

## But Did It Really Matter? Wakonse Lessons on Faculty Reflection in Community

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### **Abstract:**

*While the scholarship of learning and teaching is filled with examples of learning communities and how they enhance the development of faculty, many of these are long-term, institutionalized opportunities. Little scholarship exists around short-term, interdisciplinary, cross-institutional experiences and how they inform the work of faculty related to teaching and learning. This article examines the impact of a short-term, one-time teaching and learning conference: The Wakonse Conference on College Teaching (Wakonse). Through interviews with past conference attendees, the lasting impact, transformative experiences, and contribution to faculty development through a community of colleagues dedicated to student teaching fostered by the conference was examined. Hewson (2000) developed a framework for clinician-educators which aligned with the outcomes of the Wakonse experience. Using Hewson's (2000) framework, issues related to climate, learning-centeredness, facilitated learning and application of knowledge, self-awareness, and individualized teaching were examined. As a result, participants shared the ways in which the Wakonse experience was transformative for them. Key themes that emerged from this study included the roles of community and sense of place; learning-centered opportunities; and the importance of holistic personal development. Each of these elements – as articulated by the study participants – represented a key aspect of the Wakonse conference and how and why the conference had lasting significance to attendees.*

### **Key Words:**

faculty development; student engagement; community; learning-centered; holistic development.

### **Introduction**

Time is a limited resource. For faculty, this means a balance of research, service, and teaching. For faculty interested in enhancing the teaching and learning

environments in their classrooms, this means that choosing between learning communities, retreats, conferences, learning and teaching circles, mentoring, professional development, webinars, seminars, and so on. In committing to these opportunities, faculty hope there is a return on the investment of time and energy. Much of the existing scholarship related to faculty development programs around the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) has focused on faculty learning communities. Additionally, we have learned a great deal about the immediate impact of these faculty development experiences. However, there is limited exploration of the long-term effects of short-term SoTL events.

This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the reflections of faculty who participated in a specific five-day faculty development experience – the Wakonse Conference on College Teaching (Wakonse). Interviews were conducted with attendees who had gone to the annual conference at least one year earlier, with most participants having attended at five or more years prior to the interviews. Participants were asked about the significance of the Wakonse experience for them as well as how they made meaning of that experience in their teaching upon returning to their campuses.

## **Literature Review**

In order to effectively set the stage for this study, it is important to provide the context in existing scholarship. This section focuses on scholarship around faculty development, and the ways in which this particular study is informed by Hewson's (2000) framework

### ***Faculty Development in Community***

Faculty development is often built around long-term learning communities of practice (Wenger, 1999; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). Scholars have come to understand that faculty development is a communal rather than a private activity (Chism, Lees, & Evenbeck, 2002). Eddy and Garza Mitchell (2012) explored the idea of “thinking communities” as spaces for faculty to keep faculty engaged as well as fostering collaborative relationships on campus. These examples, while effective, require ongoing participation and engagement. This study explored whether similar outcomes could be achieved with short-term, SoTL retreats or conferences.

SoTL communities provide a number of benefits to faculty including creative and innovative partnerships in pursuit of common goals (Camblin & Steger, 2000; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002); healthy career development (Chism & Szabo, 1996); and these communities provide a sense of renewal for faculty (Evenbeck, Jackson, & McGrew, 1999; Smith, 2001; West, 1999). Wakonse aligns its outcomes with each of these considerations.

### ***Faculty Renewal***

It is this last component however – the need for faculty renewal and vitality – that was the catalyst for the Wakonse conference. According to Hubbard and Atkins (1995), early faculty development efforts focused on individuals' expertise within disciplines and pedagogical approaches while more recent activities are focused on faculty renewal. As scholars have identified, faculty renewal and its connection to institutional success began as early as the 1960s and intensified over the next 20 years leading researchers

to call for “a resurgence of faculty vitality efforts” (Bland & Schmitz, 1988, p. 205). At a critical time, Wakonse emerged as an opportunity for faculty to engage in holistic collaboration with a community of like-minded scholars and staff. Again, for the purposes of this study, the question is whether or not the five-day conference is able to achieve all of these goals.

