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Introduction

As this sixteenth volume of *Inquirer* goes to press, there is much to think about and much expectation in the air. Here in the five boroughs, we have just decided who may ask for the privilege of leading our city into the next decade. Around the country, fierce debates rage over the future of healthcare, the future of our economy, the future of our polity, not to mention the future of education. Around the world, people and nations anxiously await an international gathering on climate change that will decide how (we hope) this century will unfold for the broader earth community. Much to think about, much to talk and listen about, much to teach about, and much to research and write about. Thinking, talking, listening. Teaching, researching, writing. These are the things we educators do. These are the things we have promised ourselves and our students and our university that we will do.

Inquirer is not only a text for our enjoyment, it is a tool for our use as educators. Between these covers you will find good grist for thinking about the things we do, about how to do them all and how to do them well. The volume opens with an article about how students connect with each other in the classroom, co-authored by one of our own and a colleague from the University of Nebraska (Glaser & Bingham), and a related article that asks the question of classroom community through the lens of immigration (Hayduk). Much like other communities, our classroom communities are made of both what unites us and what divides us. Next comes an article on learning styles (Aslanian), and another by a teacher who teaches future teachers (Ray). We must always be attentive to how our students learn, and we must never stop learning how to teach. The next two articles are about teaching mathematics, but they bear on all of our various disciplines. The first is about the challenges of teaching developmental courses, and offers a reminder of some basic pedagogical techniques (Morgulis). The second concerns the more advanced side of mathematics education and emphasizes teaching a comprehensive view across the disciplinary spectrum (Lee). We must teach the basics of our disciplines so that we might teach them in depth, and we must teach the depth of our disciplines by also teaching the breadth of them. Next comes a triptych: an article on teaching poetry to remedial English students (Noiman), and two poems, one about being a teacher (Brunn), and the second, in both Spanish and English, about teaching a 'mood' (Barrero/Galasso). If a poem is a mirror of worlds for our students, it is also a window through which we teachers may glimpse our own world. The next pair of articles take up respectively the importance of a teacher's enthusiasm for the course materials (Zufolo), and the gift of unplanned teachable moments (Markstein). Students expect our enthusiasm, and sometimes we can rediscover it in the most unexpected places. The volume closes with two articles on the challenges of research and writing. If only we look, there are rich resources for us in the reciprocal influence of our teaching on our research and our research on our teaching (Isserles & Salam). And, though we teach so much and so well, there are ways to get our research and writing done too (Mathews-Salazar). It is possible, even if it isn't easy, to "juggle uphill."

Matthew Ally & Page Delano, editors

Students' Relationships in the Basic Speech Course

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This article is a brief summary of a study being published in an upcoming edition of *The Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. Bingham (Professor in the School of Communication at the University of Nebraska at Omaha) and I wanted to understand more about how students connect with one another in the basic speech course. It has been well documented that students who feel a sense of community in the classroom report greater academic motivation, affinity for school, and enjoyment of class (Battistich, et al., 1995; Battistich et al., 1991; Schaps et al., 1997). Conversely, a lack of social support has been related to difficulty in adjusting to school, a propensity to drop out of college, and negative academic performance (Cutrona et al., 1994; McGrath et al., 2000). Bingham and some colleagues developed a self-report instrument, the Connected Classroom Climate Inventory (CCCI) (Dwyer et al., 2004) (Appendix I), to understand how student connectedness relates to student learning (Prisbell et al, 2009) and communication apprehension (Carlson et al., 2006). We used that instrument and an open-ended questionnaire (Appendix II) to find out what classroom behaviors, exercises, and assignments in the basic speech course increase student connectedness. We surveyed 62 students in three of my basic speech courses (SPE 100). They anonymously filled out the questionnaires at the end of the final; I did not read them until after I had submitted their grades.

Classroom behaviors

It should come as no surprise that any activity that allowed the students to interact increased their sense of connectedness, even the contentious debate one section engaged in. However, I was surprised to find that the activity the students most often mentioned as one which increased their sense of connectedness was the speeches they presented in class. I had not thought of speeches as a way to help students bond, but they clearly are. As one student wrote, "People have to get up in front of their peers and recite a speech that can make them very uncomfortable emotionally and physically. Other students respect this and can bond on a deeper level to other individuals based on their emotional and physical needs."

Besides classroom activities there were three student behaviors that helped students form strong relationships. The first was *friendliness* (being out-going and talkative, smiling, laughing, saying hello, making each other laugh). The second was *honesty*. Said one student, "I like the feeling of sincerity and honesty that I got when everybody gave their speeches." The third kind of behavior that stu-

dents perceived strengthened their bonds was *supportive* behavior. One student wrote, "You break down social barriers when a group of people all individually have to do the same trying task in front of their group. People typically respect this and can open to console their fellow classmates which typically turns into a strong friendship bond."

Regarding the instructor behaviors that helped students feel connected to each other, the students most appreciated my efforts in structuring activities that allowed them to get to know one another. Secondly, they appreciated my speaking to them "on our level," and being "laid-back." Very few students mentioned the content of my speech as being helpful. Early in the semester, I gave a few lectures about the importance of supportive behavior in the classroom, how listening effects relationships, and some basics of interpersonal communication. Evidently, these lectures were pretty well forgotten by the end of the semester.

Student Connectedness Impacts the College Experience.

Finally, we wanted to know if students' relationships in the class impacted their wider college experience. In response to question 9 ("Has this class made you feel more comfortable at BMCC? Why or why not?"), 51 students answered "yes." The reason most often stated for their increased comfort was that they know more people, made friends, feel there are people they can relate to at the school, and feel like they belong. Some students felt that the process of making friends in the basic speech course helped them make friends in other courses also. Wrote one student, "I feel there are people who I can relate to, just like people in this class." So there may be a certain ripple effect where strong student connections in one class increase the connections throughout the college.

The students also perceived that their classroom relationships helped their learning in a number of ways: *socially, motivationally, and cognitively*. In terms of the *social* aspects of the course, quite a few students said the class was easier, more comfortable, and more fun because of their friendships. Having friends also added a supportive element to the class so that they could call on each other for help. According to one student, "I know if I have trouble with anything I didn't understand, I can consult with my classmates." This dimension of comfort and support in the classroom wasn't simply task-oriented so that students had help with the material, but according to one student, also stretched into the emotional dimension: "I feel more comfortable like if I make an effort, no one is going to judge me."

Many students also found their classroom friendships to be *motivating*. Some felt that their friendships made them want to come to class and to do well in it. Wrote one, "It's a drive to want to do the work and attend class. It's that extra push." Other students said it made them want to learn, work harder, and "give that information to them clearly." It seems, then, that classroom friendships helped some students push themselves to get to class and work harder on their assignments.

Interestingly, two students felt that they benefited *cognitively* from their classroom friendships. One student wrote, "Connecting with others makes me think better." Another wrote, that it "improves my ability." While only two stu-

dents mentioned an effect on their cognitive processes, it is certainly one directly relevant to our responsibilities as educators and deserves some serious exploration in the future.

Conclusion

In sum, students seemed to form strong connections in the basic speech course and highly valued those connections. They attributed interactive class activities (including the speeches) to helping them form those connections, as well as very specific student behavior, including joking, listening, talking honestly, and encouragement. In addition, having strong student connections in the classroom appears to have had some profound and wide effects for the students. They enjoyed the classroom experience more, found others to help them with assignments, were more motivated to attend class and complete their assignments, and consistent with previous research (Prisbell et al., 2009), may even have learned better. We hope this research helps instructors of all disciplines think about the relationships that form and the communicative behaviors that occur in the classroom.

Appendix 1. Connected Classroom Climate Inventory

Students respond to the following statements with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

1. I feel a sense of security in my class.
2. I have common ground with my classmates.
3. I feel a strong bond with my classmates.
4. The students in my class share stories and experiences with one another.
5. The students in my class are friendly with one another.
6. The students in my class respect one another.
7. I feel included in class discussions in my class.
8. The students in my class are courteous with one another.
9. The students in my class praise one another.
10. The students in my class are concerned about one another.
11. The students in my class smile at one another.
12. The students in my class engage in small talk with one another.
13. The students in my class are non-judgmental with one another.
14. The students in my class laugh with one another.
15. The students in my class are supportive of one another.
16. The students in my class show interest in what one another is saying.
17. The students in my class cooperate with one another.
18. The students in my class feel comfortable with one another.

Appendix 2. Interview Protocol—Student Connectedness

I am studying student relationships and what helps build friendships in the classroom. I am especially interested in the basic public-speaking course. Please answer the following questions as thoroughly as you can.

1. How many of the students in this class do you feel connected to?
2. What happens in this class that helps people feel connected?
3. Do you feel you are friendlier with students in this class than with students in other classes? Why or why not?
4. What classroom activities do you think make people feel connected to each other?
5. What was it about those activities that helped people feel connected?
6. What behaviors from the students in this class make you feel connected to them?
7. Does your instructor engage in behaviors that make you feel connected to the students? (Yes/No/Not sure) If yes, briefly describe those behaviors.
8. Was there a particular incident or incidents that made you feel more connected to the class? If so, please describe it.
9. Has this class made you feel more comfortable at BMCC? Why or why not?
10. Have you made friends in this class?
11. How does feeling connected to other students in a class affect your learning in the class?

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Teaching Immigration at BMCC

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I came to the topic of immigration through my experience in the Anti-Apartheid and Latin American Solidarity movements during the 1980s. As a student, the horrible violations of human rights in South Africa and Central America – that led many to flee their homelands – were matched only by the level of deprivation I saw among the children in foster care and the homeless I encountered as a social worker here in the United States. The struggles by poor and working people for social and economic justice in the neighborhoods where I worked in New York City, San Francisco and New Brunswick, N.J. – like the liberation movements in South Africa and Central America – were by-products of political and economic policies which produced rampant inequalities and mass migration.

Today, mass migration poses particular challenges and unique opportunities for educators. On the one hand, immigrants are being pitted against the native-born, especially African Americans and low-wage workers, exacerbating competition and conflict among groups. On the other hand, new immigrants are changing the ethnic makeup of the U.S., creating opportunities to address structural racism and economic exploitation. In the context of increasing inequalities and the faltering neo-liberal economic system, these developments provide openings to foster critical thinking and social change.

In my courses, my basic aim is to identify what divides us and what unites us, particularly working people and people of color, through the lens of immigration. I challenge popularly held myths, such as the notion that immigrants "choose" to migrate (rather than being displaced) and that "race" is biological (rather than socially constructed). I also explore effective strategies that mitigate competition and conflict and instead help build alliances and solidarity.

Teaching the Politics of Race and Ethnicity at BMCC

Why are things the way they are? How do we understand change? These fundamental questions animate critical inquiry, regardless of discipline and subject. I have found immigration to be a wonderful lens through which to examine various dimensions of difference and commonality, continuity and change, conflict and coalition, local and global. How is migration both a consequence of changes in the political economy and trade policy, and how does it affect politics and society? I ask students to grapple with these broad areas of inquiry by examining specific information (census data, election data, public opinion surveys), analyzing texts and movies, and exploring modes of self discovery and reflection (family histories). All of these can be powerful motivators for personal growth and life-long learning. Of course, it doesn't hurt that my classes are typically comprised of students from nearly every continent, representing a wildly diverse range of social-class backgrounds, cultural roots, and personal experience.

From day one, I ask students to write down – and share – something about

themselves (place of birth, where they grew up, interests, issues of particular concern, hobbies, etc.). The use of personal and family histories is a great way to begin to locate where people are coming from and how they are situated vis-à-vis each other. This can be accomplished through writing assignments and in group discussion settings. In this way, students begin to identify those with whom they share commonalities and/or have differences. Oh, you are from China? Are you a U.S. citizen? Hey, I'm Dominican… So, does that mean you are Latino? Or Black? Both? My parents brought me to the U.S. from Jamaica when I was young. Mine too, from Mexico… When did your parents arrive? Why did they leave? Are you going to become a citizen of the U.S.? I can't, I'm undocumented… I'm American, what is your ancestry? I'm from Russia…Does that make you white? Right away we're talking about race and ethnicity.

In short, sharing personal histories is a useful means to examine issues of ethnicity, race, class, and to do so at the personal, social and political levels. In so doing, I find opportunities to point out how immigrants from Europe (Irish, Italian, Jews) were not always perceived as "white" historically (i.e., in the taxonomy of the day), but became white and American over time. Using a mix of texts, images, movie, and music clips, I illuminate this history and draw parallels to contemporary immigrants. For example, reading portions of Theodore Allen's *Invention of the White Race* or Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White* provides compelling evidence grounded in social science; discussing cartoons from *Harper's Weekly*, such as one depicting a group of Irish immigrants sitting on a porch smoking with big lips (implying the Irish are akin to blacks who were historically stereotypes as simian figures); or interrogating segments of film clips such as *The Gangs of New York* or *A Day Without A Mexican*—all amply show how ethnicity, race and class are bound up in the making of U.S. identities and the United States itself. Students are variously stunned or nod knowingly, and often express a bit of both, all of which invariably leads to engaged debate and discussion.

Another assignment that has proven effective entails handing out (or posting on Blackboard) a short article that begins:

> In August local law enforcement and immigration officials in a small Pennsylvania town began receiving reports that undocumented immigrants were being offered sanctuary at a nearby residence…In response to this perceived emergency, an interagency task force of immigration and local police personnel was organized. It was decided that an early morning raid would be the quickest and safest way to take the immigrants into custody and to prepare them for deportation. The raid was carried out in September. After a brief struggle, the undocumented were overpowered, handcuffed and taken to jail, where they were told to prepare themselves for hearings to determine their eligibility for deportation.

