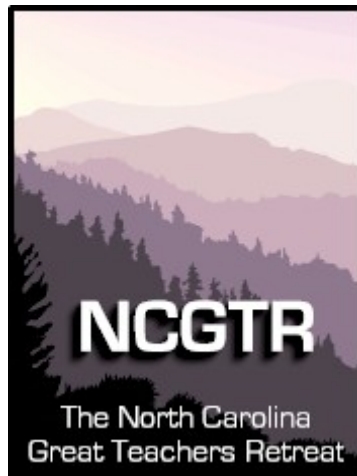


The History of the Great Teachers Movement In North Carolina



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"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. Written to document that seminar, this publication will provide some insight to this highly effective concept in faculty and staff development and its ongoing impact upon the quality of teaching throughout our state.

As the current statewide Coordinator, I feel a tremendous need to record the growth of the Great Teachers Movement (GTM) as North Carolina approaches its 11th annual retreat. The statewide retreat naturally spawns a variety of localized and single-college seminars that are based upon the concepts and principles of the GTM. As this expansion begins, I believe it is imperative 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 for 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. She remains employed at Blue Ridge. Camp Kanuga continues to be the location where each statewide NCGTR is held.

Nearing its 34th birthday as a national phenomenon, the GTM is based *entirely* upon oral tradition. While in North Carolina our retreat is called a *retreat* because it is a 3-day event, many states, including California and Hawaii run 5-day *seminars*, thus the distinction between the two terms. However, in the 2003 seminars, both states conducted 4-day seminars in order to cut costs.

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, three such events have occurred in Sinsinawa, Wisconsin, in 1998, West, Texas in 2001 and in the Kananaskis Region (near Banff), Alberta, Canada in 2003. All events have been open to the GTM leadership from all across the world. However, most attendees have been from North America. David Gottshall has directed all these "quintessential" gatherings. North Carolina will host the 4th NGTLQ in June 2005 at Salter Path, NC.

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

"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 is 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, I developed a sheer passion for the basic precepts of the GTM. After a phone call from Julie Thompson in the summer of 1998 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.

"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 College does handle 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.

"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 National Great Teachers web site at <http://ngtm.net>, as well as other information and documents of interest.

"FUTURE GTM GROWTH IN NORTH CAROLINA"

At the time of this update in September 2003, two community colleges have implemented their own professional development activities as direct offshoots of the statewide NCGTR. These include Fayetteville Technical Community College (FTCC) in Fayetteville and Isothermal Community College (ICC) in Spindale. My own college (Richmond CC) has scheduled a Great College Seminar for November 2003 and will be the second known North Carolina community college to do this. Several others are planned with Richmond's second seminar slated for March 2004.

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 planned similar retreats in the fall of 2001. ICC put their *entire* college faculty and staff through an abbreviated version of the Great College Retreat in February 2003 in a single week!

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!