### ***Learning-Centered Shift***

Another way that Wakonse’s goals align with the work done in other SoTL circles is a shift in thinking about higher education in the classroom at the end of the last century. Rather than emphasizing faculty teaching the focus is now on student learning. Chism, Evenbeck and Lees (2002) wrote, “The basic model of teaching changed from teaching as transmission of content to teaching as the facilitation of learning” (p. 34). Schwartz and Haynie (2013) added that this change was driven at least in part by the increasing demand for assessment related to student learning. As a result of these shifts in higher education, Wakonse was designed as an experience dedicated to student learning. The conference is a place where ideas about pedagogy and student engagement are shared and new approaches are developed.

### ***Hewson’s (2000) Framework***

While there are multiple ways of exploring the impact of SoTL experiences on faculty, this study employed Hewson’s (2000) theory-based development framework. Hewson (2000) identified five key elements to fostering faculty development: (1) climate; (2) learning-centeredness; (3) facilitated learning and application of existing knowledge, attitudes and skills; (4) self-awareness through reflection; and (5) individualized teaching. While in the original study Hewson (2000) focused on medical professionals, these elements translate to interdisciplinary settings. The five elements in Hewson’s (2000) work align with the Wakonse experience. Wakonse is built on a foundation of space and place (climate), learning, communal meaning-making of teaching (learning and application), reflection, and teaching.

## **Research Design**

### ***Research Questions***

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What worked at Wakonse, and
2. In what ways has it mattered to you since you attended?

The goal in this study was to identify not only what worked in the specific context of Wakonse, but also how the conference informed work done by faculty after the fact.

### ***Research Approach***

A qualitative case study approach was used in collecting the data for this study as the purpose of the research was to develop a deep and meaningful understanding of individuals’ experiences (Creswell, 2014), and the data was particularistic and highly descriptive (Merriam, 2009). The study focused on the specific case of Wakonse and included a thick and rich description. The case study expands on the knowledge of organizational learning as a result (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009).

Invitations to participate in this qualitative study were extended to 114 Wakonse Fellows (past attendees) at a large, research-intensive university in the Midwest. Twenty-four people (21%) accepted the invitation creating a pool of participants comprised of 11 men and 13 women. In a single unstructured individual interview of 30-90 minutes, participants were asked discuss how the Wakonse experience affected them and impacted their work and lives after the conference.

Interviews were then coded and inductive analysis (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009) was used to identify themes. The key themes that emerged were then coded into categories of climate; learning-centeredness; facilitation and application of knowledge, attitudes, and skills; reflection; and individualized teaching per Hewson's (2000) model.

### ***Wakonse Context***

Wakonse is a conference held each year over Memorial Day weekend at a children's camp on Lake Michigan. The conference is open to faculty from any institution who hold any position (full, associate, assistant, lecturer, etc.). Non-faculty staff are also invited, as are doctoral students who attend as part of the preparing future faculty program at the conference. Historically it draws attendees from across the country.

Wakonse is *not* remediation for poor teachers; rather it is a conference for faculty and staff who love teaching and are inspired to create classrooms as space for student engagement. Wakonse is an interdisciplinary conference bringing together chemists and creative artists, engineering and English professors, physicists and forestry faculty. The conference experiences and opportunities integrate risk, dialogue, and the importance of the individual in ways that support faculty.

In the 1980s, a group of faculty at a large, public institution in the Midwest had concerns about the shift in prioritizing research over teaching on their campus. With that in mind, these Wakonse founders designed the conference to bring together good teachers and those who valued student learning in a retreat-like setting to share ideas and challenges and to inspire one another. According to the founders of the conference, the word 'Wakonse' comes from the Lakota Sioux word that means to lead one on a quest. Within the context of the conference, it is commonly used to mean 'to teach and to inspire'.

While the conference includes sessions on engaging students; discussing difficult issues in the classroom; and employing creative pedagogy, there are also several other key elements that set Wakonse apart from other faculty development experiences. The accommodations are rustic and meals are served 'camp style' in a community dining hall. There is very limited access to technology – both internet and cell phone reception.

That said, the location is beautiful – trails, beaches, and the lake itself. According to one participant, Wakonse is a place "you go to be, rather than to do". Wakonse is about the self and engaging in transformative dialogue with colleagues. This dialogue is the core of the experience according to several participants in this study.

The idea of dialogue among scholars is the foundation for the conference. As Palmer (2007) wrote:

If we want to grow as teachers -- we must do something alien to academic culture: we must talk to each other about our inner lives -- risky stuff in a

profession that fears the personal and seeks safety in the technical, the distant, the abstract. (p. 12)

While the importance of reflection is essential to faculty development, many faculty are steered away from critical reflection, self-authenticity, and intentional work to integrate reflective practice (Rogers, 2001).

