

SUSTAINING PEDAGOGY IN THE AGE OF COVID AND BEYOND

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INQUIRY

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Introduction

Welcome to the *Inquirer's* 30th Anniversary issue! For three decades this journal has provided a space for professors and BMCC staff to engage with ideas crucial to building and supporting BMCC's unique learning culture.

As a new faculty at BMCC with almost a decade of teaching at CUNY already under my belt, I remember thinking I knew how to handle a classroom, to build excitement and engagement and above all trust with my students. I had graded piles of papers, counseled querying students, and penned my fair share of recommendation letters. In those early fall-crisped, new-pencil-smelling weeks of the semester, however, I quickly discovered the culture of learning at BMCC is different from other CUNY campuses. Fortunately, a copy of the *Inquirer* appeared in my mailbox, chock full of advice about how to teach at BMCC *in particular*. I eagerly paged through articles on peer-led team learning, teaching caring in the classroom amidst post 9/11 fears of attack, counseling the single mother college student, dealing with pedagogical privatization, and strategies for teaching in a multi-cultural classroom (these articles and more are available [here](#) in Volume 12). It was like having a veteran take me under their wing, to help integrate me into BMCC's culture, and bring me up to speed on how best to engage with and sustain our students, to help them reach their goals.

Browsing through the years of publication, one can see that the *Inquirer* has offered BMCC a safe space for passionate peer to peer idea exchange, written by faculty, for faculty. Our new president has stated that one of our [strategic goals](#) as a college is to help students feel "valued, encouraged, supported, and hopeful." The *Inquirer* is a space where faculty come to discuss just that, sharing carefully honed teaching techniques; helpful pedagogical practices and philosophies; tried and true approaches to engaging students with particularly difficult or sensitive topics and subject areas; while also providing a space to share BMCC specific faculty research findings valuable for enhancing students' classroom experience and ability to achieve. It is a forum for ideas about how best to meet the multifaceted needs of our students at BMCC, to explore what we are thinking, how we are feeling, and to help share our hard-earned knowledge with one another, and above all, the students. In so doing, the *Inquirer* has provided a place where faculty too can feel valued, encouraged, supported, and hopeful, which is arguably the best space from which one human being can reach out to another to help them feel the same.

As such, the *Inquirer* is integral to providing faculty with the tools for achieving the college's stated goals of "creating a culture of care that embraces equity, inclusion and diversity;" and to "improve learning through culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy and support." Its format of formally written and reasoned articles provides space for faculty and staff to explore ideas they are developing, sharing what works and what doesn't. By encouraging faculty

to develop and share ideas they are exploring, the journal enables faculty to not only implement sustaining pedagogy in their classrooms; it also sustains their pedagogy, and their ability to deliver high quality learning experiences for their students, by engaging larger questions of the academy and the importance of public education.

Elizabeth Wissinger, editor
Social Sciences, Human Services, and Criminal Justice

Pandemic and Personalities: How the Big Five Personality Traits Can Predict Psychological Outcomes During COVID-19

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Health Education

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought changes to the lives of everyone. Such changes vary in scale and degree based on a multitude of factors. Things like age, income, race, and geographic location have been identified as having disparate impacts on individuals during the pandemic (Pasion et al., 2020; Bottan et al., 2020; CDC, 2020; Chaudhry et al., 2020). In addition, private, internal factors also play a role.

For students at BMCC, the struggle to stay engaged in coursework was profound when everything moved online during the pandemic. We heard of students who became homeless, who had food insecurity, who were ill, whose family members had passed away due to COVID-19, who lost jobs, or who had to work extra shifts because they were the only one in their family who still had a job. We heard about students' lack of an appropriate device on which to do their schoolwork, the lack of a reliable Internet connection, the lack of privacy while on Zoom, the lack of time to do schoolwork when they had to share a computer with siblings and/or parents who had to work on them as well. There were multiple stressors on our students and on our faculty and staff.

Our students are clearly among those who are statistically at risk of health disparities and for COVID-19. Eighty-six percent of our students are people of color, 85% receive financial aid (compared to 44% of community college students nationwide), most of our students live in zip codes with high rates of poverty, and 5% are formally registered with the Office of Accessibility (Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Analytics). During the 2020–2021 school year, over 600 students sought help from BMCC's Counseling Center, and 49% of them did ongoing work with their counselors to deal with the issues that concerned them during the pandemic. In a usual year, less than 30% of students participate in four or more sessions with a counselor (N. Hajizadeh, personal communication, May 25, 2021).

When the United States began to impose social distancing measures to varying degrees, people quickly voiced their individual experiences. On social media, self-proclaimed introverts half-jokingly lauded this new reality (Kostopoulos, 2020). On the other hand, extroverts expressed their anguish at having to meet their friends on Zoom rather than at the bar (Kecmanovic, 2020). These anecdotes may

be amusing, but they point to an important fact. We all experienced a different reality under quarantine. Our personality traits may have a significant effect on how we respond to this public health crisis. Specifically, they affect our mental health when faced with novel circumstances. Using the “Big Five” personality traits, we can look at how differences in personality traits affect the mental health of our students and ourselves during COVID-19.

Finally, we can conceptualize the big five personality traits with regards to one’s political affiliation in order to link mental health outcomes to readily observable and communicable ideologies that people hold. The riot we witnessed on January 6 in Washington, D.C. is one manifestation of how the combination of political allegiance, mental health, and personality traits have an impact on the well-being of participants in the Capitol building and those watching on television.

The Big Five Personality Traits

Otherwise known as the OCEAN model, the Big Five personality traits are a framework used to broadly conceptualize individuals’ personalities based on their openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Nikčević et al., 2020). Openness concerns one’s trust in new experiences, along with certain creative tendencies. Conscientiousness can refer to an individual’s proclivity towards order and discipline. Extraversion/introversion, which is particularly relevant under lockdown conditions, is associated with positive or negative responses to external social stimuli. Agreeableness can be associated with an individual’s trust in others, along with modesty. Finally, neuroticism refers to one’s level of anxiety, depression, and other related traits (Matthews et al., 2003). Like all models meant to capture the nuances of human experience, this conceptualization is not perfect. Nevertheless, for our purposes, it can serve as an effective way to investigate how different personalities yield different personal and mental outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Openness

Openness to experience is defined by an individual’s desire to seek out new experiences. Nikčević et al., 2020 found that openness to experience was positively associated with COVID-19 related anxiety. The researchers hypothesize that because highly open individuals are more willing to engage in new experiences, they may take on the anxiety related to doing so during a public health crisis. Asselmann et al. (2020), on the other hand, hypothesized that openness could be beneficial during COVID-19, as open individuals would be more likely to stay informed and adjust to novel situations. Openness, therefore, represents a personality trait that could go either way with respect to psychological outcomes. On the one hand, being able to adapt to the new reality of mask-wearing, social distancing, and lockdowns can alleviate the anxiety associated with it. On the other hand, openness to risk-taking may leave individuals with a greater level of anxiety in the face of these risks.

In an analysis of 6,957 students in Germany, Asselmann et al. (2020) found that students who scored lower in openness felt less secure in public places during COVID-19. This adds weight to the hypothesis that openness could be associated with different psychological outcomes for different individuals based on how their openness manifests in the wake of the pandemic.

Conscientiousness

According to Roberts et al. (2014), conscientiousness refers to an individual's "propensity to be self-controlled, responsible to others, hardworking, orderly, and rule-abiding." When the COVID-19 pandemic began, both voluntary and involuntary measures were implemented to stop its spread in the United States and across the world. Given the fact that conscientiousness is closely correlated with one's tendency to follow the rules, it is easy to see how individuals who score high in conscientiousness may be more likely to follow stay at home orders. Thus, the mental health effects from conditions of quarantine may be more likely to be experienced by conscientious people.

Adherence to authority appears to ease some of the psychological burdens imposed by COVID-19. Qian & Yahara (2020) found that conscientious individuals were more confident in their own health by virtue of following guidelines. They were also shown to have a higher degree of confidence in doctors, which made them more confident in their safety during this health crisis. Another recent analysis conducted by Carvalho et al. (2020) corroborates this finding, suggesting that individuals who score high in conscientiousness tend to be stricter about following guidelines associated with COVID-19 (such as self-quarantining, handwashing, etc.).

While conscientiousness may help some individuals feel more secure during COVID-19, it can also have an opposite effect for similar reasons. According to Qian & Yahara (2020), conscientious individuals are also more likely to assume more significant risks in order to fulfill their work duties. This may also translate to expecting others to do the same if the conscientious individual is in a position of authority. This feeling of duty in the face of a public health crisis may have adverse psychological outcomes. In this way, conscientiousness represents a two-way street with regards to how people deal with COVID-19.

Extraversion and Introversion

Extraversion and introversion can be defined by what stimuli energized individuals (internal or external) (Wei, 2020). The common assumption in the wake of quarantine has been that extraverts would fare worse, as their social lives would be disrupted in a drastic way. This is due to the association of quarantine with an increased level of loneliness and isolation. Buecker et al. (2020) conducted a meta-analysis that showed extraversion to be negatively associated with loneliness. This is attributed to the fact that extroverts tend to seek out social situations actively. Under the restrictive conditions of quarantine, such social behavior would be diminished, possibly amplifying the loneliness of extroverts.

Conversely, some introverts have self-reported feeling relieved by lockdown conditions, as they no longer feel the pressure to leave their homes and socialize. Asselmann et al. (2020) hypothesize that “more extraverted individuals could have greater difficulties eliminating social contacts and activities, avoiding crowds, and staying away from public places and activities.”

Studies testing this intuition have reached variable conclusions. Asselmann et al. (2020) found that extraverted individuals were more likely to experience financial anxiety in the wake of the pandemic. This is hypothesized to be related to the fact that extroverts gravitate towards professions that are more greatly affected by the pandemic. However, the study did not find evidence to suggest that extroverts were more likely to forego lockdown in favor of social gatherings.

Wijngaards et al. (2020) found through survey data of 93,125 respondents that extraverts tend to fare worse under the protective measures imposed during COVID-19. Specifically, extroverts were more likely to experience depressive symptoms under lockdown conditions, while introverts were less likely. Furthermore, the stringency of such measures, while making individuals feel safer, disproportionately affect the mental health of extroverts.

Wei (2020) analyzed the moderative effect that introversion had on the psychological impact on 64 U.S. residents during COVID-19. This study found that higher levels of introversion were actually associated with worse mental health outcomes (such as anxiety, loneliness, and depression). This is attributed to the fact that introverts tend to suffer from these psychological problems in general disproportionately. Adjusting to the new norms imposed by COVID-19 may also be more difficult for introverts.

Regardless of personality type, research on college students’ experience of quarantine during the pandemic suggests that significant percentages of students experience loneliness (49%), major depressive symptoms (80%), and anxiety (61%) (Horigian, Schmidt & Feaster, 2020).

Agreeableness

The safety measures imposed in the wake of COVID-19 are often evaluated in terms of an individual’s willingness to follow them. Agreeable individuals tend to seek out social cohesion and are averse to conflict (Nofal et al., 2020). Therefore, it is hypothesized that agreeable people will be more likely to take proper precautions and follow safety guidelines than their disagreeable counterparts, as long as the community where they live and work is adhering to guidelines. Like conscientiousness, this may allow agreeable individuals to feel safer by complying with expert advice and authority.

Nofal et al. (2020) tested the association between agreeableness and compliance with safety guidelines during COVID-19. An analysis of 8,548 individuals found that agreeableness is positively associated with the adoption of behavioral guidelines associated with COVID-19. This is consistent with their original hypothesis. It is likely that in seeking out social cohesion, agreeable individuals will comply with measures that concern “the greater good” rather than defer to their own personal inclinations. Conversely, disagreeable individuals

may be more inclined to distrust rules requiring them to stay at home or wear a mask. Therefore, mental health outcomes associated with COVID-19 can be linked to one's agreeableness. Again, the politicization of mask-wearing and social distancing has also had an impact on people with various personality types, but those who are disagreeable are less likely to "follow the rules," and may be more vulnerable to conspiracy theories about the origin of the virus or the efficacy of the vaccines.

Neuroticism

The emotional stability of individuals defines neuroticism. People who are score higher in neuroticism are more susceptible to adverse psychological outcomes such as stress, anxiety, and depression (Asselmann, 2020). During a stressful time in a public health crisis, neurotic individuals may experience a higher degree of baseline changes to mental health (Asselmann, 2020). Furthermore, they may also be less likely to follow safety protocols and take personal measures to ensure their safety. Garbe et al. (2020) found that higher threat perceptions of COVID-19 led to higher stockpiling and hoarding of supplies such as toilet paper. This phenomenon suggests that high neuroticism individuals seek out a sense of control internally, rather than deriving it from an outside authority.

Nikčević et al (2020) hypothesized that neuroticism would be associated with a higher degree of health-related stress and anxiety during COVID-19. Sure enough, their study found neuroticism to be positively associated with anxiety during COVID-19. Under quarantine conditions, individuals who score higher in neuroticism fare worse in that the mental health effects of isolation and uncertainty are exacerbated. Liu et al. (2020) corroborate this through observation of 1055 Canadian adults. They found that neuroticism increases the perceived threat of COVID-19 and in turn, the proneness to stress experienced by these individuals. Having an amplified perception of the threat of COVID-19 may make individuals feel more hopeless and frightened, leading to negative psychological burdens adopted during quarantine.

In a large study of college students during the pandemic (n=2031) a significant majority said they had problems concentrating, felt fear, and worried about their academic achievement. Additionally, most were anxious about how they were managing distance learning (Wang, et al., 2020).

Personality Traits and Political Affiliation

One factor that has proven to be a significant predictor of an individual's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been their political orientation. For example, a survey conducted by Pew Research recently showed a deep divide in trust in medical scientists. This divide was on political lines, with 53% of Democrats reporting to trust medical scientists during the COVID-19 pandemic, but only 31% of Republicans reporting the same (Funk, 2020). The vulnerability of people who do not believe in science leaves them open to making unhealthy decisions, like foregoing vaccinations. Further, the partisan divide carries over as

a significant predictor of one's attitudes on social distancing measures. In May, 69% of Democrats supported social distancing measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. 49% of Republicans supported such measures (Funk, 2020).

What does political orientation have to do with psychological outcomes during a pandemic? Research has linked personality traits such as conscientiousness and openness to one's political orientation. For example, Gerber et al. (2010) found that political affiliation can be a significant predictor of political affiliation as education or income. Personality traits among individuals have real, tangible consequences during COVID-19. Not only do they affect our ideological response to public health measures, but they also affect our behaviors.

Conclusion

We hope the worst of the pandemic is waning, with vaccinations being required for CUNY students in in-person classes in the fall, and more and more staff and faculty are being vaccinated. However, we are feeling now that the pandemic has altered what will be the new normal. It is essential to consider how the realities of being in the classroom or not, how instruction will happen, and how the BMCC community will connect all differ on an individual level. While everyone is undoubtedly affected psychologically by the pandemic, the degree of such effects is not equal across the board. Personality traits can be a way to predict how different individuals will respond both internally and externally to lifestyle and public health changes during COVID-19. Furthermore, linking these personality traits to political ideology can add clarity to the current discourse on quarantine, lockdown, mask-wearing, and vaccination. Personality traits may guide decisions as to what and who individuals believe, and what measures they need to take to protect their health. The degree to which we can know our students and understand their personalities can inform our instruction and support their health and academic success.

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English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Students and Online Learning During COVID-19

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Health Education

The Rise in Online Learning

The shift to online distance learning was well underway prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. At BMCC, approximately ten percent of class sections were taught via e-learning in the fall of 2019, and 14 percent of students were taking at least one course via distance learning (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2020). Access to education at a distance is appealing to many students for many reasons. One is economic: students who learn online do not have to make significant investments in campus housing or commuting from home to class. For international students, higher education can be attained without moving from their home country if they want to enroll in a college in the U.S. They do not need to spend money on transportation, housing, and other essential items resulting from emigrating to another country. According to Yüce (2019), economic factors are among the greatest contributors to the rise of online learning for international students. Other factors include convenience, flexibility, and the easing of difficulties that some students have with in-person learning, such as social pressure, the need to speak English in class, and the perception that they must acculturate to norms of classmates.

As online learning has become more sophisticated and widely used, especially over the last year, its efficacy has been called into question. Some faculty who had no training in distance learning had to adapt quickly to a modality that they often mistrusted. Academic literature published before COVID-19 discusses the tradeoffs between asynchronous and synchronous online classes, and how they compare to the in-person format.

Reese (2015) notes the benefits and shortfalls of online learning in higher education. Students who engage in online learning may be more exposed to “cultural and global awareness, self-direction, risk-taking and creativity, communication, reflection, and real-world applications of knowledge” (Reese, 2015, p.35). Students who engage in online learning, particularly in the asynchronous format, must manage their time without the fixed classroom structure. This phenomenon, according to Reese, may lead to positive educational and psychological outcomes.

Other research had raised concerns about the benefits of in-person classes that are lost in the online format. Direct engagement in the classroom leads to a higher degree of cognitive absorption (Leong, 2011). Cognitive absorption refers to the extent to which content in the classroom is retained and processed by students. The relationship between direct engagement in the classroom and cognitive absorption mediates student satisfaction in their classes (Leong, 2011). Cognitive absorption experienced

by students is linked to social presence in the classroom. Students' attention is guided more directly when physically present, when students are surrounded by peers who are engaging in the same activity in the same place and time.

Another area of concern regarding online learning is student retention. According to one study from 2010, anywhere between 40%-80% of students taking online classes drop out of them (Smith, 2010). However, technology and online pedagogy have improved considerably over the last ten years, and more current research has shown that students enrolled in online courses have just a 10-20% greater chance of dropping out (Bawa, 2016). At BMCC during the pandemic, many instructors noticed that some students were "missing in action" when courses moved online, and that enrollment numbers fell over the pandemic year (as they have throughout CUNY).

COVID-19 has introduced some novel problems from a pedagogical perspective. Teaching language has a wide variety of approaches, such as reading, face-to-face communication, and total immersion. These options can be severely limited in online-only instruction.

English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in the COVID-19 Pandemic

English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is another descriptor for English as a second, or foreign language student. Benefits of international students learning English in an immersive environment include the ability to engage in cross-cultural exchange with native students. International students bring a unique perspective to the classroom that broaden every student's understanding of the world. Conversely, international students benefit from picking up on social nuances and nonverbal cues via direct communication. This benefit appears to be hindered in the online learning environment. While only two percent of BMCC students lived in other countries in the fall of 2019, that amounts to 500 learners who may have struggled in this situation. Added to that population, six percent of students in that semester (or 1,500 individuals) were non-resident aliens, many of whom were not native English speakers (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2020).

Bawa (2016) states that online classes impede the ability of students to engage in this kind of cultural exchange. In the online format, communication, social cues, and body language are reduced to the assumed "default" set by Western education. Instead of picking up on the nuances of other cultures in the learning space, they are instead "lost in translation" through technology (Bawa, 2016). Altavilla (2020) affirms this viewpoint, noting that software used for education can have unforeseen biases built into them. She uses the example of speech recognition software that is often used to teach languages online. This software can be beneficial for students to learn at their own pace, but the expectations built into the software can be biased towards native speakers. Non-native speakers may be at a disadvantage, as the speech recognition may not be able to correctly identify English as spoken by a non-native speaker.