I then ask students to respond and offer their impressions and reactions to this event. After discussion, which usually generates strong responses one way or another, I then provide the rest of the article, which reveals the above described

raid was conducted in 1850 not by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement but the U.S. Marshal, and that the undocumented were not Latinos or Asians but rather fugitive slaves who had crossed into Pennsylvania from Delaware in an attempt to escape slavery.[1] This usually leads to lively discussion. It also provides an opportunity to examine the proposition that the 'illegal' immigrant of today is the escaped slave of yesterday.

Some such teachable moments, however, may not be comfortable across the classroom spectrum. They can be confusing, unsettling, jarring. Because of this, it is natural to recoil from them. Yet, if we confront uncomfortable moments, learning experiences can be powerful.

One illustrative moment occurred in class where a student shared an observation connected to the issue of public transportation. An immigrant, who identified herself as Mexican, said: "The city put in new bus stop kiosks in my neighborhood but after a few weeks, they were defaced. What is wrong with these people?" In response, another student who identified as black, said: "You have to understand, people are hurting, scared, angry.....trying to make the rent, maybe sick with no health care… People see new buildings, rising rent, and who moves in? These new bus kiosks are a crumb...and look who gets the cake! You have to understand where people are coming from."

The class, comprised of a racially diverse group of students from mostly working class backgrounds, erupted in intense debate. One student reinforced the analysis put forth by their African American colleague: "So, people bust shit up because it's right in their face." Another student added, "Yeah, and Mexicans are taking jobs away from community residents…and they're the same people the city hired to put the damn kiosks up in the first place." A fourth student (white) countered, "Well, then why should the city put up the bus kiosks? It's no wonder the city does not provide facilities and equal services to all neighborhoods. You get what you deserve."

I seized this teachable moment, engaging students in discussion of the debate sparked by the vandalism of the bus kiosks (including spending time talking about connotations of words such as "vandalism"). In fact, we discussed the issue for the next several classes, where we analyzed the meaning of students' comments and experiences and linked them to key concepts, readings, and assignments. Over the next few class sessions more students were speaking up. Even more encouraging, more students were doing the assigned reading and producing better written work. Perhaps most importantly, these class sessions allowed students to grapple with each other around questions of race, ethnicity, and class in honest and frank ways.

We also explore how the terms race and ethnicity are often used interchangeably, yet how they have important differences. One of the most effective exercises I employ to critically examine race and ethnicity is to see how the categories have changed over time. For example, I show a segment of a film, *Race: The Power of an Illusion* produced by California Newsreel, that focuses

[1] Jean Damu. "Immigration Raids Echo History of African Americans." New America Media, September 13, 2007. http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=b1799b3bdaa10de0d629888ae9aaea26

on how particular national groups were not considered white in the scientific taxonomy of the 19th and early 20th centuries (e.g. Turks, Armeninans, Hindus, Japanese), and through several cases decided by the Supreme Court, were denied (or granted) the right to naturalize and become U.S. citizens. Citizenship, after all, is a fundamental means to gain access to rights and privileges. But the 1790 naturalization law stated only "free white persons" could naturalize until the middle of the 20th century. Similarly, I have used excerpts from Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White*, whose title says it all, to demonstrate that inclusion and exclusion are contingent and mutable. We discuss these questions in light of student's own experience and family histories – including interviewing relatives – which often leads to insight and rich discussion.

Discussion of student's genealogies and experience almost always brings up good fodder for learning, even if accompanied by the challenging terrain of stereotypes and discomfort (for students and faculty alike). Why are some groups associated with particular jobs, status, etc.? Why are some groups more "successful" than others? Does "merit" play a role in determining who benefits more than others, or are different outcomes better explained by intuitional racism and class privilege? Why do some people's "life menus" offer more choice than others? I link such discussion to literature on social distancing – particularly regarding African Americans – and to texts about how the Irish and Italians muscled their way into the political party machines during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which to this day allows many Irish and Italians to continue to hold onto jobs in the police and fire departments of major cities. This gives greater meaning to the notion of "structural racism," the changing but persistent racial hierarchy reinforced by institutions, and how it complicates the process of immigrant incorporation and has blunted working class alliances.

Illuminating change in the social structure is another powerful teaching tool. Maps, graphs, and charts can bring meaning to data and life to discussion. One such tool that has proven particularly effective for me is a large poster called "Social Stratification in the United States: The American Profile Poster" (Stephen J. Rose, 2007). Each figure represents every person living within the U.S. social structure, including by race, class, gender, age, occupation, and more—all in one multicolored poster. Moreover, it presents the corresponding income and wealth distribution of the population. Supplemental instructional material depicts changes over time. Seeing is believing. These graphic tools show that the overwhelming number of today's ethnic and racial minorities, many of whom are immigrants or children of immigrants, make up the majority of the working class, particularly in states and cities where they are concentrated.[2] When students see they comprise the majority, that the middle class has been shrinking, and that the rich have gotten super rich, we can shift the focus to what produces inequalities and how "we" can address them. Examining the connections between race, ethnicity, and class through such questions can help frame not only critical discussion but also problem solving.

[2] Although women have reached numerical parity among immigrants, power dynamics are still sharply skewed towards men. See *New Labor Forum* (Summer 2008) and Hester Eisenstein (2009).

Learning toward the future

Although there is disagreement among professionals and students alike about the overall economic impact of immigrants, there is a growing popular consensus that large-scale immigration heightens competition over low-wage jobs, particularly among people of color. Immigrants serve as scapegoats for problems exacerbated by the current economic contraction. The rise in unemployment among blacks, for example, is due principally to the decline in manufacturing, cuts in public employment, and business attacks on unions. Displacement by immigrants has been just a single factor in a situation whose primary causes – greedy and unscrupulous employers, structural racism, economic restructuring, and intransigent economic and public policy – are too easily ignored.

Throughout the semester, and especially during the last half, I focus on how the increasingly diverse ethnic make-up of the U.S. affords unique opportunities to foster progress. Thankfully, we can point to commonalities that formed the basis for multiracial alliances – within and between pan-ethnic groups (Latinos, Asians), as well as between African-Americans and progressive whites – to wage and win significant battles, such as by increasing minimum and living wages, fighting mass incarceration, enforcing equal rights protections, improving public education and healthcare, and scoring electoral victories. Such coalitions have involved immigrant and civil rights groups, worker centers, labor unions, community-based organizations, policy groups, and progressive public officials. The growing political strength of the immigrant rights movement – which, as most of our students recall, filled the streets with millions of marchers in dozens of cities in 2006 to oppose harsh federal legislation and demand political rights – holds promise for building anti-racist, class-based, multiracial alliances. Many successful and innovative coalitional efforts suggest possible strategies and policy goals for a multiracial politics. The mobilization around Barack Obama's election is the most recent example of a multiracial political formation, at least in electoral terms.

A Better Deal

How can educators help resolve social and economic conflict between immigrants and blacks? One thing I do is to ask students to develop proposals, policies, and projects aimed at building mutual understanding and solidarity. If you were mayor, governor, president, what would you do to build ties that bind among workers and people of color? Such assignments can be tailored for specific needs and preferences, including small group activities in class or individual research projects. Similarly, I often require students to consult with organizations that are in the business of advancing social justice, including having students go to open meetings, public hearings, demonstrations, a speech, or a conference. I provide examples of activities and lists of organizations they can choose from for ideas, and require a short reaction paper (what did you do/see/hear, what did you feel and think about it, and how does it relate to the subject at hand). I arrange for our class to meet at city hall for a press conference or at the office of a nearby not-for-profit organization instead of in our classroom. I sometimes ask students to take a position on an issue – for or against – and then we conduct a debate

together in class.

Over the last few years that I've been teaching along these lines, countless students – although not all of them— have arrived at the conclusion that we all have common interests in having safe streets, good jobs, affordable housing, access to healthcare, quality education, and clean air and water. More and more students believe these public goods should and can be made widely available. And they are bolder in expressing such sentiments. As one student succinctly put it, "Isn't this what the American Dream is all about? Whatever mode of transportation by which each of us got here, by boat, car, airplane or on foot—and whether you came by choice, were brought here, or by happenstance—we're all in the same boat now."

No doubt, the election of Barak Obama and the current populist outrage at corporate greed gone amuck have contributed to an increased salience of this kind of reasoning. These trends bode well for all educators who seek to teach members of the multiracial working class that they can be allies to each other in the fight against their collective oppression and for their mutual liberation.

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Learning Our Students

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Developmental Skills

Field-sensitive, field independent, introvert, extrovert, visual, tactile, kinesthetic, concrete, reflective, abstract, sequential, random, cognitive, affective, active, passive—you guessed it right: these are psychological terms denoting propensities, tendencies and inclinations that students bring to the classroom in the process of pursuing their education. As individuals are different in their backgrounds and personality traits, so are their learning styles and their intelligences (for an in-depth discussion of multiple intelligences, see Silver, et al., 2000). In the classroom, we have the teacher, the student, and the course materials; and of the three components, the student is central. Whatever happens in the classroom, if the student does not learn, then the academic goals have not been achieved. The central premise of this article is that awareness of learning styles and of the variety of ways in which students—and teachers—absorb and retain knowledge will enable teachers to improve their teaching. Understanding the ways students learn and process what they learn is key to our efforts as teachers to maximize student learning. This article looks at some recent literature on learning styles, seen in light of my own experience as a teacher here at Borough of Manhattan Community College.

It is an indisputable fact that people learn in different ways. Some move around and learn. Others sit quietly and learn. Some learn by looking and listening; others by doing. Some learn better alone, others learn better in groups. A simple definition of learning style would be: the preference or predisposition of an individual to process information (which could be visual, auditory, and/or tactile). It follows, then, that, in a class of 25 students there will be a need for a number of teaching approaches, and not just one (e.g., "chalk and talk"). Sims & Sims (1995) come to the conclusion that "Virtually all learning and teaching research indicates that a range of learning situations must be available to the students" (p. 17). We would all agree as educators that learning is a complex process, but it is also an internal and individual process, which might not be readily discernible. Learning style, according to Bloom (1976), is a function of the student's cognitive, affective, and physiological behavior. Sarasin goes so far as to say that three-fifths of an individual's learning style is biological or genetic (1998, 9). These sorts of research conclusions should convince us that there has to be a conscious effort on the part of teachers to explore and discover as much as possible just how students learn and process information.

I have no doubt that every teacher wants to do the best for his or her students. But intentions are not sufficient to make learning successful. Some of my observations of other classes have brought home to me the notion that as teachers we tend to opt for the established routine, and any kind of change comes as difficult or undesirable. I have observed classes in all their variety. I have seen teacher-centered environments as well as student-oriented classes, and the whole spectrum. We know what we want and we know what students need; and

this conviction becomes the driving force. What we often miss is the fact that good teaching does not necessarily result in good learning. If there is any lesson to be learned from exploring learning styles, it is that a teacher needs to entertain a paradox; the idea of teaching to the whole class while at the same time teaching each individual in the class (Mentkowski, 2000). I am convinced that only through reading the research literature, and perhaps especially through self-reflection and self-analysis can teachers transform their understanding of how students learn and, as a result, improve and grow in their teaching.

In the past few years, I have been able to revisit some of the classroom tasks and attitudes that I bring to my classes, and this has made me more aware of what I do, what students do, and how they respond. Mentkowski succinctly defines teaching thus: "Teaching is a multilayered and polyrhythmic activity that involves intense interactions of observation, judgment, decision making, and action, mediated by frameworks of practice" (2000, 284). The teacher needs to observe what happens in the classroom and what kinds of feedback need to be provided to the students at any given time. What I do in every class is rarely the same; the dynamics change constantly depending on students' proficiency level and the chemistry of the class. I have learned over time that as each student is different with different educational and social backgrounds, and as each student comes with a particular package of intellectual, affective, and physical characteristics, I need to be flexible in all my activities and expectations. One aspect of teaching that I have paid close attention to is my relationship and patterns of interaction with students. This self-scrutiny has led to the conviction that regular individual interaction with students enhances the level of learning and raises students' awareness of what they are expected to learn. When I talk to individual students, I get to learn their strengths and weaknesses, their social dilemmas and their personal predicaments. Without individual contact and individually gauging student performance and perception of what happens in the classroom, the teacher might continue to function in an unrealistic world, a world in which all students can and should learn the same way and at the same pace.

Educational research seems to indicate that the difference between a student-centered class and a teacher-centered one is that in the former you know whether or not learning is happening; while, in the latter there is no way of knowing what students are learning, if anything. When the teacher, for example, is constantly busy talking, explaining, and rehashing information, most students most probably are busy not listening and absorbing. In my own classes, I make a conscious effort to see what part of my lesson is received and digested and what part is lost in the noise. One of my approaches is to vary my tasks based on students' attention and stamina. Once I see them distracted or inattentive, I change the activity to help them regroup and refocus. Sometimes, after explaining a language point, I immediately ask one or two students to rephrase the point of the lesson; and based on whether or not the students have a good grasp of the issue at hand, I adjust my next move.