The outcomes identified by the Wakonse organization on its web site (<http://www.wakonse.org/mainpages/FacultyConference/AboutUs.htm>) include:

- A more supportive campus climate for those concerned with teaching; a collaborative exchange of talent, ideas and resources within and among participating institutions; increased concern for general issues of the academy;
- renewed interest, support and understanding for what it means to be a college teacher; and
- better teaching.

## **Findings**

First and foremost, the participants shared that the conference did have a lasting effect on their experiences as faculty members. Some shared their experiences in general ways. "It was good for me to get away and spend time with like-minded faculty", stated one participant, and another said, "I don't need to go again, but it was what I needed at that time. And I would encourage others to attend Wakonse if they need some time away to think about their work." Others shared that there was a transformative element to their experience. As one participant put it, "I made decisions there that informed not only my career as an academic, but that have changed the ways I look at my life holistically. I am a different person for having attended the conference."

The experiences of participants as viewed through the lens of Hewson's (2000) model fell into three categories. First climate was discussed by participants through language about community and a sense of the place where Wakonse is held. Learning centeredness was addressed consistently as a key element of Wakonse. Finally, reflection was mentioned repeatedly, particularly in the context of holistic personal development. Hewson's (2000) categories of applying knowledge, attitudes, and skills; and individual teaching were not mentioned specifically, but rather folded into other observations made by participants about what they took away from the conference.

### ***Climate and Community***

What Hewson (2000) described as learning climate was defined by participants in this study as a sense of place and a learning community. Wakonse fostered a safe environment for learning and growth in three primary ways. First, the setting itself, which allowed participants to be away from campus and one's peers and upper-level administrators, created the space for participants to be more open. Second, dialogue was prioritized throughout the conference through the development of small group conversations. Finally, the shared focus on learning and student engagement provided common ground for the participants.

Participants shared community was something missing from their work experiences because much of faculty work is conducted in isolation. Participants described community development at Wakonse through the conference setting, the intentional dialogue group experience, and other daily routines and social activities. One participant put it this way:

At Wakonse you are a part of a community as soon as you arrive. It's a small conference, so there's that. But you also are a part of a dialogue group. Even in a relatively small group you are connected with others so that you can have deeper and more meaningful conversations. Often that is what is missing on our home campuses. You don't have the time or the space or feel you can be vulnerable to really talk about your work or how your work and your life work together – or don't work together. Wakonse sets you up from the first night to have that – to fill that void. It's really special.

**Community through place.** Hewson (2000) found that it was essential to create an appropriate climate for faculty learning. This study produced similar findings in that participants stressed the importance of location in the development of community at Wakonse. The idea of a community of faculty and staff finding one another and sharing their passions about teaching and learning was a central theme of this study. One participant said Wakonse was a place to find connections around teaching and learning because “you don't run into others on your own campus who are part of the community valuing undergraduate education.” Participants shared a desire for a sense of community related to classroom experiences and students rather than focusing on conversations about research and grants.

Participants described the rustic nature of the conference as an asset. One individual said, “Your room is not glamorous. It's a bed. A dresser and closet you share with someone, and that's about it. You share bathrooms. We eat together in a big dining hall.” Another added, “And all of it gets you to talk to other people – there's certainly no reason to hang out in your room. It's not like you get internet or cell service there!”

Other participants focused on the natural setting. “You can hike or sit on the beach or find a nice tree and sit and think. I don't always take time to do that here,” said one person. Another participant said, “You can find a sand dune by yourself or go on a group hike. Being outside breaks me out of my routine of sitting at a computer or being indoors.” All but three of the 24 participants referenced the importance of the setting in the Wakonse experience.

**Community through dialogue.** Climate and community were defined as more than just the location. Wakonse attendees were assigned to eight-member dialogue groups who met daily to discuss more personal issues than those addressed in larger sessions. Many of the participants shared that their dialogue groups were key to their positive experiences. Dialogue groups talked about whatever topics were most salient to their members. Some processed sessions they had attended and one participant saw this as a key strength of her group saying, “Going to a session and then back to the team for processing was brilliant.”

