
Editorial:

Marking and Being Marked

Journal of Applied Hermeneutics
ISSN: 1927-4416
January 30, 2024
©The Author(s) 2024
DOI: 10.55016/ojs/jah.v2023i2023.78891

Nancy J. Moules

The aspect of my teaching over the years that I have enjoyed the least is the task of assigning grades to students. There is such a sensitivity to the whole exchange. I (perhaps generously) believe that students most often submit their best efforts and to have the effort evaluated and even graded, sometimes praised and sometimes severely criticized can feel personal. It can be elating and devastating. It can be taken as a general statement on one's capacity and intellect, their right to be in the program they are in, or their ability to do well in it.

Dr. David Jardine was a Professor in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary and he once mentioned that he was not willing to offer grades to his students - - that grades really do not matter at all to him. When challenged on this with the question, "Why don't you want to mark your students?" he responded, "Oh, I want to mark them; I just don't want to grade them."

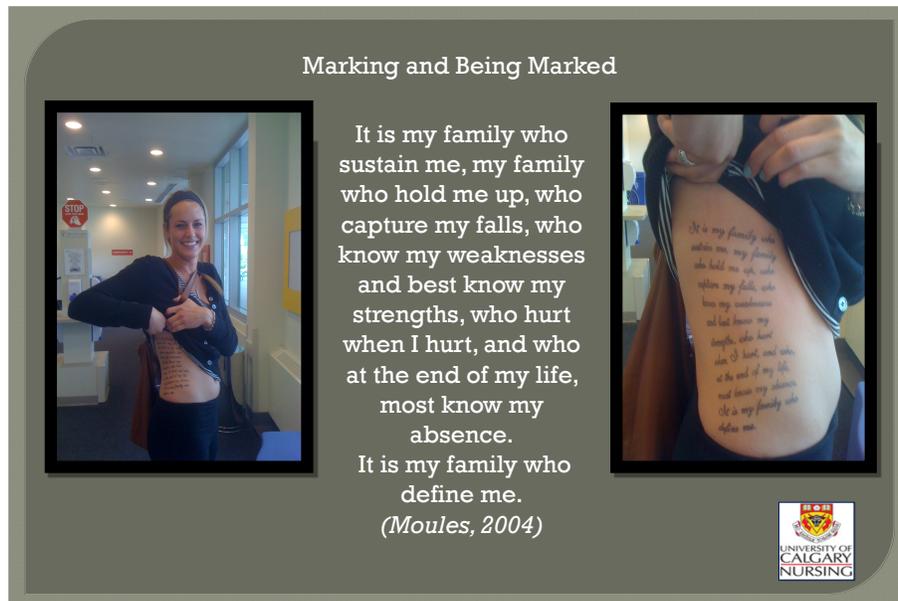
As I near retirement, I return to those words, and I think about the ways I have always wanted to mark my students. I wanted to mark their thinking, their practices, their insights, their commitment, their reflections. I wanted them to move into the world of nursing, of advanced nursing practice, and of hermeneutics and be so marked that they were ready to mark others, to leave others with indelible imprints of how they have nursed them well, relieved their suffering, and made a difference. Or how they have conducted a hermeneutic research study that is full of promise, possibility, insight, ambiguity, complexity, and beauty.

Earlier in my career as a nurse educator, I had a poignant example of how we can literally mark (even just with words) our students. Lauren was a student in my undergraduate family nursing

Corresponding Author:

Nancy J Moules, RN PhD
Faculty of Nursing, University of Calgary
Email: njmoules@ucalgary.ca

class many years ago. I had offered a PowerPoint slide about the nursing practice of families and family in general, and I later heard from Lauren telling me that she had been looking for a something to have tattooed and asked me if I would be willing to let her use my writing she had heard in class. A year or so later, I was walking into the Alberta Children's Hospital, and heard my name being called. Lauren introduced herself to me and reminded me that she was the student who had asked permission for the words for her tattoo. I asked her if she had gotten it, and she readily showed me the tattoo with my words:



Lauren was marked visibly, and I believe that anyone who bears a tattoo with this message of family is out there in the world marking families.

There are ways we mark big and boldly and the ways we make smaller marks that may not be as visible but are still tattooed on the lives and relationships of those we serve and those we study in research. I think of my mother's many hospitalizations and her excitement when nurses came up to her and introduced themselves as knowing me as a professor and loving their program at the University of Calgary. They nursed her well - - competently and caringly - - they marked her.

There are emails I have received from students who studied with us years ago to tell me of a situation with a patient or family where everything they learned about how to nurse well came back to them and they knew they had made a difference.

We mark our students, and they are marked by what they inherit from the Faculty of Nursing. Students leave our Faculty carrying a charge and a commitment to make a difference in the world. For many years, I taught every section of an undergraduate course called the Nursing of Families. Since this was a core course, it meant that, each year, I would have taught every single undergraduate student in our Faculty; over the years, this would have amounted to thousands of students. At

the last day of every course, I wrote each class a letter which varied given the class themselves but there is one section that I always included, and it reads:

There is something unique and lovely about this way we have created and opened space for each other that reflects exactly what I am asking you do in your work with families. I am asking you to courageously open yourselves to stories of suffering, across all domains of your practice, to include, hear, legitimize, and recognize suffering and success.

And then I am asking you to enter into a more sacred and privileged domain: to challenge yourselves to invite families to consider new ways of thinking about their lives and relationships and illnesses that help them grow and that ultimately diminishes their suffering.

I am inviting you to take a relational stance of collaboration, shared expertise, shared learning, compassion, openness, transparency, and ultimately love. This is not work for the faint of heart, because I believe this work takes all heart. I believe that this kind of work with families is about making enough room in your hearts and practice to sustain a meeting. And we do this by engaging, and listening, and questioning, and commending. Ultimately, I believe we do this by loving.

Marking and being marked.

Although students do not get to grade us, they do mark us. They change my understanding of the world, and of myself. They have marked me and continue to do so.

I am so grateful for these tattoos.