

From Laurel's Desk – June 2019

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Patience – allowing time to establish roots

Another academic year begins. The weather is getting cooler. The birds that stop by on their way north are returning to my backyard bird feeders for a few weeks prior to heading south. This past weekend, I was working in the garden and noticed my neighbour had removed a number of hydrangeas and other small shrubs and perennials from her front garden, most of which had been planted just 4 or 5 months earlier. When I asked her about this major change, she said the plants were not doing well and so she had thrown everything away and was going to experiment with other plants. Unfortunately, I was not in time to rescue the discarded plants to give them a chance to thrive in my yard.

Recently, I have written about empathy, appreciation, and gratitude. The interaction with my neighbour got me thinking about patience and just how much patience is needed to be a good teacher. Anyone who has had to dig deep to find another way to explain a concept (after trying three or four approaches) recognizes that each of us processes information, thinks, and learns according to a unique schedule. Fast for some, slower for others. While we operate within the construct of a fourteen-week semester, the herculean task is to help all students meet the learning outcomes of the course. Yes, there are some students who are not successful. Most are, given the right learning conditions. Challenging, interesting, and relevant curriculum taught by inspiring, empathetic and yes, patient professors. Teachers realize that you've got to allow time for each student to "catch on" and you have to keep checking in to ensure they are still "with you." And so you explain again. You deconstruct. You analyze to identify the root problem. You go back to previous course content to remind and connect that knowledge with new knowledge. You change things up. It takes time. Using my garden metaphor, you adjust the conditions for optimal growth for each individual plant and allow time for roots to



form. As you know, it is not easy, but it is one of the rewarding aspects of teaching.

I wish you all a successful semester,

Laurel

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