One of the most noteworthy discoveries of research in educational psychology is that for children to learn something new well, they need about 10 exposures to the new information in various contexts through various media. But for

adults to learn something new, they need about 50 exposures in various contexts. What does this mean to me as a teacher of English to speakers of other languages, and for all of us, as teachers in such a diverse community of learners? It clearly means that I must constantly train myself to be a patient facilitator when I teach my classes. With this specific awareness, I am able to provide as many contexts and channels of presentation as I possibly can and have students contribute as many examples and modalities as they can to make sure that a new point is comprehended and practiced adequately. To augment learning and cater to different learning styles, I make sure that students repeat the new structure orally several times, then write it down in different contexts a few times and then rehearse it the following class period, and so on. In a recent class, to give an example of my modus operandi, one of my students asked me to explain a grammar point in an essay of hers that I had marked. I asked her to look at my feedback on the paper and let me know if she understood what I meant. She looked and thought, and thought and looked, and I waited sitting next to her patiently. After a couple of minutes, I realized that she had misunderstood my correction cues. I then asked her to turn to her classmate and see if he could help her see the point. He looked at my correction and explained something in a way that confused the first student even more. For one or two minutes, I stood there quietly listening to the two to see if their interaction would bear any fruit. As no clear explanation emerged, I intervened and gave her a couple of other examples, which clarified the point beyond any doubt. Then they both wrote down the correction and read it out loud a couple of times. My judgment at that moment was that the confused interaction was a necessary precursor for my explanation to make sense. Also it gave both students a chance to think out loud and interact in order to gauge their own understanding. I notice that I find myself often busy looking for students' signs of comprehending and learning. If a student says she understands what I am saying, then I ask her to explain it back to me or provide an example so I know if it is true that she has understood.

Sarasin presents a tour of learning styles. He condenses them into four categories:

1. Concrete: in a very real way, student is physically involved in the task.
2. Abstract: student is precise and attentive to specific details and is cognitive by nature.
3. Sequential: student needs the lesson to be structured and ordered, and the process has to be clear and precise.
4. Random: student is holistic by nature and prefers to be "all over the place." (1998, 13-14).

These four categories inarguably confirm the common sense view that teachers need to present the materials in various ways and modalities (and different media) and have the students engage in a variety of activities from speaking orally, to writing it down, to presenting it to a group or the whole class, to walking to the board and writing it for all to see, to reading it silently and sum-

marizing it. Clearly an awareness of these learning styles will inevitably change a teacher's role from that of a lecturer to that of a facilitator and orchestrator.

It is worth reiterating that one of the joys of teaching and reading about teaching & learning is that the teacher discovers new ideas, new concepts, new outlooks and new approaches. It is an endlessly heuristic process. To this end, I try to make a point of periodically sequestering myself in the library for several days and peruse professional journals, books and online publications on teaching in order to learn new words, new perspectives and novel concepts. Kierkegaard, the 19th-century Danish philosopher, for instance, hit the nail on the head with regard to the teacher-student relationship in the classroom: "Instruction begins when you, the teacher, learn from the learner. Put yourself in his place so that you may understand what he learns and the way he understands it" (quoted in Felder & Bent, 2005).

To recap what has been discussed in this essay, since students learn in different ways, the idea of "one-size-fits-all" is not the most efficient approach to teaching. One of the goals of teaching is to help students become active learners—to be able to analyze, predict, compare and contrast, apply, and evaluate (for a thorough discussion, see Nist & Simpson, 2000). Undeniably, it is necessary for our students to acquire learning styles or strategies other than their preferred one(s), or at least to try them. For example, somebody who is quiet most of the time could be encouraged to participate in group discussions; or somebody who likes to talk constantly and dominate the class discussion can be cajoled into reflecting and writing, and so on. Acquiring this diversity in learning styles is crucial if students want to be successful in their academic lives and their careers simply because various fields of study require various approaches to learning. It stands to reason, then, that teachers should explicitly teach students certain learning strategies over the course of a semester. Also relevant in this context is the fact that "students and professors frequently have different perceptions of what is considered the essential thinking process in a particular domain" (Nist & Simpson, 2000, p. 649). Our observations of our students make it abundantly clear to us that very often they do not approach their academic world with an effective mindset — and that's what we need to help them develop during their stay in college. To give an example, since reading happens to be the basis for approximately 85% of all college learning (Voss & Silfies,1996; in Kamil, et al., 2000, p. 648), it is imperative that students be encouraged to take both extensive and intensive reading seriously. One way to build reading into school work would be to give homework assignments that would require reading on a regular basis. My sense is that in addition to teaching content to our students, we need to go one step further and help our students become self-driven and goal-oriented. We also should make every effort to assist them in their struggle for a college education. In other words, I consider one of my responsibilities as a teacher to be to provide my students with an atmosphere that would be conducive to learning; and I should also teach them how to learn while being mindful of their individual learning styles. In a nutshell, if we want our students to improve their learning styles and acquire some new ones, we need to reflect on how we ourselves learn—and share the process with our students.

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Reflections on the Reading Literacy Project

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Teacher Education

As a relatively new professor, I actively seek out new strategies and formats to present information or address any challenges I may be facing in the classroom. I have always aimed (as may be the case with many faculty members) to rely on the students to have the assigned reading completed before reporting to class, at times without success. Because of this discrepancy, I took part in the Literacy and Reading Project, which teamed BMCC faculty members with literacy consultants (mentors). My goal in participating in the project was to increase students' engagement with the assigned readings. Mentors and faculty members were to meet and discuss the focus and techniques we were already implementing. Then, the mentors would work with us to develop new strategies, and we would implement those strategies.

As the spring semester began to get into full swing, I started working with my literacy consultant Joseph Allen and his reading fellow colleagues. We discussed the strategy of previewing to enhance students' interest in assigned readings for a course. In the past, I have tried to mention what was to happen in the next class to give the students a preview as to what to expect. When discussing this approach with colleagues, it seemed to be a more formal strategy implemented in their classes. The meeting with the literary consultants had perfect timing, because I was teaching Toddler Care and Curriculum (ECE 304). Early Childhood Education 304 is the second curriculum class for students in the teacher education department, focusing on children two to 36 months old. There were 17 students in the class, and we met twice a week. It is important to note that the students were completing fieldwork in a closely related and co-requisite class.

This class was challenging for me for many different reasons. I was teaching it for the first time, so I had turned to my colleagues for suggestions on texts to use and how to approach this class overall. Taking my colleagues' advice, I chose the two textbooks and format of the class that they had found successful in the past. In the beginning, I felt secure with this decision, but quickly found out that I would have made different choices for the textbooks if I'd had more time to think about it. During the course of the semester, I felt a growing disconnect between the students and me. In addition, I became disinterested in one of the recommended textbooks (Textbook A), required reading for the class. A few of the students voiced their dissatisfaction with either one or both of the textbooks (Textbook A and B) as well. I felt Textbook A was presented from a perspective students had a difficult time connecting to. Reflecting on the book and their concerns, I believe I could have selected more engaging reading material that provided solid connections for the students.

I met with Joseph Allen to discuss my concerns and the previewing strategy. I informed Joseph that I was getting ready to distribute midterm evaluations to receive feedback from students. The standard form I had been using had 12 ques-

tions that required a rating and one open-ended question asking what influenced their overall rating of the instructor. After Joseph reviewed the evaluation sheet with me, he suggested that I ask for specific feedback in the comment section. Therefore, I added two questions: "What is working in this course" and "What can be improved? Please be specific."

With the changes, I found that I received more specific feedback than I had in past classes. None to my surprise, many of the students were feeling a disconnect just as I was feeling! By this time I was chomping at the bit to find out what the students believed could improve the class, including readings with more detailed explanations. In the next class meeting, I thanked the students for their comments and suggestions and engaged in an open discussion with them about how to improve the class. The class and I brainstormed ways to incorporate what they wanted more of in the classroom, still meeting the learning objectives of the class. We came up with two ideas, to bring in a short discussion of their fieldwork experience, and to have more visuals and group work to echo the readings.

After meeting with Joseph Allen, I made an effort to preview the reading and briefly state how it related to what was discussed in class that day. I was hoping this would draw preliminary links to future material and motivate students to complete the reading prior to class. In reflecting on this strategy, the majority of the time I did preview the next topic with the students as well as refer to the syllabus, although I believe there should have been more in-depth previewing in class. This could have been achieved by setting aside the last five minutes of class and presenting highlights and links of future topics, I will start this strategy at the beginning of the semester. Starting a new strategy in the middle of the semester seemed daunting for the students and me.

Next semester I will teach this same class, but will make this class more of a reflection of my teaching style. My pedagogical perspective has been to incorporate hands-on activities into every lecture to maintain active learning. Before each class, I aim to inform my students that I expected them to read before class to increase the effectiveness of the hands-on activities and that could help retain the information we worked with. Through this process I have learned to trust my intuition as an educator to fully develop my teaching style. I have decided to keep Textbook B and construct a booklet of articles for the second textbook. The articles I have selected have concrete connections to the toddler classroom and curriculum. In addition, the newly selected articles are geared towards teachers and students. I trust this will make a strong impression and connection with the students to enhance the effectiveness of the literature.

After meeting with Joseph Allen and my small group, implementing previewing, and integrating the students' feedback, I started to form a connection with the class. I concluded the students had become more engaged and interested in the reading. This was evident when class discussions were more lively and emulated ideas from Textbook B. Also, the visuals and group work reflected the interests of students and furthered their understanding of the reading material. In sum, I found that the students and I performed better with the assistance of the Reading Literacy Program.

Improving Students' Success Rates in Developmental Mathematics Courses

Alla Morgulis
Mathematics

As a mathematics professor at a two-year college, I often teach developmental courses. There are about 7,000 students enrolled every semester in one or another remedial mathematics course. The majority of the students come with little or no background in mathematics. They describe previous experiences with mathematics as: "I am not good in math", or "Math is not my strong subject", or even worse "I hate math, ever since elementary school." These sorts of claims reflect not only knowledge deficiency and a weak grasp of mathematical concepts, but also a negative attitude toward math as a subject in general. This is, of course, unsurprising, since a person's attitude toward any subject, including mathematics, is typically based on whether previous experience resulted in success.

This attitude is particularly acute when it comes to mathematics. I would almost call it epidemic. Even in casual conversations, when people ask me about my profession, after my response they often follow with, "I've never been good in math." It is unlikely to hear someone say, "I'm not good in reading" or "I cannot write," as these are considered universal skills in our society, and admitting to such a weakness could result in shunning (Ware, Johnson, 2000; Yousif, 2007; Jonson, 2003; Karr, 2007). However, admitting to not being good in math turns few heads, since so many people seem to be able to relate to the same problem. "The problem of the best treatment to remedy the behavior of math avoidance is a complicated one, since the origins of the behavior are themselves are deep-seated and complex" (Tobias, Kogelman, 1980). In time, unsuccessful math students become parents, and their message and attitude toward math is conveyed to their children as well. During my professional experience, I have heard many parents commiserating with their kids' negative attitudes about mathematics, thus giving them a message that it is okay to have problems with math, perfectly normal, since they too have had them. In the end, the anxiety becomes almost a cultural norm when so many people openly admit and accept their incompetence in the universal and logical language of mathematics.

It is only human to fear the unknown. In this case, the unknown is the language of numbers, which happens to be an unfamiliar territory for so many of our students that the general sentiment is that mathematics must be fearsome and hard, and so is to be avoided. This creates a tendency (based on brief disappointing experience and/or through word of mouth) to expect that this required class will be no less a troubling experience. Indeed, individuals with math anxiety simply do not believe they can solve mathematics problems, solidifying their negative attitude toward math (Ashkraft & Kirk, 2001). These individuals may "avoid environments and careers that require the utilization of math skills" (Hopko, 2003). As college instructors we cannot change our students' prior negativities with the subject, but we can make their future experience more rewarding. So what can we do?

When teaching any mathematics course, and especially a developmental course, an instructor is the facilitator of learning. Personally, I treat teaching and learning just like dancing: whereby I have to "lead" 30 or so inexperienced "dancers" to follow the steps of a structured routine. A well choreographed routine will allow the students to gain confidence in their first steps and build on that for the challenges ahead. A badly choreographed routine will throw everything into dissonance and the learning momentum will be off from the start. Here are a handful effective guidelines and principles that I have discovered and developed over the years of my teaching experience.

1. ***Clarity about course outcomes and grading policy. Clear expectations.***
   During the first session in a semester the instructor explains the main goal of the course and clarifies the purposes of each student. He/she lays out course requirements, explains grading policy, describes in great detail the successful exit criteria for the class as well as stressing the importance of regular attendance. He/she should emphasize that every lateness and absence counts.

2. ***Get to know your students.***
   The instructor also should get to know his/her students. It is very important to know your students by name. It will not only make the communication process easier, but also will contribute to a personal connection between the instructor and his/her students. In the beginning of the semester I collect contact information data from all students. This includes their e-mail/phone, major, availability for tutoring and one-on-one conferences. It is important to ensure that all students listen and understand everything that is being conveyed to them. Occasional questions of random students will ensure their attention and concentration.

3. ***Distribute Daily Progress Report (I also call it Quiz Progress Report - QPR).***
   This is a simple grid (mine is made on graph paper) that has two axes. On a horizontal axis I mark the quiz numbers (1 – 30) and on the vertical, the students' grades (0 – 100). I demonstrate on the board how it works, how to plot the grades on the grid, and how to connect the points. After each distribution of a graded quiz, I ask students to plot their new quiz grades on the QPR and connect the points. They see instantly their performance.

4. ***Friendly and positive classroom environment.***
   The instructor is the one who sets a special mood and climate of the group or class (Knowles et al., 1998). It must be an environment of mutual respect and desire to succeed. It is very important that the atmosphere of each class session will be positive and encouraging. An instructor's conduct should radiate faith that he/she puts in his/her students.

