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Introduction

With this issue we celebrate the 20th edition of *Inquirer*. In the more than two decades since the publication of Volume I, Number 1, much has happened, both at BMCC and CUNY, and in higher education more generally. There is much to look back on, and it is unlikely that two decades ago we would have anticipated the matters and moments we face in 2013. Some things remain recognizable and still immediate—how to work with under-prepared students, how to give them the best education we can, how to draw from them the best of their own experiences, and work with them to make them critical and active learners and citizens. Another matter endures: how to balance our devotion to education and our dedication as researchers and artists, as intellectual teachers, scholars, and *actors* in the 21st century. While this frame remains the same and continues to challenge us, much has changed. Indeed, it seems the ground under us is shifting, as social, political, and economic transformations and constraints create new challenges, new crises, and, to be sure, new opportunities.

Much is new here and near: Fiterman Hall, built on the ashes of the September 11 attack; our increased attention to the urgencies of global and environmental education and reconciliation; expanded and new programs such as a writing and literature major, a history major, a criminal justice concentration, and others in the works; the increasing competitiveness of nursing and other career programs; a library increasingly dedicated to electronic sources—and more and more of our students straining their eyes to read e-texts on tiny screens in class!; the phasing out of some projects and the building of new ones with their own catchy (or not-so-catchy!) acronyms: CETLS, ASAP, FLA, WAC, and more recently RAC and MAC, with ESLAC in the wings. All of these and more (if we've left out important examples, we apologize, and call on you to write about yours for the next issue of *Inquirer*), working to keep students in college and to help them to graduate prepared and energized for lifelong learning and engagement in the world. We face as well new educational and administrative initiatives and charges, and, in the estimation of some, questionable impositions: Learning Outcomes and Assessment issues, DegreeWorks, CUNY First, and the much-debated Pathways with its murky buckets. These continue to be among the many issues about which faculty and administration are in conversation and negotiation on behalf of our students, who remain, ideally, the primary beneficiaries of it all.

While *Inquirer* does not aim to provide a faculty-oriented "state of the college," such as President Perez offers each fall, we do want to shake the tree a little, to point to these many changes and challenges, some of which seem advances, some which seem more problematic, some of which seem a few too

many steps away from providing the kind of resources and support we think we need to teach our best. Surely, differences exist even in the way we might *name* these new things, things which might not have even had names at all when the first issue of *Inquirer* appeared in 1991. But perhaps Shakespeare's Juliet was right to ask, "What's in a name?" In any case, *this* issue of *Inquirer* arises in the glow of these and many other fires. As scholar/researcher/artist/professors, we wear many hats when we enter the classroom, department meetings, committee meetings (department or cross-college or university-wide), workshops, union meetings, formal and informal discussions with administrators. *Inquirer XX* tells some of these stories, with new emphasis on how intimately and intellectually we are tied to our students' lives and needs.

We offer in this issue a few personal accounts about teaching: David Bahr writes of teaching autobiography and the ways in which it is tied to "unlocking" his own "embodied" memories. Adele Kudish rethinks her relationship to her students who are young mothers when she too has to juggle a new baby with professional life. Bertie Feldman looks at how to organize and move forward, however experienced a teacher, in the first year of full time teaching at BMCC. Colleagues offer as well their concerns about and research addressing pedagogical challenges that arise from our diverse student body: Rose Gleicher's expert and thoughtful guide to working with an increasing population of students with autism spectrum disorder promises to be valuable for all. Catherine Cammilleri explains a useful classroom activity, teaching visual imagery to developmental writing students who struggle to find an academic written vocabulary. From Abel Navarro, we read about the benefits and detractions of teaching the "practice exam" in his chemistry classes. Yolanda Medina questions the ways by which we can encourage interactive and imaginative thinking/teaching in her education classes. And Rifat Salam interrogates the complexities of teaching topics about family inequality to students who themselves are living those inequalities.

Finally, in our second "Teachable Moment Symposium," we offer a group of essays that arise from the college's Spring 2013 workshop on ESLAC– ESL Across the Curriculum. John Beaumont's article presents a well-documented overview about working with second language students. Then a rich collective conversation comes from faculty truly across the curriculum—social sciences, science, business management, mathematics. Gathered together by John Beaumont and Judith Yancey, this section's contributors are Rifat Salam, Anne Marie Basic, Judith Young, Marci Littlefield, Bettina Berch, Margaret Dean, Maureen Keenan, Susan Licwinko, Elizabeth Wissinger, Lina Wu, and Shirley Zaragoza.

Needless to say, we all come at our work from our own experiences and needs, as some of the personal narratives, shaded by the love of teaching, reveal. Many of the articles in this issue are written by new faculty members, telling of their eagerness to improve their pedagogy, to be self-critical and honest. Some colleagues stress as well the ways we need to hear and understand our students, addressing special needs and liabilities—and at the same time urging our students to use the city's resources as part of their education. As we wear our many hats, how do we marshal our energies, how do we conserve, and how do we expend the extensive energy needed to be the kind of professors and scholars we

have set out to be? How do we shift, how can we be flexible in our teaching, and come up with 'new ways' when much of the tried and true that used to seem to work does not work so well as it did, and some of it has become—if we are honest—stale? These are just some of the concerns explored in *Inquirer XX*.

As you read your way into this twentieth volume, bear in mind, too, that *Inquirer* can be a stepping stone. It is not only a place to learn of others' ideas. It is a medium of free collegial review in which to hone your own ideas, to shape your pedagogical experience and thoughts into more developed scholarly articles and artistic pieces. We encourage you to join in this process. Don't just read these articles. Respond to what your colleagues have to say here, whether in a note or in a hallway chat. And then, add your voice to this two-decades long conversation. Given all the changes along the way, we can barely imagine what will be said in the next twenty issues. What we do know is that the conversation continues, and not simply that it will, but that it must. Too much is at stake. Not only do we invite you to listen in to the conversation. We invite you to participate in it. Who better than you, after all, to have the next word?

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Listening to the Body: Autobiography and the Recovery of Lost Memories

David Bahr
English

Years ago, while teaching a creative nonfiction course, I met with two students whose autobiographical essays impressed me. I was in awe of the specificity of their writing. I asked them how they managed to remember events with such clarity. One student mentioned that she had been an assiduous diarist, regularly recording the particulars of daily life. The other student confessed that he had made up certain details. After all, he explained, he remembered the gist of things. He simply provided the color.

Well, I thought, those are certainly two approaches.

I don't remember when I first began to write about my experience as a foster child; I do know that I had been "writing" it in my head for years. As someone who has never kept a journal, I have had to let my imagination—and body—be my guide. Waiting for a train, walking down the street, standing in an elevator, I would replay scenes, test phrases, and try to imagine the form and structure that my fragmented childhood might take.

Here's what I do remember: sitting in the dining room of my then-partner Steve's home in Provincetown, Massachusetts. I gaze at the blemished beige wood, the circular stain left by a can or cup. It's midday, diffuse gray light fills the room. My jaw is clenched, my fists tight; I am paralyzed. To work through it, I write a sentence, revise it, then return to an incapacitated state for, what seemed, hours. A friend of ours later tells Steve: "I see David sitting at that table... there is so much tension in his face and body. It's like he's going to explode."

Writing about my life as a former foster child with a mentally ill mother has been difficult for me, mostly because it doesn't seem to exist as a story but rather as a black hole situated somewhere in my body's core: it's dense and dark and traps every bit of light that enters. The fragments that I recollect come to me unexpectedly, often while listening to a song, seeing a photograph, film, painting, or piece of sculpture. Memories have also been jogged, or inspired, by other people's memoirs: *Afterlife* by Donald Antrim, concerning the author's troubled mother and his own psychological breakdown; *The Mistress's Daughter* by A.M Homes, about the writer's unsettling reunion with her biological parents decades after being given up for adoption; *Stop-Time* by Frank Conroy and *This Boy's Life* by Tobias Wolff, both coming of age stories about nomadic childhoods with emotionally difficult parents. Poetry and autobiographical fiction have been even more fruitful, in terms of unlocking embodied memories. "Kaddish" by Allen Ginsberg, the eulogy of a gay Jewish man to his mentally ill mother, continues to affect me viscerally. ("Death, stay thy phantoms!") *The Things They Carried*,

by Tim O'Brien, a work of Vietnam War-related stories featuring a protagonist named "Tim O'Brien," is perhaps the most influential book I have read, in terms of my own writing. His conception of how embodied memories are dynamic and the "truth" ever-shifting, alive, and made "true" through a life-long process of composition, resonates with me. Inspiration and the summoning of embodied memories are distinct from the challenges involved in transforming such sensations into prose. But I can't put words to paper until I physically register what I'm trying to convey. That afternoon in Provincetown, faced with such a challenge, I was stuck, choking on emotions that had no verbal counterpart, feeling like a person without a past. So I did what I often do when trying to conjure a scene: I closed my eyes and tried to invoke the phenomenology of an event. I searched for specific images, sounds, smells, and sensations. In his book, *The Invention of Memory*, Israel Rosenfield notes: "Recollection is a kind of perception . . . and every context will alter the nature of what is recalled" (89). For me, recollection is perception and writing is the shaping and communication of that perception. I could not tell you the exact scene I was attempting to relive that day in Massachusetts (there were many such days in Massachusetts before I finally published the essay in August 2004). I do know that I already had a few pages by that point, although I cannot say exactly when I first wrote them. I know that I had tried to start at the "beginning," with my earliest memory, which has always involved my foster mother, June. This is what I wrote:

> My earliest memory... is a good one. I'm five and the air is warm and sweet beneath a roof of leaves. I am walking down the street, holding June's hand and looking up at the giant trees. Light peeks through in quivering gleams, igniting the shade with specks of fire. Excited birds leap from branch to branch. I say something about it to June and brush my fingers against a neighbor's hedge, smelling the cut grass. We are walking away from our house, which sits on the corner surrounded by a wide lawn and a red log fence, heading toward the bus stop. In my pocket, I have a quarter: we are going shopping and I am thinking of all the things I'll buy. ("No Matter What Happens" 69)

I like the passage. It conveys the images and rhythm of a specific memory fragment. The words came to me like a song that I had been singing in my head for a long time but never composed. I was emotionally vulnerable when I wrote it, and by vulnerable, I mean open and in tune with my body. When writing succeeds for me, words are like tangible, sensational objects that I can feel on my tongue and at the tips of my fingers (right now, I let my forefinger and thumb gently rub against each other, trying to feel what I'm describing). At my least successful, there seems to be an unbridgeable chasm between my body and language. Then, I must wait, searching for a connection. With the above passage, I can still hear the birds and touch the leaves as I walk, clasping my foster mother's hand. The scene is comforting and, I suspect, idealized. Nonetheless, it is the memory I live with. Now that the event has been given language, and subsequently published, it has become the "official" and "definitive" account of that moment in

my life. I feel no need for another account. I am satisfied. It has been objectified and recorded.

The need to objectify, shape, and record is my primary motive for writing autobiographically. It transforms my embodied memories into an aesthetic artifact. In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry writes that "pain only becomes an intentional state once it is brought into relation with the objectifying power of the imagination; through that relation, pain will be transformed from a wholly passive and helpless occurrence into a self-modifying and, when most successful, self-eliminating one" (164). The scene with my foster mother and I walking to the bus stop transforms painful memories of childhood, and an estranged relationship with my foster mother, into something that I created and control.