The differences between online and in-person learning in cultural cues and speech recognition range from subtle to substantial, and their implications can be significant. Lowenthal & Dennen (2017) discuss how social presence in an online environment is affected by the medium by which individuals communicate.

Identity plays a major role in establishing one's social presence, as students are charged with positioning themselves in the classroom through communication. When communication is limited to text or video (if/when they turn the camera on), one's sense of identity within the classroom may be diminished. Communication in the classroom can largely depend on "the degree to which they share identity cues within their course communications" (Lowenthal & Dennen, 2017, p. 138).

International ESOL students face an added challenge because they are often stepping into a brand-new environment without the implicit social and cultural assumptions that their western counterparts hold. Taylor & Ali (2017) examined factors that hindered assimilation and learning among international students, and found language barriers, acculturative stress, homesickness, and discrimination to be among the greatest contributors. Online learning may increase the alienation felt by international students who are no longer immersed in an environment where they can pick up on familiar sociocultural cues.

Sawir et. al (2012) identified several studies that connect international students' language learning to academic success. Learning English is often cited as one of the greatest hinderances to international students' education. It is also an important foundation on which the rest of the education they are receiving is built. Learning English allows for better communication with professors and other students. It further improves oral and written comprehension on tests that are often used to measure a student's success (Sawir et. al., 2012). Prior education in English and other areas is often a major predictor of academic success for international students. Some academics are debating the politics of colonialism and white supremacy in academic literature, with the insistence on "academic" English for coursework. To what extent does this alienate, ignore, or erase minority students' identities?

On the other hand, Sawir et. al. (2012) suggest that English language proficiency for international students living in an English-speaking country is important for ensuring security. Security is defined by a myriad of factors relating to an individual's autonomy. Such autonomy can relate to major aspects of life such as the ability to get a job, or more subtle factors, like the ability to develop meaningful relationships with others in their country of study.

Without a cohesive way to bring together students, online classroom environments are reduced to mere information-conveying systems rather than a broader social development enterprise. Both student satisfaction and learning outcomes can be predicted by social interaction in the classroom (Akcaoglu & Lee, 2016). It is important for instructors to learn how to make the e-learning environment one in which students can have these social interactions.

At Borough of Manhattan Community College

Community colleges throughout the United States have experienced a disparate impact from the COVID-19 pandemic. Across a thousand community colleges in the country, enrollment is estimated to be down close to 10 percent since the start of the pandemic, which is double that of four-year colleges (Saul, 2021). Declining student retention rates during the pandemic are not only connected to the increased difficulty of learning in an online space. Issues that disproportionately affect lower-income individuals and marginalized groups exacerbate the attrition

rates. These factors include financial, housing and food insecurity, along with general uncertainty and stress related to health (Lederer et. al., 2020). We know our students also struggled with inadequate Internet connections and bandwidth, privacy/space issues, and access to appropriate technology. Between fiscal year 2020 and 2021, there was a 13 percent decline in full-time equivalent students at BMCC (Samuels, 2021).

Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) is an interesting case study with regards to the pandemic and its effects on more than 900 ESOL/international students. New York City is an area that has been profoundly affected by COVID-19 and the subsequent measures taken to control it. As of mid-July 2021, the city had accumulated nearly a million confirmed cases of COVID-19, with over 33,000 deaths (Choi, Velasquez, & Welch, 2021). New York State continues to have the fourth largest number of COVID-19 cases in the country, most of which are attributable to New York City (Elflein, 2021).

BMCC enrolls more international students than any other community college in the Northeast. Over 900 international students are enrolled, with over 130 countries represented at the school (StudyNY.com). International students attending the college are either housed at the residence hall or commute from areas surrounding it. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, BMCC followed the guidance of the CDC and moved 98% of their operations online (BMCC.edu). This posed a unique challenge for the international students at BMCC, as they were forced to either return to their home country or remain quarantined in their local residential space.

In addition to living in the area, international students also have the opportunity to learn English in an immersive environment under normal circumstances (BMCC.edu). The college emphasizes reading and writing for test taking. However, these classes were included in the 98% of classes moved online, and the pandemic and online learning challenges discussed earlier especially exacerbated the stress for our international students.

Recommendations and Conclusion

As the world gradually begins to open back up, the effects that the pandemic has had on students, both international and domestic, cannot be forgotten. Online learning will continue to have a profound impact on education as whole, as more students take advantage of the flexibility and affordability of the format. International students learning English as a second language may be of particular interest when considering possible challenges of this format, however. The intricacies of language learning coupled with the benefits of face-to-face interaction and immersion makes online learning particularly difficult for this pursuit. It also carries broader implications for how international students find community in their learning environment when not physically present.

One way to alleviate these challenges may be to encourage synchronous video classes for ESOL students. While not ideal compared to physical, in-person classes, it can serve as a middle ground by offering face to face instruction while also allowing students to reap the benefits of online instruction in general. The use of Voice Thread on Blackboard offers students practice speaking and listening in

English. Additionally, placing an emphasis on reading, writing, and comprehension may increase performance for international students' test taking.

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Faculty Professional Development and Mentorship: Reflections of a BMCC Department Coordinator

Anthony Naaeke, Ph.D.

Speech, Communication, and Theatre

Introduction

As part of BMCC's commitment to promoting and ensuring equity, diversity, and inclusion in the educational experience, various activities, workshops, panel discussions, training sessions and regular email correspondence through the Office of Faculty Affairs are organized and executed to assist faculty to be more effective in teaching, learning and scholarship. The Center for Excellence in Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship (CETLS) is particularly focused on faculty professional development and scholarship and its mission is very instructive:

The Center for Excellence in Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship (CETLS) is a faculty-driven center that serves the BMCC community by providing a forum for faculty to develop as teachers and scholars and to serve as pedagogical leaders. CETLS fosters cross-disciplinary dialogue about pedagogy and scholarship and provides opportunities for faculty professional development (BMCC, CETLS, 2021).

I am an advisory member of CETLS and in that role I participate in meetings where we discuss, identify topics relevant to faculty professional development, and organize panels to share ideas, research, and experiences. In addition to this college wide role, I am the Professional Development and Mentorship Coordinator of my department (Speech, Communication, and Theatre) where I organize and moderate professional development and pedagogy sharing sessions at a micro level. In this essay I will reflect on, and draw lessons from, the importance of faculty professional development and mentorship, with an emphasis on equity, diversity and inclusion, using my experiences as my department's Coordinator for Professional Development and Mentorship.

Faculty Professional Development and Mentorship

The importance of faculty professional development cannot be overstated. A publication by the AACU acknowledges this in a clear and succinct way:

As we enter the twenty-first century, faculty developers have identified three areas that are driving change and shaping the future of faculty development. The impact of the changing professoriate is a major influence.

How do we develop and sustain the vitality of our entire faculty—newcomers, midcareer, senior, and part-timers—as faculty roles change? A second factor is the increasingly diverse student body. How can we invest in faculty development as a means of ensuring that we cultivate more inclusive student learning environments and provide our best educational practices to all students, including those traditionally underserved by higher education? The third shaping influence is the impact of a changing paradigm for teaching, learning, and scholarly pursuits (AACU, 2021).

In an article titled, “The What and Why of Faculty Development in Higher Education: An In-depth Review of the Literature,” Amundsen et. al. (2005) give a working definition of faculty development as follows:

The term ‘faculty development’ is commonly used to describe activities and programs designed to improve instruction. ... More recently, the term ‘academic development’ has been used in some of the literature to refer to development activities and programs that more fully address the multiple roles of faculty (instructor, researcher, citizen and scholar within departments, faculties and the wider university community)” (2005).

Amundsen et. al. observed that the “definition is based on a more holistic view of the higher education faculty member within his or her institution” (2005).

Another perspective on faculty development proposed by Centra (1989), identifies four areas to consider as important components, namely: personal (interpersonal skills, career development, and life planning issues); instructional (course design and development, instructional technology); organizational (ways to improve the institutional environment to better support teaching); and professional (ways to support faculty members so that they fulfill their multiple roles of teaching, research, and service).

The three areas of concern that faculty development must address according to the AACU, apply directly to BMCC where the focus is on diversifying faculty, student/learner-centered teaching, inclusion, and culturally sustaining/responsive teaching to meet the needs of the diverse student population. When it comes to faculty mentorship, Koki states that the process extends far beyond supporting the induction of new teachers into the school system through professional guidance and encouragement. For Shadio (1996), cited by Koki (n.d), the heart of mentorship comes from “a commitment to education, a hope for its future, and a respect for those who enter into its community.”

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics is convinced that teachers need and deserve a strong, structured program of induction and continued renewal, including mentoring, to ensure their success and increase the likelihood that they will remain in teaching, grow steadily in professional expertise, and find lifelong satisfaction in a career of continued service to their student. The NCTM states:

The goal of any mentoring program is to provide the support needed to ensure the mentees’ success and long-term engagement in the teaching profession. To meet the challenge of establishing mentoring programs

that support teachers throughout their careers, NCTM recommends that “Experienced teacher leaders need to take responsibility for supporting the professional development of less experienced teachers and peers as part of both formal and informal mentorship programs and arrangements (2013).

As these institutions and scholars observe, faculty professional development and mentorship is important and, indeed, necessary to assist faculty to become more effective in teaching and scholarship and to prepare the next generation of teachers. As BMCC strives to recruit and retain more minority faculty and students, to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion, it should be obvious that a sustained program of professional development and mentorship is imperative at all levels.

My role as a Coordinator of Professional Development and Mentorship in the Speech, Communication, and Theatre department

When my department chair asked me if I would like to be the Coordinator of Faculty Development and Mentorship in the department, a new leadership role he created, I said “yes” because I felt adequately prepared to handle the role. I felt prepared because I have attended many faculty development workshops and training sessions over the years. The knowledge and skills I acquired in these workshops and training sessions would become useful resources in this role. For example, as a new faculty member at Indiana University (2003), I was required to attend a series of workshops that introduce new faculty to the University culture, policies, expectations, and commitments to students. Training sessions included helping new faculty to know more about our student demographics and needs and how faculty could be effective in supporting educational and career needs, as well as the identity struggles of students, through the syllabus, classroom instruction, activities, and out-of-class interactions with students.

Between 2003 and 2006, I attended other conferences geared toward Enhancing Minority Achievement (EMA) organized by Indiana University. These conferences were specifically concerned with helping faculty to prioritize assisting minority students to be successful through course completion and graduation. These conferences prefigured my most recent experiences at BMCC with the Resilient Teaching Workshop in the Summer of 2020 and the OER Course Redesign Seminar in January 2021. In these recent workshops, faculty were reminded of the commitment of BMCC to equity, diversity, and inclusion, and how this commitment could be reflected and actualized through a student-focused syllabus, course content, and culturally sustaining/responsive pedagogies.

This background preparation has enabled me to take the lead in selecting topics for the sessions labeled in the Speech, Communication, and Theatre department as “weekly pedagogy sharing.” These sessions are one-hour long meetings scheduled on different days and times of every week during a semester. Their purpose is to give every faculty member in the department a chance to participate in all or some of the sessions, as they deem convenient to their schedule and interest. The sessions can be conversational in nature, with the coordinator acting as a moderator. Often, the coordinator shares some input on the topic of the day, and faculty freely share their own experiences. Some topics we have covered include

equity, diversity, and inclusion; preparing a learning-centered syllabus; assessment-focused assignments; and engaging students, self-care, etc.

I have learned a great deal from these pedagogy sessions that I wish to share with the BMCC community:

1. There is a need for continued learning and reflection on teaching. No matter how long one has been teaching, there is always room to reflect on teaching practices, to make adjustments to suit the signs of the times and to respond to the diverse needs of the students. Our discussions of various topics at the department pedagogy sharing sessions reveal that no one has the answer to all the challenges faculty face in the classroom, and by sharing their experiences, faculty learn from one another and alleviate the stress of feeling that they are alone in their struggles in the classroom.
2. Some faculty are genuinely interested in improving their skills to be more effective in the classroom, and sessions like these give them a chance to share their experiences and to learn from others as well. Considering the challenges faculty face in the classroom, and the unreliability of course evaluations, the efforts that faculty make to be effective teachers by attending workshops and pedagogy sessions is sometimes overlooked when supervisors assess their performance based solely on student evaluations. This happens despite the fact that the BMCC handbook recognizes other ways of assessing teaching effectiveness to include peer classroom observation, the instructors' efforts, and success in developing new methods and materials suited to the needs of his/her student (BMCC Faculty Affairs Handbook).
3. The pedagogy sessions serve as a reminder that faculty have a responsibility to prioritize the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion in their course content, activities, and assignments.
4. Sometimes the sessions have helped clarify college and department policies to faculty, especially adjunct faculty.
5. Through these sessions I have personally come to know more about my colleagues who attend the sessions. This would not have been possible otherwise. We don't meet regularly.
6. By selecting topics for the sessions, scheduling the sessions, and moderating them, I improve my leadership, organizational, and communication skills.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have reflected on my role as the Coordinator of Professional Development and Mentorship in the Speech, Communication, and Theatre department at BMCC. The reflection briefly considered the importance of faculty professional development and mentorship, the place of CETLS as an instrument and forum for learning and experience sharing geared toward helping faculty to be more effective teachers and scholars, along with my role in professional development and mentorship at the department level. Because not every faculty member is able to attend or take advantage of the resources offered by BMCC through CETLS, departmental efforts such as what is done in the Speech, Communication, and

Theatre department is a key step towards supporting faculty to becoming more effective teachers and scholars.

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Spring Pedagogy

Marguerite Maria Rivas
English Department

Dogwoods were blooming, the daffodils were just about wilting, the sky was azure, and the Virginia Tech shootings had just shaken us all, students and professors alike. A few blocks away from the site of the former World Trade Center, I sat in a stuffy basement classroom with a group of remedial writing college students from all over the city. Some of these students had overcome obstacles that most people can't even imagine just to be sitting there that day. To say that I loved being their professor, to say that I just wanted them to write a cohesive paragraph and move on, to say that they inspired me, all of this is understatement.

Out of a class that, by the end of the term, was down to about 20, three had lost their mothers in the previous twelve months—one just three months prior to that sweet spring day, another just six months before. Both of these were beautiful girls but quite different in aspect. One was bold but defeated looking with dull eyes. The other was small, shy, wide-eyed and luminous. They shared the same pain, a hurt that no child should feel, one that is unfathomable. But it was finally spring in a semester that had started with the freezing January wind off the Hudson burning our ears and our faces. Now, we were all sleepy and had spring fever, and that is how it all started.

To break the end-of-the-semester monotony, I used to give my first-level remedial writing class short, fun exercises that I would use later in the day to jump-start my upper-level creative writing class. On this morning, I gave the class, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," by William Wordsworth, except that I deleted some of the words, so the kids could fill in the blanks to create their own poems, sort of Mad-libs with the Romantics. We got as far as "a host of golden daffodils" when the hands went up. They didn't know what a daffodil was, and their dictionaries had not yielded much information that would allow them to visualize one. I was a bit stunned. I looked at these eager faces, and a few-notso-eager, and one or two with the eye-rolling look that meant, "What, are you kidding? Those flowers they sell at the corner deli?," and decided we just needed to get moving. I thought of my dear mother, gone now five years, and her beautiful trumpeting daffodils that bloomed every Easter. Then I thought about her protracted illness, and our having to sell our family home to move her near my sister and me, so we could see her comfortably to her last hour. I looked at the two motherless girls sitting next to one another in the back of the classroom. One was disheveled, downcast, and ashen; the other was neatly groomed, dressed in white, brown skin shimmering, small, and sad. We needed to get out, out into the spring sunshine, out into the blue.

I told the kids to grab their backpacks. We were going for a walk to find some daffodils, to use our senses to make some word pictures. A few stayed behind, but the ones who came, well, my heart, my heart; they gave me such heart that semester. I needed it for I was mourning, too. I was recovering from my divorce from my true love, who turned out to be not so true.

The students and I headed down the concrete stairs of the campus that lead to the small park nearby. There were formal flowerbeds in the park, a playground, a gazebo, and some trees in full-flower. Lovely cherry trees, I supposed, in full flower. I brought my students to the first flowerbed and told them to close their eyes and just listen. There was a lot of “I don’t hear anything but traffic,” until a low-flying bird flew right past their heads, almost skimming one student’s ear!

One or two of my students jumped. One of my more challenged writers murmured, “A bird flew by.” I asked him how he knew. He said that he just knew. One of my sweet girls said, “I heard it flap its wings. I really heard a bird flap its wings!” She must have heard pigeons flap their wings before, as all New Yorkers have, but since the class and I agreed that pigeons are akin to flying rats, pigeons didn’t count. This was a bird, a “real” bird.

One of the boys said, “Yo, Miss, that’s for real. I could hear the wings, too.”

Another said, “No, I heard a squeaking sound.”

Another, a hard working student and the kind that befriends others less gifted, settled the argument. My nickname for him was “Johnny Angel”; I used to sing that song to him to snap him out of his reverie. I know it sounds peculiar that I would sing “Johnny Angel” to a student in a college classroom, but that semester I would do anything to get those kids to write, even a Flamenco dance. For real.

“No, that wasn’t a squeak. What do ya think? It was a mouse? That was some kind of little chirp from far down his throat somewhere, probably a mating call.” Johnny Angel had spoken, and having earned much respect from all of us, it was settled.

Since I’ve always believed that the best way to teach writing is to start with sensory details, I had my students compose a sentence together, out loud. It started with, “A bird flew by.”

I asked, “How do you know it did if you had your eyes closed?”

One of my sweeties said, “I knew a bird flew by ‘cause I heard its wings flap.”

Another said, “Not so hard flapping, though.”

“Okay, more, let’s say more.”

One student shouted, “Miss, Miss, get some paper. I’ll write it down.” And so they began and after composing and revising, built up to, “By the gentle flapping of its wings and the throaty chirp, I knew, even though I couldn’t see, that a bird was flying past me in the sunshine.” There it was! All semester I use myriad approaches to teaching descriptive writing, and here at the very end, right before the big final exit exam, was the most wondrous sentence of all.

Now a year later, as I sit here and write this essay, the college professor in me thinks, “This is a splendid example of a student-centered, teacher-guided kinesthetic approach to teaching descriptive writing.” The creative writer in me, however, knows it is spring, and the trees are blooming, the sap is running, and the birds are crying their mating songs.

But this episode was just the start of what may be one of the most important teaching experiences of my life. The best part was probably the most profound, and sometimes things profound are hard to write about, and I didn’t even get to the daffodils yet.