Others talked extensively about the promotion and tenure process. Others spent time discussing how to design a good syllabus or how to get a semester started in a powerful and positive way. One participant shared:

As a newer faculty member, I was scared to talk about my concerns on my home campus. I still hadn't figured out who was a safe person. At Wakonse it was different. First of all, there wasn't anyone in my discipline or anyone from my school in my dialogue group. I didn't have to worry about things getting me in trouble with my promotion or tenure. I got some great advice and met at least one person I still call up from time to time when I have questions about faculty politics.

Part of the success of these dialogue groups had to do with the fact that members came from different institutions. One participant expanded on this idea saying he felt "safer sharing with a dialogue group than on my own campus because there was no fear of political implications" based on what he shared. He suggested that he might be perceived differently (e.g., lacking competence, unable to succeed in publishing or grant writing) if he discussed teaching or shared his concerns or vulnerabilities on his home campus.

Wakonse conversations often went beyond work, however. One participant said that they opened up about work issues, family concerns, and ideas around not knowing whether they wanted to pursue tenure or not. Another participant said that the focus of her group conversations was "faculty / family life, faculty / family failures, and faculty / family fears."

The role of the dialogue groups connects with Hewson's (2000) framework in multiple ways. As has been mentioned, dialogue groups and other opportunities for dialogue at Wakonse (social activities, conference sessions, and communal meals) fostered a safe climate for the risk-taking necessary to learning. In addition, these small groups were facilitative and learner-centered, two other aspects of the Hewson (2000) model.

The dialogue group members decided the directions of the conversations in the dialogue group, and they themselves facilitated their own learning. Wakonse has rarely invited outside speakers. Instead it relies on experience and wisdom of the participants themselves. Participants "reconcile their existing knowledge, attitudes, and skills with new knowledge, attitudes, and skills introduced" (Hewson, 2000, p. 499) by their fellow dialogue group members.

All participants agreed the dialogue group had a major impact on their conference experience. Some groups stayed in touch for months or even years after Wakonse. One person said that his group felt close enough to share "fears and tears" during their discussions. In this way Wakonse was a learning climate where risks were taken, challenges shared, and support offered; it was a climate essential to effective learning.

### **Community through shared interest in student learning and engagement.**

Group dialogue led to conversations about a shared commitment to student engagement and learning. Participants discussed the tension between teaching and research in their work. One person said she was told at her home campus, "Don't teach

more if it's going to impact your writing." Another had been told by an administrator on her campus, "If it's time to prep for a class or using that time to publish – publish. ALWAYS publish." Participants agreed that while good teaching was respected, it was not rewarded at the faculty members' institutions.

In interviews participants repeatedly used words like "passion" and "love" regarding teaching. They shared a sense of excitement and relief that there were others who shared their interest and level of commitment to good teaching. One participant said, "It's nice that [at Wakonse] it doesn't have to be a hush-hush conversation to say, 'I like teaching.'" One said, "Having a passion for teaching is rebellion against the system." And yet another shared that Wakonse celebrated a community dedicated to a singular goal, "Let's teach well." These quotes exemplify the reconciliation of participants' attitudes ("Teaching is important") with new knowledge introduced at Wakonse ("I'm not the only one who cares about teaching"). The result aligns with Hewson's (2000) notion of facilitated learning for Wakonse attendees.

### ***Learning-Centered Opportunities***

Participants talked about how Wakonse was structured in a way to afford a variety of opportunities to engage beyond the dialogue groups. One person said that it was good to meet and engage with people from other universities because it provided an opportunity for "cross-fertilization" of ideas. Examples shared by participants included faculty from veterinary medicine and nursing sharing strategies for course labs and chemistry and design faculty talking about similarities between lab and studio work.

One participant shared a different perspective on Wakonse's learning-centered nature. He said, "Just being there was a way I felt my institution was saying, 'Good job. You deserve this conference because you're doing good work.'" Another echoed the sentiment and said "Time for me – away from work, away from family, away from the noise of life.... I get to rest and relax and reflect and recover. My department couldn't have given me anything better. It was just what I needed."

These examples fit with Hewson's (2000) model. Participants shared that this experience was a reward. The conference brought together learners and made them the priority separate from work, family, routine, and other obligations. The time and space and structure of Wakonse also "encourage[d] self-awareness through reflection" (Hewson, 2000, p. 499).

**Renewed interest, support, and understanding for teachers.** Participants said a unique aspect of the conference was that the focus was on teaching and learning. One Wakonse Fellow shared, "This is the first conference where I was asked 'What do you teach?' instead of 'What is your research?'" Key aspects of teaching and learning discussed by participants included the role of good pedagogical approaches, student learning, and the value of teaching in higher education.