Still, I remain dissatisfied with that passage as the "beginning" of my story. I'm distressed that I cannot remember anything earlier than that walk with my foster mother; specifically, I am frustrated that I cannot recall anything from the first years of my life with my mother Sadie. I only know what I've been told, which I wrote down:

> Sadie was single, and never married; she left me in a foundling hospital when I was 18 months old. At age two, I was placed in the foster home of June and her husband Hal, a tailor. Growing up, I couldn't say the exact reason Sadie gave me up. All a social worker ever said was that Sadie "couldn't care for me." The social worker explained what a lucky young man I was: "It's like you have two mommies," she said, her blanched lips suggesting a smile. She was as old as a grandmother; behind big round glasses, her eyes swollen from fatigue. "Twice the love." (70)

I'm not sure that the social worker actually said those words to me, but I embrace my account of that "memory" as I've constructed it. With my entire story, there is no one to corroborate the events as I have come to know them. Sadie died when I was 15 and I am permanently estranged from my foster family. A few years ago, I called the Jewish Childcare Association about my records, but I was told that they were lost in a flood. The only information they had about me, aside from the fact that I was in foster care and a resident of The Pleasantville Cottage School, was my name and birth date, the last of which they had wrong. My memory is what I have. I am satisfied with the above scene between me and the social worker, as I have recorded it; I have constructed a narrative that reconciles an embodied memory with a salvageable identity. Still, I remain haunted by what actually happened during the first five years of my life. What transpired that led Sadie to that life-altering and, no doubt, difficult decision of giving me up when I was 18 months old? I imagine various scenarios, none of them pleasant: me lying in the crib as a baby, crying and left in dirty diapers; Sadie sobbing in her bed for days, unable to tend to me, cursing me, ruing the day she gave birth to a child she couldn't care for. Sadie may now be dead, yet I am alive and I was there. What does my body remember? How has it affected me, particularly in regards to my inability to get emotionally close to people? My mother reluctantly gave me up. That decision can only be born out of pain. And I continue to feel it, viscerally,

without any narrative to anchor it. At some point, I'll need to create something.

In the meantime, all I have is what I wrote. After I decided on my earliest memory, I composed the first lines of the essay:

> My foster mother was a small woman, with a fierce white smile, and hair the beauty parlor called Natural Blonde. Her clothes were violet, rose, lavender, and honeysuckle. Everything about her suggested summer. Her name was June. (69)

I liked the contrast between "fierce white smile," which is slightly frightening to me, and the soothing associated colors and season, which is amplified (or informed) by my foster mother's name, "June." I followed that three-sentence opening paragraph with my first memory of her: our walk toward the bus stop. I then shifted my focus toward my biological mother, Sadie.

> My biological mother was tall, raven-haired, and wore a long black coat well past spring. Compared to my pastel-colored foster mother, Sadie was stark and towering, six feet in heels. My foster sister Joanne once called her a vampire, but I thought she looked more like a witch. A sad one.

> My first memory of Sadie is really more an impression: On a white sidewalk, beside manicured gardens and quiet homes, she approaches, dressed in black, her hair pulled into a tight bun. She holds a book in one hand and a cigarette in the other. The sun is everywhere, and on her forehead are beads of sweat. (69-70)

This is my earliest memory of Sadie. While writing it, I had not yet known that, by the end of the essay, I would emotionally align myself with my biological mother. Most of my memories of early childhood concern my aversion to this "sad" "witchy" woman in black. As a little boy, I aspired to be the son of the handsome tailor and his blonde pretty wife; I yearned to be the brother of their popular, charismatic son and energetic daughter. Yet I would realize, after writing the essay, that I have a significant amount of affection—and love—for the wounded and broken Sadie. Growing up, I worshiped my foster mother. By the time of my troubled adolescence, I came to hate her; by adulthood, I simply felt neither hate nor love, only disengagement. Or so I thought. With my description of her "fierce white smile," I would discover that an antipathy remained. It's not as strong as hate. I wouldn't even call it dislike. But there is an aversion toward June, as I remember her, which I can't deny. (Over the years, the animus has lifted; compassion, sorrow, and loss color my perception of her.)

In my above descriptions of these two women, particularly of Sadie, I wrote the words after sitting for a long time, eyes shut, or gazing off into space, struggling to translate sensations into language. I could feel the heat of the sun as I stood on the sidewalk, outside my foster parents' home. The empty streets were wide and the single-family houses far enough apart that I felt exposed and small. I remember how I squinted and searched for my mother as she grew from a tiny

dark spot to a tall imposing woman all in black. I was six. I didn't know it right away, but her visits were a prelude to reclaiming me, which she did a month after my seventh birthday; she kept me for a disastrous three years, before leaving me at a children's psychiatric hospital when I was ten. I vividly remember her visits. I recall how, as she came up the street, she took a last drag on her cigarette and threw the lit butt on the sidewalk. I can see her caked red lips and pained smile. I am not sure if I ran up to her or waited cautiously, but I remember feeling both excited and anxious. I am anxious and excited right now, remembering her. To capture this dynamic, I wrote the following, born out of an indelible memory of us sitting in my foster family's backyard.

> When I was six, Sadie began visiting every month. It was the beginning of the "reuniting process" with my mother, the social worker said. Sadie's black hair was usually pulled back, the roots at her temples pure white by age 40. She had green eyes and a pronounced, full chin. Her smiles were tight and distant. Usually, we sat at the backyard picnic table. She never said much. We played board games, and she let me win. When she did speak, it was usually to ask a question. Her voice was high and nervous. She lit cigarette after cigarette, blowing the smoke upward, leaving behind a dozen or so butts, each stained bright red. (71)

I remember weeping while writing this scene. My mother was such a lonely and socially awkward person. She dyed her hair and kept her lips as red as a fifties' film star. Yet she had a noticeable body odor and her clothes showed signs of wear. My identification with pained and lonely outsiders began with Sadie. Yet it was only after writing this essay that I understood the extent to which I identified with her, and the extent to which I eventually dissidentified with my foster mother.

I composed the rest of the essay, over 6,000 words, within a year. I proceeded in the same way, trying to chronologically organize my recollections and drawing on my embodied memories to make them come alive for me. I wrote a series of scenes: Sadie reclaiming me and our unsuccessful return to Brooklyn; her leaving me in the psychiatric hospital; my problematic reunion with my foster parents; Sadie's death; my attending high school graduation alone before venturing off into the world on my own. Each of those events seem encoded into my DNA by now, but crystallizing them into the specificity that good writing demands was excruciating and fraught with self-condemnation and a sense of failure. Perhaps most difficult of all was trying to write down my last phone call to my mother, who was days away from dying of breast cancer, which had spread throughout her body. Back then, at 15 years old, I didn't know she had cancer. She told me that she was in the hospital because of a stomach problem. It wasn't until our last conversation that I realized that something was very wrong. While writing that scene, I agonized over two things: 1) how to convey the sensation of hearing her totally transformed voice and 2) my sudden fear/realization that she was going die and how I told her that, upsetting her. I wrote:

Then, one afternoon, I called, and didn't recognize her voice. It was as if someone had replaced it with one from some toy. The sounds coming from her throat were tinny and robotic.

"Are you OK?" I asked. She told me she was fine. "You don't sound like you," I said. And then: "You're not going to die or something?" I heard her struggle to form some kind of response, but her mechanized voice faltered, and turned quiet. A nurse got on the line and explained that Sadie was tired and needed rest.

I ran to June in the kitchen, saying that Sadie didn't sound right.

"Sadie is very sick," June said, mentioning Sadie's health to me for the first time. (84-85)

I can still hear Sadie during that call. But I don't think that "tinny" and "robotic," like that of "a toy," fully conveys my embodied memories of her voice that day. I had originally written how "it was as if someone had replaced her voice with one of those mechanized boxes in a child's toy" but I chose to use mechanized later, so I deleted the first mention, to avoid repetition. I think I tried out the words "hollow" and "thin" and "tenuous," but I eventually settled on "robotic" and "mechanized" because those were the words that best communicate what I heard, and still hear. I also wrote that "her mechanized voice faltered, and turned quiet" but I remember this faltering as a sob, yet it wasn't a sob because her voice couldn't convey that sound. But it lives in me as a sob. The problem I have with writing about embodied memories is my tendency to overwrite, to throw in every possible association and word I can think of. But concision, I learned and continue to believe, is most effective because, when successful, it is sharper and leaner; it allows for a greater range of associative play, although I have no way of knowing how that sense of play will register with others. Still, the one thing about the above scene that is absolute and irreducible is my final statement, "You are not going to die or something." (It wasn't a question but a revelation.) I remember the words so clearly, probably more than anything I ever said in my life, perhaps because of how guilty I would later feel about having said them. To this day, I wish I could have let her die with some sense of comfort and belief that I was ok and would be ok. (And, in fact, I am ok.) In the end, however, I upset her with an acknowledgment of a truth that neither of us could address at that moment: I was only a teenager and she was physically incapacitated. Because of my panicked outburst, I imagine her last days and hours with the same morbid speculation that I imagine my first 18 months.

Still, in connecting all the scenes as I did, as I have mentioned, an emotional arc emerges: my realization of how much I loved Sadie and how much of her I continue to carry with me. Until I finished the essay, I had not quite acknowledged the extent of our similarities. It wasn't a happy realization. My mother lived and died alone, and, for my entire life, I have mostly been solitary, with no extant family or life partner. Would I too die alone? Although an avid reader, Sadie had never finished college. She was an executive secretary. But she always

wanted me to go to college. Before she died, I promised her that I would, but I was 15, and no other adult seemed concerned with my education. When I began this essay, well into my thirties, I was a part-time word-processor (not unlike a secretary) at an investment banking institution. I worked at that firm for about ten years, putting myself through school, earning a B.A. and finishing the necessary course work toward a doctorate. While writing the essay, I had already dropped out of graduate school and been laid off as a word processor. I battled low-grade depression and struggled financially as a freelance writer and adjunct instructor. I knew that my mother had given me up due to mental illness and was intermittently on welfare. At the time, recognizing the similarities between Sadie and myself was painful. This is how I concluded the essay:

> Years later I would finally attend college. I would become a writer and learn to love books, carrying them around as Sadie did, losing myself in novels the way I once lost myself in clouds. I'd sit in my studio apartment, beside an overstuffed bookcase, thinking of my mother's sadness, her defiance, the comfort she found in solitude, and I'd see myself as June saw me. As Sadie's son. (88)

I remember feeling elated after finishing the piece; I had captured what had been trapped within me for decades and put it down on paper. Something had been exorcised.

In 2012, having returned to graduate school after the essay was published in *GQ*, as "Mothered," and, later, in the anthology *Boys To Men: Gay Men Write About Growing Up*, as "No Matter What Happens," I completed my Ph.D.. I am currently an assistant professor at The Borough of Manhattan Community College, City University of New York. In many ways, I can see that I am not like my mother; I am the fulfillment of her dreams. Since the essay's publication, I have struggled to turn six thousand words into sixty thousand. Again, I can find no clear, honest narrative; I only have dynamic fragments. I know I simply must keep writing, some unifying theme or force will unexpectedly unfold. But even if it doesn't, I need to transform my memories into an aesthetic object. In her book, *Felt Sense: Writing with The Body*, Sondra Perl urges us: "pay attention to the implicit realm... to what is *not yet in words*... a palpable presence can be felt and from this presence, language, more often that not, will emerge" (54). Perl employs ellipses to communicate the pauses and rich gaps between words and feeling yet to be mined. Drawing on the philosopher Eugene Gendlin's phenomenological approach to language, Perl notes, "our bodily sense of each situation opens onto a vast implicit knowledge and no one statement or set of statements will ever exhaust what we know" (56). And so, I tell my students, whether composing an autobiographical sketch or a literary term paper, we need to be patient, sit quietly, and attend to our bodies—remembering to release the tensed jaw and tightened fists—as we search to find the words. For writing who and what we are remains a life-long process.

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La Maison en Petits Cubes-Understanding the CATW Writing Prompt

Catherine Cammilleri
English

The ancient Greek and Roman philosophers made sense of their world by capturing the essence of humanity in their works of art. During the period of Enlightenment, science brought forth a change in how people viewed the world through the visual arts, as well as poetry and prose. During the industrial revolution, with the invention of photography, again people relied on the visual to make advancements. What am I getting at here? We can clearly draw inspiration from the visual realm.