We walked along in the early morning sunshine just north of where the World Trade Center used to be, and the sky was the same blue as that awful day, and the

daffodils were wilted and brown. The thrumming of life all around us, however, negated all of that. We came upon a gorgeous grove of flowering trees with full-blown white clusters of delicate blossoms. The class knew just what to do. They were quiet; some would stop and close their eyes. Some would just feel the varied textures; others just sat. A few climbed them and hung upside down from the trees' sturdy boughs. I could see several moms and nannies giving them dirty looks, but the students were oblivious.

Throughout our journey, I modeled behavior that is part of my writing process: scratching twigs and inhaling deeply, kneeling down, closing my eyes and gently passing my hands over the grass, rubbing a new green leaf in my palms, having them breathe in the new life. The last thing that I did was to lay flat on a park bench so that I might gaze upward through the flowering bowers to the patches of blue above. Some of the kids stopped what they were doing and looked at me with interest. Dressed in a business suit looking ever-so-serious with my black-rimmed glasses, I lay exhausted stretched out on this park bench looking heavenward. I thought of my mother, who, a child of the Depression, could not go to college, but nonetheless, gave me the gift of words. My mother was brilliant. She was also incredibly kind and loving, too. What she loved most dearly were children, words, and spring flowers

That day her presence was palpable. For real. Turning back to look at my students, I could almost imagine her among them, nodding as they read to her, challenging them to find just "just the right word for nothing else would do." I then gazed up again at the white blossoms and floated there for a few minutes. I am inarticulate, even now, to describe the joy that I felt at that moment with my students all around, some exploring at a distance, some close by. I knew that they were really getting it. They were living the connection between the natural world, with all its beauties and all its sorrows, themselves and their writing. I knew that they would take this morning and recreate it someday with their own kids. They came away from that morning writing so vividly, their essays imbued with life through their own senses and sensitivities.

I looked over to see my small, shy, motherless child looking at me intently. The kids noticed, too, as she approached me tentatively. She wanted to try it, to lay flat on her back and float into the blossoms. We could all see it. I got up, and some of the other young women in the class, and Johnny Angel, surrounded her. I whispered to her, "Go do what I did. Stretch out on the bench and just look up at the flowers and the sunshine coming through."

After more encouragement from the class, she whispered, "Professor, I'm scared. Will you sit next to me?" I did.

Everyone was silent as she took her place on the bench. She lay down with one hand clutching tightly to the edge of the bench as though she were holding onto a life raft in the middle of a storm-tossed Hudson. I asked her if she would like me to support her so she could relax. She said that she would. I put my arm around her shoulders to cradle her and whispered that sometimes when I see something beautiful I talk to my mother. She asked if she could do the same and if her mother could hear her. I couldn't lie to her, so I told her my truth: I believe my mother can hear me when I speak to her, especially through something so

beautiful as a spring blossom, whether cherry or lilac. I told her, however, that she'd have to try it and decide for herself.

The entire class was still. We could hear toddlers sifting sand in the sandbox nearby, nannies chattering, and a guy jogging around us micromanaging on his cell phone. Eventually the whole class encircled this beautiful, brave child, my other motherless child standing close by, back now straight, eyes alive. "Good," I thought. I held fast to the woman-child on the bench and helped her to breathe deep breaths and coaxed her to let go and to float, and as I did, I felt my mother's presence suffuse my soul. Then I felt this woman-child's body relax as she gazed into the filtered sunlight and the sweet spring blossoms. Her classmates were still. Some were still encircling us; others watched from a distance.

Looking at my students, seeing this woman-child so meditative and her counterpart suddenly so sassy, I understood the learning and teaching process that existed millions of years before Piaget and all the rest. I knew that I had taught lessons that day that my mother had taught me, lessons that could not be found in any curriculum or on any syllabus. I knew also what my students taught me that day, too. They taught me hope. My students and I learned the unquantifiable that day—nothing can truly ever fill the place in your heart left vacant by love lost, but sometimes in spring, if only for a moment or two, your heart can have amnesia and you can find yourself again in a cluster of white blossoms.

The Visual-Mobile-Urban Everyday

Deborah Gambs

Social Sciences, Human Services, and Criminal Justice



In the Introduction to Sociology courses I teach, I take the opportunity to make connections between my research interests and student learning. Though I have been interested in pedagogy since graduate school, my teaching philosophy is gradually coming to rest on the importance of finding a way to engage my scholarly interests in the classroom and to invite students to consider how sociologists consider the world. Sociology classes are typically considered to provide facile connections between course material and everyday life, but I have come to believe that there is also a benefit to students accessing the everyday life of a scholar.

One could argue this is particularly true of the visual element of the world. When I ask students to make a list of what images they encounter, it has often been a brief list. But when I ask them to list where they see these images, it quickly becomes apparent that they are simply everywhere. I would argue their list of the types of images they see is brief because they see so many, they've not noticed them. I have them list the locations they see images, so that they note the excess of visual information we regularly take in. This, I explain to them, is one reason that visual sociology is a growing subdiscipline and methodological approach to research.

Howard Becker first analyzed the similarities between the development of photography and the discipline of sociology in the 1970s. Only more recently as visual images have permeated popular culture through print media, film, television and in particular the internet, has visual studies been given serious attention outside of art history. With the enormous volume of image transmission at the turn of the 21st century, however, the interdisciplinary field of visual culture studies has grown along with visual communication, visual rhetoric and visual sociology.

Visual sociology includes both the use of photographs to illustrate sociological arguments, as well as sociological analysis of already existing images.

Visual sociology may also be becoming increasingly popular because visual technologies are more accessible, portable, affordable, and personal than ever before. The technological developments are important because today most students have at their disposal a camera that they carry with them everywhere they go; on their mobile phone, of course. Since teaching at BMCC, I have been struck by the way in which the cell phone has become a technical extension of most students' bodies. That mobile phone is always within arms' reach, often nearby in a pocket or pocket book or shoulder bag, "hidden" under the desktop in a lap, or out in full view on the desk next to notebooks, pencil cases and textbooks. My own enjoyment of mobile phones, and my own pleasure in the new possibility for having a digital camera with me at all times, provides one way of connecting with students, and engaging students in one form of visual sociology. Yet I also must intentionally share with students the critical lens I have developed and continue to develop in my training and practice as a researcher.

Globalization has increased the sense of mobility in our environment. The technology of the mobile phone camera intensifies that further. Photographs taken by camera phone are often taken "on the move," literally—while walking, with a brief stop to snap. They are small, highly portable, held in one hand and ubiquitous, thus they are often used to capture brief moments of the everyday. The following photographs show some of what we experience in the public spaces of the urban everyday: construction and scaffolding, signs along the street, the street itself, and parks and food carts.

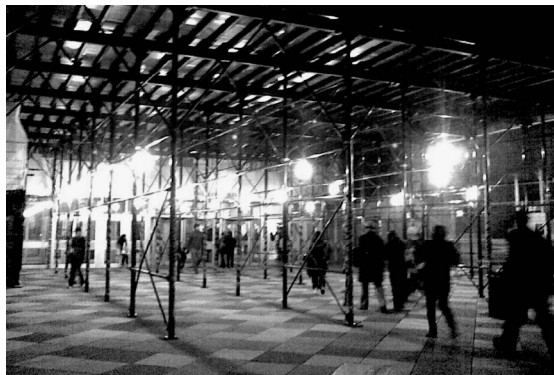


The photographs in this essay were taken as part of a larger experimental study with colleague Deirdre Conlon, of Emerson College, Boston. The paper, "Crossing Gaps, Encountering Thresholds: Texting urban images of the everyday from Boston to NYC and back" was presented at the *Visuality/Materiality* conference, London June 2009.

We used mobile phone cameras to photograph our walk from the subway or "T" to our workplace; we then text-messaged those photographs to one another.

We analyzed both the photos and the process of taking, sending and receiving the images. The photos included here were deemed

beyond the scope of that project and were not used. They are in fact my “leftovers” of this project, taken in excess.



In an urban environment, construction is a common site. Buildings are in flux, the density and number of buildings means we are used to seeing physical structures change before our very eyes. Sometimes scaffolding is a nuisance. Sometimes it is like the pothole we see but quickly incorporate into our visual field and take minimal notice of. We

walk between the metal posts, we dip into the open entrance between metal bars that divide the walkway into sections, we rest our bag on the temporary railing to dig for our keys. Sometimes, at night, lit by safety lights, scaffolding is beautiful in its foreign-ness and its temporary attachment to the building. As a kind of appendage to the building, it extends the structure of the building further into space.



**ANGRY ABOUT THE NEW MTA FARE HIKES?
FEEL LIKE THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO?**

**COME TO A
PEOPLES
PUBLIC
HEARING**

MTA Metro Theft

AND TELL THE MTA WHAT YOU THINK!

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14TH -- 5 P.M.

53RD STREET BETWEEN 6TH & 7TH AVENUE

COME AFTER WORK -- NO APPOINTMENT NECESSARY

The non-elected board of the MTA wants to raise subway fares, close booths, impose new bridge tolls and lay off transit workers.

This might not be a problem for the \$350,000-dollar head of the MTA, Elliot Sander. The rest of us can't afford another MTA fare hike.

This is absolutely the wrong time to be raising fares and cutting train and bus lines. The MTA shouldn't even think about transferring its debt crisis to us -- not when the biggest banks and Wall Street firms, located here in NYC, have just been given trillions of dollars by the government.

If anybody should bail out the MTA, it's these multi-billion dollar corporations. They're the ones the MTA owes its money to in the first place -- and they could use a fraction of their bailout money to solve the MTA's debt crisis.

Wednesday night at 5 PM, at 53rd and 6th Ave, come to a People's Public Hearing, located in front of the Hilton, where the MTA will be holding its hearings.

First it was the bailout -- now the MTA wants a direct bailout from people who use public transportation. If we get together, we can change the course of the stream of money that's only been going to the banks. The workers at Chicago's Republic Doors and Window did it -- we can, too!

BAIL OUT THE PEOPLE MOVEMENT 212-633-6646 WWW.BAILOUTPEOPLE.ORG

As a public institution, BMCC is a locus for sharing information, and in this case, political information. The environs of BMCC are a space for public discourse. A site of civil society that is increasingly mourned, feared lost, whose existence is debated.



Trees and nature can be scarce in the urban environment. Notice the ways in which trees are buttressed in urban environments, protected from the public, or from litter, or how their source of water is enhanced by for instance, the tree bladder.

Visual Sociology Writing Assignments

This essay requires that you explain one theory (Marx's theory of social class), connect it together with one concept on social class from the Chapter 8 of the text, and illustrate your discussion with images. You will do this by discussing an issue of social class you feel is important today.

What is one issue of social class that you feel is of concern today? (It does not have to relate to the current economic crisis, but it may.) In your essay, discuss this issue, using one of the main arguments that Marx and Engels make in "Manifesto of the Communist Party." You should pick an aspect of their argument that you feel is relevant for understanding social class. (You do not have to agree with them) Also select one concept on social class from the text. How is this concept related to or different from your discussion of Marx's argument?

Finally, using your cell phone camera, please include three photos that illustrate your essay.

Visual Sociology & Globalization

In the excerpt on "Globalization" reprinted from sociologist Anthony Giddens' book *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping Our Lives*, Giddens offers two perspectives on globalization. He argues that there is a skeptical and radical perspective, and that the radical perspective is most correct. He then goes on to explain why the radical perspective is correct and the range of complex forces involved in globalization.

Although Giddens does not specifically discuss visual images, the transmission (spread) of images and objects is also part of globalization. Using your cell phone camera, take a photo of something that you consider to be an object/artifact of globalization. Discuss this image and/or object using Giddens' theory of globalization. Be sure to define globalization and as part of your discussion explain 3 of the different forces that Giddens argues are part of globalization.

At the end of her essay "Bodies/Cities," Elizabeth Grosz writes that we "will no longer be disjointedly connected to random others and objects through the city's spatiotemporal layout; it will interface with the computer, forming part of an information machine ..." The methods researchers use today are increasingly intertwined with external technical objects such as laptops, cell phones, cameras, camcorders, netbooks and software. The circulation of images by mobile phones add to our experience of the post-representational. In the assemblage of object-image-human-phone, objects, images and humans become partnered and embedded in transhuman living/organic networks. Humans also become a medium for information transmission and affectivity. We become senders and receivers of sensory snippets of the world, biomedica responding to chirps and beeps, not mechanically but selectively.

“Caring For” and “Caring About”: Teaching Caring in an Age of Fear

Helen A. Dalpiaz
Nursing

In the Nursing Department, there are approximately 500 students who have finished their pre-clinical requirements and are now in the clinical portion of the program. These students put themselves through a rigorous curriculum over a two-year period of time. The science of nursing, based in anatomy and physiology, microbiology, chemistry, physics and pharmacology, as well as the liberal arts, is tempered by what we generalize under the umbrella of “caring.” The National Council of State Boards of Nursing, which oversees licensure for professional nurses, defines caring as “an interaction of the nurse and client in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. In this collaborative environment, the nurse provides hope, support and compassion to help achieve desired outcomes¹.”

Over the course of their academic and clinical preparation, students are acculturated in the value of caring for patients’ physical, psychosocial and spiritual needs without making moral judgments related to the cause of illness or consequences of lifestyle. This is not always easy. Some of our students have not known much caring in their own lives and come to us closed off, unwilling to give of themselves emotionally. In addition, nursing has traditionally been used by many capable but disadvantaged people, especially women, as a pathway out of their present life situation or economic inequality and, ultimately, as a means of entry into the professional middle class. Therefore, many of our students want only to invest their study time in memorizing the facts they will need to finish the program and pass the licensure exam. Just like an Ivy League school, caring is too expensive and leaves them too vulnerable to the elements that may have hurt them in the past. Helping the students learn how to use their knowledge and, just as importantly, their presence at the bedside is challenging. It is also, for me, one of the most rewarding facets of teaching nursing.

That caring is not an optional skill in health care is a fact that everyone would accept. The faculty continually reinforces and looks for evidence of demonstration of this most human of values. For without caring about our patients as human beings and caring about life as precious and worthy of dignity and respect in every encounter, we would fail to provide a necessary and crucial service. Computer programs can dispense medication on time, measure vital signs, and monitor symptoms of complications with uncanny accuracy. But a computer program cannot be written, and, I suspect, never will be written, that can hold a frightened child’s hand or encourage a mother laboring to bring a new life into the world. A programmed machine cannot sit with an elderly gentleman struggling to breathe or help someone leave his or her life with grace and peace. But what exactly is caring?

¹ Hertz, J. et al (2000) *Linking the NCLEX-RN® National Licensure Examination to practice: 1999 practice analysis of newly licensed registered nurses in the U.S.* Chicago: National Council of State Boards of Nursing

Like love or faith, it seems that we can all recognize caring when we see it or experience it, but in defining it we need to pause and reflect on its true meaning. I have chosen to separate caring into two dimensions, both of which I feel are important for our students to incorporate into their nursing practice. The first is “caring for,” the easier of the two. Nurses, as caregivers, convey the benefits of medical technology by administering treatments and medications accurately, by gathering clinical signs and symptoms and documenting progress, or the lack of it. Nurses exercise skills that restore health, prevent disease, and provide comfort. I think we would all agree that administering chemotherapy, vaccinating children, assessing vital signs and monitoring a mother and her fetus in labor are concrete, valuable skills that serve the greater good. But if caring were simply “caring for,” limited to a set of skills learned to perfection, it might not be so elusive to pin down and define.

Caring is a universal phenomenon that influences the ways in which people think, feel and behave in relation to one another. It describes a wide range of involvement, from parental love to friendship, from caring for one’s work to caring for one’s pet, to caring for and about one’s clients (patients). This brings us to the second dimension of caring, caring about, an ability that is as difficult to teach, as it is to judge because affective qualities and experiences, unlike actions, cannot be objectively evaluated. Caring about involves actions and behaviors that express concern for the personal well-being of a patient, such as sensitivity, comforting, attentive listening, honesty, advocacy and support. Caring about is profoundly relational. The nurse and the client enter into a relationship that is much more than one person simply “doing tasks” for another. There is mutual give and take that develops as the nurse and client begin to know and care for one another. An interconnectedness forms between the one cared for and about and the one caring. Both the nurse and the client are influenced through the transaction, for better or worse. Caring about one’s patients is interpreted by many as being a moral imperative, which provides the stance from which one intervenes as a nurse. The ability to provide presence, to be with another person in a way that acknowledges one’s shared humanity, is at the core of nursing as a caring practice. Eye contact, body language, voice tone, listening and having a positive and encouraging attitude create an openness and understanding. To care for another individual, one must understand the context of the person’s life and illness. Caring is at its core, raw, deep and personal, because empathy, compassion and mobilizing hope for our clients, transcends the limits of everyday openness and allows access to the higher human spirit. For our students to be truly prepared to practice professional nursing at the end of the program, they must, at the very least, be as competent in “caring about,” as they are in “caring for.”

I began teaching at BMCC just two weeks before 9/11. The excruciating pain that the terrorist attack brought to our campus and to our city has given way to a sad acceptance that our lives have changed forever and that fear of violent mass death and destruction is no longer a foreign problem. And, because our survival as a people and as a community depends on being prepared for the worst that humans can inflict on their own kind, we have been forced to give names and shapes to these terrifying dangers and to bring them into the classroom. We

have begun to incorporate the elements of disaster nursing into our curriculum. Our students must have the skills to triage mass casualties as dispassionately as any battlefield commander. They must be able to rapidly assess physical injury and psychological response in the victims of mass trauma and to intervene with basic therapeutic care. They may have to decide how we can best distribute finite medical and nursing care to hundreds or perhaps thousands of injured and dying people. The student nurses may have to decide which of the victims is likely to survive and whom to make comfortable while he or she awaits death. As health care workers, nurses must be able to recognize the general signs and symptoms of exposure to chemical, radiological, nuclear and explosive agents. In my usually happy subject of Maternal and Newborn Nursing, I must prepare my students for emergency childbirth. I wish this were just in case they were on their way to school one evening and a fellow passenger on the E train *went* into labor at Canal Street! While that's certainly possible, I know that traumatic events like the WTC disaster often trigger labor in women at term. Life struggles to survive even in the midst of death, and our students must know how to protect it.

I attended a professional conference not long ago, where the guest speakers were two Israeli nurses who worked in the Intensive Care Unit of a major trauma center in Tel Aviv. Almost every day brings them the casualties of the horrific violence convulsing the Middle East. Occasionally, the person who perpetrated a bombing survives and arrives by ambulance alongside his or her victims. Can one look at innocent civilians, often children, who are maimed or dying from a car or suicide bombing and not feel rage toward the person who committed this senseless act? Can that same nurse then turn and give equally skillful and compassionate care to the young man or woman lying on the stretcher next to that bloodied child or young mother knowing that he or she willfully created this destruction? The Israeli nurses said that they had learned how to separate their personal and professional feelings not simply in order to do what is morally right toward another human being, but to protect themselves from the anguish around them. Perhaps it is the human face of these hate-filled fanatics that terrifies us the most. Given another set of circumstances, they could be us or we might be them. The staff had learned how to care for these patients' physical injuries without discrimination, but found that they did not care about them. Not surprisingly, they also felt that their choice, while understandable, cost them something spiritually on a human level. The morality of setting aside one's beliefs and denying presence and compassion to a patient who, given the opportunity, would try to kill us is not a choice of conscience that I have ever personally had to make. (I would not be so arrogant as to judge these nurses or anyone else in this regard.) Once would be hard enough; however, to make that decision on a daily basis would be excruciating.