5. ***Establishing a daily routine that consists of a diverse mixture of activities.***
   "Introduction of a wide variety of activities, self-management techniques, and teaching and learning strategies may be an appropriate means of en-

hancing achievement among all the students in the developmental mathematics classroom" (Higbee, J., & Thomas, P., 1999). I have found the following mix to work well:

a) Collection of HW assignments.

In the beginning of each class session students are asked to put their homework assignments on instructor's desk. This fact obligates them to complete homework on a regular basis. Even if a student was absent, he/she is still required to be prepared and have the homework assignment ready. Usually, when I arrive at a classroom, all students' assignments are already waiting for me on my desk. This speeds up the collection process, and reinforces class routine.

b) Daily Quizzes (5 – 20 minutes).

Every class session begins with a short quiz that consists of 10 – 11 exercises (usually one is a bonus). The quizzes are cumulative and may contain material that was covered a week or a month ago. Having daily cumulative quizzes allows constant review of the material and additional practice that students need. It is important to have exercises of various levels of complexity, and not necessarily listed in order from easiest to more challenging. While students solve the quiz, I have enough time check their HW assignments.

c) Solving the entire quiz on board with students' active participation (15 – 20 minutes).

After the quiz, I ask individual students to solve each question and to explain every step of the solution. While a student explains the solution verbally, I record everything on the board. Often, other students ask questions and discuss the solution steps themselves. Many times, a single exercise will raise a discussion about a certain topic, a specific way of solving a problem, etc. At least a few exercises from the quiz will be shown with a couple of different methods of solution, which frequently ends up in an interesting and insightful debate between students. This part of the lesson is a favorite of mine, since students actively participate and learn from each other.

d) Taking up homework questions (10 – 15 minutes).

Students should always have an opportunity to ask questions about their homework exercises. Every single exercise will be solved and explained on the board completely with the students' active participation. Sometimes, if there are too many questions, I call a few students to the board, where they simultaneously solve various homework exercises that posed particular problems for other students. It is worth noting that all students who come up to solve questions on board must solve them without having their own written solution in hand, since all their homework is on my desk.

e) Presentation and practice of new material (20-30 minutes).

New material is always presented with plenty of examples and usually only after a range previous review-oriented activities. It is very important to show the connection between earlier and later topics. This connection

also helps alleviate students' diffidence about learning yet another math topic. Once they feel familiar and comfortable with one topic, they are less likely to feel intimidated by a related but new topic. After presentation of a new topic, it is important to practice enough with it, so that students will be able to do the same on their own at home. Students continue to work in groups or pairs or alone. I don't interfere with their preferences. Many of the students work in pairs, but some of them prefer to work alone. No restrictions here, it is up to them. Usually, I assign them to work on even numbered exercises from their textbook, so that the odd ones will be left for homework assignments.

f) Distribution of previous quiz and homework assignment.
While they practice with the new topic, I circulate among them, answer their questions, and at the same time return previous quizzes and catch a glimpse of their Quiz Progress Report. This is the time when I have about half a minute of personal attention with each individual student about his/her progress. Sometimes, I make remarks about lateness, or not fully completed homework, or about a need to improve his/her achievements based on the QPR. In come cases I praise the students (when they deserve it!), and, sometimes, I recommend tutoring and/or to see me during my office hours.

Frequently, I motivate them by giving an opportunity to get a high grade (100%) that will be counted as a quiz grade if they complete the entire assignment (usually about 10 exercises) correctly. Occasionally I may run this as a competition, wherein the first three students who solve everything correctly within a given timeframe will earn the equivalent of a perfect quiz grade. Students' motivation, enthusiasm, and level of engagement in the process are definitely worth it.

g) Conclusion and Summary (2 – 3 minutes) + homework assignment.
At the end of the class is vital to ask a student to summarize what was accomplished during the class session, and what was covered. These last couple of minutes of recalling the outcomes learned elicits a positive feeling of accomplishment and contributes to an optimistic viewpoint on the subject.

6. Keep clear records.

It is important to keep the records accurate, so that at any given point the instructor must be able to pull out the records about students' attendance, latenesses, homework, quiz grades, and test performance.

7. Availability of any learning resources.

The instructor makes every effort to organize and make easily available wide range of helpful resources for learning. He/she endeavors to make all kinds of writings, explanations, practice sheets, and internet resources accessible to students. It is important to make sure that every student is aware of tutoring possibilities as well as instructor's regular office hours.

8. Providing regular feedback to students.

Constant feedback is an essential tool to any mathematics course, and especially to a developmental math course. Students must be aware of their true progress. Moreover, they should be given the means to monitor their performance during the semester. An instructor should provide his/her students with feedback in the form of verbal evaluations, grades, personal conversations, conferences, etc. Providing detailed and consistent feedback to students, perhaps especially in a remedial course, is a vital part of supporting students' mathematical development (McClain, Johnson, 1995).

9. Monthly one-on-one conferences with students.

Monthly individual conferences provide an additional more extensive form of feedback to students. Every month I invite students to come to one-on-one conferences with me to discuss their performance and progress in class. Usually students are glad to participate in these conversations, where they will share with me their concerns and I can share my own thoughts about their work and progress. The conferences can be brief, taking only about 3-4 minutes for many students. When necessary, they can be longer. Students usually meet with me before or after class, and some will come to my office hours. In rare cases when the student has a schedule problem and cannot meet with me before/after class or come to my office hours, I discuss it with him during the last 15-20 minutes of the class session, while all students are practicing with the day's new material. It is important to note that the conference are not of the "…you have to do better in order to pass…" kind. It starts with a concise report on how the student is doing, how many latenesses/absences they have so far, how well they did on quizzes, tests, homework, and so on. The conversation then turns to me simply listening to the student's own feedback about the intensity of the coursework and talking about the ways they are coping with it. The student may talk about purely academic difficulties, or sometimes about a distracting personal issue that is affecting his/her performance. Regardless of the underlying issue, the point of the brief conference is to connect with the student as an individual, to care about his/her success in the class, and to provide a feeling of reassurance that you will do everything professionally possible to see them prevail by helping them to set explicit short- and long-term goals. Personal words of encouragement can work miracles in some cases.

Main points of the individual conference are:

10. Maintain high standards and requirements for your students.

It is important to realize that as college instructors we have to keep our standards at a level appropriate for the specific course. This is especially important for mathematics courses, since the material being taught has continuity in the following courses. We are simply obligated to teach the material on the appropriate level, cover all the material specified in the syllabus, and to enable our students to continue successfully onto the next course. Even

in the event that members of your class are inadequately prepared for your course level, you absolutely cannot lower your expectations and requirements. Not incidentally, and as research shows, students of teachers with high expectations perform better academically (Rubie-Davies, 2007).

Conclusion.

My main goal in teaching mathematics is to help students to develop confidence and belief that they are capable of successfully learning mathematics, and to alleviate their fear and math anxiety. By achieving this goal, we will be able to:

- Improve attitude towards mathematics as a subject.
- Improve students' attendance (and by extension, their general attitude toward formal education).
- Improve students' test scores.
- Increase mathematical literacy.
- Increase popularity of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) disciplines in general, and the mathematics major in particular.

Improving students' success rates in developmental mathematics courses can be quite challenging, as students often come inadequately prepared and/or with a negative bias toward mathematics – writing off any first-time failure as lack of natural predisposition and refraining from attempting again. Reestablishing student confidence is of the utmost importance, and can be achieved through clear class rules, a mixture of various activities in the daily routine, and frequent individual communication with students. The class routine described above, which I personally follow in my everyday work, was developed over the years with help from colleagues and through various workshops. While not a panacea for every situation, instructor, or class, as long as the suggested ten underlying principles are kept in mind, any routine can be effectively altered to adapt to changing variables.

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Bridging the Gap

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Mathematics

Is the sky still falling? That was the title of an article in American Mathematical Society's magazine *Notices*, January 2009 by David Bressoud. The article referred to the alarming trend in mathematical education, namely the decrease of the relative size of mathematics major undergraduate students. This is not only of concern to the mathematics community but to our overall society as well, since the U.S. economy's edge over the world has been its strength in technology, and technology comes from mathematics. Now our pipeline to that edge is shrinking.

The above mentioned article makes several recommendations to amend the situation. One of the recommendations is that "Mainstream calculus should not be the only entry to good college-level mathematics" (Bressoud, 2009, p.23). That recommendation is based on the observation that today's students need a more diverse approach to mathematics than what just Calculus can provide. For example, more and more applications are being developed using discrete mathematics.

Since basically all the entry to "good college-level mathematics" starts with calculus, which is mostly about continuous phenomena, students do not get the full picture of the interdependence between different branches of mathematics, for example between discrete mathematics and calculus. Too many topics are presented not as connected subjects but rather as isolated ones. It is no wonder that students do not get to appreciate fully what mathematics is all about and it is no wonder that we are losing our students.

We need to give our students more of a comprehensive view of mathematics. We need to connect mathematics with as many topics outside of mathematics as possible. We also need to connect different branches of mathematics as well (Klein 1932). In the first part of the last century, Klein described the overall mathematics education curriculum as follows: we start with the theory of equations, then the idea of powers and logarithms, then trigonometric functions as a new separate subject, then theory of infinite series. Then, all of sudden, we have: ,e-ix. =, cos-x+ ,i sin-x.., which looks surprising since these two kinds of functions, exponential and trigonometric, were defined in entirely separate fields. Then Klein described how this could be better handled with another approach (Klein, 1932, p. 77-79). Unfortunately Klein's idea was not adapted into the mainstream curriculum, but he makes a valuable point that we need to give our students a more connected and comprehensive picture of mathematics, to the outer world and within mathematics itself.

Many textbooks nowadays make a lot of effort to achieve exactly this. Personally, I ran into one good yet simple usage of mathematics in art here at BMCC. At a party at the TLC, I talked to an art professor who was frustrated because students did not know how to draw cubes correctly. She said that they could draw several edges parallel but they always made other edges go astray. She asked

me if there was any formula to help them understand how a cube is formed in 3-dimension. I was very glad that I could help her, but later I realized that artists have been using mathematics for centuries in the concept of "perspective," and also more recently by people like M.C. Escher. Physicist and theologian John Polkinghorne talked about God being faithful and merciful at the same time, a point he concluded by observing some of the phenomenon in quantum physics (Polkinghorne, 1995) – but this is exactly what mathematician Tao was talking about in his paper (Tao, 2007)! Perhaps the connection between mathematics and the outer world is deeper and more common than I previously thought.

How about giving a comprehensive picture of mathematics within itself? A good example is Stillwell (1998), who presents number theory and geometry together very successfully, communicating insight and interconnection between two different fields. Sometimes math professors try to present materials with too much rigor, failing to communicate insight and the motivation behind it. After all, having insight combined with motivation is how the complex numbers were started. The rigor came later. Nobody ever thinks of real numbers in terms of Dedekind cuts. Certainly, we have to teach students mathematical rigor but that should not be the end of the story, and sometimes that should not be the beginning of the story either.

We are all interested in using writing as a tool to teach our students, as evidenced by all the writing intensive courses. I understand writing is helpful for students because it makes them think about the process in their own term. And that is exactly why we talk about discovery learning and experimental math. After all, that is how Newton invented Calculus (Klein, 1932, p. 81-82).

Here I make a suggestion on how to implement these ideas. As I mentor my students' projects (such as in the C-Stem program and the honor program), I sometimes assign them mathematical puzzles. A wonderful source is a book by Winkler (2003). These so-called puzzles (many of these are suggested by mathematicians, inspired by their research work) are easy to understand but you really need to sit down and think about them in order to solve them. My students really enjoyed working on these puzzles. And I found them very educational, giving my students a good training in mathematical reasoning. For many, they have not had a chance to really sit down and go through mathematical reasoning processes, so this was a valuable experience for them. After this you can even introduce them to some easy to state yet still unsolved problems in mathematics such as the Frobenius problem to keep their interest.

Now, here is a suggestion on how to introduce a concept of sequence and limits in calculus, which are usually presented as stand-alone subjects. To do so, let me briefly review what Fibonacci numbers are. The first two Fibonacci numbers are 0 and 1. Then each following number is defined to be the sum of previous two Fibonacci numbers. For example, the third number is 0+1=1, the fourth number is 1+1=2, the fifth number is 1+2=3, the sixth number is 2+3=5 and so on. Here, you can let students construct a few first terms and then ask them to take the ratios of two consecutive Fibonacci numbers. Now students can observe that these ratios appear to approach a certain number. In fact, it is known to converge to the golden ratio, which fascinates many people. You can actually prove

this quite easily. Now, what if you start with some numbers other than 0 and 1 and construct remaining numbers as sum of the previous two numbers as before? What will happen to those ratios? Well, they still converge to the golden ratio. Then you can talk about all the interesting applications of Fibonacci numbers and histories of the golden ratio, giving students some sense of their connections to the real world. You can lead all these discussions while letting them discover themselves what it means for a sequence to converge and why changing a few first terms did not matter. Some students can even prove that those ratios are indeed converging to the golden ratio by themselves. And you are doing all these while showing them an interesting connection between discrete mathematics (Fibonacci numbers), Calculus (limit) and a popular concept from outside (the golden ratio). Hopefully students would find this approach much more interesting than just learning about them individually without seeing any connections between them. And hopefully this would help us to recruit some of our students to mathematics and science related fields.

