

**The Center for Educational Transformation
National Advisory Board - Welcome
Sunday, October 28, 2018, 6:00 to 8:00 pm
Georgian Lounge, Commons**

Good evening and welcome to the campus of the University of Northern Iowa. We are honored to have with us members of the newly created National Advisory Council to the Center for Educational Transformation.

Welcome also to faculty, staff, and administrators from the University of Northern Iowa and Iowa State University, to Director of Assessment for Central Rivers Area Education Association, Jon McKenzie, and to State Representative Bob Kressig. Thank you all for taking time out of your busy lives to join us.

The CET, as we like to call it, is the state of Iowa's Research and Development Center, created through Iowa Senate File 470 in 2009. The goals of the CET are:

- To raise and sustain the level of PK-12 student attainment and personal development through innovative and promising teaching practices;
- To enhance the preparation and professional competence of the educators in the state through collaborative inquiry and exchange of professional knowledge; and
- To focus on research that transforms teaching to meet the changing needs of Iowa's educational system.

While the Senate file focused on elevating the work we do in the state of Iowa, we have always conceived of the mission of the CET as something much broader, with a national scope and with ambitious ends.

I would like to tell two stories of contrasting moments in my own educational journey to set the stage for our work.

In second grade, I had a teacher who had a lasting impact on my life. Mrs. Phillips recognized something in me, some potential, maybe a dream, that others did not notice.

I was blessed to grow up in the home of an educator, with an older brother and sister who were really smart and who I adored. As a result, when I entered second grade, I had already completed much of the work that second graders complete.

Mrs. Phillips noted my mastery of second grade material and rewarded me with time alone, in the library, to write books.

She saw in me something that I could not even articulate today.

What I do know is that she understood something about the person who I was to become, and she nurtured that growth.

Let's roll forward in time 9 years. I was a senior in high school. All of my friends around me had determined that they would go to college, most of them to become engineers.

I was adamant that I would never pursue any more education. I could not imagine sitting behind a desk, being drilled on facts that had no seeming connection to reality, developing skills that I could not imagine ever using.

Instead, I lit out for the west, landing in Colorado as a construction worker. Halfway through December of that year, on a morning when the wind was rushing down from the Rockies and the temperature never made it above zero, I decided I was going to return to college.

Not because I was inspired, but because I was even more bored working construction than I had been sitting in class. And I was much, much colder.

In our time, education has become diminished as a result of a national movement where there is no longer any room for the kind of imaginative dreaming I was allowed to do in second grade, and that certainly did not exist in my high school experience.

Maxine Greene, in *Releasing the Imagination*, makes the argument that "treating the world as predefined and given, as simply there, is quite separate and different from applying an initiating, constructing mind or consciousness to that world.

When habit swathes [sw A thes] everything, one day follows another identical day and predictability swallows any hint of an opening possibility.

Only when the given or the taken-for-granted is subject to questioning, only when we take various, sometimes unfamiliar perspectives on it, does it show itself as what it is—contingent on many interpretations and many vantage points...

Once we can see our givens as contingencies, then we may have an opportunity to posit alternative ways of living and valuing and to ... [begin to make] choices” (p. 23).

What Greene calls for is “wide-awakefulness” – an active engagement with the world around us. And our educational systems should work towards engendering this engagement in students.

And we, as educators of those educators, as leaders in educational systems, should model this behavior.

This, then, is the role of the Center for Educational Transformation.

I am now quoting from the Vision and Mission of the CET: “The Center for Educational Transformation seeks to redefine the face of educational research in Iowa and beyond. Founded upon the values of partnership and innovation, the CET responds to and is inclusive of all education stakeholders.”

As such, the CET supports and conducts “transformative research, building collaborative relationships across Iowa, and sharing innovative, research-based best practices to inform policy and drive practice.”

This work is set against a national landscape that has devalued and diminished what we do in education, in all of education, PK-12 and higher education. Our roles have been narrowed and reduced to trainers of workers.

And, according to the narrative, we don't even do that well.

The role, then, of the Center for Educational Transformation is critical, not just to advance new policy or best practices. It also must be about offering a new and inspiring vision of education, one that embraces the centrality of educating the whole person.

Here at UNI we are working on more clearly articulating an intentional and developmental approach to building the capacity of our students—not just their habits of mind, but also their habits of heart and habits of spirit—which are essential to their education as whole persons.

Habits of mind include the skills that employers tell us are essential in the workforce: critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and collaboration.

The question I ask is how we can be more intentional in our own work in developing these skills across a student's journey with us (and here I am thinking comprehensively about PK-20). This is work that we must do if we want to respond fully to the national narrative.

