.

Because I have a proclivity for mapping my work, including goals, tasks, and deadlines, I have adapted worksheets provided during the writing group for use when designing and completing scholarly and service projects. Use of these tools not only increases my attention to the nuts and bolts of writing, but also serves as the touchstone for my self-assessment, enabling me to reframe and streamline priority projects as needed. Worksheets for categorizing, subdividing, and scheduling scholarly activities have facilitated my "chunking" of work, which in turn has enabled me to capitalize on the time available for research and writing. Chunking entails identifying the main goals for a scholarly project and the primary, secondary, and tertiary tasks required to achieve those goals. The end product provides me with a snapshot of project activities, priorities within them, and the basis for setting deadlines for completing the project. Now, when I have a free block of time, scheduled or not, I consult my task list and select an activity that can be completed in that period. This has the benefit of lessening my feeling that there is no time to undertake scholarly work, a perception that is a major deterrent to scholarly production (Schick, et al. 2011, p. 48).

In sum, the adaptation of backward design to research and writing not only illuminates the cognitive processes that comprise these practices, but also provides the structure for continuing knowledge creation. The insights I gained from the CDI had the effect of interrupting and altering my established patterns of scholarly production and service delivery. Previously I conceived of these as projects rather than as expressions of personal and professional goals. Similarly, I failed to ascertain the overlap among these activities and the possibilities for capitalizing on that overlap. Like Monika, I now identify and periodically reconsider my goals for teaching, scholarship, and service and attend to the interplay among these activities.

A shared analytical framework and vocabulary of backward design have also facilitated productive discussions with colleagues about our academic work and ways to improve it. This suggests that faculty members seeking to improve their scholarly output may wish to begin by learning and applying the fundamentals of backward design to course development. Taking a structured approach to teaching and writing may be old news for some, but I believe that the broadly defined concept of backward design asks more of us than identifying the goals that order our short and long-term priorities. We must also identify the personal and professional aspirations that inform our goals. We teachers and writers are intermediaries who communicate, validate, and model the application of ideas for others. When these activities are focused and imaginative, they engage the audience and yield content having considerable explanatory power. This is a powerful argument for aspiring to be a skillful and well-rounded practitioner. Knowing what motivates us – how we wish to intervene in the classroom, on campus, and in the scholarly community – ensures that our reflection facilitates the completion of discrete tasks, growing self-knowledge, and the building of a purposeful career.

Best Practice # 4: Apply the techniques of continual self-assessment and deep processing to your scholarly efforts to improve performance.

Best Practice # 5: Identify and capitalize on the overlapping goals of teaching, scholarship, and service in order to streamline your workload and develop writing projects that encompass two or more of these endeavors.

Essential Questions: Kathryn's Narrative

As a faculty developer who is primarily an administrator, I approach both course design and scholarly production differently than my co-authors. I do not have tenure requirements to fulfill, but I teach and conduct research as part of my administrative responsibilities. Programs that I design and facilitate, such as the CDI and the writing group, are primarily for the benefit of the faculty rather than myself. Fortunately for me, I find that I learn new techniques and tools for my own teaching and research development by facilitating these programs. Just as in a classroom a teacher learns from the students, so do I learn from faculty members through facilitating their professional development programming.

For the past two years I have been engaging in a writing practice that has made a marked difference in my scholarly productivity and output, and it was something that I learned while facilitating our University's weekly writing group. When drafting an academic article, I write the abstract first. I first learned of this practice through Belcher's book *Writing Your Journal Article in 12 Weeks* (2009), wherein she advised writers to draft an abstract for their manuscript in the second week of her program. The only step she prioritized above this activity is to design a plan for writing (e.g., choose the paper topic, find a place to write, choose your writing schedule). In effect, the abstract becomes the anchor and catalyst for the framing and reframing of writing goals. In the past, I had always written abstracts as the final step before sending out the article for review; Belcher noted that this practice is common among scholarly writers (2009, 54). However, when I began my writing projects with an abstract, I observed that I had a clearer sense of where I wanted to go.