This brings me back to our students who now have to learn the symptoms of diseases like smallpox and bubonic plague, scourges that few physicians and nurses working today have ever seen and that, not long ago, we had congratulated ourselves for eliminating from our world. They need to be able to recognize those who might be the first victims of a deliberately released biological toxin in our environment. Sadly, our students will graduate into a world where the old enemies of hunger, poverty, disease and ignorance have made room for a new demon,

unpredictable violence carried out on a potentially massive scale in order to intimidate societies and control the course of human events. Somehow, we must teach compassion for all in an age of terrorist hotlines and radiation-sniffing dogs, in a time when we ride home in the evening with the National Guard on our trains. Difficult as it is, we must teach our students to care about the humanity of people whose beliefs put them in direct conflict with our own and who seem to hate us so vehemently. What if one of these people is their patient? Will they be able to care for but not care about the person behind the ideology?

Caring and compassion are best taught by example. As faculty, we must be willing to demonstrate openness and empathy first to our students, and then to the patients we assign to them. We help students to assist family members to become active participants in a client's care. We demonstrate the use of touch and skillful and gentle performance of nursing care procedures. We help them to analyze their own body language and tone of voice, and to listen to what the client has to say with full attention and interest. We help our students and their patients to find an interpretation or understanding of illness, symptoms or emotions that is acceptable to both and which may involve a transpersonal aspect such as God or a higher power. Finally, we help them to utilize their knowledge and nursing skills, by demonstration and verbalization, in direct or indirect nurturant activities, processes and decisions that assist people in ways that are empathetic, compassionate and supportive, and that are dependent on the needs, problems and values of the individual being assisted. In short, we must not only train our students in the skill of caring for, we must show them the gifts of caring about.

Caring, in each of its dimensions, has been a part of the nursing discipline since its beginning and has been studied from a variety of philosophical and ethical perspectives at least since the time of Florence Nightingale. For many nurses, being able to assist individuals during a time of need is the reason for entering the profession. Human beings have great resilience in the face of seemingly overwhelming circumstances. The profession of nursing, unlike medicine, can care and assist people without medical diagnoses or new technologies and treatments. Caring is a motivating force for people to become nurses and it becomes the source of satisfaction when nurses know they have made a difference in their clients' lives. The task for our students, as for all of us, is to prepare themselves for the new realities of our world without losing their humanity in the process, without losing their compassion for one another and for those they pledge to serve. It is not an easy agenda.

Interrogating Inequality in a Socioeconomically Diverse Classroom: Lessons from the Sociology of Family Course

Rifat Salam

Social Sciences, Human Services, and Criminal Justice

Abstract:

This paper explores the experience of teaching topics related to family inequality to students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. While much pedagogical attention has been paid to teaching students about inequality, especially about the structural bases of inequality, it is also important to examine the ways in which students from disadvantaged backgrounds respond to studies and theories which describe the very inequalities they experienced in their own lives. The focus of this discussion is what happens when teaching topics in family inequality, such as nonmarital childbearing, teenage motherhood, and childhood poverty, when the students have experienced these situations firsthand. The first half of the paper raises a series of questions around this pedagogical conundrum and the second half presents strategies which can be employed when teaching this population. The discussion and strategies offered in this paper are relevant for those teaching in settings with students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, where they may need to address the potential alienation of poor and working class students. The paper may also offer insights to a broader audience of instructors who teach subjects related to social inequality and social problems.

A few years ago, a colleague and I attended a conference at the University of Pennsylvania called "Thinking About the Family in Unequal Society." We both teach sociology of the family in a diverse, open access public institution and were excited by the prospect of bringing back new information and research to our classrooms. One of the things that we realized was that the scholars whose work we ask our students to read are very far removed from the type of nontraditional students we teach. This is not surprising given that most tend to be professors at elite research universities. Their research is written for an audience very different from our students, many of whom come from backgrounds identical to the "fragile families" they study. One researcher said that her students could not fathom why an unmarried teenager would opt to have and raise a child and that it was a pedagogical challenge for her to explain how the phenomenon can be understood in broader sociological context. This was a particularly striking anecdote since in any given class I teach, there may be several students who were or had been the children of unmarried teenage mothers. What was it like for *those* students to read studies about nonmarital teenage childbearing? From that moment, I began to actively interrogate what I realized was a distinct aspect of inequality I was experiencing in my classroom. This cannot be a unique situation as I have heard

colleagues at similar institutions describe the challenges of having their students sociologically confront the inequalities they experienced in their own lives.

I began to rethink my own pedagogical approach in order to actively address the diverse experiences of these students and explore ways to equip them, both intellectually and emotionally, to read scholarship describing the inequalities they know all too well. In this paper, I explore the issue of teaching inequality to students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and discuss pedagogical strategies and specific assignments I have used to help students deal with topics that are personally resonant. I also raise questions about the ways in texts themselves may have an alienating effect on students who may feel their experiences have been objectified and judged by social science research which examines the lives of people in circumstances similar to their own.

It is no secret that today's college students are an incredibly diverse lot and that the traditional, middle-class, resident student is no longer the norm. However, it is not always easy to determine how that should shape our pedagogy. Most college textbooks start from the assumption that students begin learning from a place of neutrality. Contemporary pedagogical approaches do recognize that students bring their prior knowledge and experiences to the classroom. Sociology professors are well-positioned to understand and explore the significance of those experiences and knowledge and how they frame students' educational experiences. Knowing this on a conceptual level, however, did not prepare me for teaching sociology in a setting where students' lives were shaped by the very "social problems" under study. When I taught the same topics and used the same text as a graduate student instructor at a selective private university, I had not encountered this scenario and was perhaps naïve in my first semester teaching at an urban community college. What I encountered in that context is a complex learning environment where the student population is not only diverse in terms of ethnic and racial backgrounds, but also in possessing varying levels of academic preparedness and a variety of family experiences and social class backgrounds.

What is it like to read about unwed teenage mothers when you had been one yourself? What is it like to read about the impact of absent fathers when you never knew your own father? What is it like to read about the challenges faced by the families of incarcerated individuals when you have a loved one who is incarcerated? I considered myself a sensitive, thoughtful instructor who worked hard to create a safe and respectful learning environment. But here is what I encountered: students were curiously silent. When we talked about gender inequality or poverty in general, they were very vocal and engaged. They especially loved critiquing middle class "intact" families with their second shifts and helicopter parenting. But when it came to subjects whose experiences mirrored their own, they shut down. Nancy Davis (1992) identifies three "classroom climates" which can emerge in sociology courses focusing on inequality: 1) resistance, where students deny the existence and/or importance of inequality and resist structural explanations; 2) paralysis, where students are depressed and paralyzed, unable to see the potential for creating social change; and, 3) rage, where students are angered by injustice and are unable to get past the anger and develop a nuanced understanding of society. The students at various points exhibited some combination of the three but their reactions were

not those of students confronting their class and race privilege and therefore, their resistance, paralysis, and rage take on a different quality. Embedded within these responses are feelings of shame and embarrassment—feelings they are unlikely to admit openly. They do not deny the structural barriers that exist in an unequal society and they acknowledge the persistence of racism and discrimination, having faced or witnessed both in their own lives. Yet they believe so strongly in the achievement ideology that brought them to college in the first place, that they resist a critical examination of the ways in which family social class and educational inequality are part of a stratified system which reproduces existing class boundaries. Their belief in their own path to success through their personal characteristics and effort also makes them skeptical of studies which focus on barriers to equality. Their anger, when it emerges is often directed at “bad” or “lazy” people who might be members of their own communities and there are always eager to share the story of “the welfare cheat” or the women who have too many children with too many different men. Their anger is also directed at research itself, with students challenging the validity of data collection or denying the conclusions of the studies they had not closely read or read at all. Healthy critical thinking and challenging ideas is a good thing. But some students find the texts difficult to read and what they have to say depressing so they end up displacing their frustrations. They become angry at the researchers whose work we study and then avoid completing the reading and writing assignments entirely. Early on in every semester, I let my students know that learning sociology is not like studying ancient societies or the nature of subatomic particles, where the subjects seem far removed from everyday life. Rather, they should prepare to tackle “real life” issues and they will not always feel comfortable with or comforted by sociological analysis. This is especially true when studying the family when the subject matter may truly hit uncomfortably close to home.

There are numerous studies in the literature on teaching sociology around classroom activities and techniques designed to help students learn about the structural bases of inequality. They offer strategies for dealing with uncomfortable topics like racism, sexism and homophobia (Ablev, Vincent and Haney 2008; Harley 2009; Jacobowski 2001; Obach 2000) and I have used variations on a number of “classic” activities. However, I was hard-pressed to find anything to help me teach students about inequality when their own lives may resemble those of the subjects presented in the research we study.¹ Davis’ (1992) heuristic device can be helpful in understanding the potential reactions of students—there is resistance and denial, paralysis and anger. Often that anger is unarticulated, and unproductive and prevents students from learning material and developing their critical and analytical thinking skills. Halazs and Kaufman (2008) call for using what they call a reflexive pedagogy where teaching becomes inextricably linked to sociological practice. In taking this to heart, I started to incorporate what I knew about my students on a sociological level and began to adapt my reading and writing assignments as well as my entire pedagogical approach to teaching the family to this population.

The family course at my institution is taken by students as a required option for human services and early childhood education majors and as an elective by

¹ For an exception, see Carreiro and Kapitulik (2010) “Budgets, Board Games and Make-Believe: The Challenge of Teaching Social Class Inequality with Non-Traditional Students.” They discuss the ways in which many classroom activities designed to have students understand the experiences of the less fortunate (e.g. make a household budget based on poverty-level wages) are ineffective and alienating to non-traditional students whose real-life experiences may resemble the simulations.

other students. The students who take the class for their major are predominantly women, ranging in age from their early twenties to their late thirties and beyond. The rest are liberal arts students who are interested in learning about the family, with the occasional post-B.A. student taking the class to prepare for application to graduate programs in field such as counseling or education. Out of a typical class of 25 students, I rarely have more than four to five male students in a section. The classes tend to reflect the demographic profile of the institution, with the majority being students of color and native-born, 1.5 or second generation and some recent immigrants and international students. It is not unusual for at least one or two students to be enrolled in a special program for single mothers receiving public assistance. At the same time, there are an increasing number of students from financially hard-pressed middle-class families attending community college to save money before transferring to a four-year college. These students are typically better prepared academically in terms of their reading and writing skills and tend to be exempt from remediation. This creates internal stratification within the class, not only in terms of students' social class backgrounds but also their academic preparedness, furthering the feelings of marginalization experienced by students of disadvantaged backgrounds. By the time they take the family course, an upper-level social sciences option, they have completed remedial English courses but their reading comprehension and writing skills are developing and longer and more analytical paper assignments are still challenging.

All classrooms are inherently unequal, at the very least in the relationship between the instructor and his or her students. However, this relationship is further complicated when there is a wide social and cultural gap between instructors who come from relatively privileged backgrounds teaching students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is a not a new problem and the issue has been explored in the K-12 context with teachers working in disadvantaged communities. However, the distance can be palpable in a college classroom, where students are older can perceive the difference as a feeling of disconnect that might inhibit their ability to be engaged in the classroom environment. So it is not only the subject matter and sociological analysis which can be alienating to poor and working class students. Indeed the persona and background of the instructor (or the students' perception of such) can heighten feelings of marginalization, especially where students might feel they are judged as having a lower status and academically deficient.

Pedagogical Challenges

The first semester that I taught this class at my current institution, I was baffled by a number of problems, among them: 1) students did not do the assigned readings; 2) students did not have much to say in class and wanted me to lecture (see #1); 3) with only a few exceptions, students were especially silent when we discussed controversial topics; and, 4) the students did not seem to have the requisite motivation and/or skills to successfully complete the paper assignments. With this in mind, I began looking for ways to address some of these problems. After completing workshops based on the Writing Across the Curriculum pedagogical approach, which emphasizes "writing-to-learn" and writing process, I started teaching the course as "Writing Intensive." This resulted in smaller class size

(25 versus 38) and a writing-focused pedagogy, Problem #4 did become more pronounced as the course required more formal writing than many of the students were accustomed to. However, the smaller class size enabled me to switch to a “seminar” style and assign more informal writing and to have more interactions with my students. Still, getting the students to successfully complete longer formal papers was still a challenge.

The first two problems on my list are not uncommon for anyone teaching at non-elite institutions and with many students coming out of remediation, mine had skills issues which affected their comprehension of their assigned texts. That too is a problem of inequality, with native-born students from disadvantaged backgrounds having greater challenges with academic preparedness. The reasons for number three became apparent when I assigned students reflective or autobiographical writing where they talked about having a child while still in high school or growing up in a family receiving public assistance. Dealing with problem number four was a bit easier as I began to incorporate the strategies of Writing Across the Curriculum, including writing-to-learn exercises like reading journals, revision strategies to help students improve their writing process and by developing better paper assignments.

Over the last five years of teaching this course, I began to employ the reflexive pedagogy that Halasz and Kauffman (2008) described. I determined that I need to address the following:

- Deal with the issue of academic preparedness and “remind myself” of the ways in which it is linked to structural inequality
- Choose texts carefully and provide students with context about the readings and their authors
- Encourage deep and critical reading of said texts
- Employ writing as a source of learning and dialogue
- Promote active engagement in the classroom, especially of those students who have felt marginalized in their prior educational experiences
- Offer opportunities for personal reflection—a place for negative or difficult feelings to be expressed in a safe way

Most instructors who consider themselves good teachers and those generally sympathetic to the idea of “meeting students where they are,” are probably already doing these things. Though like me, most may not have had the opportunities to consider these aspects of teaching prior to beginning their teaching careers, either as graduate student instructors or newbie assistance professors. I started to think about how to do each of these things in very focused ways as I tweaked my class over several semesters, with an eye towards preventing my students from “shutting down” in the face of topics which hit too close to home.

Academic Preparedness and Reading Deeply and Critically

It is not possible to address educational deficits rooted in years of K–12 education and/or language barriers, not to mention cultural capital issues, in the space of one college semester. However, there are assignments and resources that instructors

can use and provide in order to help students improve their skills. The first area to address is reading. The primary text is Skolnick and Skolnick's *Family in Transition* which includes excerpts from "classics" (like William Goode or Hochschild's *The Second Shift*) as well as contemporary studies related in family issues and related social problems. In addition, I have my students read the entirety of Annette Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race and Family Life*. For many of the students, the texts are difficult to read so I start the semester with guidance on how to approach academic texts (using strategies used in remedial reading courses) and how to write summaries. Students are required to write a brief summary on each of the assigned readings covered in our twice-weekly class sessions. In addition, students are asked to start reading Lareau's book independently with several "check in" activities and class discussions on the study starting in mid-semester.

The reading summaries function as reading "journals." After summarizing the readings, I ask students to include a separate section just below where they are asked to generate at least 2–3 questions, comments, opinions, reactions, etc. from what they read. The students do not particularly like doing these journals as they find them quite time-consuming. However, they inevitably report that writing them helps with the comprehension of the text and they are glad to have had the writing practice. Towards the end of the semester, they report that the volume of writing they did gave them a greater sense of confidence around writing than they felt before. Being required to write journals on their readings "forces" them to do readings they might have otherwise not done and they come to class prepared and even excited to discuss the topics under discussion. At the end of class, I give students a sneak preview of the next set of readings, and give them context or information about the author where it is relevant. This sets up the assigned readings as a critical component of their learning and demonstrates my confidence in their ability to do the work and engage in a critical dialogue with the authors they read.

In addition to the informal (i.e. non-graded) writing in the form of reading journals, students are required to complete two paper assignments. They both incorporate the technique of "scaffolding" where shorter writing activities or assignments build up to a longer paper. Students start these papers with an informal writing or discussion activity we begin in class and are required to develop and submit at least one draft of the paper they are working on. When scheduling permits, I often have a class visit to the college's Writing Center and make sure students are well acquainted with the resources and tutoring services available there.

Choosing Texts and Developing Assignments with Reflective Aspects

As I described earlier, the primary text I use in the class is an anthology which features a wide range of topics in the sociology of the family. "Standard" marriage and family texts tend to be written in a uniform style and do not prepare students for reading authors writing in a given discipline so it was a deliberate decision to use an anthology which includes different types of discipline-specific writing in the study of the family. Many of my students have voiced the fear that community college courses "dumb down" content and that they will not be adequately prepared when they transfer to a four-year college or university. I use a text that is widely used at four year colleges and universities but I provide my students

support and context to help them with their reading assignments. It's an excerpt of a study, we discuss the body of literature it addresses and the methodology and rationale for the larger study. We identify and discuss different types of academic writing and their purpose and scope.

The decision to use Annette Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods* came from trial and error in my attempt to have my students read original research. My original goal was to have students read an entire book since most students have not ever read the full account of a sociological study. In the past, I asked students to choose from a recommended list of books representing a range of contemporary research in the sociology of family. They were then asked to write a summary and critical analysis of the book. Instructors tend to think that students like choices and I thought that having a choice would result in students being more interested in what they chose and consequently write better papers. However, students seemed to pick books at random and on second glance, I realized that 1) the books I gave them as choices represented what I thought were worthy or important studies and not what the students were actually interested in, and 2) most students did not have the context to decide which studies were interesting to them. In addition, I felt that students may have a better experience if we all read and discussed the same book, sharing in the challenges and the discovery of what the study had to offer. In employing my version of reflexive pedagogy, I decided to have my students read a study which confronted the issue of family and inequality directly and had elements which would engage any reader interested in family life in the United States.

Five years later, in evaluating the course, students report that reading Lareau's study was the most important learning experience they had in the course and advise me to continue to use the book in the future. *Unequal Childhoods* brings into focus many of the topics we studied all semester and provides students an immediate buy-in. In addition, the ethnographic methodology and the engaging writing style is an important part of why students react so strongly to the book. The portraits of the children and families representing "focus children" from the study are so compelling that students are drawn in and want to read it to the end (especially as the second edition now has follow-up data.) It also resolved the dilemmas of teaching inequality to the disadvantaged by presenting students with a research that connects structural inequality to lived experiences representing differences in childrearing styles and unequal family resources. When they begin to connect the theoretical underpinnings of the book with the data presented, students do not experience the book as judging deficiencies in poor and working class families but rather one which presents the challenges and opportunities children experience as a result of their family social class background. The ethnographic data allows to students to see the larger picture of what families experience in everyday life, making it more difficult to dismiss than the quantitative studies they had been skeptical about earlier in the semester. Students then begin to reexamine their initial responses and to explore their resistance, resulting in the development of a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which society structures inequality. In this way, I find that using a sociological study, rather than a more narrative or journalistic account of "fragile families," works to achieve my larger learning goals for students. They do not feel that their family experiences are invalidated or exploited by research

but they can explore their feelings through the sociological lens provided by the book. The resolution of their ambivalence and feelings of shame, embarrassment and resistance happens while they critically analyze a sociological study, grounded in the methodology and theoretical perspectives of the discipline. They are also immensely proud when they finish the book and the attendant paper.

