CTLs as Genre:
A Message From the Editor-in-Chief

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Where there is style there is genre. The transfer of style from one genre to another not only alters the way a style sounds, under conditions of a genre unnatural to it, but also violates or renews the given genre . . . . Sooner or later what is heard and actively understood will find its response in the subsequent speech or behavior of the listener. (M. M. Bakhtin, 1986, pp. 66-69)

I attended my first Association of University Regional Campus of Ohio (AURCO) Conference a few months after I'd begun my first semester as co-coordinator of our campus's Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). Our CTL itself was, relatively speaking, still in its infancy. Over its two-year existence, the Center had established a core set of functions: deciding on faculty awards and grant proposals, overseeing small-group instructional diagnoses, supporting regular faculty/student lunches, publishing a newsletter, and—in what has become our signature activity—organizing a series of "Conversations," sessions devoted each year to a particular theme, such as "Access and Empowerment" or "Why U?: The Relevance of the University Today." This period was (and still remains) an exciting time for our CTL, as we were (and remain) tasked with the work of constructing our identity, discovering what we can accomplish given our resources and our situation on a two-year, open-enrollment campus of a public ivy university. During this same time, however, members of what we call our CTL's "leadership collaborative" and I often felt some anxiety about what we ought to be accomplishing. What, for instance, were we supposed to be doing during our staff hours? Was there more we should be doing in terms of outreach? Were we at any point stepping onto others' territories? Were we really having any effective impact?

At that AURCO Conference, I attended a presentation by staff members of another CTL at another Ohio two-year institution and immediately felt this particular form of anxiety disappear and a new kind emerge. The group presented a grid that described their CTL's functions, and these functions were immediately recognizable to me, even to the point of being

overly familiar. I now identify the shifting anxieties I experienced then and there (the alleviation of one; the generation of another) as an effect of genre placement. In other words, I felt the degree to which our CTL might be termed satisfactorily generic: "Good—we're doing what we're supposed to be doing"; but I also felt the degree to which our CTL might be termed satisfactorily generic: "Crap—we're doing what we are supposed to be doing." While they don't use the term, Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy, and Beach, in *Creating the Future of Faculty Development* (2006), affirm the existence of the CTL genre, noting that while "there are distinct differences by institutional type in the prioritization of specific goals" (p. 51), "recent surveys . . . have continued to find similar [CTL] services regardless of the size or mission of the institution" (p. 14). The authors list the following practices as standard to CTL work: consultations for individual instructors; University-wide orientations and workshops; intensive programs (such as immersion retreats); grants and awards for individuals and departments; resources and publications; and other services, "such as student evaluation of teaching instruments, computerized examination of test scoring, programs to assess student learning outcomes, resources in instructional technology, classroom/audio-visual, and distance-learning services" (pp. 14-16). While our CTL's genre placement relieved me of the anxiety related to possible dereliction of duty, the new anxiety was generative: It had me, as Owens (2008) might say, standing on the neatline, peering into the overedge—recognizing for the first time, in other words, the borders of our institutional function, our map, and wondering what we might do to extend the edges, create territories not yet charted for us.

Genre placement, I've come to believe, serves as point of departure from which we might construct the genre anew: Could our CTL provide a significant forum for our campus's new Honors Program, which expects students' involvement in self-directed learning experiences in regard to multiple competencies (such as collaborative work and intercultural communication)? Should we take a leadership role in crafting a new governance structure that would unify the University's regional campuses as a way to expand and facilitate our faculty development efforts? How do we maintain contact with former CTL staff members as a way to disseminate and maintain transformative practices, such as service-learning opportunities, dialogic pedagogies responsive to learner interests and concerns, and course policies sensitive to life circumstances that shape school life for our campus's mostly working-class, mostly first-generation, mostly nontraditional-aged students.

As our CTL considers new venues (in the overedge) for our efforts, we also reflect persistently on those practices we have already identified and

that have already identified us as a CTL (inside and along the neatline). Most of our work together, it's clear to me now, has been devoted to laboring within and against our genre placement, devoted to exploring, as Bakhtin (1986) would say, what might violate and what might renew our given genre. At each staff meeting, we not only consider new but also scrutinize our current practices, exploring their significance and possible courses for renewal: Perhaps during our staffing hours, we could each contribute to a log that charted and reflected upon the meetings we had with faculty who dropped in; or as a way of symbolizing our role, perhaps we could post provocative quotes on a sandwich board outside our door to draw people in or just make them think a little differently about their teaching and learning that day. How can we create spaces that would connect sessions in our CTL Conversation series and extend dialogues that begin there? Does a faculty member's grant proposal connect her research with her teaching interests to the extent that the proposal really would not be better considered by the campus's Research and Grants Committee, and what are the implications of our drawing the lines between research and teaching the way we do? What actually should be included in the dossiers we ask from faculty-award nominees—what questions should we pose and what materials should we request to best represent the kinds of teaching we value, and how are we (re)shaping teaching through our award guidelines? How can we involve more of our regional campus students (given their job and family obligations) in helping us think about the vocabularies and activities we use to define good teaching?