Indeed, for this co-authored article, for which we needed to have a coherent direction from the beginning, the abstract was the first thing I shared with our group. In one of the only studies that connects backward design and scholarly production, the authors similarly found that "clarity on the final goal assisted in avoiding time-consuming deviations" (Shah, Shah & Pietrobon 2009, p. 514). By working out my argument first, rather than waiting for it to develop as I meander through drafting my manuscript, I save time in the long run. I also

find that if I step away from my writing for more than a few days, reviewing my abstract helps me get back on track before I continue writing.

While simultaneously facilitating the CDIs and our writing groups, I discovered that the concept of writing one's abstract first could be likened to best practices in planning a course. Of the five reasons that Belcher noted for why abstracts are an important component of a scholarly work, the first is the most important for productivity and output: abstracts help you clarify what your article is about (Belcher, 2009, 54). Without a direction for writing, it can be hard to reach the final destination of a completed draft. Similarly, Wiggins and McTighe (2005) described backward course design as being analogous to travel planning. They argued that "our frameworks should provide a set of itineraries deliberately designed to meet cultural goals rather than a purposeless tour of all the major sites in a foreign country" (p. 14) when planning a course. To start drafting these itineraries, Wiggins and McTighe recommended identifying the "essential questions" of the course that "explicitly focus on the big ideas that connect and bring meaning to all the discrete facts and skills" (p. 105). By simultaneously reflecting on both my course design and scholarly writing, it has become clear to me that the act of developing essential questions is a similar process to writing my abstract first. As Monika states above, one must put the big rocks first whether constructing a new course or an article. Both backward design principles and writing abstracts allow me to clarify in my own mind the foundational components of my work before I begin the labor of properly designing a project.

In a similar vein, Wiggins and McTighe said that the purpose of essential questions "is to stimulate thought, to provoke inquiry, and to spark more questions… they are broad, full of transfer possibilities" (p. 106). Compare this description to the remaining reasons (aside from clarification of your argument) that Belcher offered for writing a good abstract: to get published, to get found, to get read, to get cited (p. 54). In other words, scholars write a good abstract to ensure knowledge transfer—one's own knowledge transferred to the page in an organized way, followed by knowledge transfer to colleagues, editors, and readers. I have found that both the writing of an abstract and the drafting of essential questions are honing activities that allow me to bring clarity to my work and, through my work, to my audience.

Best Practice # 6: Write your abstract first to save time and stay on track.

Best Practice # 7: Reflect on the essential questions you are posing and trying to answer within your writing and scholarly work.

The Social Nature of Writing: Frank's Narrative

I am a tenured full professor of law in my fourteenth year of writing on masculinities, race and, policing; but until last year I did not fully understand the importance of an audience to the process of scholarly production. Prior to my experiences of the CDI and writing group, I had long thought about writing as akin to the loneliness of the long distance runner. That is, it was something one does alone. It also required stamina and a degree of asceticism. My model was a friend who had written the bulk of her 400-page dissertation in three months. She said she had worked so long and hard to produce a virtually new yet polished document that she had gotten diaper rash. Productivity as a writer does require "butt in chair." I have come to learn, however, that it does not require loneliness. Applying the backward design method to scholarly production while in a writing group has taught me not only that loneliness is unnecessary to the writing process, but also that the discipline required to be a productive scholar is strengthened by sociality.

I began to understand the sociality of writing when participating in the CDI's discussion of backward design. For me, the most important part of backward designing a course is the

detailed communication of the course goals and course objectives to oneself. Talking to myself about the outcome I have in mind for my students greatly assists me in communicating those ends, and their means, to students. The bottom line of backward design is that, in order to help students achieve our goals for them, we must first communicate those goals clearly to ourselves. Accordingly, I now believe the most important thing I learned from the CDI discussions of backward design is that communication makes our work better.

