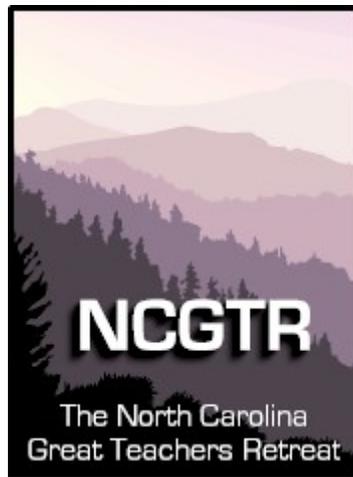


THE DEFINITIVE HISTORY OF THE GREAT TEACHERS MOVEMENT

In North Carolina



1993-2008

Written & Published by Steve Smith

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PROLOGUE

This document updates the first and only writing of the *History of the Great Teachers Movement in North Carolina* that I wrote in 2003. Since its inception in 1993, the National Great Teachers Movement has flourished in many forms throughout higher education in North Carolina. This development has occurred primarily in community college settings, but has also been adopted for use by K-12 and four-year colleges and universities.

As there are no “how to” manuals and GTM handbooks, I initially resisted writing about the movement as oral tradition has historically been the method of perpetuating seminars and retreats. However, this account of the NCGTR simply serves as a means of understanding the roots and beginnings of a form of professional development that philosophically transformed my own teaching practices.

IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS NOTHING. . .

In 1993, North Carolina community college faculty first experienced a statewide, professional development seminar that has become known as the North Carolina Great Teachers Retreat (NCGTR). Written to document this evolution as we approach the 2008 retreat, this writing will additionally provide some insight to this highly effective concept in faculty and staff development and its ongoing impact upon the quality of teaching throughout North Carolina.

The NCGTR has naturally spawned a variety of localized and single-college seminars that are based upon the concepts and principles of

the National Great Teachers Movement (NGTM). As this expansion begins and as North Carolina embarks upon its 15th annual retreat in 2008, I believe it is beneficial to understand the people and circumstances that have enabled the movement to flourish and become an integral part of this fascinating, grassroots approach to professional development.

The GTM is truly a "grassroots" movement that consists of professional community college teachers who wish to improve their teaching and who seek to discover the art of teaching in themselves. There is no head office, telephone, fax, or any one person in charge. It belongs to no one, but yet to everyone.

In 1993, the first North Carolina Great Teachers Retreat (hereafter referred to as the NCGTR) was held at Camp Kanuga in Hendersonville, North Carolina. This retreat was a direct result of Dr. Kathy Matlock (then Dean of Instruction at Blue Ridge Community College) deciding to have Blue Ridge Community College sponsor a retreat after hearing David Gottshall (founder of the GTM) present information about the GTM at a national conference.

Dr. Matlock then designated Julie Thompson, Director of the Blue Ridge Community College Career Development Center, to coordinate the event. Retreats were held in 1993 and 1994 with no retreat held in 1995. However, in 1996 the 3rd annual retreat was held followed by retreats in 1997 and 1998. Julie left her Coordinator's position in 1998 and the responsibilities of the retreat were forwarded to me. Julie's enthusiasm and understanding of the retreat process were essential in continuing the retreat. If it were not for her efforts, the retreat would have vanished. To this day,

Camp Kanuga continues to be the location where each statewide NCGTR is held. Nearing its 39th birthday as a national phenomenon, the GTM is based *entirely* upon oral tradition. While our North Carolina retreat is a 3-day event and called a *retreat*, many states, including California and Hawaii run 5-day *seminars*. However, in the 2003 seminars, both states conducted 4-day seminars in order to cut costs but have since returned to a 5-day format. It should be noted that many GTM practitioners have customized seminars to address specific organizational and professional development needs. Various seminars for faculty, staff, and entire institutions have spanned as little as 90 minutes and as long as an entire week.

To fully understand the North Carolina retreat and its relationship to the hundreds of other seminars and retreats across North America and Japan, I must include mention of the development of a periodic event known as the *National Great Teachers Leadership Colloquium*. To date, five such events have occurred with the most recent in Santa Barbara, California in 2007. The next **BIGTLC** (*renamed the Biennial International Great Teachers Leadership Colloquium*) is scheduled to be held in the Atlantic Maritime Province of Nova Scotia at Cornwallis in June 2009. Colloquia have been conducted in each of the following locations: Sinsinawa, Wisconsin (1998), West, Texas (2001), the Kananaskis Region (near Banff), Alberta, Canada (2003), and Salter Path, North Carolina (2005). All events have been open to the GTM leadership and interested parties from all across the world. However, most attendees have been from North America. David Gottshall has led all these quintessential gatherings.

The basic purpose in holding such meetings was to insure that the GTM would continue after David's participation in the movement ended. He currently serves as director for about 25 or so retreats/seminars each year. One of those is our North Carolina retreat. In fact, David has directed all of our statewide retreats to date with the exception of the 2004 retreat which I lead in his absence.

THE NEXT EVOLUTIONARY LINK

North Carolina's Great Teachers Retreat is patterned after and heavily influenced by David himself, as he has been the sole director of the NCGTR as previously noted. As coordinator, one of my responsibilities was to insure that the spirit and intent of the GTM continues as David originally intended and as so established in North Carolina.

I became coordinator by virtue of circumstance. Having just experienced the National Great Teachers Leadership Colloquium in Wisconsin in 1998, I developed a sheer passion for the basic precepts of the GTM. After a phone call from Julie Thompson that following summer announcing her withdrawal as statewide Coordinator, I humbly accepted those responsibilities and became the next link in what will surely become a long chain of GT leadership in North Carolina. Having left my own college in December 2006 to pursue a position in law enforcement administration, Kay Crouch of Caldwell Community College & Technical Institute agreed to serve as NCGTR coordinator beginning with the 2007 NCGTR. Her school will serve as the new host

institution, replacing Richmond Community College which has supported the retreat as host since 1998.