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The Power of Nonsense: Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky" in a Remedial Writing Class

Chamutal Noimann
English

First year remedial writing and reading students are scared. More than the unfamiliar places, faces, the new methods and serious consequences of it all, they are afraid of words. College means BIG words; words like "galvanization," "slovenliness," "egregious," and "pretentious." They are afraid because they know they will be asked to read, understand, write, and then be tested on these words. All college teachers know that most of what our students will read unfortunately still suffers from the ills George Orwell describes in his classic essay "Politics and the English Language." "The English Language is in a bad way," declares Orwell, because it is plagued by "a mixture of vagueness and sheer incompetence" (1946, p. 311). As a long-time teacher of writing, I have struggled to help my students acquire the reading skills they will need throughout their academic career to decipher such vagueness and incompetence.

Facilitating the acquisition of vocabulary is one of the priorities of a writing teacher. We do it through writing, reading, and talking. But since we cannot cover every word our students will encounter, we try to find ways to help them understand the overall meaning of a sentence even without recognizing all the words in it. Having used Dr. Seuss's books and Edward Lear's limericks in my ELL classes, I was familiar with the pedagogical power of nonsense. Using Lewis Carroll's nonsense poem "Jabberwocky" from *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* to teach comprehension through context was a clear and natural choice (Billman & Cabrera, 1996, p. 539). "Jabberwocky" is often used in grade schools to teach parts of speech and basic grammar, but the poem is much more effective in higher education because it prepares students for more than just grammar. "Jabberwocky" teaches vocabulary reading skills, literary literacy, and, even more it teaches self-esteem, for it allows students to view their academic future as filled with creativity of thought and process.

The way remedial students first view "Jabberwocky" is very similar to the way Alice reacts on first encounter with it in *Through the Looking-Glass*. At first, Alice does not even attempt to read it because at a glance she concludes, "it's all in some language I don't understand" (Carroll, 1872, p. 148).

YKCOWREBBAJ
sevot yhtils eht dna ,gillirb sawT`
ebaw eht ni elbmig dna eryg diD
,sevogorob eht erew ysmim llA
.ebargtuo shtar emom eht dnA

When they quickly glance at the "Jabberwocky" handout I give them, my students invariably express the same sentiment. "I don't get it," says one and flips it over. "Is this even English?" asks another, while a third silently stares at the words and her eyes begin to glaze over. "Do we have to do this?" she whines. Students' reactions to the poem can actually be described as following the Kübler-Ross model for the five stages of grief. At first they deny the fact that they will have to confront it ("can't we just do a practice exam?"), next they become angry and frustrated ("this is a waste of time!" "It isn't a poetry class!"). After anger comes bargaining ("Can we read this at home?" "How about letting us choose our own poem?"). Soon depression sets in (sinking down in their chairs they utter a weak "oh man…" or "damn…"), but as they realize I will not give in, they accept their fate ("fine, no big deal, let's just do this"). Once they decide to cooperate and take a second look at the poem, they realize, again like Alice, that they CAN attempt it. "Why it's a looking-glass book, of course" says Alice, "And if I hold it up to a glass, the words will all go the right way again" (p. 148).

We begin by reading the poem out-loud. Luckily, as part of the stage of acceptance, they willingly volunteer to read the poem themselves. It might take a while, as they often struggle with pronunciation, giggling as they read:

JABBERWOCKY

`Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

`Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jujub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!'

He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought
So rested he by the Tumtum Tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

`And has thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Calloh! Callay!
He chortled in his joy.

`Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

I allow time for their eyebrows to settle before asking, "so, what do you think?" Their responses usually repeat Alice's response, sometimes verbatim: "`It seems very pretty…but it's RATHER hard to understand!" and "SOMEBODY killed SOMETHING: that's clear, at any rate" (p. 150). But Carroll immediately explains, "she didn't like to confess, even to herself, that she couldn't make it out at all" (Ibid.) We can guess just about the same about our students. But we may also be sure that it affected them, just as it affected Alice: "somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas -- only I don't exactly know what they are!" This is what I count on when I enter the next stage: deciphering the vocabulary.

In chapter VI, Alice meets Humpty Dumpty, who declares, "I can explain all the poems that were ever invented -- and a good many that haven't been invented just yet" (p. 214). She recites the first stanza from "Jabberwocky" and asks for an explanation. Rather than discuss the overall meaning of the poem, Humpty Dumpty proceeds to explain every individual word without connecting them to produce a better understanding of the whole. Similarly, rather than allow them to discuss the narrative action of the poem, I focus, like Mr. Dumpty, on the "plenty of hard words there" (p. 215). The key to this stage is to think of the entire classroom as a collective brain, never offer my opinion or explanation, but allow them to rely on each other to think things through. Invariably, one of them will figure things out and the rest will continue the thought process. I ask my students to feel the words; to remember that words often sound like the very thing they describe, like buzzing, bubble, or wonder. It also matters very much how one reads the poem; what emotion they ascribe to the words. One receives a very different message, for example if the sentence "I am pregnant" is said happily, sadly, or with a tone of utter surprise.

I read the first line: "'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves…" The first word to be explained is usually "'Twas." They are not as used to the abbreviation as Alice was in the 19th century. As soon as they recall the uses of the apostrophe, they realize that it took the place of the "I" for "IT." It is a small yet important moment. They seem to subconsciously activate those parts of their minds that help them recall past grammatical lessons that will help them understand their present task. What does brillig mean? One student takes out his iPhone and proceeds to look it up in an on line dictionary. I wait patiently knowing that technology will fail him in this instance. Rather than invoke grammar, which often turns students off, I suggest they ascribe an emotion to the word in order to understand its meaning within the context of the sentence. The "ig" ending is close enough to

"ing" to suggest a verb, but unlike grade school students, college students know this automatically. Asking them to name the part of speech each nonsense word belongs to will be condescending. "It was brillig," I hear one student whisper to himself, "it was bright?" "What was bright?" I ask. "The weather," answers another student impatiently. I rejoice! Nothing provokes students into thinking more than if they believe I know less then they do. They feel their way through the rest of the words in the first stanza, basing their conclusions on internal logic and past literary experience. They reason that if the weather was bright, the rest of the words must be a description of nature. "The slithy toves" could be plants ("slimy bushes") or animals (toves could be a type of doves). Then, without being asked to identify the part of speech, they figure out that "gyre" and "gimble" are actions because they follow the word "did."[1] Then I ask them to put it all together. The slimy bushes moved and swayed. "Wabe" then MUST be a kind of wind! In no more than fifteen minutes, they "translated" the first two lines of a poem they previously thought was beyond their ability to comprehend. They feel a sense of accomplishment. It does not matter if their translation is correct because in this case there really is no one right way to do it.

After going through the third and fourth lines of the first (and most confusing) stanza, I ask them to utilize the same thought process and translate (individually or in groups) the entire poem. The results are fantastic because often one word is ascribed multiple, sometimes, contradictory meanings by different students. "Uffish" in the fourth stanza, for example, is sometimes translated as "indecisive," "deep," or "lazy."[2] These discrepancies produce a discussion regarding the suitability of the translated words to the narrative's internal logic. The boy is obviously brave to fight a dragon,[3] then why would he be lazy? Why would he be indecisive? Maybe he was suddenly scared or else why would he stop to think about it? And so, without noticing it, they enter into an analysis of character development and narrative structure and the words they were so scared of earlier become instruments they use to facilitate creative thinking. Almost as soon as they notice how proud the father is of his son's bravery in defeating the monster, so do they become proud of their control of the language in the poem. As soon as they realize the meaning of the "nonsense," they open up to a wonderful discussion of the poem's narrative that is universal and familiar in any culture. They have conquered their own monster just as the boy defeated the Jabberwock.

In *Through the Looking-Glass*, Humpty Dumpy declares, "when *I* use a word it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less" (p. 213). When Alice question his ability to "make words mean so many different things," he replies that the real question is "which is to be master," the writer or the words. We want our students to become masters over words, to rule them rather then be intimidated by them. "Jabberwocky" trains remedial students to read challenging texts with a sense of adventure and empowerment that allows them to tackle new vocabulary as friendly nonsense words to which they can ascribe meaning,

[1] "Gyre" is defined in Webster as "a circular or spiral motion or form; especially: a giant circular oceanic surface current," which still leaves much to be explained in the context of the poem.
[2] Carroll explained in a letter to child-friend Maud Standen that by "uffish" he means "a state of mind when the voice is gruffish, the manner is roughish, and the temper is huffish" (quoted in Gardner 153).
[3] No one disputes the fact that the Jabberwock IS a dragon. I often show students John Tenniel's illustration.

rather than threateningly monstrous verbal communication they are powerless to understand. We teach reading and writing to our students as a means to an end, not as an end onto itself. We want them to read critically and to write analytically in order to influence actions, theirs and others'. George Orwell concludes "Politics and the English Language" saying that what is most needed to save the English language "is to let the meaning choose the word, and not the other way about" (p. 318). "Jabberwocky" offers an introduction to the power of choice in words and how they effect action.

When she leaves Humpty Dumpty, Alice feels disappointed and frustrated, as she does with most other Looking-Glass characters she meets. But she expresses her frustration with such a new sense of command over language that Carroll feels compelled to note it particularly.

> `Of all the unsatisfactory -- ' (she repeated this aloud, as it was a great comfort to have such a long word to say) `of all the unsatisfactory people I EVER met -- ' She never finished the sentence, for at this moment a heavy crash shook the forest from end to end. (p. 220)

The crash is the sound of Humpty Dumpty falling off the wall, a fine metaphor for the pretentiousness he represents and the triumph of the little girl he fails to intimidate.

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Subjuntivo

Hilario Barrero, translated by Regina J. Galasso
Modern Languages

Y tener que explicar de nuevo el subjuntivo,
acechante la tiza de la noche del encerado en luto,
ahora que ellos entregan sus cuerpos a la hoguera
cuando lo que desean es sentir el mordisco
que tatúa con rosas coaguladas sus cuellos ofrecidos
y olvidarse del viejo profesor que les roba
su tiempo inútilmente.
Mientras copian los signos del lenguaje,
emotion, doubt, volition, fear, joy...,
y usando el subjuntivo de mi lengua de humo
mi deseo es que tengan un amor como el nuestro,
pero sé que no escuchan la frase
que les pongo para ilustrar su duda
ansiosos como están de usar indicativo.
Este será su más feliz verano
el que recordarán mañana
cuando la soledad y la rutina
les hayan destrozado su belleza,
la rosa sin perfume, los cuerpos asaltados,
ajadas las espinas de sus labios.
Pero hoy tienen prisa, como la tuve yo,
por salir a la noche, por disfrutar la vida,
por conocer el rostro de la muerte.

The Subjunctive Mood

And yet another lesson on the subjunctive,
the chalk lurks in the night of the mourning blackboard
now that they surrender their bodies to the bonfire
when what they want is to feel the bite
that tattoos clotted roses on their exposed necks
and forget about the old professor wasting
their time. For what?
While they copy down the signs of the language,
Emoción, duda, deseo, temor, alegría…,
forming the subjunctive of my evanescent tongue
I wish they had a love like ours,
but I know they're not listening to the sentence
I give them to explain their doubt
sweaty as they are to use the indicative.
This will be their best summer ever
the one that they'll remember tomorrow
when loneliness and routine
have trampelled their beauty,
fragrantless rose, ransaked bodies,
worn down thorns on their lips.
But today they only think about, as I once did,
throwing themselves into the night, living it up,
looking death in the eye.

Schoolmarmalade

Elena Brunn
English

Sensible, she tried to turn
from adjunct to schoolmarm.
Not Rockwell's, but Braque's.
Planes sprung and spun
she was cubist not cute.

Then she was a Cyclops-dame
jived from Steinberg's pen.
A melon eye blinking atop
the swiveling scoop of an ear
pierced with an earring
that shimmied like a mouth:
Put that down. Stop it.
Shh. Sit down. Shut up.
From her pupils lased diagonals
to the pupils who lazed
shutting her out like stitched lids.

This marm was in a jam
sticky with seeing and hearing.
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The Bard at BMCC

Cybele Zufolo
English

When I first walked in to teach Introduction to Shakespeare at BMCC, I was greeted by a packed room of eager and enthusiastic students, some who were theater majors. Some older students asked me if I was the professor whom they were expecting. I told them I was not and they seemed puzzled. One student asked me if I had taught Shakespeare before to college students, and I told her that no, I had not. Thinking I might lose them, I immediately revealed to the class some of my artistic background before I went into teaching; I reassured them that I absolutely loved Shakespeare, and used to be a professional actress, and that I performed in a few of Shakespeare's plays, as well as *Epicoene* or *The Silent Woman* by Ben Jonson. I studied Shakespeare extensively in college and graduate school. The students were reluctant. I needed to prove myself or they would leave after the first day. This was not going to happen. The first day I performed for them one of Juliet's monologues in *Romeo and Juliet,* then throughout the semester, I would offer dramatic interpretations from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Desdemona in *Othello* and Hamlet in *Hamlet*. On the first day, I asked for two volunteers to read the roles of two soldiers in Verona, the backdrop for *Romeo and Juliet*. This was an opening fight scene between Sampson and Gregory. The lines were short and provocative. They loved the small demonstration on the first day. The class found the scene more humorous than provocative. The energy in the room was palpable from the first day, due in part to the theater and liberal arts majors sitting in various places around the room. There was a contagious sense of enthusiasm in the room because I was teaching something I really loved and the students picked up on it.