By simultaneously participating in the CDI and the writing group, I learned to backward design my writing as well as my teaching. Like teaching, scholarship is about communication; and in more ways than we typically acknowledge. Certainly, as Kathryn notes above, a good article is a conversation with a group of scholars. We implicitly backward design our articles in order to make them clearer. For instance, we develop a thesis before writing the article around its proof. As Kathryn says, reflecting Belcher's ideas (2009), we are best off when we make sure our article revolves around its thesis by means of writing the abstract first. When we write an article around its thesis, we seek to explain what we are adding to the scholarly conversation. That is, we write in relation to an audience. By helping us articulate our writing goals and objectives to ourselves, the writing group has also helped me to identify and internalize an audience.

Most valuable for me in the writing group has been the process of articulating goals and objectives for what I want to have understood and accomplished by the end of the summer, by the end of each week, and on a daily basis. The writing group has taught me just how much the internal process of articulating goals and objectives for writing is aided by making it social. I found that anticipating talking to others about my work made me articulate my goals and objectives to myself. I developed a better sense of where I was heading as a writer and how to get there because I had to express that narrative to my colleagues in the writing group. As with Monika's conceptualization of her scholarship as a course she is taking and Patricia's use of scheduling techniques, I find setting goals out loud to be crucial to scholarly production.

The benefits of sociality for the *internal* process of goal-driven writing productivity are enhanced by an *external* process of being accountable for achieving my goals. Not only must I be accountable to myself, but I am answerable to the writing group. If I had not been writing every day, I would certainly write the morning before our meeting. In effect, I had internalized the group by imagining my reaction and theirs to my failure to meet stated goals. While in reality people are unfailingly supportive, in my mind they are harsh judges. Externalizing my writing goals and objectives to people I like and respect makes me internalize them as important. So the sociality serves as a valuable way of kick-starting my writing.

Moreover, the fact that most writing group participants are familiar with backward design principles helps us to communicate effectively. For instance, at a point when I was struggling with meeting my goals, my writing group colleagues had great advice. One person noted that it is a principle of manufacturing that, because of unavoidable glitches, one only assumes a machine will operate at 80% of its potential. He thus suggested that I scale back my goals from assuming my maximum potential output. Others suggested that I use a writing log to record when and how much I was writing as a means of more accurately judging what I was likely to accomplish under the less than ideal conditions that exist most of the time. This advice helped me realize that I was setting my expectations too high and that I could indeed celebrate my otherwise high productivity once I accepted that things do happen that negatively impact my productivity. As we are sometimes required to do in our teaching, I had to work backward from a more realistic goal so that the student, myself, could actually achieve it. This is just one example of the benefits of thinking about scholarly production as

a backward designed course. In both situations, the teacher-scholar's outcomes improve when the audience is prioritized.

Best Practice # 8: Clearly articulate your writing goals and objectives to yourself.

Best Practice # 9: Communicate your writing goals and objectives to others.

Best Practice # 10: Make sure that the expectations you set for yourself are manageable.

Losing the Thread of My Story: Elizabeth's Narrative

After twenty years in the academy, I have learned that backward design and reflective practice can be applied to the scholar and scholarly identity. I am a seasoned academic, having published scholarly articles since 1986. I believe that to participate in reflective practice or backward design, one must have a story. As each of my co-author's narratives reveal, there must be a goal to place at the start of the planning or a coherent trajectory on which to reflect. This is equally true of planning a course, a piece of writing, or the arc of a career. Several years before our Center for Teaching Excellence opened, I lost the thread of my scholarship story. Attending the writing group helped me find the thread of my story again. Simultaneously attending the CDI also provided me with further tools and ideas for improving and invigorating my scholarship.

When I began coming to the writing group, I thought I had writer's block. I had been writing blog posts, book reviews, and short articles for my various associations' newsletters and web pages. I had published two articles in electronic journals that were professionally edited and several poems in two different respected journals, but nothing was going into the traditional journals that matter most in my field of law librarianship. I could not think of a topic that seemed to matter. I had lost sight of my personal and professional goals, or perhaps they came to seem meaningless to me. As Patricia points out, without such clear goals, there can be little hope of completing tasks, self-reflection or building a purposeful career. I was wandering in a dark wood.