THE REASONS FOR SUCCESS

The National GTM is different from most conventional staff development organizations/movements because its unprecedented and continued success is due more to what has been *left out* rather than what has been included. In other words, emphasizing the ideal that "less is more," the NCGTR is characterized by the noted absence of. . .

- ▶ Manuals or "how to" handbooks
- ▶ Organizational officials / organizational structure
- ▶ Phones
- ▶ Headquarters or national address
- ▶ Ownership
- ▶ Employees
- ▶ Politics
- ▶ Institutional or commercial interests
- ▶ Ego involvement in GTM leadership

As mentioned earlier, the GTM occurs at a grassroots level amongst interested educators and is kept alive by oral tradition. The NCGTR is no exception. As a result, there is no bureaucracy present to impede the creative process that allows each retreat to be successful. True to form, the NCGTR is run as a first person seminar, focused upon each individual's performance in his or her classroom. There is just enough structure so that something can happen, but not so much that nothing happens.

THE RCC CONNECTION

Richmond Community College became the "default" institutional sponsor of the NCGTR by virtue of my employment therein. Each NCGTR is run as a self-supporting retreat. No college, local, or state monies underwrite any NCGTR. The host college manages the minimal accounting required to deposit and pay out monies associated with retreat expenses. However, this institutional involvement in no way impacts the retreat itself. As previously mentioned, Caldwell Community College will now assume this responsibility in 2007 and beyond.

THE SPIRIT & INTENT OF THE NGTM

Cross-referenced in this document is *The Spirit and Intent of the National Great Teachers Movement* written by David Gottshall in March 1999. This writing was published in order for those who venture into GT leadership to maintain a clear picture of the spirit and intent of the GTM. It also marked the observance of the GTM's 30th anniversary. It can be found at the *Official Web Niche of the National Great Teachers Movement* at **ngtm.net** as well as other information and documents of interest.

THE GREAT COLLEGE PHENOMENON

I created and implemented several organizational development activities for my own college (Richmond CC) known as the "Great College Seminar". This organizational development model of the GT process was highly successful for Lansing Community College in

Lansing, Michigan. I consulted with Pam Bergeron, a colleague in human resources there (since retired), in order to develop a proposal for our own series of GCS. Steeped in the tradition of the GTM, the primary aim of these events was to provide an opportunity for a literal cross-section of the institution to meet face-to-face in order to become better acquainted and to examine the concept of a single college.

RCC's Great College Seminar was perhaps the first such event in North Carolina in that it included participants that literally represented every aspect of the college to include students, faculty, staff, the college president, and members of the board of trustees. Each sample of the school's human capital and energy potential converged at a single point in time. It was amazing to see my own colleagues in one place all at once. We ate meals together, "small-grouped" together, and explored our successes and problems together as well. Richmond's GCS was designed to integrate all levels of the college into the collective *uno* as a means of starting an organizational dialogue that had the potential to transform the college. Three GCS's were held over a 2-year period. The most important aspect of the GCS is that it represents a beginning and not an end. Organizational health must be maintained over time and with much intentionality. The GCS serves as an impetus for change. Guilford Tech (GTCC) just finished their second GCS in November 2007 that was held in Stoneville, North Carolina.

FUTURE GTM GROWTH IN NORTH CAROLINA

At the time of this update in the spring of 2008, at least five (perhaps even more) community colleges and one university have

implemented their own professional and organizational development activities as direct offshoots of the statewide NCGTR. These include Fayetteville Technical Community College (FTCC) in Fayetteville; Isothermal Community College (ICC) in Spindale; Southwestern Community College (SCC) in Sylva; Guilford Technical Community College (GTCC) in Greensboro; Beaufort Community College in Washington; and Western Carolina University (WCU) in Cullowhee. In April 2007, I conducted a seminar held for a state-level law enforcement agency in North Carolina.

In September 2000, ICC assembled the first ever "Great Teaching Retreat" held at Camp Kanuga, the site of the statewide retreat. This event effectively combined ICC faculty and administrators together in what became the search for great teaching at Isothermal, examining the interests of both in the teaching process. Shortly thereafter, FTCC held a similar event at the east coast counterpart of Kanuga, Trinity Retreat Center in Salter Path, North Carolina. Both of these events were considered highly successful by those involved. Both colleges conducted similar retreats in the fall of 2001. ICC put their *entire* college faculty and staff through an abbreviated version of the Great College Seminar in February 2003 in a single week! FTCC's most recent GT event was held in November 2007.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In conclusion, the NCGTR has become a much-anticipated annual event that allows community college faculty a chance to learn from each other and find the great teachers within themselves. It is positive, introspective, and intensely focused on teaching

methodologies that work. As its popularity increases, more adaptations of the great teachers model are used in new and creative ways, not only to enhance teaching faculty performance, but to build great institutions of higher learning within our beloved state and beyond.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steven L. Smith is currently serving as a law enforcement administrator for an eastern North Carolina Sheriff. Prior, he served as Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice and Department Chair (1992-2006) of the Criminal Justice Technologies Curriculum at Richmond Community College in Hamlet, North Carolina. His career in criminal justice began in 1982 as a police officer in Hickory, North Carolina. His most recent innovative and creative interests include staff, organizational, and professional development activities as well as promoting a unique approach to ethics training for criminal justice professionals. He may be contacted at steves@ngtm.net.