To teach the course at BMCC, I used the *Shakespeare Set Free* book series by Peggy O'Brien from the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC. I was introduced to these books at Teachers College, in an excellent course called "The Teaching Shakespeare." These wonderful books have an abundance of enormously helpful and creative lesson plans to structure the teaching of a particular play. There are intricate details of lessons designed to motivate and energize students about Shakespeare's plays, while demystifying the language and image of Shakespeare as being "too difficult" and intimidating. I found the lessons in *Shakespeare Set Free* to be witty, lively, creative, energetic, with a thorough grounding in written response, thematic analysis and poetry. I based a substantial amount of lessons from this book, and then created a few of my own. *Shakespeare Set Free* and previous theatre training provided an effective springboard for my course that helped me scaffold the entire semester. Students learn that these plays are actually about human emotion, silly slapstick comedy, and gut wrenching drama. These lessons help them get past the challenge of the language and see the play in a more physical dynamic way. Students actually enjoy the camaraderie of reading to another student, in a small group, on their

feet. The challenges were there, such as how to make the course interesting, entertaining and less intimidating for students who were new to sixteenth century English. How could the students stay motivated and intrigued with the material? Then I thought, how can they *not* love these brilliant plays written in a language that replicated the beating of one's heart? The iamb is the human heart and these are living, breathing words. The power of Shakespeare's words never diminishes.

Students worked on group research projects analyzing the geography and history of *Othello's* Venice in Renaissance Italy. Another group explored the various depictions of *Othello* throughout the ages from Paul Robeson to Lawrence Fishburne. Students gained a deeper understanding of the character and the portrayals of him in different time periods, where racism and xenophobia ran rampant in the theater world from 1500's to the1920's. We worked on the opening scene in *Macbeth* in which three witches are stirring a pot of magic stew skillfully brought to life by a few volunteers. Students stood in two long rows facing each other exchanging three word insults and compliments such as "thou beetle-headed saucy knave" and having fun in the process.

Some other lessons went extremely well: the Othello talk show, in which students spoke as the characters, as though they were on a modern day talk show panel, complete with a psychologist, judge and host. This lesson was designed to help students connect Othello's predicaments in the 1600's with those of modern day, some that we might even see on a TV talk show. Groups of students acted out small scenes with playful gusto. Later in the week I gave an in-class essay, inspired by an essay written by Barbara Mowat, who wrote the introduction to the Folger edition of Othello, analyzing the "motiveless malignity" (Greenblatt and Spivak) of Iago's character.

In another lesson students worked in groups to bring the first ten lines of the *Romeo and Juliet* prologue to life. With music and movement, staying grounded in the text, students enthusiastically re-visioned Shakespeare's words for a modern audience. Some had no intention of doing this, some were laughing excitedly and getting to know each other, some were taking notes and assigning different things to do. After the artistic presentation of words, I noticed that some students were surprised with themselves, and their newfound creativity. They hadn't believed they were up to the challenge. Some shed a layer of timidity and diffidence as a new more confident self began to emerge. Some didn't think they would like the Bard, let alone love him, or find the heights of drama, humor and excitement that I feel when I read the plays. Students were free to read male or female roles. The most important thing for me to teach was asking the students to view and read Shakespeare's words as a script and not a text. These were not dusty 400 year-old books, but rather living passages of real human emotion, all taking place on stage, between characters much like ourselves, with similar experiences. The words truly become powerful when they are read standing up, speaking to another character. When Juliet says, "My only love, sprung from my only hate!" students could easily say the same thing in modern English about the complexities of a close relationship.

One particular assignment I enjoyed was to have students write a poem that stemmed from the significance of the night in *Romeo and Juliet*, and everything

the night meant to Juliet. One student created a magnificent post card entitled "Greeting from Verona" in which Romeo is writing to Juliet after his exile, telling her how much he misses her and longs to see her. Another day, students learned the dances at the banquet where *Romeo and Juliet* met for the first time, to create the environment of the play. One of the most memorable lessons addressed Juliet's 'dueling consciences' before she takes the poison. Three volunteers sat in front of the room, on three chairs, one playing Juliet and the other two playing her 'dueling consciences' of good and evil, telling her to take or not to take the poison. This was a very successful lesson as students were able to see Juliet as a real human being forced to make a grave and potentially fatal decision. Students were eager to participate and spoke to our Juliet with earnest concern, as though she was a good friend. Students playfully and then fervently disagreed as to what she should do.

Another successful lesson called for four volunteers to demonstrate how Hamlet's soldiers would stand guard outside the castle when they saw the ghost of Hamlet's father. This helped students visualize the scene and the guards outside the castle, taking the words off the page and into their hands. Students pondered: how would a real soldier stand guard at 2AM in the freezing cold? The study of old English words becomes the study of physical actions. After viewing the physical action of the characters, the words became easier to understand. Another Hamlet lesson that I put together involved discussing Foucault's prison theory as a model for Hamlet's Denmark. Hamlet often mentions how Denmark is a prison and we thought about the network of Elsinore castle as a self-contained prison. Later in the week we explored the validity of Sigmund Freud's Oedipal complex in relation to Hamlet and his mother.

In addition to the lessons from the Folger library, I asked each student to discuss two of his or her papers with the class, to offer insight into the writing process. It is important for students to hear each other's work, and this also helps guard against plagiarism, especially in a Shakespeare course where so much scholarly material is easily accessible. The presentation showed that the student did a sizable amount of research on the subject and was familiar with the subject. Or, on the other hand, if a student was unable to mention any of the material or key points of her essay, it was likely that the student didn't write the essay.

Some memorable essays were about the father-daughter relationship in and Othello, the role of the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, movie depictions of the plays on screen such as "*William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*." One essay was about racial discrimination in Othello and an analysis of the Moor identity throughout the middle ages. One student chose to write about cross cultural and bi-racial romantic relationships in *Romeo and Juliet*, in Othello and modern society. A literature student wrote three different letters that the characters might send to each other such as a letter from Iago to Roderigo, revealing his sinister plan, from the Nurse to Juliet, begging her not to marry Romeo, and from the Ghost of Hamlets father to Hamlet, revealing who murdered him.

Introduction to Shakespeare at BMCC was an effective and rewarding precursor to a program that I participated in a few months later, an intensive five-week program at the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton Virginia, spon-

sored by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The program was made up of college English professors and Theater professors from around the country who were brought together to study, perform and listen to lectures by renowned Shakespeare scholars, including one from Oxford. We worked in small groups with professional actors in the stage company of the Blackfriar's Theater Company to offer an interpretation of key scenes in *Antony and Cleopatra*. On the final day, each group of actors and teachers performed scenes of memorized text, complete with costumes, lighting and music. The experience was a great joy. Teaching Shakespeare taught me about the power of enthusiasm for a subject. If you love a subject then they just might love it too. The spirit of the Bard is alive and well here at BMCC.

Teachable Moments: A CUNY Story

Linda Markstein
Developmental Skills

We in the education game are always searching for teachable moments, something that we can latch onto and exploit that will engage our students momentarily on at least a superficial level. Usually this search takes a lot of time and energy and we more than earn our pay. The results are often not memorable in any way. In the fall of 2008, however, I began to see that something very powerful and completely different was going on not only in the world around me but in my classroom. Change was truly in the air.

I was teaching a reading and critical thinking course at BMCC. I had a class of 22 students, mostly African Americans from Harlem or the Bronx, a few Latinos from Queens born here, and several ESL students from China, Ecuador, Cameroon and the Ivory Coast. The students were generally in the 17–20-year-old range. They were late enrollers, people who had come to the college at the last minute, so late that a new section had to be opened to accommodate them. This late enrollment factor often, but not always, signifies complicated, fragile, and sometimes fragmented lives.

As I prepared my syllabus, I hoped I might be able to interest them at least marginally in the upcoming election, partially for purely selfish reasons: I was spending hours a day online devouring every poll, every article, every blog about the election. I was obsessed and I thought, as many obsessed people do, that it would be gratifying and maybe even important to have others share my obsession. But, to tell you the truth, I didn't think I would be able to generate much interest, although on the first day, I did give the students a somewhat stirring speech about the historic nature of this particular election. They listened to me politely but displayed no particular emotion.

In the past, one of the problems with teaching current events was getting really current readings. I always asked the students to bring the New York Times to class but many students had trouble getting it in their neighborhoods and so they would have no time to read articles before they came to class.

I give the students a survey the first day and one of the questions I always ask is how often they read a newspaper. For some reason, at the very last moment, I added a question about whether they had Internet access at home and if they read newspapers online. Imagine my shock when I discovered that all the students had Internet access at home and they typically read newspapers online, to the extent that they read newspapers. It was a "light bulb" moment.

I introduced the students to some of my favorite political Web sites, including realclearpolitics.com and politico.com, and polling sites such as fivethirtyeight.com, Rasmussenreports.com and pollster.com. As the semester progressed, I added other websites and the students suggested some as well. One of the regular class assignments was to read an article of one's choice on one of these websites, write a summary, bring the article to class, and make a report on

it to the student's small group. At first, the same few students dominated these discussions and there was considerable variation in the quality of the presentations. But gradually more and more students became engaged as they became more familiar with the candidates and the issues.

One day a student reported on a website he had found that compared the candidates' positions and past voting records on specific issues. For several other students, this proved to be the discovery of a treasure trove. They showed great interest in measuring the candidate's positions against his or her actions in the past, particularly on issues of special interest to them, such as women's reproductive rights, immigration reform, and gun control. Needless to say, students expressed unmitigated glee at catching a candidate off base.

One day a student gave a report on an article by Charles Krauthammer, the conservative commentator, entitled "Why I'm Voting for McCain." The student very clearly outlined all the principal points and then noted that while he disagreed completely with Krauthammer, he recognized that Krauthammer is a very good writer and that he makes solid arguments. "I thought I could learn from him something about how to make a good argument," he noted.

Another student gave a report one day on an article from the Anchorage Daily News. I asked how she happened to pick that newspaper and she said she thought it would be interesting to see how Sarah Palin was being viewed in her hometown.

Another student reported on polls from one of the polling websites and he astutely observed that the Zogby poll was an outlier (although he didn't use that term), and went on to say that it was often inaccurate, according to what he had read. This led to a lively discussion about polling methodology and the difficulties of polling people who did not have land lines. One of the class projects was to design a poll and to interview six people, preferably of different ages and backgrounds. Although, as might have been anticipated given the demographics of the class, our poll results heavily favored Barack Obama, it was noted that older men, particularly with military backgrounds, tended to favor John McCain.

On another day one of the students volunteered to give a report to the entire class. He began by saying his report came from The New Republic, and then he politely turned to me and asked me if I had heard of this publication. I was so moved by his question that I could only nod. What flashed through my mind was that this was proof positive that the internet had the potential to level the playing field for our students, giving them easy access to all types of materials and perspectives. It made it possible for them to enter the conversation at a broader and higher level. Much as the printing press had ushered in a new world of possibilities centuries ago, the internet has the potential, although still largely untapped, to revolutionize our world.

What began to touch me so much as the weeks went by was how engaged the students were becoming. They not only wanted to read but they were eager to share their ideas with others, to argue and to dispute with each other. One student chose a great number of articles from the Wall Street Journal, inviting sharp criticism if not outright condemnation from many of the other students. "You shouldn't be so narrow minded," he responded, "I have a right to read anything I

want to." He was undecided about whom he would vote for until just a week or so before the election, when he announced his support for Obama. His independent stance took no small amount of outright courage in this class.

In addition to the articles, we read *Dreams from my Father*, Barack Obama's first book, published in 1994. They were shocked and amazed by many things, e.g., that he would admit to using drugs and alcohol to excess in his youth, and that he would give up the opportunity to take a high paying job to work as a community organizer. I noticed something very interesting: the more they read, the more they tended to refer to him simply as Barack, rather than Barack Obama.

They related to many, many things in Obama's life story: the absent father, the confusion over identity, the feelings of alienation, and the flip-side: the desire to be part of an inclusive community. Class discussions can often be strained, difficult to initiate, and even more difficult to sustain. But not in this class, not once Barack Obama entered their lives through his powerful book. The end of the class would come and they would slowly disengage, reluctant to leave a new world they were discovering. Sometimes I would see them huddled together in the cafeteria, still discussing and arguing.

On still another memorable day they started talking about the dream Barack had about his father after his father had died. In the dream, the father is in jail, old and thin and vulnerable, barely clothed. A judge listens to the case against the father and finally tells the jailor to let the father out. In the dream, the father tells Barack that he loves him and has always been so proud of him. Barack takes the frail old man in his arms and embraces him. When Barack awakens, he weeps for the first time for his father and he regrets that he has been too judgmental of his father, that he has kept him in prison too long. He realizes how much he has loved his father all these years and has been strongly influenced by his father's high expectations of him, setting such a high standard even in his absence.

The dream had a powerful effect on the students, many of whom were all too familiar with absent fathers. They talked about the difficulty of reconciling with someone, particularly if the person has died. This was such a raw nerve for some. One young woman revealed that she was so angry with her father that she often crossed the street when she saw him coming, how she could not forgive him for leaving the family and mistreating her mother. Several of the students told her that we all have to accept our parents as human beings with weaknesses and that in order to move on in her own life, she needed to forgive her father and maybe learn from his example to be a different kind of parent herself. "That is what Barack did. You should learn from him," they told her. "You don't want to live your whole life in anger and bitterness." Many times I did not enter the discussion because I felt I had nothing to add. Maybe I had something to learn.