As I noted earlier, I develop writing assignments employing the pedagogy of Writing Across the Curriculum with an emphasis on informal writing, writing-to-learn and a focus on the writing process. The reading summaries/journals form the bulk of the informal writing and writing-to-learn in the class. In addition to the summary and critical analysis of *Unequal Childhoods*, students are asked to write a reflection paper at the beginning of the semester. The first paper serves as an autobiographical exploration of their own family lives and socialization experiences and it is largely graded for effort and basic content. Students are given a set of guidelines and asked to submit a draft and then show that they made revisions to their papers—this speaks to the academic preparedness issue as most students are unaccustomed to producing revised writing. This is a critical habit for any writer, developing or more proficient but students tend to avoid submitting drafts so I assign a significant number of points for the draft and then for demonstrated revision. I encourage students to incorporate what they read so far and students will often review their journals to find a reading that “spoke to them.”

The summary and critical analysis paper based on *Unequal Childhoods* is challenging for most of my students. Students are given short activities and assignments as they start reading the book and are also given an assignment guideline sheet for the paper. The guidelines give the students directions for analyzing the study through a series of questions to ask themselves as they read the book. It also gives the students an imaginary audience for the paper. I ask them to imagine that they had an internship at a social policy organization dealing with children and education and that their boss asked them to write a summary and analysis report for her as she is too busy to read it herself (a scenario they love—a big, important person who is too lazy to read!) After discussing methods, theory and policy implications, students are then asked to conclude with their personal reflections on the study and to try to make connections to their own real-life experiences. Many of the students have written about their experiences working with children in daycare centers and after-school programs or have talked about rethinking their own family experiences through this newly acquired theoretical lens. Because they are usually writing multiple drafts (at least one of which they must submit for feedback), most students are successful in fulfilling the requirements of the paper and feel a tremendous sense of accomplishment.

Promoting Classroom Engagement

As I stated earlier, in my initial experiences of teaching this class, many students demonstrated resistance, paralysis and shutting down. While there is still occasional resistance towards the beginning of the semester, I have experienced fewer students “shutting down” and perhaps not coincidentally, fewer students dropping out or “disappearing” from the class. Instead of doing a lecture-style class, I run

the sessions like a modified seminar and employ quite a bit of visual sociology to promote discussion. For every topic/set of readings, there is a set of guiding questions/themes presented on PowerPoint slides. At the top of class, we start with a set of images which connect to the topic being discussed. For example, when we discuss changing gender role ideology, there are images from various historical periods described in a reading or when we discuss the social construction of childhood, I will show images of children from different eras including contrasting images like portraits of upper class Victorian children alongside a photograph of their working class contemporaries working in a textile mill. As a group, we work together to answer the questions presented and we connect the images to the topic under study and contemporary social issues.

Because the majority of students have completed readings journals, it eliminates the issue of students not discussing because they did not do the readings. Students who might not otherwise speak up in class report that they felt more confident about class participation because they had written about the topic and had prepared a set of questions and comments. The less academically prepared students reported that they felt confident because they realized that they *could* do the readings, even if it was challenging because the reading/writing task gave them a place to articulate their confusion and generate questions. As an instructor, I became less of an authoritative entity and more an active and interested participant, albeit one with a little more background knowledge. Using classroom technology, we could explore the topics further using youtube videos, news excerpts, websites, as questions and relevant controversies arose in the context of discussion. As a result, the classroom atmosphere became one more of collaboration than a one-way depositing of knowledge and I truly am surprised by and interested in what my students contribute to my understanding of the subject.

None of these strategies are new and indeed, they are employed by many professors interested in pedagogy and creating engagement and successful learning in the classroom. I have incorporated them over the years, learning various strategies from the numerous teaching workshops I have taken and from colleagues from a variety of disciplines. They can be used in any classroom settings, not just those with socioeconomically disadvantaged students. However, when there is a subsection of students who are particularly vulnerable to feeling shut down or alienated in a typical college classroom, these techniques might help to address their (often unarticulated) feelings of embarrassment or vulnerability.

Conclusion

This paper interrogates a type of inequality that we tend not to directly address in the context of teaching and learning. As a sociologist, I have a deep understanding of the ways in which my students' lives have been impacted by structural inequalities in American society. Until teaching at a large, open access institution, the topics in family inequality were academic subjects I studied. My knowledge of family inequality was "from books" and not situations I experienced firsthand. However, learning about the details of my students' family lives and their experiences of living inequality opened my eyes to how their experiences of learning these subjects were so different from my own. Their resistance and shutting down led

me to rethink my pedagogical approach in my sociology courses and I think other instructors could benefit from using their own versions of reflexive pedagogy, especially as it relates to the potential alienation of students around discussions of inequality. Discussing social stratification can make students feel uncomfortable but they can always distance themselves from “social structure,” an abstract idea. However, when reading about social problems they themselves have experienced and when disadvantage is part of your own personal history, it is difficult to overcome feelings of alienation or suppressed shame.

Shame and alienation are not a fruitful place to start the learning process and in my own experience, it was importance to reframe how my students “read” studies about family inequality and how they feel about the sociological analyses of these issues. My initial goal was to buffer them from negative feelings generated by the course but the strategies I used created a better learning environment for all my students, regardless of their family backgrounds. Middle class students began to think critically about their own assumptions about family life and the transmission of advantages and those from less privileged backgrounds felt more confident discussing and writing about these issues, putting their life experiences in larger social and structural context. I would also like to think that the activity of reading and writing itself helped the students develop skills that go beyond my class, including critical thinking skills that will serve them in the rest of their college careers and beyond. As sociologists, we interrogate inequality all the time, but perhaps in our teaching, we might examine the ways in which sociological knowledge itself and the ways in which we teach inequality might inadvertently promote the perspective and cultural capital of academic elites. Those of us who teach and work outside those ivory towers must be especially mindful of who, what and how we teach.

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Teachers as Imaginative Beings

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My experience as a teacher educator in urban settings has led me to see that my student' educational experiences are shaped by a pedagogical system that is hierarchical and non-interactive. Paulo Freire (2000) refers to this model as the "banking concept of education" (p.71) in which students are reduced to storing bits of information provided by the instructor, who considers her/himself a superior authority, and "turns them [students] into receptacles to be filled" (p. 72). In this educational model, students' experiences and ways of interpreting the world are not welcomed. The learning process has no personal relevance and students are discouraged from creating meaning out of the content taught because they cannot see the connection between what they are learning and their lived experiences.

Over the course of time, this educational approach can weaken students' faith in their own power to transform the world and they see it as fixed, unchangeable, with units of knowledge set, and defined by the authority figures pontificating in front of the classroom. Because of this, students begin to lose faith in their capacity to imagine and to create changes. Maxine Greene (1995) defines the imagination as the "ability to look at things as if they could be otherwise" (p. 19). We must be capable of imagining things as we want them to be before we can see ourselves as agents of change. If students cannot develop their imagination, they cannot envision their own power to create and recreate the world in which they live.

This concerns me in incredible ways because if my teacher education students cannot see themselves as imaginative beings they will go on to teach in ways that do not encourage the development of the imagination or the empowerment needed to create social change. Maxine Greene (1995) once said:

Imagination is as important in the lives of teachers as it is in the lives of their students, in part because teachers incapable of thinking imaginatively are probably also unable to communicate to the young what the use of imagination signifies. If it is the case that imagination feeds one's capacity to feed one's way into another's vantage point, these teachers may also be lacking in empathy. (p. 37)

Infusing the Arts in Our College Classrooms:

I believe that infusing the arts in our college classrooms is a way to help students enhance their capacity to imagine and hinder the feeling of disempowerment that results from being in a banking approach of education. Exposing our students to the arts can help them learn in ways that are critical and divergent and can help them see things in a different light because it allows them to express themselves, bring their experiences into the classrooms, relate them to the works of art, and to the content we teach. It allows them to see themselves as imaginative beings.

An example of this aesthetic process can be seen in a course I taught for the first time this Spring 2013 called EDU 203: Art in Education. According to the BMCC catalogue description, this course is “an introduction to the theories, methods and materials for integrating visual arts into the elementary school curriculum. Through reading, writing, and hands-on studio art projects, the students will experience and discover the intellectual and emotional joy of creativity and develop effective strategies for integrating art within a 1–6 grade curriculum to students with diverse cultural backgrounds.” EDU 203 offers me the opportunity to bring forth four goals that I consider important when educating future teachers in ways that empower and supports the enhancement of the imagination. First, I hope to convince prospective teachers that they are imaginative beings capable of creating, understanding, and utilizing the arts to teach in creative ways. A second purpose is to help future teachers see the connections between the academic content they will teach and the arts, to understand how they can use the arts to assess student learning, to know children on a deep level, and to enable emerging bilingual students to use multiple ways of expressing and using content knowledge. A third aim is to teach future educators to use the artistic organizations and the artists from the community where they will teach as a way of bringing their children’s experiences and cultures into the learning environment. Finally, most of our BMCC Teacher Education students will teach in public inner city schools where art is one of the first programs eliminated when budgets are cut. I want to empower teachers to use the arts on a daily basis so children do not miss out on the arts and they do not perpetuate the same oppressive systems of education that do not allow students to develop meaning from the knowledge imparted.

A mask making activity illustrates how I address these four goals. I invited a teaching artist and current BMCC student, Keith Saari an expert in mask making, to join me for this session. Based on a presentation and discussion of the role of masks in different cultures my teacher education students work in pairs to create their own mask from inexpensive and easily available materials. Based on what students have said about this activity and others, they are increasingly aware of their creative powers.

As students make their masks, we discuss and journal about the use of masks in different cultures—connecting Social Studies and Literacy content; we measure and use vocabulary such as symmetry and asymmetry, parallels, lines, angles, curves, patterns, and reflection—connecting Mathematics content; and we mix colors and concoct materials—connecting Science content. This portion of the activity exemplifies how arts can be integrated into all academic subjects. Observations of and conversations with students reveal what they understand about the roles of masks in different cultures and about the content areas they will teach—connecting to assessment. In addition, this activity engages all students, including emerging bilingual learners.

Keith’s presence models what I hope the future teachers will do—invite members of the community into their elementary school classrooms. Keith and I encourage students to think about masks in their own cultures and to use those elements in their mask making, emphasizing to students how they should take into account the cultures and experiences of the children they will teach—integrating cultural awareness.

Finally, as students see themselves as creative beings and realize how possible it is to integrate communities, cultures, academic content, and assessment through the arts, they develop units of study that incorporate the aforementioned elements and that can be used on a daily basis in their future urban school classrooms.



Concluding Thoughts:

There are many other ways that the arts can be integrated into our college classrooms. BMCC has a wonderful partnership with the Rubin Museum. The purpose of this partnership is to unite Rubin Museum teaching artists with BMCC faculty to help us find the connections between the works of art exhibited in the museum and our academic content and to give our students an aesthetic experience that is meaningful and unforgettable. I encourage faculty interested in learning about ways to enhance their teachings through the arts to reach out to any of the members of the BMCC/Rubin Museum Partnership committee chaired by Dean Michael Gillespie.

The Primacy of Passion: On the Requisites of Education

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“The barbarian, late or early, is typically an unmitigated pragmatist; this is the spiritual trait that most profoundly marks him off from the savage on one hand and from the civilized man on the other hand.”

—Thorstein Veblen, *The Higher Learning in America*

There is one core truth about education that is easily recognized by most but, tragically, is repressed in our society. That truth is that *you can only become educated if you like it*. One can be trained or schooled, but to become someone who is educated it is necessary that you have a love, a passion, for the thing itself.

Many of us know educated people. My friend Constantine is educated, his eyes light up when he explains financialized capitalism by way of T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land”. My friend Carla is educated; she can talk for hours about every English translation of Max Weber and which concepts have been mangled by each. My friend Michael is educated; he can map out every innovation in materialist thought from Epicurus to Alain Badiou. George W. Bush, not one of my friends, is schooled but not educated, he has degrees from Yale and Harvard but prefers clearing brush on his ranch to discussing Aristotle.

Many forces today conspire to preclude such a passion from forming, and to extinguish it should it emerge. First and foremost, in this regard, is the contemporary reduction of education to practical concerns, whether they are the careerist pursuits of teachers and administrators or the quest by students for formal credentials in their struggle to secure a position in the labor market. The notion today that education is a good onto itself, that any question of economic impact and vocational aspirations is in opposition or, at best, secondary to the process of intellectual creation and understanding is unthinkable to most. Questions regarding the importance of universities or other educational institutions are dominated with calculations of economic impact, graduation rates, employability, and salary differentials. Students are advised on what to study based on projections regarding future needs of the labor market. For students with an eye toward getting the best job and the highest salary possible, any substantive qualities of what is being taught quickly vanish. Readings, discussions, essays, all are simply means toward the ends of employment, certification, a better mousetrap, or a host of other pragmatic goals.

This raising of market values and practical concerns as the highest, and often only, value in education not only corrupts the aspirations and sensibilities of students, it also transforms the procedures of education in ways that make

schools and universities ever more antagonistic and alien to the love of thinking. Schools employ an elaborate system of human dressage by way of which students are sorted, processed, formatted, and distributed. The techniques involved in this dressage (repetition, punishment and reward, standardization, tracking) lead many students to, quite naturally and correctly, view and experience education as oppressive, humiliating, brutish, and boring. The current trend of standardized curricula, exhaustive testing, police roaming the hallways and campuses of schools and universities, and ever growing tuition and debt rates (which compel nominal students to view themselves as consumers and/or investors that need to maximize “satisfaction” and/or “returns”) are key elements in an ever tightening vise of a market ethic and bureaucratic coercion which has largely destroyed the mission, privilege, pride, and honor of being a student. Under such conditions it is no surprise that the machinery of schooling today is extraordinarily efficient in minimizing education and maximizing training and subjection.

If we take these two simple positions as points of departure, that to be educated you have to want and like it and that schooling today overwhelmingly works against the formation of such a desire, I believe there are many important implications for those of us who teach in institutions of higher learning, especially institutions like BMCC. Although we have no choice regarding the society within which we find ourselves and possess little agency in relation to the broader system of schooling that our students have been subjected to, how and what we teach is still, largely, within our control. What can we do, then, to help reverse the damage done to students and to encourage the formation of a passion for intellectual life? How can we break from the broader pedagogical trajectories of the present in order to, at a minimum, do no harm to the capacity of students to think and to their desire for such thinking? It is undoubtedly true that there are students who, despite all, come to us with a passion for intellectual inquiry that has taken root and flourished even in these barren and inhospitable times and many more students still have the potential living within them. For such students, what it is that we can do to further that passion or potential? In the remainder of this necessarily brief exploration of the why and how the encouragement of a love for thinking should be a primary focus for all university teaching, I will highlight two areas of instruction: what we teach, how we grade. The intended character of this essay is not to present some blueprint for teaching. Rather, by examining teaching through the lens of how it might impact the desire for thinking, I hope to problematize some common teaching practices and uncover what are often opaque ideological implications with an eye toward some broader discussion of the reasons behind the how and what we teach.

Although it may be the case that some students come to form a great love of thinking completely externally to their classroom experiences, for many of us this passion was passed down from someone in school. Witnessing a teacher’s great passion often inspires and spreads a love for thought. At a minimum, it is clearly the case that unless the teacher or professor themselves is passionate about the substance of what they are teaching, there is little chance that the students will be passionate about what is being taught. A fundamental requisite of teaching needs to be that the teacher is invested in what they are teaching.

Of course, the goal here is not that we simply act excited about the class but that we are teaching ideas, questions, readings, and concepts that we consider to be important and valuable. There is a great threat to this in colleges such as ours where the vast majority of what we teach are introductory, survey, classes. Whereas specialized graduate level or upper undergraduate level classes are often very much narrowly within our areas of greatest interest and expertise, this is not always true of introductory level classes. More importantly, textbooks are, much more often than not, the foundation for introductory level undergraduate classes. The danger present here is that we end up teaching material that is not that which excites our own interests and does not go to the heart of the questions and problems that we consider to be the fundamental and key ones in our subject areas. In my own field of political science, for example, introductory textbooks are often immense collections of empirical facts, pie charts, graphs, and descriptive accounts. What one does not often find are the concepts and questions that underpin social scientific inquiry. How is it possible to become interested in social science from textbooks that are largely devoid of the substance of social science? The textbook industry, from giants like Pearson on down, creates textbooks to appeal to as wide a range of instructors as possible. In so doing, the content of the books become homogenized and inoffensive, appealing to the lowest common denominators within each discipline. Having a strong, explicit, analytical point of view or being too conceptual would not bode well for sales. The only people whose pulse gets racing about textbooks are the accountants who keep track of the profits and royalties. Although I am sure that there some areas of inquiry (such as the natural sciences or mathematics) that may be more amenable to textbooks, in my own experience I have found it impossible to teach from any one textbook and also have the class correspond to a meaningful exploration of the key questions and problems of the subject area. Thus, I believe, in introductory classes especially, students need to be exposed to the most meaningful sets of readings and ideas possible. Regardless of the level of study, students need to be taught those texts and arguments that we ourselves think to be fundamental. When we teach something that we consider important and meaningful, the probability exists that some of the students will come to share that passion and judgment. In short, the “what” we teach needs to be very strictly of our own choosing and the decision of what we teach cannot be surrendered to the textbook industry or other forces that attempt to homogenize and standardize content and curricula.

As important as what we teach is how we assess students. Grades have no pedagogical value. Sorting students in terms of their relative performance does not help them understand the material being taught or the world around us any better. Grades, of course, do exist and are important since they indicate how students performed relative to each other; grades function as a way of helping select which students will be chosen for jobs, graduate schools, scholarships and awards, and so on. In educational institutions that were detached from the labor market (such as Plato’s Academy) or, at least, struggled to not be subsumed by market discipline (the first years of the University of Paris VIII, 1969 to the mid-’70s) assessments have normally been pass/fail, students needed only to master the substantive content well enough to be able to move on to the next

level. A key problem for us becomes how to use the grading system we have in ways that are consistent with the demands of education and to keep students from experiencing and reducing higher education to a competitive struggle for credentials and resources or to an oppressive and punitive set of practices. Since it is impossible that a love for thinking can be created through fear and threat, students need to experience grades not as rewards and punishments but as a way to maintain some discipline and focus. One very key dimension of this point is that grades need to be exclusively about the substantive foci of a class. That is, a deduction of marks for something like class attendance and lateness would indicate to students that teaching them to be on time is indeed a goal of the class. It is likely that this is not one of the 'learning objectives' of the class but many instructors might fall into the trap of thinking that using the threat of a grade deduction will get the students to attend the class more regularly. That may or may not be true but it is a certain that using coercion and threat will not lead to a love for what is being taught just as it is true that attending a class is not sufficient for understanding what is being taught. This is also true regarding a host of many other formalities that some may take into account regarding grades, things like fonts, referencing styles, and deadlines. Why penalize for deadlines? Is it an unfair advantage that one student had more time than another to complete an assignment? Why emphasize referencing styles? Are they in any way pertinent to the substance of the assignments? Does it matter if the authors' initial or entire first name is used or if the title is in italics or underlined? Grades need to indicate as clearly as possible, what it is that we consider to be the substance of the class, and what we want students to learn from the class. This allows the student to recognize and fully focus on what it is that we hope to teach them.