Through the writing group meetings and the application of backward design principles to my scholarly production, I found my way out of what now seems not so much writers' block as, perhaps, depression. My problem lay in a feeling that the list of possible topics for articles seemed worthless and pointless, rather than any problem putting words on paper. I had no problem about self-esteem or confidence, but I had every problem with finding meaning or a reason for moving forward with scholarship. The support and accepting culture and tone of the writing group meetings have been very important to me. I have attended the meetings regularly, even when I really could not say that I was making measurable progress. However, I think I was making progress, internally, just by showing up. The support-group aspect of the writing group should not be underestimated, just as Frank has pointed out. I moved forward into writing again through camaraderie and small acts of faith. I simply declared that I would work on a particular article and, having said so in the group, was committed to do so, no matter how pointless it might seem on a particular day. As Frank describes above, the fact that we report our progress to the group becomes a huge motivating factor to keep working.

As my co-authors have articulated, self-reflection is a major theme in our writing group as well as in the backward-design structure we apply for creating new courses. I have proposed and begun structuring a new class that features metacognition as a major component for student study. The work I am doing to prepare this course, with assistance from our Center for Teaching Excellence and building on the backward design concepts I learned, is actually helping me to consolidate the gains I have made for myself in previous workshops and writing group meetings. For instance, continual self-evaluation, a major piece of

metacognition, actually helps us become more aware of what we have learned and deepens that learning in our memory. Continual self-evaluation is a process of checking back on a regular basis to consider what progress has been made toward goals and whether or not changes need to be made in the plans for achieving the goals or changes to the goals themselves.

Another way to increase learning is to structure new information on previous knowledge. As an example, I had previously been taught about self-reflective practices when I worked at a Jesuit institution; but the self-reflection and self-checking in that case was part of the Ignatian Daily Examen, an examination of conscience. The spiritual self-checking with which I had been familiar gave me a basis to learn about other, newer traditions of self-examination, such as the Japanese Kaizen, for continuous self-improvement. Other methods of self-improvement gave me excellent examples and less religiously-charged techniques to offer my students. Yet, much of what I had learned from the Jesuits helped me quickly understand how Kaizen and other continual improvement systems work.

As I began to implement self-improvement cycles in my own work, I found this reflective practice was actually encouraged by the writing group because of the incorporation of self-checking in the discussion, the structure of the weekly meetings, and the methods of our director, Kathryn. For instance, when we meet, we write our plans for the coming week in a book that is passed around the group. That means everybody sees each other's plans, which forms a sort of promise that pushes us to do work we might not otherwise accomplish. However, it also means each participant has a chance to flip back and see previous weeks' intentions. I have often found that opportunity both sobering and sometimes heartening. It provides a chance to reflect upon what I had been planning in the past, what I had accomplished (or not), where I had changed my mind, and how I had changed as a scholar. This collaborative writing journal keeps us on track and certainly functions as a metacognitive, self-checking practice very similar to ones that I am recommending to my students. As I came to recognize the opportunity that this book offered, I began to use it in a more reflective way than I had before. As with all improvement programs, this is an ongoing project; but I feel confidence and control through the tools that allow me to check my progress continually.

At the same time, I have learned skills about managing my scholarly workflow that allow me to push several scholarly articles along at the same time. This is a management effort I would never have tried before. I always worked on one article at a time, but by using the backward design techniques I can estimate when I need to complete intermediate tasks for various writing pieces. Kathryn provides calendar programs and a re-usable pipeline sheet on which authors can stick notes listing information about various projects in columns that show what stage of publication each item is in. I can put the tasks into perspective and organize the workload by prioritizing the most important tasks first. I no longer feel overwhelmed or out-of-control at the idea of juggling several pieces of scholarly writing at different stages.