On election day, all the students who were eligible to vote not only voted but many took other family members and friends with them to vote. One young woman, voting for the first time, took her severely disabled mother with her, who was also voting for the first time. Later the students shared powerful stories of their voting experiences. Another young woman turned around and ran home in fear when she saw members of rival gangs, the Crips and the Bloods, standing in line to vote. But when she got home, her father, not a citizen himself, ordered

her to go back and not to come home until she had voted. He sat waiting in his car nearby to help her feel safe – and also to make sure that she voted. But, to her amazement, the gang members were chatting casually among themselves, grudges and grievances temporarily buried. The gang truce and voting for Barack Obama would be forever intertwined in her mind, she said. They told stories of people, young and old, different races and ethnicities, dancing in the streets after the results were announced, horns honking, sirens blaring, little children staying up half the night to celebrate something or someone called just "O-ba-ma"! They talked about receiving calls on their cell phones from all over the world, from Cameroon, the Ivory Coast, Germany, all over – and how they had to turn their cell phones off finally because of the high per-minute costs.

Our class met again on the Friday after the election and the students had still not come down from the tremendous high they had experienced. I asked them what they thought Obama would be able to accomplish, given the many crises at home and around the world. What was realistically possible? They were measured in their responses, stressing that the important thing was to try to start new initiatives in health care and job creation at home – and to gradually stop the war in Iraq. The important thing, they said, is for him to try, no matter whether it is possible to be successful. And he must be honest with the people, always tell them the truth, even if it is hard to hear. "We cannot have everything at once," they said matter-of-factly. "It's not possible. Everyone should accept that." One young man, the Wall Street Journal reader, said, "Hey, we all got to step up. The man can't do it alone." In other words, ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.

Shortly after the election, I woke up in the middle of the night in a full-blown panic, something rare for me. "What in the world is the matter with you?," my husband asked. After all, our children and grandchildren were all more or less okay, nobody was on drugs or in jail, not that we knew of, and we were all healthy. What could I possibly be worried about?

What I was panicked about was the class, these students who, partially at my invitation, had invested so much of themselves in a dream. Here I was, a veteran teacher of more than 40 years, and I had encouraged my students to get completely carried away with exciting ideas – while ignoring the simple fact that they had to pass the CUNY exam or their academic dreams would at least temporarily be dashed. What had I been thinking? I had not been hired to "engage" the students intellectually; I had been hired to make sure that they passed that one single exam, hadn't I? An exam which, I could guarantee, would have not one single question on it relating to Barack Obama or the election. I had tricked them, sold them out, so that I could indulge my own passions. No wonder I couldn't sleep.

I started coming to every class armed with practice reading exams and I lectured them sternly about going to the reading lab. I myself started going to the lab at least a couple of times a week, working through the various programs. Finally, an old friend, and another veteran reading teacher, took me aside and said, "They have to do it, Linda, not you. You can't do it for them. You should know that by now."

My students were not interested in the practice reading exams. They humored me by taking them but they showed no interest whatsoever in their results. I hammered away at understanding inference questions. They nodded while barely stifling yawns. All they wanted to do was to report on their articles, argue about the wisdom of the bail-out, if it really was a bail-out, who was really responsible for the mortgage crisis.

"That won't be on the CUNY test," I snapped, hating myself in the process. So? they seemed to respond. And your point is?

My dilemma was becoming more complicated by the day. You see, I agreed with them. I think it is more important to be engaged and excited by ideas and the world, that this is what education is really about. But on the other hand, I know CUNY has to have standardized exams and that it is important to have competency standards. I am not against testing and I think the CUNY test is a fair and accurate measure. Well, there you have it. I was caught in a trap of my own making and that would have been fine if I were the one to pay the price. But, let's face it: I would get my paycheck no matter how the students did.

We compromised. They would take a comprehension test each class and then we would spend the rest of the time giving reports and arguing and fighting about the mortgage crisis or the auto crisis and talking about what Barack should do in his first 100 days. In fact, we wrote letters to him, some of which were actually mailed or e-mailed, giving him very specific prescriptions for success in the crucial first 100 days.

Meanwhile the class numbers had dwindled. One student, a soccer player, broke his leg for a second time and had to drop out of school. A young mother, 19 years old, had to drop out of school because her son developed seizure disorder. Another young woman, 18 years old, dropped out because she became pregnant and was experiencing severe morning sickness.

But the real story was not about how many students had to drop out; it was about how many students with very difficult challenges managed to stay in. One 22-year-old man, the sole supporter of his family, had to hold down a full-time job, go to school full-time, and visit both of his parents almost every day in two different hospitals, one in Yonkers and one in the Bronx. And yet he came to class every day except once. Can you believe it? He overslept.

And there was the other young man from Harlem who had had numerous operations on his spine and his legs, who came to class every day in a wheelchair. He was always at least an hour early because he had to travel by Access-A-Ride and that's when they could pick him up. He missed one class to have one of a countless number of scans in preparation for his next surgery, which he was scheduling for January so he would not miss any classes. Not once did he ever complain. He was uniformly pleasant and cheerful and always prepared – and his hair was always sharply spiked and his clothing carefully chosen, revealing his acute sense of style.

There was the young woman, 20 years old, seemingly robust and healthy, who collapsed one day at school and had to be taken by ambulance to the emergency room, where they diagnosed her with a rare heart ailment. She asked me how many hours she should spend in the reading lab to make up for missing

class a few times. “I might have to have some sort of machine put in my heart,” she explained casually.

The night before the critical CUNY exam I slept scarcely a wink. I got up early, as usual, ate a full breakfast (as if that would help the students in some way) and then walked the 2+ miles to school, trying to calm my nerves. They all showed up, laughing and merry, not a nerve showing. I sat outside the computer room where they were being tested, guarding their forbidden cell phones and iPhones and iPods and what-have-you, all the gadgets that grounded them in their everyday lives.

Slowly they trickled out. “Easy! Piece of cake!,” the first few claimed. “Okay. Not bad,” the middle ones said. “Hard to say,” the later ones remarked. “Who knows?” others said. “Hard, but I think I passed,” the last one said.

Generally speaking, veteran teachers know who is going to pass. There are always surprises of course, the good student who had an off day, the student who misunderstood the question, and, sometimes, the student who was lucky, very lucky, that day. Judging by my years of experience, I qualify as a veteran teacher but I had lost my ability to be objective with this class. I told myself that I should be satisfied if half the students passed, nine out of 18. That would meet the department average. I was a little afraid that it might turn out to be eight though, maybe just seven. They had never taken those practice exams seriously and I had introduced them too late.

“Calm down, Linda,” my old friend and colleague cautioned me. “You did what you could do. Now it’s up to them. Calm down, and I’ll take you out to lunch after.” As if it were all about me.

The students took the exam on a Friday and the results were posted on Monday. I walked down to school as usual, braced for the worst. The secretary handed me the grade sheet, beaming, “Here it is, what you are waiting for!” Eleven out of 18, one more missing by just one point, and another by two points, eligible for intensive tutoring and a retest in January before the next term.

I looked at the scores carefully, comparing the entrance scores in September with the final scores. With the exception of those two, everyone who had had a realistic shot had made it. The ones who had not passed had started very low and would not have been placed in that class if a lower class had been available. They had all made progress, significant progress, but the truth was that they were not quite ready yet.

Only one student showed very little improvement in test scores, the young man in the wheelchair, who never complained, never missed class and always did his work. I dreaded having to meet with him. But he already knew the results when we met; he’d checked online and he knew he had not passed. As usual, he was cool, calm and collected, and he thanked me several times. He said he had learned a great deal and he would like to take my class again and he asked me if I would be teaching the same section next term.

What I wanted to tell him though, but didn’t, was that I had learned a great deal from him, much more probably than he had learned from me. I had learned from him something about how to be brave when life has been unfair, how to fall down and just get back up and start all over again. And how to keep smiling and

stay cool – and, yes, how to try to look good in the process.

"That class drained me," I remarked to my old friend. "I'm too old for this. I don't know if I can do this again."

"Trust me, you can," he said, "and you will." And then we went out and had a great lunch.

Teachable moments at CUNY. There you have it.

Adventures in Faculty Development: Our Students' Roles in Shaping Our Teaching and Scholarship

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The most beautiful adventures are not those we go seek.
-Robert Lewis Stevenson

The unexpected discovery is what makes an adventure. Now, you may be wondering how faculty development, an important and ongoing aspect of our professional lives here at BMCC, could be thought of as adventurous. And such skepticism is warranted. Yet, as we relay in the following pages our recent adventure, we want to share the enormous and surprising *pedagogical* benefits of attending a conference. In May of 2009, we attended a one-day conference at the University of Pennsylvania entitled, "Thinking about the Family in Unequal Society." We went not as presenters, but as interested faculty who teach Sociology of the Family (SOC 250), a course which generates a great deal of student interest at BMCC. Aside from our participation in the myriad opportunities for faculty development offered at BMCC, like Writing Across the Curriculum, Reading Across the Curriculum, Distance Learning, and technology workshops, we were excited by the prospect of hearing presentations of scholars whose work we both teach in our courses.

What we did not anticipate, however, was that in addition to coming away with information on the new developments in research, we left reinvigorated with questions about our students and how to teach them to think sociologically about the family inequalities that many of them know all too well. This article offers a brief discussion of some of the papers presented at the conference, but more importantly, a discussion of the reactions we had to what we learned with respect to our students. Upon reflection, it turns out that thinking about these issues through the lens of our students helped us to improve our teaching as well as our own understanding of the scholarship.

The papers presented at this conference centered on several major themes, among them, the concept of "fragile families," the phenomenon of multi-partner fertility, unmarried childbearing and the lack of public discourse on contraception, and finally, the implications of family inequality in perpetuating inequality in society. With few exceptions, most of the presenters (and it seemed many in the audience) teach at elite institutions, much like the one at which the conference was held. It was apparent, by the characterizations of their students, that the vast majority of these academics' students fit the model of the "traditional" college student—mostly white, middle and upper middle class economically, and rich in social and cultural capital. Interestingly, some of the presenters noted that their students could not understand why economically disadvantaged young

people would decide to have children.

We both had similar emotional, academic and pedagogical reactions to much of what we heard. Where are our students in these discussions, many of whom have personally dealt with the issues of inequality that were being presented? How would they respond to some of what we were hearing? How would they respond to the speakers' and their students' lack of understanding and awareness? Further reflection helped us to understand the degree to which our students have felt "judged" (by us, and by researchers they have read) when we have taught this material in the past.

When 'students' were discussed by presenters, they were assumed to be the traditional college students they generally teach. It was also implicit that students and academics, the audience for their books and articles, are far removed from the inequality they describe in their research. So we started talking about our own students. The majority of our students are working class, mostly non-white, and many are from immigrant backgrounds. Quite a few of our students became parents when quite young—the stereotypical unwed teenage mothers who are often the bugaboo of social policy. Among those are students who have young children and receive public assistance. While the scholars presenting at the conference were generally sympathetic to the plight of "fragile families," there was an underlying current, if sometimes inadvertent, of judging their subjects.

Some of what we reacted to was a normative set of assumptions that many of the speakers seemed to hold with regard to an ideal family type. Marriage is good, single parenthood is not as good, multi-partnered fertility is problematic. We were somewhat surprised by these normative evaluations, perhaps because we have tried to pay careful attention to the multitude of family realities of our students. Here we were sitting among those whose only relationship to the individuals they were researching was as subjects. For us, such relationships extend to our students, as the persons we teach. The conversations on our return trip centered on these concerns and galvanized us to find ways to teach this research that recognizes our students' life experiences without alienating them through the normative assumptions grounded in the life experiences and expectations of white, middle-class realities.

A few examples may help illustrate our discomfort with the tone of these discussions. One of the questions with which several of the speakers were grappling was, why does the bar for parenting seem so much lower than the bar for marriage? In other words, why are economically disadvantaged women and men more likely to have children than get married? Why do such different cultural norms exist among middle and upper middle class people who tend to place marriage before childbearing in the life cycle order? These are reasonable questions which we ourselves explore in our own classrooms. As with any social phenomenon, there is a wide range of explanations, from the ill effects of poverty, to poor schooling and skill building, less optimism for the future, fewer job/career prospects, the cultural importance of parenthood, to name but a few. Some of the policy prescriptions that were raised included making parenthood a more important decision, delaying it, and helping people to "explore and better understand the context in which one wants to have a child". When we heard this, we

couldn't help but channel some of our students and wonder what their reactions would be to such statements. In fact, in Robin's conference notes she wrote, "I wish there were people from fragile "unstable" families in the room right now." The implication that parenthood is not an important decision is troubling to us as it contradicts many of the comments our students have shared with us over the years. Furthermore, we were hoping that a more complicated set of questions would follow, in good sociological fashion, such as, is rushing to marry and birth a child before it's "too late" a more common social phenomenon among the middle and upper middle classes? And does this provide a necessarily better context for having a child?

Another paper we heard , "Daddy Baby, Mama Maybe," explored the ways in which the father-child connection binds the couple, a digression from the long held belief that fathers were only obligated to their children through the mothers. In this study, the majority of the subjects held the ideal family unit (married couple with children) at the time of the birth of the child, whether they were married or not. Yet, because of the economic and emotional demands of a new baby, many of the fathers disengage, break up the relationship with the mother, start new relationships with other women, and perhaps have new children.