Similarly, the more that our classes remind our students of the heavy handed disciplinary practices of the high schools that many have endured, the more they will perceive us and our classes as antagonistic to their own autonomy and development. The more our own classes break with what many of our students have experienced in high schools, the more likely that they can appreciate and come to care about the substantive content of what we are teaching. In addition to using grading to make clear and allow students to focus on the substance of a class, grading can also be used to help maintain the discipline that a student needs to successfully achieve the objective of a class. Rather than using grading to penalize and strike fear, grading can act as a tool for helping students maintain and intensify their efforts. In my classes, for example, I allow students to revise and resubmit essays as many times as they like. I give back written assignments with comments and suggestions and students are free to rework them and hand them back in to be regraded. Ideally, students can use the process to continue their efforts on understanding the material.

If passion is necessary for education to be possible, all that inhibits or decreases that love for thinking needs to be eliminated. In our own classes and departments, we need to be absolute in our focus on higher education and cautious of external, practical, influences and attempts to reduce students to consumers or investors. When we focus on creating a climate that most encourages students to develop a passion for thinking, for attempting to understand the world around them, many

tendencies that have become second nature in our universities become recast. What we teach and how we grade, most importantly, need always to be considered from this standpoint. Even though the broader society in which we find ourselves is anti-intellectual and becoming more barbaric by the day, we should do our best to maintain the traditional role of universities as a sanctuary from this barbarism and to maximize the chances that students develop as thinkers and civilized beings.

Stop Talking or Start Talking

Domenick Acocella

English

“Domy, stop talking or I’ll put tape on your mouth!”

“Okay. Sorry.” But I wasn’t sorry and I would continue to talk. I had a lot to say. There were a lot of strangers in the class, and I wanted to know them all.

So I kept talking and she kept threatening.

I did not take her seriously. Why would a teacher put tape on my mouth? I wasn’t talking that much more than the others, was I? The others had been told to quiet down during long division as well, so, really, what worries should I have?

Having arrived from Holy Name of Jesus Christ, a Catholic school, to Trinity School, a K-through-Six public school in New Rochelle where I didn’t have to wear a tie and fear the particular wrath of Sister Mary Ellen Francis, the principal, I thought the talking I was doing in class appropriate. Wasn’t I free in public school?

So I talked.

And she, eventually, box-tape taped my mouth shut. One piece across the lips. At least twice a week I would have that awful-tasting beige tape on my mouth.

At the time, my mother knew about the teacher’s method but didn’t really say anything. Now a Montessori-licensed daycare provider, she still wishes she “knew then what I know now about teaching. I would sue the shit out of that woman and the school.”

But that whole tape ordeal is in the past. I never really held it against the teacher. And I still don’t. And I never learned in that class to keep quiet in her class or any other teacher’s class. I had, after all, tape on my mouth every week in that third grade class. I would also go on to fourth grade and beyond to spend many hours after school for talking during quiet time or reading time or any other stupid time the teacher needed to just hear silence.

Ah, the myth of the perfect student. I count myself as barely ever having threatened to be one of those students. I had no sense of an imagination that teachers could connect with. I hated taking risks. I daydreamed in the middle of my own comments. So, now, as an instructor, how can I expect perfection from my students, imperfect as I was, and let’s be honest, still am? The idea of the perfect student is quixotic, but admirable—isn’t that, indeed, what quixotic is all about? I don’t think my third-grade teacher was looking for perfection, but I do think she wanted quiet.

In my sophomore year of college, I recalled this teacher’s failed strategy of silencing me (indeed, not only did I not stop talking but other students also started donning the box-tape accessory about their lips) with a friend who had also been perceived as too talkative in class. He boasted that he had been worse than I when it came to blabbering.

“What?” Andre intoned when I told him of my third-grade trauma. “Shoot,” he reflected, “my teacher moved me around the room.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Instead of telling me to stop talking, which would never happen anyway, he would sit me next to a quiet kid—we had a lot of ESL kids who didn’t talk in class at all. And there I was. I wouldn’t stop talking, and in a week or two, these kids would start talking. Then the teacher would move me onto the next one.”

“That was smart.” As I said this, rage grew in me. A box-tape-taped rage.

I thought of Andre’s teacher’s strategy as I stood in front of my first City College composition class, FIQWS Engineering. I met the first of the talkative students before class had begun. He rode BMX bikes, he told me, and that the others were on their way to the room. He then told me his name. I gave him mine and smiled. A few minutes later, three minutes before class was to begin officially, the remaining twenty-two students walked in, smiling, apprehensive, and dubious about me, about the classroom, about the subject.

I watched my semester’s writers as they moved to select their seats for the next fifteen weeks. They had been at The City College since Monday and it was Friday. The lines had been drawn and the allies picked, already. Some had made friends and already had inside jokes. Others sat in the corners, toward the back of the room, silently, looking at me, looking at the board upon which I had etched in dusty chalk my name and contact information.

The quiet students sitting in the back and to the sides, not wishing to draw too much attention to themselves, immediately caught my attention. They unwittingly reminded me, strangely enough, of Andre’s and my teachers’ innovative ways of dealing with talking in class.

My ideal student is my ideal teacher. She is a talkative person. He is not afraid to challenge authority. This person knows that education is about him or her and not merely what the teacher thinks: the student implicitly understands Freire without having read his mesmerizingly leftist critique of the banking concept of education. In fact, Freire has this person in mind when he talks about the relationships of power and knowledge. This student understands that real education is liberating, not suffocating. This student understands a teacher who says—and means it—“I am just as much a learner as a teacher and so are you as much teacher as you are student.” This student is my ideal student and teacher.

That first day, I met several students who were “non-native” English speakers. They had come from countries in which English, though learned in school, was not been used daily. I came to know this because I asked each student where he or she was from—Queens? New Jersey? Northern or southern hemisphere? The challenge, as I understood it, would be that these new-to-the-US students, some of whom have only been speaking New York’s English dialect for a couple years, would invariably remain silent, sit way in the back of the room—up against the wall—and wait until class had ended (or contact me via e-mail) to ask a question about material I had covered in class and about which I had asked, thrice, whether anyone had had a question.

Here are my thoughts at the time. Does their reticence stem from two possible, troubling origins? Could these students be afraid to speak aloud in class because

they anticipate negative, embarrassing reactions from me or from other students? Do they fear what these other students—“native” speakers for whom “proper” English is neither a challenge nor a concern—may say or think about them? The BMXer doesn’t strike me as the verbal bully... Even worse is the second possibility: these students are waiting for me to deposit knowledge into their brains. And I am afraid I really don’t have much to deposit.

I professed my shortcomings to my students that first day. I smiled as I said it. I told them all, as I scanned the room slowly, moving about amiably, that I don’t know what they need. I cannot read minds and my body-language-reading skills have softened as I’ve aged. I suggested asking questions in class, during class, to all students and offered that any question a student may have was more than likely the same question others may also have.

I wanted all my students fearless of public speaking so that they would freely talk in class—communicate—with (well, what I initially thought would be) ease, but I don’t think that is the word I want to use now. Communication, written or spoken or other, never becomes easier. But regardless of the inherent difficulties that communication of any sort comes strapped with, I think one’s writing improves when one speaks more and listens even more and has others hear one’s voice. So these students’ remaining silent, out of fear of others’ negative, condescending judgments or their own image of how they sound or out of some uncalled-for respect for my “authority,” would be counterproductive to what they would accomplish in school. The earlier we address these concerns, the quicker these students could start to work and think as, and become, producers of knowledge.

There is nothing wrong with college students hesitating in class on the first day. I wish I were more hesitant at times.

The professor would ask, “so what does Geertz suggest is the link between Balinese cockfighting and masculinity?” and I would fall out of my seat to say the wrong thing or the not-quite thing. I would answer rhetorical questions because my mind wandered long enough to miss the tone but not far enough to miss the sound of question.

“No, Domenick,” answered the professor.

“No, Domenick,” answered the teacher in junior high.

“No, Domenick,” is what my friends would also say to me as they pointed, just like Dr Grant, at Isaac Young Junior High, had that day in earth science. But unlike Dr Grant, my friends mocked me for my jumpiness.

No, Domenick.

Freshman composition students are new to college, surrounded by strangers with strange mannerisms and fronted by a stranger at the head—or in the back or to the side—of the room barking on about a syllabus and critical thinking and due dates and voice. They are used to seeing the teacher in front of the class, the depositor of knowledge. Some may be lucky enough to have had a teacher who saw herself or himself as a student, also, who asked his or her students what they thought about things that he or she as teacher and student thought were important enough to learn. And some learned to question, question, question, and reflect.

The ideal change I strove for in that situation was for the reticent “non-native” speaker to gain comfort with his or her “language barrier” and to understand

that she or he is in college to learn how to learn and communicate openly and effectively and to accept that mistakes will be made and perhaps teachers will be chagrined and other students annoyed at having to stay in class another three minutes. I wanted these students to talk as much as, if not more than, the “native” speakers and the teacher in the class.

So I did what any good-intentioned life-learner would do. I tricked the whole class. I used more small-group work and combined the talkative with the silent. Ostensibly, they were reading and critiquing each other’s work and not to establish bonds that would make all communication in and out of class less frightening for the frightened. They were, of course, reading each other’s work as part of their peer-review-sharpening skills, but I was more concerned with enabling them to all talk comfortably with their peers. These students worked together weekly. In their groups, they would work on an issue or problem I would propose to the entire class. In small groups, students discussed possible solutions. Once they’d arrived at a solution, each group elected a presenter, a speaker for the group to deliver the group’s proposal. Each week, a different student in each group—of three students---had a turn speaking. If one spoke for his or her group last week, one could not speak for the group again until everyone had spoken at least once. Once three weeks passed, new groups were formed.

And they all seemed to enjoy the group work and peer review. I looked, in vain, for chagrin or doubt.

I found on the first day that those hesitant students had seemed more at ease speaking to classmates in groups of three or four. But when it came to class-wide discussion, these students were silent. Perhaps the size of the group and the proximity of seating helped, I wasn’t sure.

Using peer review for writing exercises and essays became the best way to get students to talk to one another in ways they may not have normally talked to one another. Another boon was that they ended up exchanging ideas and thoughts with people in the class they may never have talked to were it not for the rearranging of seats. Students not only commented by writing on the student’s text; they talked to the writer and said what they thought of the text, clarified any handwriting concerns, and explained any ambiguous commentary—two-way ambiguity being a certain conversation maker when writers write and comment on writing.

Did my plan work? Did I manage, along with the help I had from my talkative students, to draw out and ensnare and entangle my reticent ones into dialogue and disagreement with student and teacher alike?

I remembered my silenced self—at age eight, mouth haphazardly taped shut, wanting to speak, embarrassed but no longer shocked—as I gazed at my reticent and outgoing students, all talking to and with each other, arguing the finer points of word choice. And I smiled. Within weeks each student had talked to every other student in the class, had each other’s e-mail addresses and cell phone numbers, and there were no more strangers amongst us.

return of radical black art in the time of #blacklivesmatter

Syreeta McFadden

English Department Faculty Forum Spring 2016

It is not a coincidence that our cultural wars have resurrected with potent veracity over the past several years as we assert and insist on expanding equity and equality in plural America.

Last June, I attended a day long conference at the Ford Foundation, focused on the relationship between art and identity. Jeff Chang, who's recent work, *Who We Be*, chronicles the ongoing cultural transformation of the body of the American republic, began the day's events, posed critical observations about our current American moment. Chang pointed out that the shape of the world in which we find ourselves, the places where our political and culture wars have flattened identity to the dream-politick of erasure, its insistent pleading for color blindness, yet believe their own "identities somehow transcends all others" brushes up with the reality that by the year 2043, white Americans will no longer be the majority race.

We've matured to a great degree after decades of push/pull between conservative reasoning and insurgent movements, cracking old modes of being. We broke the canon of what is "traditionally American" representation in music, art, dance, and literature. And yet, these recent years have been fraught with persistent and expanding inequities in class and gender, surges in police violence against poor communities of color, statehouse battles that block women reproductive freedom and black votes, all of this as we mark the anniversaries of the toil and sacrifice of the activists who pulled America forward (activists from Civil Rights, Anti War, Feminist and LGBT movements) to recognize the plurality of her people.

Paraphrasing Karl Marx, Chang opened his remarks deconstructing big news stories events of late June, "History appears twice first as tragedy then farce." In this case, farce proceeded tragedy. While the nation was embroiled in the drama and confusion of Rachel Dolezal, a woman born "white" who adopted the identity of "blackness," our gaze and hearts pivoted from that spectacle to the horrific mass murder of nine people, killed in a church during their bible study.

These were (and are still) strange days indeed.

In this cultural moment, where we've witnessed the resurgence of social justice movements to wrest a kind of equity and balance in American life, from Occupy Wall Street to Black Lives Matter, to the realized aspirations of families, partners and lovers from the Marriage Equality movement, we are witnessing yet another paradigm shift. And if we're to be honest here again, it is a kind of vital reckoning and shift vital to our very survival as a people.

"These new social movements take seriously the question of seeing," Chang said. "They protest to erase the invisibility of the 99%. They protest to show

how modes of 'unseeing,' to flip a phrase of the writer China Miéville, such as colorblindness and implicit bias, produce vast, brutal, deadly structures of segregation and violence."

We are being challenged to adjust our gaze inward and outward seamlessly.

I have been a participant on panels and conferences similar to the Ford Foundation's June convening, for more than two decades now, where I had been tasked with publicly interrogating the construction of my American identity. My first moment of that kind of facilitation was as high school senior, where my classmate asked me to come to her former suburban high school to help educate the teachers about how to engage black students bussed from the city to help integrate their district. I told them stories. I was deliberate in my dress and articulate in my speech. I was seventeen years old when I told a room full of adult white women and men to be aware of their bias when engaging black students and students of color, because we were more sophisticated how the culture represented us. I responded to the burden of explaining black lives to white people all my life.

I tried to teach people to see.

But, for too long, the purview of diversity and identity has rested squarely on the shoulders of people of color, primarily because our work created a world in which we can be seen and access our own humanity. There's a weariness in that unwanted responsibility, of having to be the translator, or compel white Americans to resist their natural tendency to reduce my identity to a set of fixed and innate biases.

Over time, however, I realized or rather, was reaffirmed in my belief, that individuals and institutions must do the work of unpacking identities and resist anti-black racism, classism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia. I only echo an assertion so plainly defined by Baldwin in his 1955 essay, "Autobiographical Notes" where he spoke this harsh truth, "no one in America escapes its effects and everyone in America bears some responsibility for it." And in doing that work, to recognize the other, to not eschew difference, and most importantly, to not rely on people of color to be the teachers or to address the ways we are complicit in the culture of whiteness that erases all identities is ongoing, and perhaps requires us to embrace a fluidity in being. What I'm trying to say here is this: that to do the work of recognizing and engaging people and the multiplicities their identities is our movement.

Chang argued that the function of justice movements are about the transformation of seeing. We have been blind to a system and set patterns of inequality." Perhaps now is the time when we need the arts to help us see through the fog to clearly apprehend what our new realities are," Chang offered.

For me, taking pictures was my way into the arts, to help me "see through the fog." The earliest visit to the art museum when I was a child taught me very subtly the power of seeing yourself part of a larger American narrative. And in that past, the larger American narrative dehumanized black bodies, rendered us grotesque. So I picked up the camera, and later still, the pen to reorder this world. I had to for my own survival. Recreating and crafting the visual naturally extended itself to the written word for me. I write and take photographs now because I wish to see my own experiences represented in the world. In that selfishness, I created space for beauty, visibility, equity, and maybe a truth. And in creating that space, it has become an

invaluable tool to connect with students, helping them, too, see that there's space for them in the academy and America.

"One writes out of one thing only—one's own experience. Everything depends on how relentlessly one forces from this experience the last drop, sweet or bitter, it can possibly give," writes Baldwin in 1955 essay "Autobiographical Notes." It is one of many works of Baldwin I return to when I consider the question of how my work as a writer, artist, teacher and citizen, or when the work of interrogating social identity in modern American society for some becomes exhausting in that some audiences regard it as performance or oversimplify it. Baldwin metes out the struggle for black creatives in modern American life, "This is the only real concern of the artist, to recreate out of the disorder of life that order which is art. The difficulty then, for me, of being a Negro writer was the fact that I was, in effect, prohibited from examining my own experience too closely by the tremendous demands and the very real dangers of my social situation."

I've written recently about the radical art and activism of Nina Simone, Jacob Lawrence and Beyoncé, each artist of a very particular sociocultural and political moments where they've harnessed the energy of the zeitgeist, able to communicate and render black American stories visible. This isn't an argument to say that their works are equal, only to note that each artists' impulse to create their works were and are borne of a black pride, and in fact, and that assertion alone in America is a radical act. Lawrence created the Migration Series because there was an absence of his American story. Simone wrote Mississippi Goddam because she was fighting a culture that sought to erase a social justice movement and a story of murder: four little black girls in killed Alabama. Beyoncé used the weight of her own body (and by extension, her stardom) to illustrate the impact (and her support) for the Black Lives Matter Movement in her recent music video, Formation.

In February, a student asked me if there was a deliberate connection to the work presented by popular black artists, whether or not Kendrick Lamar's Grammy politically charged performance, a visually and lyrical commentary of mass incarceration and police violence and Beyoncé's Super Bowl performance, which was a deliberate nod and homage to the Black Panther Party as we approach the 50th Anniversary, insisted upon his attention, that these two popular recording artists mean to deliberate draw connections to mass incarceration, Black Lives Matter. It was the class discussion on the assigned reading for that day (Plato's "The Cave") that inspired the question. He felt like, and here were his words, "Feels like they're trying to get me to see." I answered him only as Miss Nina Simone would if she were standing in the classroom, "An artist's duty ... is to reflect the times."

Art is a kind of technology, it creates space for imagination, experience and understanding leading us to embrace of a kind of "ethics of identity." Art that provokes questions, challenges us to see, to touch hem of the divine to connect to our true selves to empathy.

The work of the American democratic experiment (and by extension, in its classrooms) should no longer be centered on the faulty notion of perfection, but rooted in an earnest and unceasing effort towards cultivating equity, beauty and justice for all.