And finally, I am feeling more like writing the sort of article that I originally thought was the only kind that counted. I recently contacted colleagues regarding co-authoring a journal article about a project that we shared a couple of years ago. Now that I feel like moving back into my traditional scholarly writing, I can be much more productive and maintain my blogging and other types of writing as well. I am very glad to have picked up the thread of my own scholarly narrative again, no longer lost in the dark woods. I felt reaffirmed as a scholar, and as a productive member of the academy, where before I was concerned that I had become like deadwood.

Best Practice # 11: Recognize the importance of writing to your scholarly identity, and be open to nurturing communities such as writing groups that can re-invigorate your academic life.

Best Practice # 12: Use tools to increase productivity, but recognize that all tools require self-management and self-reflection.

Concluding Thoughts

While there is little in the literature (with the exception of Shah, Shah & Pietrobon, 2009) that explicitly ties backward design methods to scholarly production, throughout our shared experience we have noted several connections between these two areas of our academic lives.

First, as Monika's and Elizabeth's narratives attest, we find that our writing has benefitted from the clear articulation of our end goals and the development of several objectives (or action items) to help us accomplish these goals. By creating and tracking realistic goals and objectives, we have become more reflective about our scholarly practice and, in turn, more efficient. Evaluating our progress also keeps us motivated during even the busiest times of the academic year. We have all learned how baby steps forward toward publications are better than no steps at all.

Second, we find that increased attention to our audiences, including the writing group and future readers, helps us to stay accountable to one another and to ourselves. As Frank's narrative highlights, the social component of the writing group and the inherent accountability of the group are foundational to our consistent scholarly production. The writing group's design, which centers on a collaborative journal where members write down their weekly goals, supports this accountability. Not only does the group provide accountability, but the weekly sessions often become group troubleshooting sessions as members ask for help with how to schedule their writing into busy academic lives.

Third, as Patricia and Kathryn discuss, the organizational strategies of backward design have helped all of the authors stay on track with our writing. We have also found that by organizing our writing projects using backward design methods, we can better align our priorities with the time available to accomplish those priorities. Combined with the group accountability and troubleshooting, organizational principles based on backward design also help us to make tough decisions about just how much we can tackle and accomplish during a given semester.

Finally, the social dimension of the writing group has been crucial to the self-development of its members, as Frank, Elizabeth, and Patricia have mentioned in their reflections. The support network, the internalized peer expectations, and the structure of meeting each week bring invaluable assistance to us as teacher-scholars. Also, as Frank notes, one of the great pleasures and revelations of the writing group has been the discovery of writing as a social experience, which is enhanced by the fact that we all come from diverse disciplines and scholarly backgrounds. We have found that questions and feedback from those outside our field are often more useful than expected. We must explain things more clearly, and at a fundamental level, which improves the quality of our writing. Each of our narratives demonstrates that scholarly productivity is the result of individual effort combined with mutual support and exchange. We realize that we could not have achieved our individual work without the group. We all have come to rely on the guidance, feedback, and inspiration from others, which is why we continue to be part of such a group whenever our schedule permits.

Our writing group program challenges faculty members to reconsider their assumptions about the requirements of scholarly production by instructing faculty in practices that have proven results. Faculty members who adopt backward design methods learn that

productivity depends on completion of sequential cognitive processes rather than luck, talent, inspiration, or boundless time. This lesson enables faculty members to identify the shortcomings of their previous practice; to engage in continuous skills development; to capitalize on available time; and to understand that the preconditions of intentional teaching, research, and writing are complementary. Goal-setting and skills development foster meta-cognition about scholarly writing, which in turn spurs faculty members to hone their practice further. The result is a feedback loop of continuous assessment and learning.

Our experiences provide evidence that backward design principles are as beneficial to scholarly production and motivation as they are to course design in higher education. As our narratives attest, backward design methods offer both a process and a structure for moving forward with scholarly writing projects at varying career levels and across disciplines. Thus we believe these principles will be applicable in diverse institutional cultures.

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