As educators, we are frequently frustrated with the lack of independent thought produced by our students. Looking deeper into this phenomenon, it can clearly be concluded that, along with their lack of independent thought process, many students lack the confidence in themselves to produce anything remotely comparable to the thoughts of the authors they study. This results in regurgitation of material, verging on plagiarism, much like what takes place in the high school setting. How do we resolve this problem? We take the words away from them!

I use this approach in my English 095 class, which is an upper-level intensive developmental writing course for students who have failed the CUNY Assessment Test in Writing, or CATW exam. The assignment is based on the use of *ekphrasis*. Although the definition of *ekphrasis* has evolved, for the purpose of this assignment it is essentially transforming something that is purely visual into written form. Through the use of *ekphrasis*, students perform the tasks associated with the writing directions for the CATW exam based solely on a visual aide.

The CATW exam is designed to test a student's ability to read, understand and write a response to a short passage in ninety minutes. Students must pass this exam to be able to enter English Composition (ENG 101), as well as to enroll in many other courses at BMCC. The instructions direct students to summarize the passage in their own words, stating the author's most important ideas, develop the essay by choosing one idea that they find especially significant, and support their claims with evidence drawn from something they've read, learned in school and/or experienced.

While perusing the channels one late evening, I came across a short film called, *La Maison en Petits Cubes*, "The House of Small Cubes." Immediately it caught my attention. An animated Japanese film, absent of dialogue, about twelve minutes long, it features an elderly man who has lost his wife. The place where he lives has been flooded with water, and as the water rises, he is forced to build new levels, or cubes, onto his house in order to escape the rising water. One day he accidentally drops his pipe, an item of great sentimental value given to him by his now deceased wife, and it sinks into the lower levels of his home.

His search, to retrieve his pipe, forces him to journey back in time and relive scenes from his life. Each level, or cube, represents a different time in his life. I thought to myself, *I could use this film in my 095 class to take the words away from my students*, and I did just that!

After viewing the short film, *La Maison en Petits Cubes*, I asked students to summarize it, focusing on the main ideas it presents. Because the film is purely visual, without dialogue, students are forced to use their own words, and not those of the author's. We do this together as a class. I involve myself very little in the process, allowing sufficient room for my students to focus on and trust in their own vision.

Once this sense of security in their own thought process has been established, students are then asked to develop an idea they consider to be significant. Ideas will vary student to student. Here are some examples of significant ideas students have chosen to develop based on the film: fear of change as an explanation for why the man does not leave his home; life is cyclical; the cubes get smaller as the man grows older signifying the window of life slowly closing in; the water rising is a symbol of time passing; and they sometimes bring in the idea of global warming as a possible underlying theme.

Once a significant idea has been established, students are asked to bring in support based on something they've learned in school, read, and/or experienced. Upon completion of this step, students have successfully navigated through the CATW writing directions, and they have done so without the "training wheels" access to the author's words often provide. When students learn what they can do without reliance on the words of others, incorporating the written passages back into the equation seems like a much less daunting task.

I find that, as a result of taking the author's words away from them, students take ownership of their own thoughts, ideas, and their own writing voices. They feel a new sense of accomplishment in being able to create something, from scratch. This practice acts as a catalyst to reignite some sense of confidence in their own abilities to think independently of the author, and of the professor, for that matter. I dare not say that every essay is without flaw, but this exercise certainly does well to pour the foundation required to begin the process of building upward to a deeper understanding of the writing process.

What I learned my first semester teaching at BMCC

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I began teaching full time as an assistant professor in the Department of Speech, Communications, and Theatre Arts in August 2012. New hires had the opportunity to attend an orientation where, among other topics, we covered student behavior, classroom management, and briefly, teaching and learning at BMCC. As a PhD of CUNY's Graduate Center, I was quite familiar with CUNY's undergraduate population, having taught within the CUNY system since 2003, when I was a teaching fellow here at BMCC. Since, I had taught at City College, College of Staten Island, and Bronx Community College, as well as Medgar Evers (as a WAC fellow) and Hunter College (Instructional Technology fellow). I thought I knew what to do. I was experienced. After all, I had years of pedagogical training. So when during the orientation portion we got to the teaching component of the program, and discussion turned to establishing ground rules of conduct and how to appropriately ask a student to keep his pants up, I thought to myself *oh boy, here we go again*. Seeing however as this was my first full-time appointment, I began to listen, and panic. *Maybe I should reconsider my ways. Maybe I need to be "tough" or at least tougher here. Maybe I need to be firm and tolerate no excuses*. I decided I was going to be very strict. I went home and edited my syllabus and **bolded** the paragraph on absences. I added a paragraph on dress code. I wrote out a contract on classroom behavior that the students would sign on the first day. Unbeknownst to me, I was going to promote student-learning outcomes by shifting most of my focus those first few precious days to promote form over content: rules, expectations, classroom and university policies and so forth. Even though I had taught for various years in numerous CUNY campuses before coming to BMCC, I did not realize just how much I (as much as the students) would be learning that first semester in college. How could I use these lessons to my advantage and best transition to the next semester?

My first day on the job, I put on heels and a jacket to play the role of professor; making sure students would not notice my artsy side. This was, after all, a "Presentation Skills" course. I was determined to put on a role. I was so eager I brought copies of new activities every week, which most likely confused some of the students, more than helped them. It was difficult (and literally heavy) to keep up with the amount of handouts and paperwork I was carrying from class to class. I got personally frustrated with students who were constantly late, did not come or did not do their assignments, and focused too little on those who did, those who cared. I over prepared for each and every class, and would get upset when we didn't cover something. I was hard on myself, for both good and bad reasons. *Was I too tough on that student who was texting throughout class? I*

should have put no sleeping in class on my syllabus! Maybe the assignment was not clear enough? Maybe I could have simplified the reading? What can I add and/or clarify better for next time? "Next semester" would become my mantra: everything would improve "next semester." I was determined to make this a reality however, not just a feel better quote in my head, and began compiling a notebook called: "Next semester." Every idea, clue, question, answer, note, and thought regarding what to change/keep/improve would go there. It was a few weeks into the semester, after having to call security on a very disruptive student, that I realized that my first semester was only the beginning of a very long learning process.

The first thing I did was actively seek out dialogue with colleagues regarding pedagogical and disciplinary strategies. Conversations would address anything from the specific wording of an assignment to general suggestions about respect in the classroom. Over the course of my first semester, I continuously spoke with senior faculty and more experienced colleagues about their teaching strategies, shared and exchanged exercises and tactics, asked questions. I also connected with new faculty about how their courses were going, how they were approaching certain situations with students in the classroom, even what techniques they used to assess student learning and exercises that had worked in the past. A question on my end would usually lead to a longer conversation and exchange about pedagogy in the larger context. In short, I became a student myself, listening to others, gaining perspective, and researching ideas for next semester on what I could improve on: what needed clarification, how to do it, what to edit out, what to worry about, what not to worry about, what battles were worth it, what battles were not. By the time I was correcting finals, my brain was already thinking about how I would approach my course "next semester." I was ready to transition.

Over the winter break, I put my research into practice and decided, for one, to go paperless, creating all my classes via Blackboard. I attended the workshops at the E-Learning Center and plan to continue attending more so that eventually I can post all grades online, as well as have students do take home reading quizzes via Blackboard. I would also like to extend the classroom discussion to online group discussions so that thinking around class material is continuous. Based on my "next semester" notebook notes, I reworked all my assignments, as well as the peer evaluations we use in class for presentations. I prepared exercises for the first two weeks of classes that would build trust as well provide confidence in an environment that fostered respect, and most of all focused on encouraging the students rather than scaring them. Yes, I would go over the syllabus and general ground rules, including make-ups, absences, tardiness, workloads, and so forth, but only after I gained their trust. I also realized I didn't even need to say much, as long as I was consistent in fulfilling my own policies. Silly as it sounds, I even watched all sorts of corny teaching movies over the winter break—to provide myself with inspiration.

I was myself from the first class on, no need for those heels anymore, and established classroom etiquette/behavior by beginning with a conversation on role playing in everyday life (a la Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in*

Everyday Life), initiating a discussion about what roles *they* played in their lives and what characterized their role in the classroom, at BMCC, at home, and work, and how their behavior, dress, attitudes might be different in each as a result. I changed one of my introductory assignments to a more personal one, asking them to seek a "meaningful message" by a literary, cultural, historical, and/or political figure and explain what it meant for them and why they had chosen such a passage. I shared an article I love on the difference between leading a happy versus meaningful life. I expressed my own discontent with their obsession with grades over what should be an obsession with thinking and learning. Of course, not every student was thrilled. Or even present that day.

This time around I would focus my energy on those students eager to learn, eager to listen. By simply shifting my attention in class to those giving something in return, I have discovered my own energy changes. I won't lie: some classes are better than others, but even in that 8:00 a.m. class, where sometimes over half the class is absent or few have done an assignment, a little voice in my head helps me focus on those who are present and ready, and together we move forward. The others to my surprise often end up joining in. Because the course I teach is mostly skills-based (how to choose and narrow a topic, how to create an outline, how to write a thesis statement, a bibliography, how to conduct research using BMCC's library database, etc.) as opposed to content heavy, I try to incorporate current, historical, political, cultural events and material whenever possible. If we are working on the elements of an introduction, for example, I might show excerpts from real presentations by prominent figures, so that besides observing the strategies used, students are also getting the additional content they may not otherwise be exposed to. Whenever possible, I let the students do most of the work: having them engage in group activities that actually have them implement what's been discussed. I've consistently seen that classes whose members get along work the strongest. I've also seen their interest level go up when other classmates depend on them for a group assignment, or when they have to teach each other the material in small groups. Sometimes I've asked the students to hand in questions at the end of class, anonymously, so I can get a real sense of what they still don't understand. At the end of the semester I plan on asking them for feedback pertaining to certain assignments I still would like to change and improve next time around.

So far this semester, I feel I have a better handle on things, but I would be lying if I told you I've put away that notebook called "next semester." There are still so many things I want to try. In retrospect, I am not sure exactly what would have helped me to prepare for that first semester, because experience is really always best. But here are some brief pointers that perhaps could benefit someone like me coming in as full-time professor to BMCC:

* If you are teaching a course that has or is currently being taught by other professor(s), get as many variations on the syllabus for the course as you can. You will see different ways of combining and grouping the material—it might help create your own via what has been tried in the past.

* Talk, talk and talk with colleagues: don't be shy about your own weaknesses

and doubts. You might notice others share the same experiences and might even be able to give great advice that is useful.

* Seek help through Student Services early: especially with a student who seems disruptive—don't wait until a situation goes over board.

* Go Paperless as much as possible: have the students print out syllabus and assignments themselves—why wait in line at the copy center when the technology is there to help?

* Use group work, but take time conceptualizing assignments that foster group learning and *apply* what has been taught. It's easy to teach; it's harder to facilitate learning.

* Do less by having students do *more*: think of how much you learn just by having to teach the material. I remember feeling so frustrated at a new faculty meeting and the chair said: you are doing too much of *their* work!

* Be yourself in the classroom. Find your own style. No need for heels…

Autism Spectrum Disorders and the College Classroom: Challenges, Interventions, and Resources

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Students who have Autism Spectrum Disabilities (ASD) are a growing population at BMCC (Gonzalez, 2013). In Spring, 2013, there were 33 students with ASD, out of 488 students registered with the Office of Accessibility (OA) (Gonzalez, 2013). This number is an estimate because some college students do not receive student support services due to stigma, misconceptions, or lack of awareness (Gonzalez, 2013; Markey, 2012).