**Better pedagogy.** Participants shared they were able to – according to one – "extrapolate across disciplines" in exploring classroom strategies. Participants discussed role-plays, case studies, team-based learning, and playing devil's advocate during discussion and lecture. Fellows shared conversations about changing their syllabi to be more student-centered, the importance of the organization of classroom space, and the development of assignments. One participant said, "designing



assignments which help students learn is a better way to help students overall.” While innovative pedagogy was familiar to faculty, discussing ways to improve and creatively implement additional strategies was what they took away from the conference.

Several participants mentioned a Wakonse session on Socratic dialogue as a powerful tool exemplifying creativity and intentionality. One participant summed up this aspect of Wakonse saying, “It’s okay to keep experimenting with unorthodox approaches when you teach.” Again, this emphasizes Wakonse’s learner-centeredness and its focus on attendees’ needs and common interests.

The word “creativity” was also used in multiple interviews in terms of classroom development. Participants shared that it was important to be pedagogically creative in the classroom, but also in ways of thinking, doing, and being in terms of all student interactions. One individual discussed “the art and craft of asking questions to stimulate conversation.” Another participant said, “Teaching is still very much an art. No one can tell you how to paint. Likewise, teaching is not a science. Teaching is art.”

This is a merging of the participant as learner (Wakonse attendee) and the participant as teacher (faculty member). Participants in this study shared that Wakonse focused on faculty development in terms of how it is uniquely positioned to align these multiple identities (student / faculty) and perspectives (learner / teacher) of the conference participant in the educational context.

**Student learning.** All the participants stressed that they went to Wakonse with a pre-existing commitment to active learning, student engagement, and a value on teaching. They discussed attending teaching workshops throughout their careers. Some participants also had experience in the K-12 system as educators and had published on SoTL.

One participant said he asks himself on a regular basis, “What are all the things we need to be doing to make learning work as well as it ought to?” Another shared that she tries to put herself in the student role when planning classroom activities. “I am always learning, so I try to remember what it’s like to struggle with something new,” she said. Still another said he has developed strategies to show students he cares about their success in higher education saying, “I know their lives are more than my class. When I know they have other things going on, I congratulate them or try to support them depending on the issue.” These are examples of Wakonse achieving the fifth element of Hewson’s (2000) model – teaching tailored to participants. There was enough flexibility in the Wakonse structure that participants could choose sessions that best meet their needs.

### ***Holistic Personal Development***

Twenty of the 24 participants discussed how Wakonse afforded them time to think about cultivating healthy life practices in addition to building relationships with students and developing productive classrooms. One participant shared, “personal time away from work and life obligation to relax and think and connect with like-minded individuals” was a huge benefit to her as a scholar, teacher, parent, partner, and individual. Another said Wakonse was “more about the whole life experience” than simply about his life in higher education. Participants shared that because of the setting – with limited access

to technology and with time for thinking away from the distractions of daily life and work – they did deeper thinking and intentional reflection about all aspects of their lives.

One participant summed it up this way:

At Wakonse you can be alone without being lonely. You can be in community that is real community based on trust and a shared vision of what is important. You can reconnect with your most authentic self. I wish I could say most of us have that experience when we're at home on our campuses and in our departments, but I don't think we do. I think instead we get caught up in politics and gamesmanship and miss out on what drew us to the faculty life to begin with. For most of us here that draw was students – not only our students in classes, but ourselves as students and as learners. That's what Wakonse did for me – it reminded me that I am a learner and I need to create safe spaces for myself as well as for my students. I can't do right by them if I don't take care of myself.

**Academic life.** Specific examples of the Wakonse impact on participants as academics included discussions about the promotion and tenure processes and decisions about career opportunities. Participants said that Wakonse increased their enthusiasm about teaching, helped – according to one participant – “get out of a cyclical funk,” and re-engage with a relational approach to faculty work. Some participants developed new classes, programs, honors seminars, and approaches to mentoring as a result of the conference. That said, because participants were inspired by teaching and learning before Wakonse, the conference served more as reinforcement and re-inspiration.

The impact of the conference went beyond participants' work as faculty in the classroom. Some participants said that their career trajectories shifted significantly after being at Wakonse. One person said, “I am going to look at pedagogy in my area and write more about how to create dynamic learning environments in my discipline.” At least five participants shared a desire to look at SoTL in the context of their teaching as a possible means of research and publishing scholarly articles.

