Dear Prof. Aoki,

Allow me to begin by thanking you for sending me a Christmas card every year. It’s always wonderful hearing from you during the Christmas season and, as I prepare for January teaching. It’s therefore very meaningful to receive a Christmas note from a mentor.
Today I want to talk to you about my time in the Ph.D. program at UBC, in the Department of Curriculum Studies, between January 1994 and 1997 February. I strongly feel that was the best time in my life as a learner. I enjoyed every moment of it and I believe it is because my thesis advisors became great mentors. I am a positive thinker but I strongly believe were it not for you and Linda, things would have been different. Teachers make lots of difference in students’ lives especially when they care, are thoughtful, and authentic about the whole pedagogical relationship (Khamasi, 2001). Of course they could make a difference negatively, but that is not the perspective I want us to dialogue about.

We first met in strange circumstances. It was in 1991 in a manuscript that was written by Prof. Linda Peterat. I was researching for a term paper at the University of New Brunswick when I came across a quote in the manuscript. I can’t recall the title. But, as I read and re/read the statement, something connected us—the person who was quoted and I. Three years later, I was privileged to be in your class in the summer of 1994 at UBC. I hadn’t met you but I recognized your name from what was indicated as the course instructor’s name. By then I had read a bit more of your writings and curriculum perspective. The writings were always intriguing and convincing that there was something special about teacher Ted.

I wasn’t sure what it was but I was eager to seek it out I anticipated for the course and ruminated even as I sat in that course

the something special wasn’t difficult to find it was there! in the air in the classroom in the students that sought your course it was there!

in the resource materials that you brought to class in that reading list your references it was there! in the authors of those materials
yes, it was there
in our journal conversations
it was all there!

the qualities of a special teacher
a mentor who reached out to his students in
a very special way
that special teacher i had read about
YES, it was there!

i remember journalizing on the Rwanda genocide, the catastrophe that occurred in the neighbourhood of my country, Kenya. It was a very sad time; and, you acknowledged the catastrophe in class and my concerns in the journal.

The course was festive. i enjoyed it for many reasons but above all, because i felt at home. i always felt harassed in courses where people are valued more and therefore graded higher for taking too much air time without contributing as much. There was much fun for me listening to constructive conversations and watching the class dynamics. Just listening to students enjoying learning was a learning experience in itself. The comfort of knowing that my teacher understood learning from a broad perspective was all i needed as motivation.

Journalizing was a requirement in the course. Did you realize i was afraid of writing in the beginning? i wasn’t sure what journalizing was. i came from a background where teachers are assumed to have all the answers. i wondered how you would grade the journal, an activity where every one is writing his/her thing. The concept didn’t make sense to me but people were excited every time they received their journals with your comments. i was encouraged and slowly opened up, freed my spirit and just wrote.
Incidentally i have found the practice crucial in establishing pedagogical relationships with my students (khamasi, 2002a). It happens that i teach first year students and proceed with them up to third year. First year is therefore crucial, in that i feel obliged to set the pace for the next two years; and i have always found the journal a useful and reliable tool in this regard. The journal allows me to know the students and they also get to know me as a person they can seek out whether i have a course with them.
or not. I have used the concept and practice of journalizing to develop a philosophy of teaching, to try it out and evaluate it with students (Khamasi, 2001; 2002a; 2002b). I wonder what remains memorable for my students over the years, what learning they have gathered from their journalizing?

I often reflect on your mentoring skills and always conclude that I was blessed to have been one of your students. You always motivated us to dare to dream our ideas, to risk academic challenges where no one has journeyed before. People wonder about the format of my dissertation (Khamasi, 1997), and ask lots of questions—How come they allowed you to use so many different fonts? Didn’t UBC have a standard format? Where is your last chapter? It is different! I have not seen any one use a poem instead of Conclusions and Recommendations in a dissertation! How did you escape?

‘You need to take a class with teacher Ted,’ should have been my response.

Thank you

for being a mentor.

for encouraging difference.

for being a great teacher.

for being a motivation in my teaching.

Your perpetual student,

Jennifer Wanjiku Khamasi

April, 2003

References


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**About the Author**

Jennifer Wanjiku Khamasi is the Associate Dean, Faculty of Education, and Head of the Department of Home Science & Technology, Moi University, Kenya. She holds a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of British Columbia (1997). In 1995/96, she was a recipient of the University Graduate Fellowship and Faculty of Education Research Grant at the University of British Columbia. She returned to Kenya in 1997 and in 1998-99, moved to the Kingdom of Swaziland as a consultant in a national education project. In 2003, she won a Ford Foundation Research Fellowship for East Africa offered at the International Center for Research on Women in Washington DC where she spent three months. Her areas of interest range from teacher education, sexuality and HIV/AIDs, health education, and human science research.