People with *Autism Spectrum Disorder* (ASD) have deficits in *social interaction* (e.g., lack of eye contact, lack of emotions), *communication* (e.g., delay or lack of language, impaired ability to initiate/sustain a conversation, lack of spontaneous play), and *repetitive behaviors* (e.g., rocking, hand-flapping, unusual preoccupation with parts of objects, routines/rituals) (APA, 2000; APA, 2013). Some people with ASD also have sensitivity to loud sounds, bright lights, touch, dietary limitations, and difficulty sleeping (Kalb, 2008; Kantrowitz & Scelfo, 2006; Van Pelt, 2008; Wallis, 2006). Autism is thought to be caused by a combination of genetics, environment, chemicals, infections, and hormone imbalances (Kantrowitz & Scelfo, 2006). Current estimates are 1 in 50 children have ASD (Heasley, 2013). Despite these challenges, many people with ASD have creative abilities in math, music, sports, singing, and art, superior memory, and intelligence (Baio, 2012; Farrell, 2004; Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2012; Kalb, 2008; Van Pelt, 2008; Wallis, 2006). Some people with ASD have a mix of high and low levels of intellectual functioning (Mackelprang & Salsgiver, 2009).

Despite the strengths of people with ASD and increase in students with disabilities attending college, graduation rates are lower for students with disabilities compared to students without disabilities (Belch, 2004-2005; Dutta, Kundu, & Schiro-Geist, 2009; McCloy & DeClou, 2013; Myers & Laux, 2010). Nearly half (47%) of students with disabilities leave college without completing a degree compared to 36% of students without disabilities (Myers & Laux, 2010). Since the majority of students with disabilities attend community colleges with the hope of transferring to a four year college (Myers & Laux, 2010), it is important for BMCC faculty to learn strategies that will help students with ASD to succeed in college.

In Spring, 2013, I conducted workshops that aimed to develop faculty awareness about the needs of students with ASD and possible interventions. The workshops were sponsored by the Office of Accessibility, through a grant called CUNY Project REACH Resources and Education on Autism as CUNY's Hallmark. PROJECT PASS (Progressing Autism Spectrum Services) is BMCC's project within

the campus to provide assistance to students registered at the Office of Accessibility. As a social worker and parent of a special needs child, I was delighted to be part of CUNY and BMCC's efforts to support students with ASD to succeed in college. This paper will highlight important information from the faculty and staff workshops for the benefit of those individuals who were unable to attend.

Challenges in the college classroom

The presence of students with ASD in the college classroom has the potential to create challenging learning environments for community college professors who teach large-size classes. Professors can easily be overwhelmed when there are several students presenting with some of the following behaviors in the classroom: asking too many questions; asking questions that go off the topic, complaints about fluorescent lights, being easily distracted; complaints about crowds (in public transportation, hallways, bathrooms, lunch areas), difficulties with time management, lack of understanding a professor's use of language (e.g., sarcasm, jokes, irony, metaphors, humor, and abstract concepts), and frustration .

Interventions for success in the college classroom

In this section, I present interventions mentioned in the literature. It is important to note that individuals, with the same diagnosis, are different. No two people respond in the same way or can represent the same diagnosis (Van Pelt, 2008). Students with ASD have unique personalities and learning styles, thus, one approach for all does not work (Gobbo & Shumulsky , 2012). If and when you meet a student with ASD, it is important to keep in mind that is just one student. The next student with ASD might be different.

The Organization for Autism Research (OAR), has a wonderful 15 minute video about students with ASD in the college classroom and suggested faculty interventions. The video is called: *Understanding Asperger's Syndrome: A professor's guid*e. Organization for Autism Research (OAR). It can be retrieved from: http://www.researchautism.org/resources/AspergerDVDSeries.asp. A summary of tips for professors presented in this video included: helping a student decide where is the best place to sit in the classroom; having clear classroom rules (put on course syllabus); allowing for note-takers and tape-recording of lectures; providing access to classroom notes in advance; allowing for extra time on essay tests; sending students to the library for quiet time; and facilitating peer study groups for students with a variety of abilities.

Course syllabus. It is important to anticipate that there might be students with disabilities in the course and prepare the Course Syllabus in a way that contains certain information. For example, The University of Washington (2008, p. 2) wrote:

> A proactive approach is to include a statement on your class syllabus, inviting students to talk with you about any disability-related concerns. For example, you could say: "If you wish to discuss academic accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible." This will make students with disabilities more comfortable discussing accommodations.

In addition, the course syllabus needs to identify classroom rules, academic expectations, which should be very specific, and it should list resources, such as the counseling center and office of accessibility, formerly known as the office for students with disabilities (Monroe Community College, undated; Sorincelli, 1994). Also, you might want to include in the syllabus other students support services such as the writing center, the tutoring center, library, advisers for your major, and others.

Flyers for the counseling center and accessibility office. In addition to having the counseling center and accessibility office mentioned briefly on the course syllabus, be prepared for students needing support services by having multiple copies of each brochure for various student support services with you in your materials folders that you bring to class.

How to talk to students about getting help. The literature suggests ways to address problematic student behavior in general: The behavior should be addressed right away, which is as soon as possible because if you wait too long, it will become acceptable and the problem behavior will not go away on its own. (Gobbo & Shumulsky, 2012; Sorincelli, 1994). The University of Washington (2008) points out that professors should not ask a student who appears to be struggling in class whether or not he/she has a disability. If a student has a disability and has been approved for accommodations, professors will receive a letter asking for accommodations but it does not disclose what the disability is. I would like to stress that conversations with all students should be private, such as in an empty classroom or an office, whenever possible. You can say, "Please stay a minute after class. I need to talk to you about something."

For example, if it is early in the semester and the problem is not too serious, you can say, "I am concerned because I've noticed in class... It is early in the semester so there is time for you to get help with this..." For a small issue or disturbance by a student whom you have not yet received a letter indicating approval for services from the Office of Accessibility, I would give the student a brochure for both the counseling center and the disabilities office, indicate the services are free and confidential, and suggest that the student go and "check out" to see what services they might be eligible for, with accommodations such as: extra time on a test, taping lectures, a notetaker, counseling, tutoring, etc. If we already have a letter from the Office of Accessibility, we can direct the student to see his/her counselor there as well as the counseling center.

For students who have major classroom behavior issues, have failed an exam, did poorly on a paper, or are at risk of failing the course, we need to be firm and insistent about the importance of getting help from student support services as soon as possible. If you have a letter of accommodations on file for the student and they offer the services that the student needs, you could direct the student to the Office of Accessibility. If you are not sure if the student has a disability, you can give both the accessibility and counseling center brochures to the student, read the list of services provided by each office, state that services are free and confidential, and then look the student directly in the face with a very serious face and tone and say, "You **need** to go because (a) you need to get help with... because your grade in this course is in jeopardy, or (b) you need to

get counseling because..."

The following table is a summary of suggested faculty interventions to deal with student behaviors that was summarized from the literature, with specific comments added about BMCC.

Type of classroom challenge	Possible faculty intervention
Students asking too many questions	-Establish a classroom rule in large classes of asking two questions per student per class period (Video: *Understanding Asperger's Syndrome*), or three questions (WTCS, 2009, p. 17 & 43), and the policy is written on the course syllabus. -Ask students to write down questions and save them for after class (Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2012; *Understanding Asperger's Syndrome*).
Students ask questions that go off the topic	-Re-direct students to bring their participation closer to the point (Monroe Community College, undated; Moore, 2006). -Ask students to write down these questions and save them for after class (Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2012)
Students who complain about fluorescent lights	-Let students wear sunglasses in class (WTCS, 2009) -Try Online classes for flexibility of working from home environment
Students lacking confidence to participate in class	-Talk to student privately to encourage participation. -Establish "cues" or signals with the student so the professor knows when to call on the student (Colarossi, 2013; WTCS , 2009). -Use Discussion Boards and count the student's participation in that instead (Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2012) -Encourage student to e-mail professor after each class to share comments (Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2012). -The teacher should set up "groups" to work together in class (Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2012; WTCS, 2009), the teacher should assign roles to each student, like researcher, executive, and speaker (Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2012), or the teacher should allow students with ASD to work independently (WTCS, 2009). -College should provide counseling for self-advocacy. -Encourage student to attend clubs -Allow students to make presentations during office hours, in a less intimidating environment (Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2012).

Students need predictability or a routine	-Establish class routine (Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2012; Monroe Community College, undated; Washington State University, undated). For example: reviewing prior class at the beginning, and giving exams on the same day of the week.
	-Point out any changes in dates of exams or assignments as advance, as early as possible (Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2012; Minnesota State University, undated; Monroe Community College, undated; Washington State University, undated). For example, things such as changes to dates on the syllabus, fire drills, a new room, and surprise quizzes.
Student is easily distracted.	-Student should sit where there are the least distractions. Seats near the door have the most distractions and should be avoided.
	-Seats in the front of the room are recommended (Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2012)
	-Sit near the aisle, if student requires frequent breaks (Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2012).
	-Allow student to sit in the same place each class once he/she has found a suitable seat (Monroe Community College; WTCS, 2009).
	-Allow student to wear earplugs to reduce environmental noise, but does not block out the instructor (Monroe Community College, undated; WTCS, 2009).
	-Use of light colored paper for tests can help with distractibility, as white paper is too glaring for some students(Monroe Community College, undated; WTCS, 2009).
Student complains about crowds in public transportation, hallways, bathroom, lunch area	-Try Online classes.
	-Students can wear earplugs of noise-canceling headsets in hallways or lunchroom (Washington State University, undated)

Time management issues	-Peers, Peer mentors, or Peer Navigators, who work 1:1 with students with ASD to assist with socialization, time management, independent living, etc. (AHEADD, undated; Moore, 2006; WTCS, 2009)
	-Also, using a graduate student is possible (Lorenzetti, 2012).
	-Breakdown large assignments into smaller, more manageable parts, with multiple due dates (Monroe Community College, undated; VanBergeijk, Klin, & Volkmar, 2008).
	-Use a PDA (Personal Digital Assistant) or alarms to remind a student when to go to class, when to start studying for a test, and when to start researching for a term paper (VanBergeijk, Klin, & Volkmar, 2008)
	-Peers help students use their free time between classes. *At this time, BMCC does not have a peer program, but it is possible for the future.*
Students who don't understand a professor's use of sarcasm, euphemism, jokes, irony, metaphors, humor, and abstract concepts.	-Avoid abstract concepts, if possible; explain things as clearly and directly as possible, or use pictures next to words (Minnesota State University, undated; Texas A & M University, undated; VanBergeijk, Klin, & Volkmar, 2008).
	-Use visual "aids" (like a Powerpoint, graphs, and charts) whenever possible (Monroe Community College, undated; Washington State University; WTCS, 2009).
	-Use "visual schedules" and "graphic organizers" and give written instructions, rather than just oral instructions (VanBergeijk, Klin, & Volkmar, 2008; Washington State University).
	-Give an outline to help the student understand the purpose of the discussion and expected outcome (Monroe Community College, undated).
	-Avoid giving choices, so don't say: "Will you" or "Can you" (WTCS, 2009).
	-Provide lecture notes in advance so students can read about difficult concepts before class (WTCS, 2009).
Students who cannot sit for long classes	-Allow students to take a break during class (Moore, 2006)
	-Encourage students who need frequent breaks to sit in the aisle to get easier access outside for a break.

Students who have difficulty with fine motor skills, such as writing or typing	-Use e-mail because it allows for screen-reader capability instead of synchronous chats.
	-Allow students to use a computer (e.g., word processing for writing) or have a note-taker (VanBergeijk, Klin, & Volkmar, 2008; Washington State University, undated) or tape-record the class (VanBergeijk, Klin, & Volkmar, 2008)
	-Provide the lecture notes in advance (Texas A & M University; VanBergeijk, Klin, & Volkmar, 2008)
Student with poor time management	-Use a timer when doing a task.
Students with high frustration	-Let student listen to soothing music on a walkman (WTCS, 2009).
	-Ask the student to leave the room and speak to student privately outside for a minute or two (Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2012; Monroe Community College, undated).
	-Suggest that that student go to a quiet, "safe place" like a lounge, library, or empty classroom for a "time out". (Farrell; 2004; Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2012; Washington State University, undated; WTCS, 2009)
	*-At BMCC, the "safe" rooms would be the **Office of Accessibility** and the **Counseling Center**, and perhaps, the library.* **Ideally, BMCC will provide a "safe" room in each building, not just 199 Chambers Street. Fiterman and Murray St. also need satellite counseling offices or "safe rooms."*
	-Try to have a "meltdown prevention plan" pre-arranged with the student about where there is a "safe place" for student will go to calm down (WTCS, 2009).
	-Try Online classes (Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2012)
Students being teased by their classmates in the classroom	-The instructor has to make a statement at the beginning of the semester, or whenever such behavior occurs, saying that we "all are different and learn different." Gobbo & Shmulsky (2012, p. 42) wrote: "We're all going through the same course, but we'll all do it differently."
	-The student can talk to the class about what ASD is, what the behaviors do decreasing anxiety, stress, agitation, and what other students do when in this situation (WTCS, 2009).
	-The professor should talk to the student privately to let the student know that he/she will be protected by the professor and that he/she should continue to attend classes (WTCS, 2009).