As we listened to this we started thinking about the amount of stress (emotional, economic, etc.) that is felt among families across the class system. There seemed to be an implicit judgment as to why some men (poor) disengage and others do not (middle class and up). Thinking of our students, conscious of a desire not to create a classroom atmosphere where they feel judged, challenged us to think about this issue across the class system, something that did not happen at the conference. That is, in what ways is this same condition manifest among men in the middle and upper middle classes? Is it the case that middle class/upper middle class men retreat just as much by working more? Do they disengage from their children and (mostly wives) by spending more hours at the office and commuting, justified by the financial need of the now single income earner family? Do middle class men disengage by conforming to the male breadwinner family model, to which they have access, but poor men disengage in ways that correspond to the lack of employment opportunities supported by the cultural importance of parenthood? Rather than judging the actions of some while ignoring the actions of others, shouldn't we be interrogating the differing class-based responses to the emotional and economic stresses that new children bring to any family? Wouldn't this provide a more nuanced understanding of such a phenomenon?

The final example is the gender asymmetry and lack of public discourse around the issue of contraception, and the related distrust between men and women that seems to take a particular form among the poor. While it's true that our social and political institutions tend to shy away from such discussions, when contraception is discussed, it is very gendered, with most of the onus of responsibility placed on women. However, certain important questions must be addressed, among them, why aren't men charged with the responsibility of birth control as much as women? Why do we direct our judgments on the women more harshly than the men who impregnate them? Why is there social accep-

tance of the idea that if women don't insist on contraception then there is the green light—why aren't men encouraged to put the stop sign up themselves? While it is changing somewhat, the majority of students who take our family course are women and when we raise the issue of contraception, our women students are eager to explore these questions. They want to understand and analyze the gender asymmetry involved. Thus, Robin calls for a feminist re-thinking of this phenomenon, bringing a dimension to the discussion not usually found in the family literature, nor in the conference discussions.

A related issue is the often overwhelming distrust found between men and women. As sociologists, we are curious about the cultural cues that create this distrust. Is it more acute among the lower income classes? If so, what explains this? The distrust between men and women, the perceived "lack of responsibility," and the gender politics involved are not addressed in the family literature, but are important issues which the conference raised for us. They are also issues raised in classroom discussions. Interestingly, Rifat has found that over the past several semesters, an increasing number of men are enrolling in the family course, most of them taking it as an elective rather than to satisfy a major requirement. This semester, the young men raised some interesting points regarding unwed parenthood and the issue of contraception. Some of the young men said that there is often a deliberate carelessness involved in failure to use contraception that they hope will result in stable relationships between them and the mother of their child. This would validate some of the research mentioned earlier in this paper. They claimed, for instance, that in their cultural milieu, impregnating a girlfriend was a sign of manhood and, perhaps, a marker of adulthood. Other male students disagreed and reflected normative ideas of male responsibility and waiting for marriage to have children. In the general discussion, students related the adversarial relationship that often develops between mothers and their "baby daddy" with each side questioning the motives of the other. Is this adversarial quality in the gender politics class-based or does it reflect gender-based assumptions of male and female "responsibility" and roles? To the extent to which it is class-based, how much of it relates to the larger debates in the public sphere about the "costs" of unwed parenthood? With welfare reform and public sentiment against the support of single mothers, these "absent" or "irresponsible" fathers are the target of public ire and harsh child support collection strategies. Do these fathers, many of whom are young, minority, and economically disadvantaged, resent this and retreat from the roles society would like them to fulfill? If the distrust and adversarial attitudes are class-based, might it be helpful to discuss the ways in which the larger social structure fosters these dispositions? Such questions ramify.

We are reminded, once again, of the value that the diversity of the lived experiences of our students bring to our classrooms, which we now see ever more clearly, make us at once better teachers and better scholars. Ultimately, this conference had an unexpected effect on our thoughts about teaching the family course. We had thought we were attending primarily to get information about the latest research. Instead, even more important than the information in the presentations, was our response to the tone of the presentations and the discussions

which ensued. The new research on fragile families and unwed motherhood and fatherhood provides us with additional data to help us analyze and understand those social phenomena, but it also gives us additional context with which to think about our students' lived realities. When we discuss these topics in our classes, we need to develop new frameworks for discussion that go beyond the analysis of these scholars to approaches which reflect our students' experiences and our own analyses of these phenomena. We also need to encourage our students to generate their own questions and analyze social issues through both the sociological lens and their own experiences.

So it turns out that we returned to BMCC not only with information about the most recent scholarly work in this area, but also with ambivalence about the way academics deal with the inequality from which they (and often their students at elite universities) are so personally removed. Both of these undercurrents have inspired us to re-think our teaching and re-envision the teaching of inequality to college students outside of the ivory tower. What we also found was that scholars of the family, and especially of inequality in the family, unwittingly convey their class assumptions and ideas of "normative" family life in their presentations, and possibly in their written work as well. In teaching about family inequality at BMCC, we as instructors need to be particularly sensitive to ideas rooted in a value-system based on assumptions of mostly white, middle class family life with its inherent class and gender norms.

Juggling Uphill: Publishing, Teaching, and Surviving at CUNY in the 21st Century. Some Suggestions for BMCC Faculty

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I. Introduction

When I think about writing during the semester I have to think about multi-tasking. Other titles I had considered were The End of Publishing in order to stress the double meaning of end as in finale but also as a main objectives; Staying Afloat in Turbulent Waters, How to Publish at BMCC without Perishing in the Attempt. You get the idea.

I kept Juggling Uphill. If juggling demands energy and concentration, 'Juggling Uphill' stresses the effort and hardship. The implicit reward is reaching the top.

Why Is Publishing Important?

In academia, we often talk among faculty in the context of Publish or Perish.

Outside academia, however, there is little sympathy for the idea of tenure. True that probably most of us should think about prospects of job security in different fields, tenure in the academic world is also shrinking. At a time when tenure jobs are diminishing and we see that throughout the world most teaching jobs are taken by adjunct faculty, tenure can be seen as an extravagance. I think that it is important to preserve the value of tenure in academia, mainly for purposes of academic freedom. But I think we have other reasons to publish. I feel freer to write after tenure than before.

Publishing is important not just for tenure or promotion but also for grants, for recognition among other colleagues but, ultimately, for ourselves. We need to stress this self-rewarding experience as a source of inspiration. And, it is important to write because we have something important to say rather than because it adds to your list of your accomplishments.

Below I have prepared a few suggestions in the form of tensions that need to be taken into account to keep a balance and still make writing a priority:

II. Why Is Publishing Important?

1. Teaching/Scholarship:

Unless you are doing research on the scholarship of teaching, chances are that your teaching gets often in the way of your scholarship. How to work this tension out? It is essential after all to keep attention to both activities. Try to look at teaching as a source of inspiration and as a practice that feeds our scholarship.

Research institutions have more strict requirements and standards. Colleagues in research institutions will have no problem saying that research and publishing are a priority over teaching. BMCC is a teaching institution. The rules

for tenure and promotion have been changing in the past years everywhere as they are here. With 24 hours course release and a seven-year clock, new faculty will be expected to reach meet higher standards. If there are no fixed numbers of what counts for tenure, it is good to inquire but also, to follow your own drive.

We should also remember that publishing doesn't guarantee not perishing.

2. Keep The Excitement/Keep The Cool:

Most of us, particularly those in the Social Sciences, Arts, and the Humanities, chose our fields not for the money but for the love of it. I think it is important to remember this. This is why we dedicate insane amounts of hours on these tasks after having written a dissertation. We are enamored with some kinds of inquiry and exchange that take place in an academic environment. On the other hand, we work in institutions where we have many obligations. Publishing is shrinking in academia and it is changing in various ways. We also need to keep cool, assertive about the long and tedious process of submitting, waiting and possibly being rejected sometimes.

I have always been in touch with developments in my field, attending meetings regularly to keep in touch with my classmates, former professors, mentors, and friends. Presenting in these professional settings has also helped me sharpen my interests and topics.

3. Be Strategic/Be Strict:

As much as we honor our students, we do teach too much; we do have pressure to work on many other things yet we still need to write and publish. Of all these activities, writing and publishing is the most time consuming for various reasons: we cannot do it every five minutes we get free. We usually need larger amounts of time to allow our ideas to come down, especially since most of our research is not directly related to teaching itself.

> *As an anthropologist, I have gone through all these difficulties. My research is in a Quechua speaking area in the highlands of Southern Peru. This area is not easily accessible – I am vulnerable to altitude sickness--. Besides the difficulties of research, I have to deal with issues of not just literal but cultural translation and with other more personal processes of culture shock and reverse culture shock. In anthropology as in other social sciences, we need a lot of time to complete research and conduct writing. How to get this time?*

- Apply for programs that offer course release, that support writing; i.e. Faculty Publication Program at CUNY and at BMCC. KEEP TRACK OF DEADLINES. When you get in what my office neighbor calls "The Vortex," you can lose track.
- Apply for grants that allow you to do research and publish.
- Save your summers for research and writing; minimize your teaching, if you can.

4. Be Creative/Be Compliant:
Publishing, as we know it, is changing fast. With the digital revolution, the future of academic presses in particular is more uncertain than ever. Online publishing, open access, blogging are other venues.

5. Be Ready/Look For The Best Timing:
One of the best pieces of advice I received from a colleague at the Graduate Center is simple and more applicable for faculty in two year colleges with so many time restrictions: be ready. Be ready as soon as you turn in grades.

Another successful colleague from College of Staten Island's English Department noted :

- Establish a schedule so that you have at least four hours per day, four days per week free to do absolutely nothing but write.
- Then set up a writing schedule and stick to it (so that you don't get lost in endless research).
- Form a support group if necessary in order to get feedback and have set deadlines for submission.
- Don't ignore your teaching and service work, but be absolutely clear that they should come second to your research and writing.
- Senior faculty should be protecting the untenured by giving them lighter service loads; if they have not done that for you, assert your rights in as collegial a manner as possible.

[I am proud to note that the Social Science Department has started a Faculty Salon to celebrate scholarly publications of our faculty. The English Department has had such a program for years.] This leads me to the following tension.

7. Be Collegial/ Be Selfish:
It will help you to network and to be collegial though some times we also need to be protective of our time.

Essential for me has been to participate in CUNY wide seminars/colloquia/ grant programs and CUNY-wide service. This year I joined the Graduate Center's Center for the Humanities colloquium. But don't overdo it at the expense of your precious writing time. For me this CUNY wide collegiality keeps me alive. As one of two full-time cultural anthropologists at BMCC, I have found in my CUNY colleagues sources of support, camaraderie, inspiration and growth. Make time to be involved and connected. It pays off in ways you may not even anticipate at first.

Develop a Circle of Advisors. You will need their support.

I have found that although we teach in a two year institution, we have to be connected to colleagues across the colleges and outside CUNY. I keep excited about developments in the field and the productivity and quality of several scholars in various fields. Here are few people who either serve as models for writing successfully. Marie Lee, a friend who later became a fiction writer, once

shared with me the frustration of trying to write outside academia. It takes longer to unlearn the bad writing devices we acquire in graduate school: we are trained to write poorly in academic settings. Despite that, I don't want to dismiss the important contribution of so many scholars. In my field, David Harvey, professor of geography in the Anthropology Department at the Graduate Center, produces a book every couple of months and more important, he has relevant things to say. Paul Farmer, anthropologist and medical doctor at Harvard who travels the world to find out the sources of pandemics such as the HIV/AIDS virus and various strands of TB, is a prolific writer moved by passion to denounce social disparities. On top of that, he supports a hospital in a small village in Haiti and spends little on himself.

III. Find Your Way:

The title of the new journal of the Writing Intensive Program is powerful,

WRITE NOW!

I see this effort as a place for publication of student papers in writing intensive courses, but also as a reminder to us, faculty, of its importance. Inspired by this title I have created my own slogan,

MAKE IT YOUR RIGHT AND RITE: WRITE RIGHT NOW!

I have some non-academic suggestions that do wonders to our success: EXERCISE, MEDITATE, EAT WELL, KEEP A POSITIVE ATTITUDE ABOUT LIFE

In ending, I leave the powerful lesson I got after reading the book *Le papillon et L'escaphandre* (2007)–*The Diving Bell and The Butterfly* by Jean-Dominique Bauby, editor-in-chief of Elle--France. In 1995, 46 years old, Bauby suffered a strange form of stroke/embolia (locked-in syndrome) that left him paralyzed except for his left eye. In this state he wrote a memoir of the exotic places he had and had not visited. Bauby finished this memoir only dictating movements through his blinking eye. He died of heart failure two days after completing the book. His novel is for me a lesson in perseverance as he created a form that outlived him. It has helped me approach the monster upfront, '*agarrar el toro por las astas*' (grab the bull by the horns).

CALL FOR PAPERS

Inquirer is a journal devoted to teaching and learning at BMCC. We welcome manuscripts on any number of topics, among them the following:

- successful or provocative classroom activities
- themes or units in your teaching
- use of technology or a new pedagogy
- ways you enliven the classroom
- the impact of syllabus or curriculum changes in the classroom
- writing or speaking across the curriculum in your classroom
- classroom-based research you've done
- balancing the curriculum issues: race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, environment
- teaching problems you've faced and resolved
- assessment and evaluation of students or of teachers
- the impact of policies on teaching and learning
- other topics relevant to teaching and learning
- teaching the global citizen
- teaching environmental understanding and action

Please submit a proposal for your article (a paragraph or two on one page) to the editors by January 27, 2010.

Submit an electronic copy of your completed computer-generated *Inquirer* article by March 3, 2010.

Manuscripts should not exceed 2500 words (or 8 pages) and must be double-spaced and in APA style.

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