But we must also be working towards nurturing the essential habits of heart that develop whole human beings, including such capacities as

- **care and compassion** which can lead to empathy, an essential component of the ability to collaborate across difference;
- **honesty and integrity** which are essential in the maturation of an adult but becoming more and more rare in our time; or
- **humility**, the ability to have confidence without becoming arrogant and closed minded; or
- **gratitude** which leads to a willingness to recognize that life is a gift and with such a gift comes great responsibility.

These habits of the heart should be developed as much through our curriculum and co-curriculum as they should be modeled by all of us, faculty, staff, administrators, and fellow students.

And finally, we must be cognizant of developing habits of spirit, such capacities as

- **resilience** and **determination**, the willingness to persist in the face of discomfort and complexity so that when our students are challenged they know that through these challenges they learn and grow and become smarter, wiser, better.
- Or the capacity of **passion** so that our students know that the true measure of a career is the alignment between their inner calling and the work they do in the world

This work of educating the whole person, the mind, the heart, and the spirit must become

- more intentional on our part,
- more systemic in our curriculum and co-curriculum,
- more integrated into our conversations and deliberations.

We must write a new narrative and capture the imagination through our work so that we become a bright light in this dim time. And this work, I would argue, is most essential in educator preparation, for it is not only our college students who need these capacities, but our future teachers who will touch the lives of our future leaders.

And so this is the work of the Center for Educational Transformation. Over the last few years, the Center has supported the research of faculty to address current issues confronting schools in the state of Iowa and across the nation. This research has engaged chronic absenteeism in rural majority-minority schools; literacy and the way in which technology can enhance writing; mental health; and the epistemic cognition of science teachers.

Researchers have partnered with 58 school districts across the state of Iowa, touching the lives of approximately 1,500 teachers, 85 undergraduate and graduate students, and even parents and school administrators.

This research has connected theory to practice, focusing on the application of research in school settings. As a result, many teachers have participated in research that has informed their teaching, and many students' lives have been touched.

The CET has also sponsored an annual, well attended Education Summit. Participants come from across the midwest and include teachers, teacher-leaders, principals, superintendents, higher education faculty, legislators, and undergraduate and graduate students. The purpose of the summit is to share new and innovative research and best practices for addressing critical issues facing our schools.

In the last year, the CET has been guided by the Dean of the College of Education, Dr. Gaetane Jean-Marie, who is also the Richard O. Jacobson Endowed Chair for Leadership in Education. She is in her third year as Dean at the University of Northern Iowa.

Dr. Jean-Marie is happy to be joined by our newly hired Director of the Center, Dr. Lisa Hooper. Dr. Hooper formerly served at the University of Louisville and received her PhD from George Washington University.

She has over 90 peer reviewed publications and has procured grants from the National Institutes of Health and the National Institute of Mental Health. She also worked closely with the Jefferson County Public School System and serves as a Health Disparities Scholar with the National Institutes of Health.

Dr. Jean-Marie and Dr. Hooper are joined by Dr. Chris Opsal, the Program Manager at the CET, and a contingent of innovative, passionate scholars and teachers.

And while the focus over the last few years has been on conducting research to inform practice, we know we must do more, for we must now become directly engaged in policy work to shape the legislation and structures that govern our educational systems.

I am mindful tonight of events of the past week. Three hate-filled, violent crimes that I fear are becoming normalized in our nation. Our hate is no longer a matter of our opinions; it has become weaponized in a literal sense. I am left with questions:

- How should a nation respond?
- What is the role of educational systems in responding?
- Educational research?
- How do we address hate in such a way that we dissipate its venom?

We must remember that hate is elevated through indifference; to remain indifferent and inactive is to further hate's agenda.

What we need is a new narrative about education, one that frees the imagination, that unleashes the potential of our teachers, one that nurtures talent like that of my second grade teacher, Mrs. Phillips. One that builds character and values, not only in our citizens, but also in our systems which guard against narrow-mindedness and hate.

What Mrs. Phillips understood about me in second grade was that I needed a different kind of stimulation, something more than sitting in the classroom learning how to write in cursive (an important, and lost skill).

But I wasn't special or different in that classroom.

She recognized and elevated the attributes of all of her students. She catered to the different intellectual, emotional and social needs of the entire class of 20 students, allowing each of us to realize our second grade potential.

When I graduated from high school, so uninspired, and moved out to Colorado, my father let me go with his blessing and, I thought, encouragement. The week before I left, we hiked to Spence Field and Thunderhead Mountain, one of our favorite places in the Smokey Mountains.

Many years later, he told me that the following week he hiked back to our spot, and wept for an hour, deeply concerned about what he thought of as a great mistake that I was making.

But he kept that concern from me until only a few years ago, believing that somewhere in my past, perhaps in second grade, a spark lived in me that would draw me back to this great work, this great work that has become my life's work.

Again, thank you for being here. We have much to do. But I firmly believe that when we come together in partnership, we can do great things.