Another person said he determined at the conference that he would focus almost entirely on undergraduate education as his priority. Upon his return to campus, he said he chose to dedicate “95% of my time to undergraduate teaching and advising and working with student organizations because with [so many] undergraduate students here, someone ought to care about them.”

Still another participant shared that the support network she developed at Wakonse helped her successfully navigate the promotion and tenure process. She described it as a very challenging experience due to a variety of personal and professional circumstances. She said, “I wouldn't have gotten tenure without Wakonse. I didn't want to let them [Wakonse colleagues and mentors] down.”

**Sense of self.** Time for self was a common theme throughout the interviews. Every participant mentioned some aspect of self-care or reflection about themselves as individuals as a part of their Wakonse experience. Some participants shared that they made decisions about their families and about prioritizing things beyond their work. Others shared they thought about how to better attend to themselves in physical and

emotional ways after Wakonse. Still another talked about a more basic experience she had at the conference: “I took a nap for the first time in a decade.”

There was intentional reflection time in the schedule. Participants were encouraged to set both personal and professional goals. One participant shared that one of the things she learned at the conference was, “If I am not healthy and good with myself, I cannot foster healthy class interactions and be good with my students.”

Finally, one participant shared that she made a series of personal decisions while at Wakonse.

I was sitting there on the sand dunes looking out over Lake Michigan. I knew there were decisions about my personal life I had not made because I was overwhelmed at work. I also knew that if I didn't actively engage in making those decisions, time would make the decisions for me. I finally had the time, space, and quiet to figure out what my next steps would be. And I haven't had a single regret since then.

These pieces all fit together to tell the story of how Wakonse fostered self-reflection and awareness on the part of attendees. Whether it was a shift in one's research agenda, a change in work priorities, or a community of support related to tenure and promotion, Wakonse served as a place where individuals had time and space. The conference and the setting encouraged increased self-awareness through reflection (Hewson, 2000) and gave individuals time to think about themselves as human beings and as faculty members.

## **Implications for Practice and Scholarship**

The key implications for this study are related to faculty needs (community, learning, personal development) and conference / retreat effectiveness. These findings can inform practice not only for faculty development staff, but also provide insight to academic administrators looking to attend to the needs of their academic communities, and – perhaps most importantly – to faculty members themselves as they navigate the academic life and environment.

### ***Faculty Needs***

**Community.** Faculty development professionals can use the results from this study to inform the thinking, planning, and doing of their work. Understanding that faculty have a need for a community is at the heart of many faculty development programs. A key finding here is the importance of place to community development. As directors of centers for teaching plan activities, making an effort to get away from campus and mix participants with faculty from other disciplines – or even better other institutions – are essential.

Having small groups where people feel safe to disclose successes, challenges, and fears – both professional and personal – proved to be a key factor in the success and long-lasting impact of Wakonse on participants in this study. A challenge to doing this is time. The process of trust-building and risk-taking takes time to develop. As expressed in this study, the investment of time does pay dividends for those who participated.

Similarly, academic administrators, by supporting these sorts of initiatives, have the opportunity to foster campus environments that value scholars as employees and as individuals. More studies focusing on how faculty development conferences and activities impact faculty promotion and retention can take this work and move it from the impact on the individual participants to the impact on the institution.

For faculty members, this study is useful in identifying areas of struggle other faculty members have faced. Palmer (2007) wrote, about our “inner lives” (p. 12) and the importance of dialogue in fostering transparency and a sense of belonging. This study provides insight and support not only to new(er) faculty, but also to those who are more seasoned and possibly feeling stuck or in transition. Faculty development needs do not stop at tenure, nor do they cease once one reaches full professor status.

**Being learning-centered.** With more adjunct faculty, lecturers, and part-time faculty there is a shift in the wants and needs of academics on campus. While there will always be researchers in higher education and there will always be research-focused faculty who enjoy teaching and do it well / seek to do it better, developing new strategies to support more diverse types of faculty is essential.

Sending faculty to conferences like Wakonse is one way to be learning-centered. Additionally, developing teaching initiatives modeled after Wakonse on individual campuses is another approach. A focus on learning is something the participants in this study stressed as valuable. More research on other ways that being learning-centered affects faculty experiences can help inform program development and individual practice of faculty members.