Teaching in the Era of Trump

Ewa Barnes

Academic Language and Literacy

Since November 9th of this past year, when we woke up shell-shocked to learn that Hillary Clinton was not the new president of the United States, and that, what is worse, the new president was a businessman with no experience in politics, a man who aired contempt for the long-standing American values of liberty, equality and justice, and who instead promoted white supremacy, misogyny and hatred for immigrants—that day many of us educators woke up grappling with the same dilemmas: How to teach in the era of Trump? Do we remain neutral for fear of being accused of trying to indoctrinate our students? Or do we discuss current events and risk pushing our own political agenda onto them? Do we act like the Trump era is politics as usual, as if education can be separated from politics? Or do we let the students know, openly and straightforwardly, that we've been depressed since November 9th, and insist that it is a part of our job to speak out?

I myself had, initially, fallen somewhere in between those two positions. Outside the classroom, with friends and colleagues, I despair every time President Trump speaks, tweets, and signs laws. I am a liberal, but I also strongly believe that the role of an educator is to inform, not to indoctrinate. To ask open-ended questions, not to lecture on how to answer them. Politics is important, as is awareness of what is happening in the world, but there is a fine line between explaining the differences between our two political parties and between suggesting that Democrats are better than Republicans. Consequently, in the classroom I teach like I always did—with an ongoing effort to appear neutral. Or so I thought.

This semester, after the election, I decided I had to continue incorporating current events into my Critical Thinking course's curriculum. After all, BMCC's mission statement says that we prepare students for, among other things, "lifelong learning and civic participation." And in which course can we better promote lifelong learning and civic participation than in CRT, the sea of inquiry and informed decision-making? Plus, one of the course's main objectives is to teach students how to recognize biases, including stereotypes and fallacies in thinking, with regard to personal, academic and contemporary issues. President Trump appeared to provide all the necessary materials to achieve all those objectives.

I decided that, instead of letting the students know what I really think of our new president, I would show them bits and pieces of current events, say of President Trump's speeches, and let the students decide if they included any bias or misleading information. I would also portray other politicians, including former President Obama, in a critical light, so as not to appear biased myself.

Accordingly, when we talked about the use of rhetorical devices, I flashed examples of both Obama and Trump, to demonstrate how politicians can use language to manipulate. Obama's euphemism for innocent people killed by drone

strikes was the phrase “civilian casualties.” Trump announced that more people attended his Inauguration than his predecessor’s, although the numbers quoted by the National Park Service revealed otherwise. In the lesson, I made a distinction between rhetorical devices and straight out lies. A student pointed out that while Obama sugarcoated a truth that we would rather not acknowledge, Trump told lies. I found myself agreeing with the student.

In a follow-up lesson, when I showed a skit from Saturday Night Live in which a shirtless Putin, the Russian president, pays a surprise visit to Trump and, unbeknownst to the latter, installs a camera in Trump’s living quarters, I asked the students to identify the rhetorical devices the media employed. I also wanted to know if those devices were effective. The students discussed the power of sarcasm and hyperbole. One student said that, sure, SNL makes fun of Trump, but there is truth underneath all the humor. Several others agreed. While I continued to make an effort to appear objective, I couldn’t help but nod in agreement.

And then, in a lesson on moral choices, I introduced two variants of the trolley problem, the infamous thought experiment in ethics. And it wasn’t going to be a lesson on Trump.

Imagine, I told my students, that you are on a trolley heading down the tracks. Up ahead on the tracks are five people. They are tied up and cannot move. You realize that if you pull a lever, it would cause the trolley to veer off to a side track, and the five people would be saved. But there is a catch: on the side track is a man, unaware of the danger. If you pull the lever, he will die. What do you do?

Most students in the class, like most people surveyed over the past several decades, decided that they would pull the lever. Saving five lives, they reasoned, while causing one person to die makes sense, mathematically and morally speaking.

Now let’s move to the second scenario.

You are on a bridge as the same trolley is about to pass under. You can stop it by putting something heavy in front of it. As fate would have it, there is a fat man standing next to you on the bridge. You realize that your only chance to stop the trolley is to push the man down onto the tracks. Do you do nothing, allowing five people to die? Or do you push the fat man down, thereby killing him, but saving the others?

Most students in the class, like most surveyed people, said that they wouldn’t push the man down the tracks. The idea of intentionally causing another person’s death is too difficult to bear. This, of course, reveals a distinction we tend to make: even though in both cases we can save five lives and lose one, there is a difference between pulling the lever, which, in turn, causes a death, and between actively committing a murder.

One student asked what if ... the fat man on the bridge was one rather unpopular politician. A few students enthusiastically said that they’d change their mind: *him* they would push down the tracks.

Was I supposed to tell the students that their comments were inappropriate? As I tried to frame the comments as another variant of the trolley problem—what if the fat man on the bridge was your enemy—I felt proud of my students: they not only added a new complexity to the moral dilemma, and thus demonstrated the ability to think critically; they also, out of their own initiative, showed a civic awareness

that happened to coincide with my own and everyone else's who appeared sane to me. Of course, as I pointed out to the class, a fantasy of assassinating a public figure is never a desirable option; however, an open discussion about why Trump should be removed from office, and how this can be done, should be a good workout for the brain.

And then it dawned on me. What if, among my CRT students, there was a Trump supporter?

Given that BMCC, as it proudly announces on its website, "enrolls more international students than any other community college in the Northeast," the chances that an anti-immigrant president might have a fan lurking around the classroom body was unlikely. And yet, I worried, because it was possible. What is more, I feared that my mysterious Trump supporter was feeling isolated, unwelcome, silenced by the anti-Trump majority, to which I myself now openly belonged.

And yet, it felt good to pick a side, to find common ground with students in the light of the disastrous first few weeks of Trump's presidency. In addition, Trump seems to be on an ongoing pathway to committing all the *faux pas* of critical thinking. To justify the repeal of The Affordable Care Act, Trump calls it a disaster and cites evidence that confirms his stance when, in fact, the health care law has decreased health care spending and increased the number of people with insurance: that's what we call a conformation bias. When a federal judge in Hawaii blocked the administration's revised travel ban because the bill discriminates against Muslims, Trump accused the judge of "judicial overreach" and of political motivations: that's called *ad hominem* fallacy. When reporters ask Trump about his team's ties to Russia, Trump responds that everyone, except for the "dishonest journalists," knows it's "fake news": that's the bandwagon approach. In other words, Trump is the perfect case study for ... what not to do as a critical thinker.

And then it happened: I discovered that there was a Trump supporter in my classroom.

The assignment, on Blackboard's Discussion Board, was to select a controversial topic, write a paragraph using emotive language and rhetoric supporting one side of the issue, rewrite the paragraph using neutral language, and evaluate whether your argument depended on emotive language and rhetorical devices rather than reason.

The student, whom I will refer to as Student X, wrote that Trump will improve our lives. That he knows how to get what he wants. That America desperately needs him. That if he can win the presidential election without any political experience, he can do anything.

I was shocked. In my head, I replayed all the conversations we'd had over semester, and remembered that this particular student didn't laugh when I showed the SNL skit of Trump; and he was silent when we discussed the trolley problem. He was excluded. And he was excluded not only by his classmates, but, most of all, by me. And if he was excluded, then I wasn't doing my job very well.

I was also anxious that other students, upon seeing X's post, would attack him. After all, most, if not all of the other students were against Trump. I imagined an online fight, accusatory statements, offensive language. Instead, another student responded that her friend, a Trump supporter, is afraid to tell his own friends who

he voted for. The student added that she hoped her friend would be able to say who he voted for without having to fear retributions.

That, of course, is what I also want in the classroom. All students, regardless of their race, gender, country of origin, and regardless of their beliefs—all students should be comfortable expressing their viewpoints. No one should come to the conclusion that if they speak up, they will be laughed at, or, worse, bullied.

I am not suggesting that we stop debating controversial topics because there might be one or two students whose opinions differ from the rest; but I do think that, as educators, we must exert an air of objectivity that will allow all students to feel comfortable expressing their viewpoints. Moreover, even if a majority of students believes that, say, electing Donald Trump as president of the United States was a grave mistake, we should make it clear to the class that opposing viewpoints are welcome, as I reiterated to my students the other day. To prepare students for lifelong learning and civic participation, we must let them know that, while being in the minority can be isolating, it doesn't mean they should remain silent. It's easy to discuss a controversial topic if everyone agrees with us; the ability to have a respectful discussion about an issue we care about with someone who disagrees, now that's an important skill, both in a critical thinking course and in life in general. After all, one of BMCC's strategic goals says that we aim to "improve student experience." And the only way to do this is to include all students in the conversation. And that, invariably, means to also listen.

The Goal Is not to Grade, but to Teach

Hollis Glaser

Speech, Communications, and Theater Arts

I. Introduction

It all started because I was tired. I was tired of feeling more like a police officer than a teacher and tired of awarding (or not) points for every little piece of an assignment and then seeing my students come up short at the end of the semester. I just didn't feel like I was teaching well; I needed a different way to tackle the basic public-speaking course.

My old way of teaching was standard: 3 main speeches, each with a detailed evaluation sheet that had points assigned for every element I could think of. Fifty points for 10 different delivery aspects, 50 for the outline and so on. I also had mini-speeches, mini-assignments, all intended to keep the students moving toward completing the semester by accumulating points every week, each assignment building on the previous ones.

But here was one of the main problems. If a student stumbled on an assignment early on, or missed mini-assignments, it was very difficult for them to get their footing again, and the failures accumulated (instead of the points). So I often had a fairly bifurcated class—those who kept up and moved smoothly toward a B or an A, and those who couldn't make up for early problems and dropped or earned a D or worse.

Plus I was getting incredibly frustrated. It didn't matter how much I emphasized to them that they had to just plug along every day, every week and they'd do fine. Many didn't or couldn't and I ended up feeling like I was punishing instead of teaching. I also came to see my detailed point system as arbitrary and tyrannical. One student gets three points for eye contact and another gets four. Really? The activity of circling those numbers was becoming more ludicrous every year.

Our basic public speaking course has a very high DFW rate (Ds, Fs and Withdrawals) and I was sick of it. So I came up with a different way to teach the class and to "grade" the students. I'm not saying this will work for every course or subject, but I'm happy with how it has worked in my public speaking class.

II. The Plan: Teach more and grade less

I changed two main components of the class: how they earn their semester grade and how they earn credit for a speech. First, they earn their semester grade by deciding how many assignments they will complete. Completing five assignments earns them an A, four a B, three a C and so forth. Second, each assignment is credit/no credit, the credit earned by achieving a basic level of competence and writing a reflection paper.

The assignments: there are two required traditional face-to-face in-class speeches that are standard across the department's 180 sections, one informative and the second persuasive. Then I offer them six assignments from which they can choose one, two or three (depending on the grade they want), some of which can be completed in the public realm of the web, some in other face-to-face situations or in our classroom.

The "grade" sheet: No more points attached to every single thing they are supposed to do. While I thought that was giving them specific instructions on how to get a good grade, it was also giving them a whole lot of ways they could fail. Instead, I give them eight things they must do in order to get credit for that speech. I'm not giving them points according to how well they do each element, but I do give them written feedback. So if they give me a typed outline but the grammar is poor, I will mark their outline to teach them, but not penalize them for poor writing. However, if the outline has no citations, they have to rewrite it with proper formatting

The goal is not to grade but to teach. Teaching is helping the students improve their performance or increase their knowledge or change their thinking. Students learn by doing (writing, creating, speaking), reflecting and getting feedback. Grading is poor feedback. Plus grading stresses the teacher-student relationship. We can be having a great time in class, laughing, having lively conversations, encouraging one another, giving everyone a chance to shine. If the class is really going well, I have a couple of students who make fun of me. And then I hand back the speeches. Eyes lower, energy falls. It is a big energy suck. And there is absolutely no good reason for that to happen.

Now, instead, the students receive a lot of feedback from their peers and me. First, immediately after they have presented, we tell them what we liked about the presentation and what they can work on. Second, they get written feedback from their peer group in the form of a sheet with ten items rated as Unsatisfactory, Satisfactory, Excellent. The students get into these groups at the end of each presentation day. Before giving the sheets to the speaker, the group asks the speaker what they think they did well and need to improve on. Then they verbally respond and give the speaker their sheets. Third, they get my written feedback the next class session, the kind of feedback I give professionals when I do professional coaching. "Good eye contact, try not to touch your hair, could speak a little louder" and so forth. There are no points attached to this feedback. That means they are focusing on the content of the feedback not the grade.

III. Giving more control to the students

Besides deciding on what grade they want (or can reasonably attain) by the number of assignments they do, the students also have control over some of the assignments. Other than the two in-class speeches, they have a lot of options:

1. Read at Trump Tower with Learn as Protest
2. Twitter: Get in on a discussion early and continue to respond in a meaningful way.

3. *New York Times* online discussion: Respond to an article as soon as it is published and continue the discussion with other readers.
4. Post a video on YouTube of yourself talking about something or explaining something—about 3 minutes long.
5. Give a third speech in class or lead a 10-minute discussion with the class, on a topic of your choosing (approved by me), research required.
6. Open-ended: come up with your own assignment, must be okayed by me, must engage in the public realm somehow, either face-to-face (may be in class) or online in the web.
7. Johari Window: Talk to 5 people close to you and ask them your three strengths and three weaknesses. Summarize in a paper and tell me what you learned.
8. Go to a live talk outside of class and write about it. Describe who spoke, where, what they said then evaluate how they did and how the listeners responded.
9. Give a live talk somewhere outside of class, record it, write about it. Where did you talk, why, what did you say, how did the listeners respond, how did you do. (Counts as two assignments.)

The sixth option (come up with your own assignment) is the epitome of my teaching philosophy for this course. It gives them the opportunity to create their own learning, to think about what they need to know, what situation to apply this course to. I tell them that it must engage others in some way, either digitally or in person. The students have come up with a huge variety of presentations. One needed to ask her boss for a raise. She role-played the request in front of the class with other students taking part, then asked her boss for a raise a few days later, reported back and wrote a reflection paper. Many students displayed their art work or read poems they had written, then answered questions from the class. Students organized debates, led discussions, taught us how to meditate, make Nigerian rice, deal with a health emergency. The students are excited both about presenting what they want and listening to their classmates. And I've been very moved as to how personal some of these presentations have been and the openness and kindness with which the class received them.

In other words, the students are taking more control over the course and I am happy not to have the entire burden on me.

IV. Fewer details, more meaning

There are a number of benefits to having the students meet a minimum requirement to get credit for each assignment, rather than issuing points and grades. For one, the students feel they can meet those requirements and it takes pressure off. Second, the students do more re-writing in order to get credit if they missed one of the requirements. They were less likely to rewrite in order to get more points. Third, evaluating the assignment is much easier. I simply check off the short list of requirements and give them feedback.

But the biggest benefit is this system creates meaningful assignments. Here's why. The endless precision and awarding of points focus the students on details and checking off boxes or making a checklist (hello rubrics), instead of the deeper more meaningful aspects of the assignment. It also brings their attention to the surface details and atomizes the assignment, instead of allowing them to approach it in a more holistic way. Yes, I want them to write grammatically and stand up straight and use proper formatting. But breaking down the assignment into its most minuscule parts does not necessarily engender those actions(not to mention that writing properly is a multi-semester endeavor).

We often think that specificity is good. But in some cases it's not. It's oppressive. I spent many years being more and more detailed in my assignments, being clearer and more precise about exactly what was expected of my students. If they didn't do whatever exactly that way (which they hardly ever did), I was fully justified in giving them a lower grade. I even had a great little mini-lecture about why it was so important to do the outline precisely the way I instructed: "Hey, we all have to fill out forms according to precise directions. Otherwise, we don't get paid, or don't get our taxes back, or get in trouble with the police, etc., etc." See? I'm doing them a favor by preparing them for faceless irrational stubborn bureaucracies. But you know what? CUNY does that part just fine.

So I've become more open and I focus them on the meaning of the assignment, on creating a speech or paper that expresses what they want it to. I'll give them feedback on the details. And they'll learn those specifics over time. But it's much more interesting to pay attention to what the student is actually saying than it is to pay attention to the minutia of grammar or para-linguistics. It's much more fun to talk to the students about what they are saying and why, rather than how they are saying it. We have much better conversations when we're all talking about what the student wants to talk about, instead of preordained categories of evaluation (goodbye rubrics). Specificity traps the teacher as much as it traps the student.

What this looks like then is fewer evaluation categories, fewer required assignments, and more freedom for the students to create their own assignments. How do I know if the assignments are meaningful? Certainly, I evaluate by deeply subjective measures: the extent to which the students seem to care about their performance and whether the speech engages their classmates and me, the degree to which the speech seems to strike an emotional chord with the students, and whether or not the assignment is personal, unique to that student.

We've had lots of these criteria met, many more than in my traditional semester where I give them fewer options. The poems were all personal as were the presentations of their creative work, and obviously so was the explanation of the "23 and me" results. This came from a student who had always thought she was simply Dominican. She displayed the chart that showed us she was made of DNA from three continents. She had just received the results the day before and was still stunned.

And the student who read her aunt's letter to her mother from 20 years ago was amazing. It could have been on NPR. Her aunt had just married, was sent to live with her husband's family as is traditional in that culture, and was terribly

lonely and upset. She wanted to go back home to her mother and eat her mother's food. I was deeply moved by this beautiful and heart-breaking letter.

I also deemed the student-led conversations as quite meaningful. One was on the effects of technology and children, one on the ethics of zoos, another on cryptocurrency. While not necessarily personal, they did a good job of getting their classmates to engage in the conversation and a number of students had excellent questions and insights.

Ultimately, however, the assignment is meaningful if the student finds it meaningful. And the only way I know if that is true is by asking the students to reflect on their experience. These reflections work on at least two levels. The obvious first level is that it allows me to see how they understand the assignment, what they got out of it, if they took it seriously, etc. For example, many of the students wrote about how nervous they were expressing themselves in this new way in front of the class. Exposing something they cared about (the poems, the art work) felt very risky to them and they all wrote about how relieved and grateful they were that the class responded to them so positively.

But the next level is that the reflection creates the meaning. It's one thing for them to present a poem or read at Trump Tower and then go on with their lives. It's something else altogether for them to stop, get clear about how they understand the experience and then explain it to me. They could very well do the assignment, find it meaningful and then not look back. And so that meaning can be lost in the hustle of their days. But if they write about it, that reflection anchors the meaning deeper into their consciousness. Or better yet, they may not have even realized their understanding of the assignment, until they have to write about it.

V. Conclusion

As of spring 2019, I've only done this for two semesters and the second one isn't finished it yet. I'm not sure if this has made a big difference yet in the DFWs of my sections. But I do know that the students are more confident that they are able to earn the grade they want and more relaxed in this very anxiety-ridden course. For my part, I feel like I am doing more teaching and less grading and am treating the students like they are professionals.

The Joy of Math

Kathleen Offenholley

Mathematics

I Believe

I believe in active and inclusive learning. I believe that the classroom can and should be a place of joy. I believe that everyone can do math.