Online classes

For people with disabilities, technology has the potential to "...maximize independence, productivity and participation in academic programs, employment, recreation, and other adult activities." (Burgstahler, 2003, p. 7). Flanagan (2013) points out that Blackboard, the Internet computer system used for online classes, is ADA compliant. Davis (2011) wrote: "For some students with autism, online education can be the right fit, taking away sensory overload and social stigma..."

The benefits of online classes to students with ASD include the following: listening to soothing music, doing work at home in any room of the house; sitting on an exercise ball, instead of a desk and chair; sitting in a sensory swing; being in the company of a favorite pet; taking frequent breaks; keeping the lights dim; and avoiding crowded/noisy lunchrooms and public transportation; and long lines in the lunchroom and bathroom.

Course Guide. In my online classes, I send e-mails to my students every other day, to both their BMCC and personal emails, which is 3-4 times a week, about the week's agenda, which includes due dates for all items that week as well as upcoming major assignments. Online classes provide a course guide to students. In the workshops, I provided samples of a real "Course Guide" that I used in Spring, 2013 as samples for faculty who did not teach online. The course guide contains a week-by- week listing of all items due for the semester. This item is available upon request from the author at: rgleicher@bmcc.cuny.edu

Face-to-Face examples

Specific instructions. In preparing for this workshop, I was surprised to see how much of my face-to-face teaching style already fit the needs of students with ASD. I believe that all students can benefit from a professor being specific and providing detailed instructions, a classroom routine, and due dates provided in advance. Faculty never know who has ASD in class due to confidentiality. The letters of accommodations for students that we receive from the Accessibility Office never specify what disability a student has, so we have to guess by observing symptoms the student demonstrates in class. Therefore, I argued how preparing to teach students with ASD, is beneficial for all students in the class.

In the workshops, we practiced how to talk to students and write in a specific and detailed way with students. The following is an example from the literature about what happens when faculty are vague and too general with students, and how to correct it. As you will see, all that was needed to make things clearer for the student was one word. The following is adapted from Lerner (2012).

A professor told the class to "*submit an assignment before 4:30pm on Tuesday.*" However, one student, with ASD, waited outside the professor's door waiting for the professor to arrive at 4:30pm to personally give him/her the assignment. When the professor did not arrive by 5:00pm, the student was upset, went home, and took his/her paper home. The student did not understand the professor's instructions and did not ask for clearer instructions. In addition, the student was not a good self-advocate or he/she could have reached out and asked the department secretary for clarification before

leaving the college. The professor meant to have students put the assignment in his/her mailbox before 4:30pm, but the student did not figure that out. The professor received the paper the following week during class time and marked it late. However, the student finally told the disability coordinator at the school about what happened. Ultimately the situation was resolved by the disability coordinator at the college who talked to the professor and the paper was not marked late. The item for discussion was: How can we better explain what we want to students with ASD?

The answer to this question is similar to other examples that we practiced with in the workshops: **Be specific**. How did the faculty member want to receive the paper? The possibilities in this situation were: put in his/her mailbox, send by e-mail, put under the office door, bring in person to his/her office, or submit to the dept. secretary.

To emphasize those points again, we also discussed the following three statements and answered the question as to which statements needed fixing? The answer was all of them. In general, being **clear and specific** with deadlines will help <u>ALL</u> students with time management. We do this in online classes all the time. The answers are:

1. *We'll be having a test right after the Spring break*. This is: ***Incorrect***. We will have a test on Friday, April 5th, 2013.

2. *Contact me before Friday, 3/15/2013 about your grade*. This is: ***Incorrect***. You need to be more specific how you want students to reach you. If you want e-mail, say email. If you want phone, say phone. If you want students to visit you in your office, say office. Here are three samples of what could have been said: Call me at (212) 123-4567. Leave a message and I will call you back during my office hours (see below). Tell me what time is best to call you on Monday (9-10am) or Tuesday (11am-12 noon). OR E-mail me: rgleicher@bmcc.cuny.edu I check my e-mail twice a day, so please be patient for a response. I do not check e-mail on weekends. OR Please stop by my office (N-651) and talk to me. My office hours are 9am-10am on Mondays, and 11am-12 noon on Tuesdays.

3. *I need to read a draft of your Midterm essays two weeks before they are due:* This is: ***Incorrect***. It is my policy to read drafts of student Midterm papers two weeks before they are due. Therefore, I need you to bring in a draft of your Midterm paper and give it to me in class on or before Monday, March 4th, 2013. Your final paper needs to be brought to class on Monday, March 18th in class.

How to make a large written assignment manageable? Following these samples, the workshop discussed how to breakdown a "sample assignment" which asked students to write a ten (10) page paper, worth 30 points towards the final course grade, into several smaller assignments with several deadlines, instead of one. The assignment was originally written as, "Write a 10 page research paper on a

topic related to this course that interests you. (30 points). APA style. You must use at least six sources other than the textbook. Paper is due on the last day of class: May 20th, 2013." This could be broken down in many possible ways.

The assignment was re-designed so students would receive a small amount of points for each step that they complete. Here is one example of how to make it manageable:

Monday, Feb. 4th: describe your topic in 3-5 sentences (2 points)
Monday, Feb., 25th: submit a list of three sources that you have located (2 pts)
Monday, March 11th: summarize the main points of the articles (2 pts)
Monday, March 18th: submit a list of another three sources (2 pts)
Monday, April 8th: summarize the main points of these articles (2 pts)
Monday, April 22nd: submit an outline of your paper (2 pts)
Monday, May 6th: submit a draft of your paper (3 pts)
Monday, May 20th: submit your revised, final paper (15 pts)

Course Calendar. In addition to the course syllabus being detailed, I also talked about how I add my own (1) one page "**course calendar**" to a face-to-face class to show the agenda for each session as well as the entire semester, which is helpful to me as well as for everyone's time management. Each line on the calendar represents one week, with the topic and items due. The course calendar is always stapled on top of the syllabus; it can also be personalized with an individual faculty's contact information in the event of a uniform departmental syllabus. I also talked about writing the upcoming due dates for assignments on the chalkboard every class meeting.

I talked about how I spend the entire first class period going over every page of the course syllabus and course calendar, which is around 20+ pages, and that I go back to the course calendar and syllabus at the end of every class period to remind the class of upcoming deadlines or due dates, exams, and readings. I also explained that my syllabi are usually around 20+ pages because they list every possible reading and written assignment for the entire semester. This assists students with time management similar to an online course. I stick with this plan, unless there is an unforeseen interruption in the college calendar. A "course calendar" is available from the author by request.

Recommendations:

Safe rooms. Farrell (2004) talked about the need for "safe rooms" while Gobbo & Shmulsky (2012) used the term, "safe places," to describe quiet places on campus for students with ASD who need to calm down. It is recommended that BMCC develop such places around the campus. We have the Accessibility Office, Counseling Center, and the library on the main campus in the 199 Chambers Street. However, faculty need assistance when dealing with students exhibiting frustration in classrooms at Murray Street or Fiterman. BMCC could make an arrangement with staff in offices in those buildings, such as the COPE office in Murray Street so that a staff member would be willing to talk to students taking

classes in that building who become upset. We need a small, private faculty office, for both adjuncts and full-timers, that is available for use with a student. The large faculty offices, at Murray Street, are not suitable for private conversations with students or for calming down upset students. I'm told that there is no faculty office at Murray Street. Due to confidentiality, faculty never know if the students have ASD, but we need assistance for dealing with *any* student who is upset. Another idea is to pair students to walk back to the main campus.

Smaller class sizes. Small class size is an important consideration for students with ASD to adjust to college (VanBergeijk, Klin, & Volkmar, 2008). There should be a note on the roster or a code assigned in the registration process to let the instructor know. Some schools also assign an assistant to the class, who can speak with students who are upset and prevent the professor from spending a great deal of time out of the classroom.

Professors need to obtain information about a student's disability. Students could sign a release of information that allows the disability services office to send information to the student's professors about the student's disability and helpful teaching strategies. This is the way it is done in the College Program for Students with Asperger's Syndrome (APSAS) at Marshall University in West Virginia (Lorenzetti, 2012).

Location of classrooms. Classrooms should not be held in trailers; this is probably less of a problem since Fiterman Hall reopened. Classes that have students with disabilities should be away from the noisy West Street Highway area. Professors who think that they might have a students with ASD should ask for a room change away to a quieter location. The classrooms in Murray Street are on high floors and are definitely very quiet.

Self-advocacy training. The college needs to hold self-advocacy training for students who have ASD. This can be done through the Office of Accessibility.

Use of Universal Design. BMCC faculty should receive training and information about Universal Design and its benefits for students with disabilities, as well as the diverse, non-traditional student population found at community colleges.

Conclusion
This paper summarized the ASD awareness workshops for faculty and staff that were held during the Spring, 2013 semester at BMCC. Information was provided about the definition of ASD's, the rise in number of students with ASD's attending colleges, strengths of people with ASD, classroom challenges, and faculty interventions. The benefits of Universal Design were also briefly discussed. The paper concludes with information about clubs, student support services at BMCC, and other organizational websites. For samples of course materials, please contact: rgleicher@bmcc.cuny.edu For more information about Project PASS at BMCC, or to refer a student, please contact: Elsie Balu, Project REACH at: 212-220-8180 ebalu@bmcc.cuny.edu

APPENDIX: Resources for and about students with ASD
Clubs within BMCC and CUNY

1. **Beyond the Limits Club.** Meets Wednesdays, 2pm–4pm, in N-470. Students can develop self-esteem, identity, self-awareness, and role models. They can be part of disability culture, in the arts, in writing, exploring a shared history of oppression, and use the power of groups to make changes in society.

   Please contact: Jessica Spalter, Club Advisor and CUNY LEADS Advisor: E-mail: jspalter@bmcc.cuny.edu or phone (212) 220-8200

2. **CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities (CCSD)**. Helps students to develop their talents, develop leadership qualities, create a positive impact, and develop advocacy skills.