Additional studies about focusing on learning in the classroom can provide insight not only to faculty development coordinators, but to other academic administrators. If faculty develop a better understanding of learning-centeredness for themselves, how might that affect their teaching and advising? More research on this and related topics can provide a broader picture and deeper understanding of how learning-centeredness affects both faculty and students.

**Personal development.** The academic life – like any career – has its own set of challenges and rewards. Attending to individual faculty members as they navigate their careers is essential to institutional success. This begins at the point that an institution recruits a faculty member and is sustained (or not) as individuals join college campuses, do their work, and navigate their lives and careers.

Rather than focusing on why faculty members leave, studies on why faculty members stay could help provide additional insight in this area. What are the roles of faculty development activities in retaining faculty? How do faculty members describe their own experiences and ways of feeling valued by institutions? In what ways do different universities attend to faculty holistically? What opportunities for reflection are integrated into the faculty experience, and in what ways are those reflective experiences valued by faculty members?

### ***Conference Effectiveness***

Participants in this study said that Wakonse had an impact on them after they returned to campus. Of the 24 participants, 20 explicitly stated that Wakonse informed

their teaching, their collaborative relationships, and the ways in which they attended to themselves or all three of these areas. As faculty development offices and coordinators plan for the success of their programs and their faculty, an understanding of what works and what does not is essential.

While this study serves to inform, it is far from comprehensive. This study focused on a single, small conference focused on teaching and learning. There are transferable pieces of information that can serve to either attract faculty to Wakonse or to inform how other faculty development professionals might build their own experiences on campus. However, what other opportunities and experiences can inform professional development? What other conference, training, and development opportunities exist? How do participants express the effectiveness of those experiences? What can be customized for a particular campus or region?

## **Conclusion**

Multiple participants used the word “transformative” in describing their experiences at Wakonse. One participant described Wakonse as “a series of enduring experiences”. Due to the transformational nature of this experience, most participants said that they only attended Wakonse once because it was a singular and unique experience. One participant even shared, “I don’t want to go again. I’m afraid it will compromise the amazing experience I had when I went the first time.” Another participant put it this way, “It was a golden moment in life – an experience you would never trade.”

While these are powerfully positive quotes, without a framework to examine Wakonse, it is difficult to discern why it works in such a transformative way for so many attendees. This study sought to dissect the experience in order to make meaning of the pieces. While the whole may be greater than the sum of its parts, the parts nonetheless must be understood. Hewson’s (2000) theory-based faculty development program breaks the experience down into five essential elements. That framework is well suited for more deeply examining how Wakonse works and how other experiences may either be created or carefully examined in terms of effectiveness.

The learning climate is important. It must be a safe space where participants are comfortable engaging in the learning process. In the case of Wakonse, the natural setting that afforded both community and space for individual reflection was a strength of the conference. The lack of technology enhanced the experience for participants. One shared, “I found myself looking at faces instead of screens and saw faces looking back at me. That is pretty unusual for most of us anymore.”

Three elements of the Hewson (2000) model focus on the learners. The experience must be learner centered; it must facilitate rather than impose knowledge, attitudes, and skills; and it must be tailored to meet individual learner needs. Wakonse achieved this by affording autonomy to learners to choose how they engaged in the process. Wakonse values the expertise from within and therefore all the sessions are facilitated rather than “relying on expository lectures” (Hewson, 2000, p. 499). In this setting individuals can choose what sessions to attend, which to skip, when to take a nap, when to sit on the beach, what to share with dialogue groups, etc.

Finally, Hewson (2000) stressed the value of encouraging self-awareness through reflection. There is scheduled reflection time on the Wakonse agenda, and reflection is the thread that binds the Wakonse experience together. Perhaps this element of the experience is best summed up by a participant who was passionate about the time for self and reflection in the Wakonse experience. She said, “We teach who we are. Wakonse helped me get in touch with who I am.”

In closing, Hewson’s (2000) framework provided a way of examining why the impact of Wakonse was sustained over time. The climate, the focus on learners, a respect for the contributions of attendees, individualized teaching, and time for reflection were all elements of the experience for Wakonse Fellows. The conference met the needs of participants and had a lasting impact on them. All those interviewed were able to recall certain moments of growth, learning, and appreciation – whether they had gone to Wakonse the year before the interview or ten years prior. The role of time, space, place, trust, and community helped participants attend to themselves as faculty and as individuals and made a lasting impact on them.

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