Interactive, Joyful Classrooms

I teach remedial math – fractions, decimals, basic algebra – stuff that reminds my students of the horrors of bad grade school math experiences. I also teach math for elementary education; these students are future elementary school teachers, the most math-phobic students you can imagine, who, without my intervention, would probably go on to influence their students to think that math is awful. (I am not making that up – see for example <https://www.futurity.org/girls-learn-lesson-in-math-anxiety/>.) The anxiety and misery *stops* at my classroom.

In all my classes, my students spend a large amount of classroom time working in pairs or groups. I often use learning games to begin an activity and get students primed to start thinking. My own classroom research (with my colleagues from the English department) shows that when students enjoy a class more, their ability to learn more *deeply* increases (Crocco, F., Offenholley, K., and Hernandez, C., 2016). There is something about joy and laughter that allows us to open up to new ways of thinking.

In my course evaluations last semester, one of my Math 214 (Math for Elementary Education) students wrote, “Professor Offenholley is a great math teacher and actually helped a ton especially when anyone in the class was struggling and would make sure everyone understood. The use of her projects actually allowed for interaction with other students and allowed for each other to help when we needed help.” A Math 8 (Arithmetic and Pre-Algebra) student told me, “This is the most interactive class I have.”

Innovative Pedagogy

I started using games in the classroom well before the current trend to “gamify” everything. I have created games for my students that aren’t just “fun” (although fun is important all on its own), but that also actually teach deeper concepts. For example, the counting game, *Bizz Buzz for Base Systems*, teaches students about base 5. Even the simple game, paper cut-ups, teaches students how multiplication and factoring are related, or how logarithms and exponents are related. The game I modified from *Mad Libs*, *Mad Math*, doesn’t teach deeper concepts but does interweave storytelling and grammar into math. These and other math games can be found on my blog on the CUNY Academic Commons, <https://mathgames.commonscuny.edu/>.

I also started teaching online before it was fashionable, about 14 years ago. The math department where I worked at the time didn't believe it could be done, particularly for math. I had taken an online education class that I thoroughly enjoyed, and was convinced that the degree of online interactivity that was in that class could be done in math as well. I ended up doing my PhD research on what kind of interactivity in online math class discussions makes for better online discourse (Offenholley, 2012). I have since written (with Glenn Miller, in press) a chapter on how to create good, interactive discussions in math classes.

Finally, I recently created my own OER for math for elementary education: an online, free textbook, with videos and interactive questions, so the students can read, watch and interact with the book: <https://collegemathforelementaryeducation.wordpress.com/>. I also worked on the math 56 Algebra OER (with Jenna Hirsch and Eugene Millman), also replete with videos and an interactive online homework system: <https://math56oer.wordpress.com/>.

What's the Real Secret?

As good and as important as all of those cutting-edge things are, I don't think they embody the secret of what works, which is much more old-fashioned than those now-trendy things I do. What works is love. Writer bell hooks (2000) says that love is a combination of six ingredients: care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect and trust. Those are the real things that underlie and inform all the other things I do.

In both my online and face-to-face classes, I reach out to my students to connect, to praise them for their hard work and their willingness to persevere. I show them I care, and that I am committed to helping them learn. The students who wrote letters of support my Distinguished Teaching Award application show how much that means to them. Sam, one of my online students last year, writes, "because of Mrs. Offenholley's continued guidance and mentorship, I feel seen. I have a path laid out in front of me, and it helps encourage me when it gets tough to continue. When I am in front of my students one day, I hope they feel the same way I did in her classroom."

My former student Ivana, who is now teaching math at Hunter, writes, "At the beginning of every semester, as I am walking into my class of about thirty-five students, I often think of Professor Offenholley. I wonder if I could help at least one of my students the way that my professor helped me—if I could direct them to the path they should follow to discover themselves." Phoo, who also worked as my SI leader after she was my student, wrote, "I drew a picture of Professor Kathleen as my inspiration in mathematics in my mathematics for elementary education (2) class at CCNY. That's how much she has inspired me and I want to become a teacher like her because I as a student and a future educator, believe that we need many more teachers like her."

Mentors

I want to take a moment to acknowledge a few of the amazing teachers I have learned from. Alyse Hachey, formerly of the BMCC Teacher Education department,

taught the first online course I ever took, at Columbia Teacher's College. Without her to inspire me, I would not have gone on to teach math online. Gay Brooks and Holly Messitt were amazing teachers for the WAC trainings, and Leslie Craigo, also in the Teacher Education department, taught me so much about diversity and inclusion. Finally, Brenda Jones, one of my first karate teachers, taught me by example how to love my students and listened with endless patience as I described my teaching in my early days at BMCC.

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“I will try my best:” Imparting Western-style Argumentation to Students in China

Katherine M. Johnson

Academic Literacy and Linguistics

Thanks to a generous scholar incentive award granted to me by BMCC, I had the unique opportunity to teach college composition at an American university in China during the 2018–2019 school year. For many years, I had already taught ESL and developmental writing to students of diverse backgrounds at BMCC, as well as literature and composition to international students at other colleges. In terms of travel to Asia, I had taken only one three-week trip to China before heading there for an academic year. Teaching college composition in China gave me new insights into both instruction in critical thinking and some of the differences in Western and Eastern argumentation styles. Through an examination of relevant literature and case examples, this article will share some of the lessons learned with a view to providing educators a deeper understanding of their nonnative students, both Chinese and others.

Eastern and Western learning traditions

A good place to start in considering the differences between Eastern and Western concepts of education is the influence of the master teachers in each culture, Confucius and Socrates. Socrates, (469–399 B.C. E.), a master teacher of philosophy in the West, taught that one should start from a place of doubt, question authority, and provide a justification for one’s beliefs. By demonstrating the unsound thinking of the political authorities, he believed, he was doing a service for the community (Tweed & Lehman 2002).

Confucius (551–479 B.C.), often referred to as the father of Chinese philosophy, created a tradition with a different understanding of serving the community. Confucius taught that respectful learning leads to the improvement of both skills and virtue. Excellence can be reached through diligent effort and practice. Confucius taught learners who were being prepared for civil service positions. The strong moral bent, pragmatic emphasis on the collective good, and respect for authority stand in contrast to the principles of Socrates (Tweed & Lehman 2002).

How does this relate to the teaching of college composition to first-year students, both Chinese and others? The line from the Socratic tradition of learning to today’s critical thinking and argumentative essay is quickly evident. Not only does a research-based piece of writing involve critical thinking, but also one might argue that it demands more agency than the other common rhetorical modes. Creating writing that integrates and responds to multiple information sources requires a student to fully understand those sources, to discern which ones are

useful to his or her project, and to maintain authorial control. Managing this is a challenging task for many first-year students, regardless of linguistic background or educational setting. The experience that I had of teaching college composition in China gave me a chance to see how the distinct Eastern and Western learning traditions played out, particularly in the students' processes of crafting research-based argument essays.

Learners' difficulties in creating evidence-based arguments

In the area of research papers done by first-year students, their struggles are often evident. This work sometimes contains a confusing array of inappropriate sources, insufficient paraphrasing, and oddly juxtaposed facts. One study, the Citation Project (Howard, Serviss, & Rodrigue 2010), examined the problems in students' final drafts to better pinpoint their causes. Jamieson (2013), who further analyzed the project, found that students tended to use just a few individual sentences from a given information source, and that those sentences were often pulled from the first page or the abstract of the article. Selected ideas were often too lightly paraphrased, so that ultimately, students' essays were collections of copied phrases and points from various information sources, pastiches that Howard has termed "patchwriting." Rather than constituting the ethical violation of plagiarism, Howard argues, patchwriting should be seen as a developmental stage of learning that instructors can help students to work through (Howard 1993; Jamieson 2013).

How critical thinking and research pose challenges for Chinese students

One area of cross-cultural difference and difficulty for international students is in the teaching of critical thinking, argumentation, and composition. Frequently, instructors in these disciplines are asking international students to learn a whole new way of thinking. Sometimes, a lack of knowledge on either side of the cultural divide leads to faculty frustration with their students' work habits and thinking. In the U.S., faculty impressions of Chinese students have been shown to reflect a perplexed attitude in the face of what is seen as students' passivity and lack of curiosity. In describing two groups of Chinese students at a U.S. university, Lin (2007) states that the students, while having strong academic backgrounds and work habits, are accustomed to assignments being fully structured by instructors, and not accustomed to taking risks, exploring subjects, or evaluating resources.

Many research studies (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Nelson, Badger, & Wu, 2004) have indicated that "challenges faced by Chinese learners could be attributed to the Confucius cultural heritage and the collectivism social context" (Zhang 2016). Participants in one study stated that they hoped that their instructors in the U.S. would give credit for their effort and positive attitude as opposed to their talent, as had been the case in their earlier educational experience (Heng 2017). In my own experience, knowing this helps to explain an expression that I have commonly heard when teaching Asian students, both at BMCC and abroad: "I will try my best." The promise to make a great effort may be taken to carry a stronger weight in Eastern culture.

English preparation in Chinese secondary schools

English as a foreign language education around the world occurs in a context particular to the local culture. Comparatively few studies have examined how Chinese students are taught English in the secondary education years that precede entry into a Western, English-speaking undergraduate college.

In China, nine years of education are mandatory for everyone. After finishing the ninth year, students choose whether or not to continue on to “senior” secondary school. The majority of those who do is college-bound, and will take the rigorously competitive National College Entrance Examination, the Gaokao.

In her article that compiles data on secondary school English education, Y. Sang (2017) identifies the traits of this instruction that lay the groundwork for students’ subsequent difficulties in writing in English. With class sizes ranging from thirty to fifty students, classes are typically teacher-centered, and offer few opportunities to practice writing or for teachers to adequately respond to it. (Sang 2017)

The test-prep-driven educational system, furthermore, does not encourage the assigning of pieces longer than 150 words, or writing in drafts. Writing instruction in the Chinese tradition prioritizes language elements such as grammar and vocabulary over substance, and even the argumentative essays can often privilege beautiful language over step-wise idea development (Heng 2017).

My students at WKU often told me that there were disparities in the quality and intensity of English learning in Chinese secondary schools, with big-city schools differing sharply from rural ones. Nonetheless, students from a range of high schools and towns echoed the points mentioned in Sang’s study, remarking on the limited opportunity for both English conversation and essay-writing, as well as on the large classes, small number of hours, and heavy use of drills and exercises. The situation was improving, they told me, but it had not improved as quickly as many students would have wished.

Wenzhou Kean University

The student work discussed in this article is drawn from two sections of College Composition 2 taught in Spring 2019 at Wenzhou Kean University, a U.S. university in south China. Operating since 2011, WKU is an international campus of a New Jersey state university, located in a medium-sized city in southern China.

The student body at WKU is comprised almost entirely of Chinese nationals, predominantly from Zhejiang or provinces near Zhejiang. It is ranked a “second-tier” university out of a four-tier system. Students attending it, therefore, scored from the mid-range to the upper range on their National College Entrance Examination. Tuition is relatively high by local standards. The university attracts a demographic that seeks an EMI (English as the Medium of Instruction), American-style education but without traveling abroad; the security of being at a smaller, more personal institution; and one that can afford tuition. Approximately 2,000 undergraduates are enrolled.

In all disciplines, the university faculty is required to follow curriculum from the New Jersey campus. First-year students are required to take one semester each of College Composition 1 and College Composition 2, regardless of their level in English writing.

The argumentative essay in Composition 2

The case studies discussed below are drawn from student work on the third essay assignment of the second semester, the research-based argument essay.

The essay assignment in my sections was presented to students in a series of steps, starting with brainstorming for topics. Students created a working thesis and an initial set of supporting arguments, and three drafts of the essay, accompanied by a minimum of four APA-cited sources. Students completed a peer review on their second drafts, and received instructor feedback on all drafts. Ultimately, the essay length was a minimum of 1300 words.

Having a suitable topic is always paramount to writing strong research essays. Students' topics ranged widely, including, for example: helicopter parenting, why China should increase its minimum education requirement beyond eight years, China's one-child law, China's filial piety law, preventing animal cruelty at zoos, "fake food," and censorship of films in China.

First Essay Case Study: "Fake Foods"

Walter's essay took "fake foods" for its topic and used as a working thesis that the government of China needs to work harder to stop the manufacture, distribution and consumption of fake foods. Fake food is currently a popular topic in both the Chinese and foreign media.

Walter's first draft used arguments that were not objective or supportable by evidence, and that demonstrated a reliance on morality. One of the causes of the unsafe food problem identified by Walter's essay was the greed of those selling it. Walter wrote in support of the government "cracking down," without specifying what that would entail. For example, the essay stated that, "Therefore, in the face of the temptation of profit, many people choose to produce fake food against morality, law and conscience."

For a conventional American research essay, the topic of fake food as one of the violations of food safety laws and procedures, raising the question of how this crime is being permitted to occur. At this stage, I gave Walter detailed directives, asking him to define fake food, and prompting him to find factual information to answer several questions. I mentioned that research-based essays cannot cite greed or immorality as a cause of the food safety problem, but rather must rely on arguments supportable by objective evidence. Walter and I also discussed his draft. He was receptive to feedback and eager to improve his essay, although he may not have understood some of the deeper issues I was raising.

In Walter's second draft, he included a great deal of new material and changed much of the essay in response to this feedback. The draft now defined fake food, described the Chinese FDA (CFDA), and included some examples of particular food safety violation incidents. Much of the newly added information, while showing an effort on the student's part to do research and cite sources appropriately, still lacked a basis in sound argumentation. The descriptions included many statements with the ring of a government press release and bureaucratic jargon. For example, the essay cited the fact that in 2015 the CFDA had published new amendments to the law, which contains 10 chapters with 154 articles, and it included several

statements such as, “there is zero tolerance on crime,” a cited quotation from the vice minister of public security. Such statements, while they might serve an essay investigating media handling of the issue, supplied little substantive evidence for a study of a problem and its possible solutions.

By the third and final draft, the essay had now moved to providing more relevant, cited information; however, it still showed a lack of depth to make its facts meaningful, an acceptance of issued press releases as factual evidence, and some continued moralizing. As the essay neared its conclusion, it entered into a “government to the rescue” narrative. “In the face of such bad behavior, the Chinese government will never be able to sit still.”

Overall, Walter’s process showed some positive outcomes insofar as he learned to research and to include more factual evidence and data to provide the necessary background and to serve his thesis. The final essay relied less on morality than earlier drafts. Perhaps most revealing in light of the Eastern-Western distinctions mentioned above is his ready acceptance of government-issued press releases as genuine evidence for an argument, and the strong moral subtext to his essay, especially its early drafts.

As I told my students at WKU, there are numerous different ways to write a “good” essay, but it was my job to nudge their writing into the American academic style. In the process of talking with me and sending drafts back and forth, Walter was shown another point of view that forced him to question and justify the sources he was relying on, and ultimately, he was introduced to a whole new style of argumentation.

Second Case Study: Increasing Compulsory Education in China

Rachel’s essay’s thesis was that China ought to increase the nine years of compulsory education, passed into law in 1984, to twelve years. Her initial arguments relied strongly on the idea that additional years of education make people “better,” expounding on the virtues of the knowledge gained and the preparation for college. She also pointed out that China was now a big economic power, different from what it had been in 1984.

Rachel and I had a conversation about her first draft, in addition to my giving written feedback. I suggested that she try to find more measurable good to society out of a requirement of more years of education, such as higher incomes or better health outcomes. The argument concerning college, I suggested, could be defended only provided that she wanted to suggest that more people needed to attend university. Lastly, she had included an uncited statistic about high school degrees being directly tied to employability that appeared to me to refer to the U.S., and not China. I urged the student to check it, and to use only data concerning China, as the job markets are so different.

In her subsequent drafts, Rachel gradually added a great deal of relevant, accurate information. One point that she and I discussed was her argument about the cost of secondary education. Her essay demonstrated how the cost of secondary school tuition was burdensome or out of range for most families presently. I knew there was a range of secondary schools in China, but I had

supposed that some of them were free of charge. However, I learned from her that in fact all secondary schools charged fees, which were often difficult to afford. Therefore, a fundamental change in making secondary school compulsory would be that the state would cover costs now being paid privately.

On Rachel's final draft, the main point that seemed to get missed, despite my having questioned it, was the employability statistic; I confirmed that it did not refer to China but rather it came from the U.S. Department of Labor. The students were doing much of their research, frequently on China-based topics, in Google—still relatively new to them—or in the WKU library's American databases, even less familiar. In doing so, there are various layers of potential confusion as to what context one is reading about, and Rachel was not the only student to mix up what country an article was referring to.

In brief, I helped Rachel to narrow her focus at the same time that she moved away from the loftier and less quantifiable arguments. She herself had included the economic argument early on, so I encouraged her to treat education in a business framework. The student did a good job of finding objective evidence to support the increase in compulsory education in China, and ended up with a persuasive, well-researched essay.

Discussion and comments

Overall, I believe that the experience of coming up with a topic and narrowing it, researching it, reading what was often difficult material on it, and working from instructor feedback benefited Walter, Rachel, and my other composition students. Although I was in the role of the instructor to whom the students had to listen, I also learned a great deal from what the students had to say about issues affecting their own country and how they expressed those views.

Knowing more about the Eastern learning tradition has helped me to understand the attitude of students' stressing the effort that they made. Likewise, it has illuminated the essay points Rachel made, such as that acquiring more knowledge is in itself "good," and Walter's views, regarding the immorality and greed of the profiteers. Institutions in China strongly promote these ideas so that many adults have internalized them, and have probably used them as accepted arguments for previous essays. Similarly, Walter's acceptance of government press releases could be characteristic of the way students interact with media in his culture.

As someone who spent only nine months in China, and doesn't speak Mandarin, I only began to graze the surface of Chinese culture. Still, the experience was helpful to me as an instructor. There are many suggestions that I would make to educators who are interested in this area, but if I had to distill them down to a few, they are:

- Try to understand some of the "givens" or accepted ideas of a student's (native) culture.
- Develop ways to ask students, respectfully, the right questions about those givens or assumptions.

- Know that having certain values, such as “knowledge” or the “collective good,” does not prevent critical thinking, given the right guidance.
- Bear in mind potential confusion as to context when students are reading scholarly articles from databases.
- Remember that many aspects of American culture will seem strange to some students, such as our high prioritizing of our individual civil rights.
- Remember that “patchwriting” often represents a genuine effort to do research by a student whose reading and paraphrasing abilities still need some assistance.

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CALL FOR PAPERS

Inquirer is a journal devoted to teaching, learning, and scholarship at BMCC. The editors welcome manuscripts on any number of topics for No. 29, including but not limited to the following:

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- The story of on-line teaching: successes, failures, benefits, problems, joys!
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- Ways to enliven the(on-line)classroom
- Teaching challenges faced and resolved
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Send *proposals* to the editors by February 15, 2022.

The deadline for completed manuscripts is April 16, 2022.

Authors should aim for a finished manuscript of roughly 2500 words, though the editors will consider longer and shorter submissions. Works in Progress will also be considered.

All submissions should be in Microsoft Word, double-spaced and in 12-point font, with text, notes, and references formatted in a recognized style (e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago) or in the conventional style of the author's discipline.

Send inquiries and articles to the editors:

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