   E-mail: http://www.cunycoalition.org
   Location: CUNY Central Office for Student Affairs.
   101 W. 31st St., 12th fl., NYC, NY (646) 344-7350

Organizations outside BMCC/CUNY
Achieving in Higher Education with Autism/Developmental Disabilities (AHEADD) http://www.aheadd.org/

Asperger's Association of New England: http://www.aane.org/ (college resources)

Autism Higher Education Found. http://www.autismhighereducationfoundation.org/

Autism Society of America http://www.autism-society.org/ 1-800-3Autism

Autistic Self-Advocacy Network (ASAN). http://autisticadvocacy.org/
Free PDF: *Navigating college: A handbook on self-advocacy...*
http://autisticadvocacy.org/wpcontent/uploads/2012/02/NavigatingCollegeHandbook-1.pdf

College Autism Spectrum: http://www.collegeautismspectrum.com

College Internship Program. http://www.cipworldwide.org/

College Living Experience http://experiencecle.com/about-cle/

Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation http://www.djfiddlefoundation.org/

Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, & Technology https://www.washington.edu/doit/

Global and Regional Asperger Syndrome Project (GRASP) Free support groups. http://grasp.org/ or http://grasp.org/page/new-york-spectrum-resources (New York)

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Baby Talk: Negotiating Relationships between Professors and Student-Parents

Adele Kudish
English

It's the week before finals, and I am furtively working on this article while my husband, who is a law student, takes his turn rocking our snoring, runny-nosed, ten-month old back to sleep. Rosie has her fifth cold this year (her last one seemed to coincide perfectly with my husband's midterms), and each time we lay her down, no matter how deeply asleep we think she is, our little somnambulist rolls over, pulls herself up to standing holding on to the rails of her crib, and starts howling. So we hold her and rock her. I nurse her back to sleep. Between illness, gum pains (her first tiny tooth finally pushed through last week), growing pains, adjusting to solid foods, and shifting nap schedules, each twenty-four hour cycle slips away in a fog. With a huge effort on our part, Rosie sleeps the requisite fourteen hours sleep specialists recommend between night and naps, but, as parents, our sleep is fragmented and disrupted. We reminisce about how long, long ago (three or four months ago, that is), she used to sleep in her crib from 7pm to 1am before waking to eat. My husband and I used to eat dinner together and then study, grade papers, read, and even watch a little television. Now, even when she is healthy, it can take her over an hour to fall asleep, only to wake up again an hour later. We eat and work in shifts, and watch Netflix movies on our iPhones as we sometimes spend hours in the rocking chair with her.

This is my first year as an Assistant Professor of English at BMCC, but I have worked as an adjunct lecturer at a number of CUNY schools—John Jay, Baruch, Queens, and Hunter Colleges—over the last decade. I was pregnant when I interviewed for the job, but I'm pretty sure I hid it very well. In the spring semester that I was pregnant with our daughter, I finished my dissertation, defended it, attended a major conference in my field, gave two papers as an invited speaker, landed a tenure-track job for the fall, and taught four classes as an adjunct. I was lucky; pregnancy energized me and gave me the momentum I needed to accomplish so many of the goals I had set out for myself as an academic. Having my due date looming over me helped immeasurably with deadlines; I had to put my dissertation baby to bed before I could give birth to the real one. Not due until mid-July, I lobbied to teach two summer classes in June. After a very easy pregnancy, though, I went into labor almost four weeks early, four days before the end of the summer session. I managed to miss only two of the remaining four days.

I wish I could say that I was able to keep up the momentum from when I was pregnant. I do still have a good bit of energy, but it is all directed at keeping up with my daughter and with my students (or sometimes exceeding the energy level of my students). Even if Rosie is not a great sleeper, even when she's healthy, she is social, alert, and curious. She is what some specialists call a "spirited"

baby. That means that her schedule is erratic, her personality ebullient, and her energy level shark-like (if sharks were cute and cuddly): she never stops moving. At the park, she crawls up to adults and other children alike to babble and flirt; she already loves books and hands her favorites to us to read to her, and her silly noises and the way she chases the cat around the apartment make us laugh harder and longer than we ever have before. She has incredibly bright blue eyes, a goofy, gummy grin, and still-tiny hands and feet, like a newborn. Watching her thrive and develop is awe-inspiring, hearing her explosive giggle is the best cure for a frustrating day at work or a bad mood.

Two or three mornings a week, before I go to school, I strap Rosie into her stroller and travel from the east side of Manhattan to Long Island City, where the CUNY Law School and her daycare are. Sometimes we take the train, and sometimes we walk if she falls asleep on the way, but often I end up running late and wasting money on a taxi. After I drop her off, I take the E train to BMCC, where some of my developmental writing students walk in late and complain about the early hour of our meetings (my first class is at 11am—I am not joking about their complaints). Underneath my perky façade, I, too, am often exhausted from commuting back and forth between the dark bedroom where I help Rosie stay asleep and the living room where I stay up late trying to catch up with grading and class prep.

Even with a strong support system of daycare and grandparents, my husband and I struggle to do half the work we used to before we had a baby. The hour I have between each of my classes flies by in meeting with students, pumping breast milk (more on that later), and last-minute class prep. After my last class ends, close to six o'clock, I race home to have a quick dinner with my family and start the nightly bedtime ritual. Like my students, I try to get as much done on the subway as possible, but mostly I spend my time on the train as "me" time, catching up on email and reading a few articles on my *Times* app. Two days a week I spend entirely with Rosie, taking her to baby dance and music classes, meeting other moms and kids in the park, and walking for miles around the city while she naps in her stroller. I relish this time that I get to spend with her, and am forever thankful for the flexibility of my schedule.

I have to admit that I was always pretty indifferent to children before I decided to get pregnant. I am an only child, have never babysat, and had held friends' newborn babies only very briefly and incompetently. Before I became a parent, I certainly could not empathize with students who came to my classes either pregnant or who told me they had children at home. I didn't think much about them as far as their capacities as parents. I did notice, however, that many (though not all) students with children, particularly young students with young children (under age five, let's say) missed more classes and turned in fewer assignments than their childless counterparts. At the other extreme, I remember being struck with a few dedicated women who never missed a class and got stellar grades, who I thought were admirable in their ability to juggle it all: young children, school, and even a part-time job. I remember one remarkable student who was eight-months pregnant at the start of the semester. She assured me she would be fine, and, amazingly, one day, she came in no longer pregnant, telling

me that her mother was outside with the baby while she attended class.

In the last year and a half, I have undergone a significant change in my thinking about pregnant women and parents in college. While I was pregnant, as my stomach expanded, I became cognizant of my body and my sex in the context of work for the first time. Some colleagues, and even friends, asked me if I planned to return to work after the baby was born. To me, this was a shocking and unnecessary question: of course, I would still pursue my research and teaching.

Moreover, my rapport with my students shifted. I started to sense that they saw me as more than their professor; suddenly, my students deemed me a "real" woman for the first time, and even as a nurturing mother figure. I had never been so aware of having a body while teaching before. I discussed this at length with my husband and my academic friends. The students were finally seeing me as a person, true, but the feminist in me was irked at being suddenly gendered in my students' eyes. Was I being humanized or reified? How should I address the pregnancy with my students? Some students congratulated or stared, many asked almost daily (until I requested that they stop) how I was feeling, and a few even had questions about my fetus and the easiness or complicatedness of my pregnancy. Surely, this was just innocent curiosity, but at times I felt that it was an inappropriate violation of the student-teacher boundary.

Now that I have a baby, I occasionally mention her in the classroom. "And I have a three-month old (or a seven-month old) baby" has become part of my first-day-of-class introductory speech that also includes from where I got my Ph.D. and the fact that I'm from New York. My students always smile when they see her picture on my desk. But there are stresses that come with working and parenting, too; I think about—and worry about—my daughter a great deal during the workday. Between classes, I text or call her daycare center or my husband, if he is with her, for updates on how much she ate, slept, and played, and about her soiled diapers (a note to those who don't have children: parenting an infant is made up of studiously monitoring an unceasing succession of banal bodily functions that each parent finds endearing, even miraculous). Hearing that she finished her bottle or ate a whole banana, or that she took a long nap can make my day.

Towards the end of a longer class, I feel as awkwardly aware of my body as I did when I was pregnant and the fetus was kicking me while I was lecturing. I can only go about four hours without pumping milk in my office or in the Women's Resource Center, which I visit twice a day. Breastfeeding, beneficial as it is for the baby and a wonderful way to bond between mother and child, is a major source of anxiety for almost all new mothers who choose to do it (I've only heard a few lactating mothers say they refuse to stress about milk). And pumping milk is a nuisance, requiring a private place (breast pumps are louder than you may think), storage and refrigeration solutions, and the occasional risk of leaking and stains. In the past, when I dreamed about my first serious job as a professor, I certainly did not imagine that so much of my energy and thought would go to where and when I was going to pump that day!

Many professors, myself included, believe that part of our job is socializing students into academia, as well as into responsible citizenship and the adult

world in general. I didn't realize it before, but one of the many challenges we face as CUNY professors is helping students with children negotiate between being students and being parents, at least for those of us who think about it. Many of our non-traditional students have taken time off from school, have had jobs, and have started families at very early ages; they propel themselves into the world of adults before they are out of their teens. Perhaps, then, teaching students with children—especially if the fact that they have children comes up in the course of the class—should be considered in a special way. I am not suggesting that we change our course content to reflect the needs of students with children; students with children are like any other students: they need our guidance and consideration, and they need to be challenged to think outside of themselves. Nevertheless, it may be a valuable experiment, for those of us who don't already do it, to integrate some material, when appropriate, about such topics as pregnancy, raising children, education, and human development. In the English department, our developmental classes, English 088 and English 095, as well as the first in a series of two freshman composition courses, English 101, could easily incorporate some readings and discussion about parenting and topics of interest to parents. In fact, in the fall of 2012, I taught my whole English 101 course around the theme of sex and gender (the final exam, which is set by the department, required students to write papers in response to two essays about gender roles). I asked students to discuss such issues as transgendered identity and transvestitism in both adults and children, and what they would do if their children (real or imagined) came out to them as gay, lesbian, or somewhere in-between.

Too often in our courses, our students with children give the impression that they are not fully present. Indeed, they have something much more important to attend to at home, but at the same time they very much want to stay in school. There is no panacea for this—no go-to answer for how to negotiate with or for students whose responsibilities extend beyond just being students. In the past, I have asked students who miss many classes and/or assignments because of a lack of childcare to reevaluate their priorities, just as I would to students who have jobs or sick relatives that sometimes take precedence over academics. What I mean by that is intended as a dose of realism: not everyone can have it all. In order to be both a good student and a present parent (and a dedicated employee, too), students need a combination of meticulous planning and good luck. They need support systems in place to help them: parents, significant others, babysitters, friends. One of my husband's friends at CUNY Law has an alternating roster of classmates who babysit her nine-month old son in shifts after daycare hours are over, until it is time to take him home in the early evening.

Now that they know I have a child, students sometimes expect me to be more understanding of their absences or lateness because of childcare issues. I am torn about this – how do I balance my sympathy as a mother and my role as a professor? How do I remain fair and objective to all my students? How do I maintain what I believe is an important professional distance? I will likely be working out these answers for myself for quite a long time. Professors' levels of flexibility in terms of due dates and special exceptions are a very personal matter,

with policies that evolve over many years of teaching. For the time being, I tend to be rather strict with deadlines, always citing fairness to all the students who submitted their work on time. I speak to students outside of class about their lateness and absences, and try not to make a big deal of it in the classroom.

Do I have different expectations of student-parents? Not really. Just because they are parents does not make them any more or less responsible than anyone else. Many teen parents are incredibly responsible, while others who wait to have children in their late 30s still behave like sixteen-year olds themselves. In my developmental English classes, each student is unique as far as the circumstances that brought them to the course and the kind of extra help they need. I try to treat each student individually through frequent conferences about their writing, and, in general, about how they are doing in the course and in college overall.

What professors (with and without kids) have that students need more of is a strong and supportive social network. Coworkers who are mothers have told me about banding together in offices in which they could feel comfortable pumping milk (thankfully we have the Women's Resource Center for that now). There are various parenting in academia support groups, as well as seminars and workshops. When we are feeling lonely as parents on the tenure track, all we need to do is Google "parenting on the tenure track," and we find a dozen intelligent, supportive blogs to read.

I don't think our students have these. While students must shoulder the adult responsibilities of parenthood, many of them at BMCC are still in their teens or early twenties. Most are single parents (some fathers as well as many more mothers) and because they are only now earning their degrees, they live on low wages and have often-unreliable childcare situations. Students are very lucky that BMCC has a highly regarded daycare center, but this center does not accept children younger than age two, only partially bridging the gap that comes before kindergarten. There is, however, a system of vouchers for parents to find childcare for infants and young toddlers, but some may find the process daunting. But students need to be encouraged to take advantage of the resources that the college makes available to them. Most of us professors direct our students to the tutoring center, the office of accessibility, and even the counseling center, but how many of us think to direct our students to the Women's Resource Center or the Childcare Center?