As I began to read a little more in the field and, subsequently, edit issues of the *Journal on Centers for Teaching and Learning* (*JCTL*), the tension between who we are and what we might become intensified for me. The collection of essays in this issue and the process of selecting them and working through reviewers' responses and authors' revisions, especially, provoked in me questions about ways our generic functions (the things most CTLs most commonly do) might align with or challenge the genres through which we represent our practices. Reciprocally, I grew more conscious of (anxious over?) the degree to which these genres might shape our practice, perhaps in beneficial ways that convey the complexity of various CTLs' interactions with faculty, staff, administrators, and students at their institutions or in less-than-beneficial ways as we begin to rely on representational (generic) practices that (overly) stabilize our identities. Working off the premise that CTL work will shape its scholarship as much as its scholarship will shape CTL work, I'm thinking that while the genres through which we represent our work might indeed make us more recognizable to and communicative with one another as we convey insights

and trade useful practices, if we draw the neatlines of our representations too rigidly, we may also rest on them to the extent that we hypostatize ourselves, reduce our focus and our identities only to that which generic conventions might allow. Collectively, I think the essays gathered here do speak to the value of careful research that situates arguments in relation to previous scholarship and identifies and assesses outcomes, but articles in this issue of *JCTL* also speak to the value of narrative to "retain the complexity of the human relationships under investigation," as Downing, Harkin, and Sosnoski (1994, p. 20) write, and to explain and engage local problems (Harkin, 1991).

This issue of *JCTL* comprises a collection of articles that use both narrative and conventional research approaches to represent challenges to generic CTL functions. To various degrees, the articles push at the customs of residual practices as they locate representational forms to match their content. Narrating his attempts to shift his institution's approach to teacher evaluation, **Peter Lindsay**, in "Teaching Centers as Teaching Advocates: Navigating University Politics," offers a text that complicates the CTL director's role as he must negotiate change at the intersections of faculty senate's, students', administrators', and various colleagues' concerns. In "Engaging in a Collaborative Project as a Team-Building Strategy During a Period of Organizational Change," **Zack Lee**, **Lydia Jones**, **Roselyn Verwood**, **Isabeau Iqbal**, and **Janice Johnson** each display their written reflections on an institutional change at their University. Their individual reflections, gathered and discussed in this article, not only represent attempts to negotiate the impact of shifts that bring their various organizations into contact, but also enact the very kind of reflectiveness and active listening they recommend for CTL workers who find themselves in similar situations. In "Writing in Action: Scholarly Writing Groups as Faculty Development," **Kurt Schick**, **Cindy Hunter**, **Lincoln Gray**, **Nancy Poe**, and **Karen Santos** describe a similar intersection, joining CTL work with their University's Writing Center to trouble easy distinctions between research writing and pedagogy. The teachers who find voice in their piece and through their Center for Faculty Innovation's partnership with the Writing Center intensify their own sense of the writing process and consider, in turn, ways they might create optimal writing situations for their students.

For **Allison Boye**, **Micah Meixner Logan**, and **Suzanne Tapp**, in "Learning from Each Other: Involving Students in Centers for Teaching and Learning," students become important collaborators in CTL work, helping CTL staff identify critical areas of need. At the same time, the CTL's embrace of student involvement represents a reciprocal arrange-

ment where the students' CTL work enhances their understandings of their teachers and the craft involved in curriculum development, and students bring this new understanding back to their course work so that they and their peers can better position themselves as partners in the learning process. Collaboration marks a key feature in **Alan Altany's** CTL practice, which he depicts in "A Peer-Based, Dissemination Model of Professional Faculty Development: A Story." Altany's narrative accumulates metaphors (banyan trees and hallways, for example) and incorporates voices of faculty members and CTL staff to tell a story of "dialogic and collaborative strings forming a kind of kaleidoscopic tapestry where faculty at any point of their development, or career, can experience the creative energies of the PBD matrix" (p. 95).

For **Eric Grosse**, in "The 'New' Faculty Development? Exploring the Relationship Between Human Performance Improvement (HPI) and Current Best Practices in Faculty Development," an alignment with HPI theory can renew a CTL's conception of the individual practices that commonly define the work of faculty development centers. Grosse conducts a close reading of CTL genres, finding, for example, that "[w]hile virtually all CTL sites reviewed indicate that events, workshops, brown-bag lunches, certificate programs, etc., are major activities, these tend to be event-driven and reactive rather than process-driven, integrative, and proactive" (p. 120). He argues that HPI theory could provide CTLs with a more coherent sense of organizational success that would replace generic approaches in which we hope that our individual activities will eventually add up to something sustainable and transformative. **Claire Bélanger**, **Marilou Bélisle**, and **Paul-Armand Bernatchez**, in "A Study of the Impact of Services of a University Teaching Centre on Teaching Practice: Changes and Conditions," argue that the typical ways in which CTLs attempt to evaluate events—in which we merely count the number of participants and ask about their satisfaction levels—cannot account for the actual effectiveness of our organizations. They "felt the need to identify and propose new tools to better document, describe, and orient our work" and report on their attempts to intervene in existing genres by developing the questionnaire they describe in their essay, along with the changes they have begun to make "in light of the nature and quality of the responses received" (p. 155).

Sorcinelli et al. conclude *Creating the Future of Faculty Development* (2006) with the results of their own survey, reporting on CTL administrators' suggestions as to which directions CTLs will and should move. These directions include integrating technology into teaching and learning, teaching for student-centered learning, assessment of student learning

outcomes, integrating faculty roles (in a sense that involves teaching, service, research, and well-being), a focus on new and part-time faculty members, interdisciplinary connections and communities of practice, and diversity. *Creating the Future of Faculty Development* also raises concerns about the professionalization and recognition of the field of faculty development, overcoming the stigma of faculty development as remedial work, developing opportunities for doctoral studies in the field, the development of a theory of faculty development centers, and the construction of a "scholarship base for our faculty development work" (p. 151). The specter of such developments pushes at current CTL genres, genres that (consciously or not) indicate for us new directions at the same time they situate us in current practices. These practices can dig for us deep trenches of routine if we are not intentionally and persistently unpacking their pedagogical, political, and cultural dimensions and seeking the best (new) ways to represent these practices not only to others entering the field but also to ourselves at this point in our history as we shape the work we do now and should be doing in the future. Our hope is that *JCTL* can be one of the principal places in which our present and future can be persistently defined, debated, and redrawn.

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