

A Teacher Educator and His Students Reflect on Teaching High School Physics

By Tom Russell

“Well, I guess it’s back to the ‘crystal palace,’ isn’t it?”
—science teacher on my last day at the school

Introduction: Returning to the Classroom

It had been 25 years since I last taught full-time in a secondary school, and 14 years since I began my academic appointment in teacher education. With tenure in hand and enough teaching and research experience to “know the territory,” what could I do to make life more interesting and push myself to re-examine my teacher education practices? During a year’s sabbatical leave in England, where a different set of practices helped me rethink old assumptions, I decided to try to arrange a return to the secondary classroom as a physics teacher. A few letters to the people most likely to be interested was all it took; a physics teacher in Kingston agreed to

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an exchange of services in which I would teach Grade 12 physics for 76 minutes every day from September through January (a full semester’s course) and he would teach one of my physics methods classes once a week for two hours.

To link my teaching and teacher education activities, I invited the 27 physics methods students to