I am sometimes embarrassed to talk to my students about parenting. Parenting is such a personal thing—it's one of the few inviolable boundaries, like when your best friend asks you if you think she should leave her husband. You just don't give your opinion. No one wants to risk criticizing another parent. And parenthood is a great equalizer; my daughter's sleep problems are no different than my students' children's. The trick, here, is to strike a balance between understanding and academic rigor. It's tough to ask for a student-parent's diligence, when I really want to ask for just one more day to grade their papers. But professional responsibility dictates that I be strict but reasonable—and that I return their papers in a timely manner. I suppose I will continue to manage this dilemma for years to come, and as I look forward to every stage of my daughter's life—toddlerhood, childhood, adolescence—these breathtaking changes will bring fresh perspective to my relationship with student-parents.

Teachers as Imaginative Beings

Yolanda Medina
Teacher Education

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

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

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

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

Infusing the arts in our college classrooms

I believe that infusing the arts in our college classrooms is a way to hinder the feeling of disempowerment that results from being in a banking approach of education and help students enhance their capacity to imagine. Exposing our

students to the arts can help them learn in ways that are critical and divergent and can help them see things in a different light because it allows them to express themselves, bring their experiences into the classrooms, relate them to the works of art, and to the content we teach. It allows them to see themselves as imaginative beings.

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

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

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

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

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

Concluding thoughts

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

Practice Exams: Study Guides or Exam Underestimates?

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Science (Chemistry)

What is the exam going to be like? Is it going to be multiple-choice exam? How many questions? These are just few of the most common questions I have been asked during the first day of my classes. Since 2009, I have taught several chemistry courses at BMCC, including chemistry for liberal arts, nursing, science, and engineering majors. They all share these questions and the ambiguity from alternating instructors. Many of the science courses are taught in two semesters (i.e. General Chemistry I and General Chemistry II) and they are very unlikely to have the same instructors for diverse reasons. This gives the students a huge concern about the varied teaching styles they encounter. As a commuter school, BMCC is proud of initiate students in the careers they will study further in four-year colleges or other programs to finish their goals. This creates psychological pressure on the students about earning As in all their classes to improve their chances when transferring to other schools.

Therefore the fear and concern of the students when meeting a new professor as well as the questions I mentioned at the beginning of this article during the first day of classes are completely natural.

As part of my teaching style I try to be more "predictable" in my tests and use practice exams as a guide for the students. These practice exams are posted on Blackboard at least one week before each exam and include practice problems where the students can have a feeling for my tests. After four years of teaching, I have noticed that practice exams in science (i.e. chemistry) can have divergent effects on the learning process of the students. Most students restrict their goals and limit their vision to the problems included in these practice exams. As their instructor, the original idea was to prepare the students for the tests and not surprise and cause them disappointment and frustration. Therefore, this question is completely valid: *to what extent are practice exams useful?* I have divided the answer into two clear sectors and I will describe briefly their characteristics and potential consequences.

Sector one: Most of the class textbooks offer test banks and also have end-of-chapter problems where the students can practice and compare their results with the answer key that is also provided. The Internet is also an excellent bibliographic source where sample exams with well-detailed answers are given. Therefore, the resources are available for the students. Yet I believe that students feel overwhelmed with all this information. There is so much to study from that they do not know what to start with. Here is where the practice exam comes into action. It zooms in on the problem approach or wording that a particular instructor has for his/her exams. These practice exams should also be used as good tim-

ing tools. In class, I have encountered students who finish their tests in half of the time and some other students are rushing in the last five minutes because they did not have time to complete the last questions. It is not surprising that students complain about not having enough time for the test if they have not practiced.

Sector two: Students reduce the complexity of a given subject to the questions they see in the practice exam and expect the same or very similar questions for the real exams. I have noticed during the semesters the growing anxiety of the students to have the practice exams in their hands as classes go by. E-mails are sent periodically asking the time and date when the practice exams will be posted. Most of the time, students complain about how much harder the actual exam was compared to the practice exam or even that a particular question was not taught or mentioned during the practice exam. Great disappointment fills the classroom, followed by a failing grade, and then students start asking about the well-known "extra credit." This second sector leans more towards the "teaching to the test" educational practice. This practice provides both limited knowledge and skills to the students, reducing their horizons and creativity (Phelps, 2011). The practice exams are used as the only material they need to have to get the dreamed A in the class.

Obviously, this philosophy has catastrophic consequences. For example, most chemistry courses are requisites for other courses like microbiology, genetics, engineering, and physiology. These courses use the chemical application of the topics taught in chemistry in biological or industrial systems. Under this practice, the students are unable to address these new problems because they are only taught chemistry for taking a test (Menken, 2006). Lack of initiative and creativity can be consequences of the wrong use of practice exams.

Upon discussing these two possible points of view, we can conclude that students must be prepared and taught that practice exams are simple models for their learning and problem approach. They should never be taken as rules and expectations for the class they are taking. Practice exams are excellent learning tools if used properly. An easy practice exam should not be understood as an easy exam or the same as the future exams. This underestimation might lead them to failure and disappointment in the class. This potential risk could be avoided with slightly more difficult practice exams where the students are challenged and even with partial answers where the students need to get their way through the problem and not have everything served for them to memorize or repeat. Let's not give them the fish; let's teach them how to fish.

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

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

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

It is no secret that today's college students are an incredibly diverse lot and that the traditional, middle-class, resident student is no longer the norm. However, it is not always easy to determine how that should shape our pedagogy. Most college textbooks start from the assumption that students begin learning

from a place of neutrality. Contemporary pedagogical approaches do recognize that students bring their prior knowledge and experiences to the classroom. Sociology professors are well-positioned to understand and explore the significance of those experiences and knowledge and how they frame students' educational experiences. Knowing this on a conceptual level, however, did not prepare me for teaching sociology in a setting where students' lives were shaped by the very "social problems" under study. When I taught the same topics and used the same text as a graduate student instructor at a selective private university, I had not encountered this scenario and was perhaps naïve in my first semester teaching at an urban community college. What I encountered in that context is a complex learning environment where the student population is not only diverse in terms of ethnic and racial backgrounds, but also in possessing varying levels of academic preparedness and a variety of family experiences and social class backgrounds.

What is it like to read about unwed teenage mothers when you had been one yourself? What is it like to read about the impact of absent fathers when you never knew your own father? What is it like to read about the challenges faced the by the families of incarcerated individuals when you have a loved one who is incarcerated? I considered myself a sensitive, thoughtful instructor who worked hard to create a safe and respectful learning environment. But here is what I encountered: students were curiously silent. When we talked about gender inequality or poverty in general, they were very vocal and engaged. They especially loved critiquing middle class "intact" families with their second shifts and helicopter parenting. But when it came to subjects whose experiences mirrored their own, they shut down. Nancy Davis (1992) identifies three "classroom climates" which can emerge in sociology courses focusing on inequality: 1) resistance, where students deny the existence and/or importance of inequality and resist structural explanations; 2) paralysis, where students are depressed and paralyzed, unable to see the potential for creating social change; and, 3) rage, where students are angered by injustice and are unable to get past the anger and develop a nuanced understanding of society. The students at various points exhibited some combination of the three but their reactions were not those of students confronting their class and race privilege and therefore, their resistance, paralysis, and rage take on a different quality. Embedded within these responses are feelings of shame and embarrassment—feelings they are unlikely to admit openly. They do not deny the structural barriers that exist in an unequal society and they acknowledge the persistence of racism and discrimination, having faced or witnessed both in their own lives. Yet they believe so strongly in the achievement ideology that brought them to college in the first place, that they resist a critical examination of the ways in which family social class and educational inequality are part of a stratified system which reproduces existing class boundaries. Their belief in their own path to success through their personal characteristics and effort also makes them skeptical of studies which focus on barriers to equality. Their anger, when it emerges, is often directed at "bad" or "lazy" people who might be members of their own communities and they are always eager to share the story of "the welfare cheat" or the women who have too many children with too many different men. Their anger is also directed at research itself, with students chal-

lenging the validity of data collection or denying the conclusions of the studies they had not closely read or read at all. Healthy critical thinking and challenging ideas is a good thing. But some students find the texts difficult to read and what they have to say depressing so they end up displacing their frustrations. They become angry at the researchers whose work we study and then avoid completing the reading and writing assignments entirely. Early on in every semester, I let my students know that learning sociology is not like studying ancient societies or the nature of subatomic particles, where the subjects seem far removed from everyday life. Rather, they should prepare to tackle "real life" issues and they will not always feel comfortable with or comforted by sociological analysis. This is especially true when studying the family when the subject matter may truly hit uncomfortably close to home.

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

The family course at BMCC is taken by students as a required option for human services and early childhood education majors and as an elective by other students. The students who take the class for their major are predominantly women, ranging in age from their early twenties to their late thirties and beyond. The rest are liberal arts students who are interested in learning about the family, with the occasional post-B.A. student taking the class to prepare for application to graduate programs in fields such as counseling or education. Out of a typical class of 25 students, I rarely have more than four to five male students in a section. The classes tend to reflect the demographic profile of the institution, with the majority being students of color and native-born, 1.5 or second generation and some recent immigrants and international students. It is not unusual for at least one or two students to be enrolled in a special program for single mothers receiving public assistance. At the same time, there are an increasing number

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

of students from financially hard-pressed middle-class families attending community college to save money before transferring to a four-year college. These students are typically better prepared academically in terms of their reading and writing skills and tend to be exempt from remediation. This creates internal stratification within the class, not only in terms of students' social class backgrounds but also their academic preparedness, furthering the feelings of marginalization experienced by students of disadvantaged backgrounds. By the time they take the family course, an upper-level social sciences option, they have completed remedial English courses but their reading comprehension and writing skills are developing and longer and more analytical paper assignments are still challenging.

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

Pedagogical Challenges

The first semester that I taught this class at my current institution, I was baffled by a number of problems, among them: 1) students did not do the assigned readings; 2) students did not have much to say in class and wanted me to lecture (see #1); 3) with only a few exceptions, students were especially silent when we discussed controversial topics; and, 4) the students did not seem to have the requisite motivation and/or skills to successfully complete the paper assignments. With this in mind, I began looking for ways to address some of these problems. After completing workshops based on the Writing Across the Curriculum pedagogical approach, which emphasizes "writing-to-learn" and writing process, I started teaching the course as "Writing Intensive." This resulted in smaller class size (25 versus 38) and a writing-focused pedagogy. Problem #4 did became more pronounced as the course required more formal writing than many of the students were accustomed to. However, the smaller class size enabled me to switch to a "seminar" style and assign more informal writing and to have more interactions with my students. Still, getting the students to successfully complete longer formal papers was still a challenge.

The first two problems on my list are not uncommon for anyone teaching at non-elite institutions and with many students coming out of remediation, mine had skills issues which affected their comprehension of their assigned texts. That too is a problem of inequality, with native-born students from disadvantaged

backgrounds having greater challenges with academic preparedness. The reasons for number three became apparent when I assigned students reflective or autobiographical writing where they talked about having a child while still in high school or growing up in a family receiving public assistance. Dealing with problem number four was a bit easier as I began to incorporate the strategies of Writing Across the Curriculum, including writing-to-learn exercises like reading journals, revision strategies to help students improve their writing process and by developing better paper assignments.

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

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

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

Academic Preparedness and Reading Deeply and Critically
It is not possible to address educational deficits rooted in years of K-12 education and/or language barriers, not to mention cultural capital issues, in the space of one college semester. However, there are assignments and resources that instructors can use and provide in order to help students improve their skills. The first area to address is reading. The primary text is Skolnick and Skolnick's *Family in Transition* which includes excerpts from "classics" (like William Goode or Hochschild's *The Second Shift*) as well as contemporary studies related in family issues and related social problems. In addition, I have my students read the entirety of Annette Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race and Family Life*. For many of the students, the texts are difficult to read so I start the semester with guidance on how to approach academic texts (using strategies used in remedial

reading courses) and how to write summaries. Students are required to write a brief summary on each of the assigned readings covered in our twice-weekly class sessions. In addition, students are asked to start reading Lareau's book independently with several "check in" activities and class discussions on the study starting in mid-semester.

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

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

Choosing Texts and Developing Assignments with Reflective Aspects

As I described earlier, the primary text I use in the class is an anthology which features a wide range of topics in the sociology of the family. "Standard" marriage and family texts tend to be written in a uniform style and do not prepare students for reading authors writing in a given discipline so it was a deliberate decision to use an anthology which includes different types of discipline-specific writing in the study of the family. Many of my students have voiced the fear that community college courses "dumb down" content and that they will not be adequately prepared when they transfer to a four-year college or university. I use a text that is widely used at four year colleges and universities but I provide my students support and context to help them with their reading assignments. It it's an excerpt of a study, we discuss the body of literature it addresses and the methodology and rationale for the larger study. We identify and discuss different types of academic writing and their purpose and scope.

The decision to use Annette Lareau's *Unequal Childhoods* came from trial and error in my attempt to have my students read original research. My original

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

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

immensely proud when they finish the book and the attendant paper.

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

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

Promoting Classroom Engagement

As I stated earlier, in my initial experiences of teaching this class, many students demonstrated resistance, paralysis and shutting down. While there is still occasional resistance towards the beginning of the semester, I have experienced fewer students "shutting down" and perhaps not coincidentally, fewer students dropping out or "disappearing" from the class. Instead of doing a lecture-style class, I run the sessions like a modified seminar and employ quite a bit of visual sociology to promote discussion. For every topic/set of readings, there is a set of guiding questions/themes presented on PowerPoint slides. At the top of class, we start with a set of images which connect to the topic being discussed. For example,

when we discuss changing gender role ideology, there are images from various historical periods described in a reading or when we discuss the social construction of childhood, I will show images of children from different eras including contrasting images like portraits of upper class Victorian children alongside a photograph of their working class contemporaries working in a textile mill. As a group, we work together to answer the questions presented and we connect the images to the topic under study and contemporary social issues.

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

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

Conclusion

This paper interrogates a type of inequality that we tend not to directly address in the context of teaching and learning. As a sociologist, I have a deep understanding of the ways in which my students' lives have been impacted by structural inequalities in American society. Until teaching at a large, open access institution, the topics in family inequality were academic subjects I studied. My knowledge of family inequality was "from books" and not situations I experienced firsthand. However, learning about the details of my students' family lives and their experiences of living inequality opened my eyes to how their experiences of learning these subjects were so different from my own. Their resistance and shutting down led me to rethink my pedagogical approach in my sociology courses and I think other instructors could benefit from using their own versions of reflexive pedagogy, especially as it relates to the potential alienation of students around discussions of inequality. Discussing social stratification can make students feel

uncomfortable but they can always distance themselves from "social structure," an abstract idea. However, when reading about social problems they themselves have experienced and when disadvantage is part of your own personal history, it is difficult to overcome feelings of alienation or suppressed shame.

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

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ESL 101: Bridging the ESL-College Composition Divide

John Beaumont
Developmental Skills

"[In the workshop] I was noticing an avid hunger, among all of us, for further discussion of the implicit normative claims we are making about the world, in teaching standard written English, and grammar (or not), and thesis-driven essays, and the exam readings we choose as a department, and the individual readings we chose as teachers, etc., etc...."

– ENG 101 Instructor

Introduction

Depending upon the length of their residency in the U.S., students entering community college with an English as a second language (ESL) designation need to adjust to any number of new challenges: learning to use English, living in a new culture or between cultures, and adapting to a new educational system. On top of these challenges are those that most young people face in college such as meeting new friends, working to pay expenses, and identifying goals for the future. However, students with remedial placements seem to face even steeper challenges. According to the Community College Reseacher Center (CCRC), students enrolling in two-year colleges with remedial requirements, including ESL courses, are having a hard time. Studies from the CCRC report that two years after beginning college, only two-thirds of students had completed remedial writing requirements, but two thirds of these students had not gone on to complete a gatekeeper courses, prequisites to students' major coursework, such as college composition (Jaggars & Hodara 2011). In other words, ESL writers and their basic skills counterparts are struggling to pass their remedial requirements, and, even if they do, they are not making a successful transition to their post-remedial coursework.

The research anecdotally suggests probable causes of these unsatisfying outcomes, including inadequate K-12 preparation, questionable placement and assessment practices, and ineffective pedagogy (Crook et al., 2011). An added complication is the diversity of the ESL and language minority population at community colleges, which poses a considerable challenge to the mainstream faculty who have a strong desire to better serve these students but lack the training and institutional support to do so. With class enrollment high in courses such as English 101, coping with the unique needs of non-native users of English can be time-consuming, frustrating, and overwhelming.

One simple solution could make a significant difference. In the case of ESL and college composition courses, instructors and students alike may benefit from faculty engaging in focused, practical discussions about the challenges within and between these two contexts. In many community colleges, ESL programs are housed outside the English department. The result is often minimal articulation between the highest-level ESL course and the college composition course,

which students are placed into after they complete their ESL requirements. The ESL-ENG gap is, in part, due to this distance between departments.

There is also a larger issue of the preparation of the instructors. ESL instructors are trained in methods and principles of second language acquisition. This means that they receive pedagogical training in how to present materials in such a way that students' comprehension and skills build as the lesson progresses. For their part, English department instructors are more often specialists in literature and the art of writing. However, there is a problem if these two groups do not interact. ESL and English instructors share students traveling along the same trajectory from ESL to college composition, yet the language and literacy skills development aspect of their learning may come to an abrupt halt upon the completion of the highest ESL courses. Lack of continuing support may contribute to students' having increased difficulty and lower grades (Jaggars & Hodara, 2011). Bringing instructors together across the ESL-college composition divide and engaging in practical, focused conversation about the student population, instructors' expectations, and classroom practices is essential for the increased success and satisfaction not only of the students but of the faculty who work tirelessly with them.

This paper reports on a grant-funded workshop for instructors who have ESL students in their English Composition I classes (a.k.a., college composition and ENG 101). It summarizes eight dominant issues or concerns identified by these instructors. Rather than being addressed individually, these issues are framed in three larger questions of students' identity, the nature of language variation in an urban college setting, and implications for pedagogy.

Background
Setting
This voluntary workshop took place at Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC). Prospective BMCC students must pass proficiency exams in mathematics, reading, and writing. Students scoring below the cutoff in any of these subjects are required to take basic skills, or remedial, courses in that area prior to taking courses in their majors. Students below the cutoff score in writing are placed in one of two basic skills writing levels or in one of four ESL levels. Readers of the writing exam designate essays that seem to have been written by non-native-speakers of English as "ESL." If a reader from the ESL program confirms this designation, then that student is placed in an ESL course rather than basic skills English. Upon successful completion of either basic skills English or ESL, students are then able to enroll in English Composition I.

Participants
The workshop participants were all instructors at BMCC. Over the course of the semester, the group met three times for two hours for a total of six hours. The core participants were 15 full- and part-time English Composition I instructors from the English department. The two facilitators included one ESL instructor from the Developmental Skills department and one from English. Also involved were two ESL/Linguistics faculty members from Developmental Skills, who acted as consultants, addressing the instructors' specific questions about language variation and second language acquisition.

Needs Assessment

The primary purpose of the workshop was to address the concerns of ENG 101 instructors working with ESL students. To begin the interaction, participants submitted their answers to two questions prior to the first session:

1. What challenges do you encounter in helping ESL students succeed in ENG 101?

2. What questions about ESL learners and/or instruction would you like answered?

Their responses can be grouped into eight areas, summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Concerns of ENG 101 Instructors Working with ESL Students

1. Affect
    • How do I help students manage the fear, stigma or intimidation they feel about their writing in English?
    • How do I manage my own feelings of inadequacy, frustration and anger regarding teaching this population?
2. Methods
    • What teaching methods best serve the needs of ESL students?
3. Grammar
    • What grammar should I teach?
    • How do I teach grammar to students when I don't know it myself?
    • How does students' first language influence their English?
4. Cultural references and vocabulary
    • What do I do when ESL students don't understand the cultural references and vocabulary in course materials?
5. Participation
    • How can I get ESL students to participate more actively in discussions and group discussions?
6. Standards
    • Should I have different grading standards for ESL students?
    • Should I give them any special treatment or consideration?
7. Feedback
    • What kinds of feedback should I give my ESL students on their writing?
    • How do I help them develop or express their ideas in writing?
8. Support
    • How much time outside class should I spend helping ESL students?
    • How do they develop their English language skills outside of class?

The discussion that follows shows the ways in which these eight issues are inter-related and how they can be addressed in a college composition course.

Workshop Themes
There are resources that provide direct answers to many of these questions (e.g., John Jay College's Faculty E-Resources). However, while it might seem more practical or straightforward to address each of the eight concerns in turn, doing so may oversimplify the discussion of larger issues related to teaching diverse student populations. In fact, these eight concerns are better understood by broadening the discussion to three key themes (listed in Table 2): Identifying the student population (i.e., Who are "ESL students"?), Identifying sources of language variation (i.e., What is "English"?), Implications for pedagogy (i.e., What can instructors do to help students?).

Table 2
Key Workshop Themes

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1. Identifying the student population
2. Identifying sources of language variation
3. Implications for Pedagogy

Identifying the Student Population
In the first session, participants spoke briefly about their interest in the workshop. Not surprisingly, they consistently expressed a strong desire to understand and help their ESL students. However, as they spoke, they described a broad range of students. For some, their ESL students were international students still acclimating to English, the culture of the U.S., and college life. Others spoke of recent immigrants, those who had been in the U.S. for a few years and had had some schooling here. Still others were speaking of students who were proficient in English but had a second, more dominant language that they used at home or outside of class.

ESL instructors at BMCC are acutely aware of this range. In an average ESL class of twenty-five students, there might be two or three who are international students studying on student (F1) visas. In contrast, the majority of their classmates are residents, having been in the country for a few months, a few years, or more commonly longer and demonstrate a wide range of language and literacy skills. These students are labeled by some as members of a population called generation 1.5—loosely defined as those students who immigrated to the U.S. as children or teens and, as residents, received much of their schooling here. Having learned English largely "by ear," generation 1.5 students are often characterized by native-like aural/oral proficiency in English but still limited proficiency in academic English (Roberge, 2009; Nakamaru, 2010). These students are also called language minority students (Reid, 1997).

The reality is that many native and non-native users of English come to community college with language and literacy skills below the college level because of the scores on their proficiency exams. Many are in community college for this

reason, having not been accepted at four-year colleges. Tables 3 and 4 report the percentages of students at BMCC needing basic skills English or ESL writing and reading courses prior to enrolling in college composition.

Table 3
Percentages of Students Needing Basic Skills English or ESL Writing (Spring 2012)

ENG 088	ENG 095	ESL 054	ESL 062	ESL 094	ESL 095	Exempt	Unknown
6.0%	28.5%	3.2%	6.2%	5.6%	3.2%	46.8%	0.5%

Table 4
Percentages of Students Needing Basic Skills Reading (Spring 2012)

Reading 094	Reading 095	Exempt	Unknown
15.0%	17.7%	67.0%	0.3%

Source: BMCC Factbook 2011-2012

The numbers demonstrate that more than half of first-time freshman writers are placed in basic skills writing courses. Roughly 34.5% of students placed into remedial English writing and 27% into an ESL (the highest two levels focusing primarily on academic writing skills). The exit exam in both ESL and basic skills English is the same university-wide writing proficiency test. Interestingly, as many as one-third of first-time freshmen, ESL students included, also require remedial reading instruction to get them up to the minimum college standard. This is an important factor in any discussion of language and literacy development in community colleges.

While any label is limiting and insufficient, the discussion of who their students are and where they actually come from was instructive in that it broadened instructors' perspective on the students in their classes. "ESL students" are not simply those learning the English language but a subset of a larger group of students who are developing a range of language and literacy skills. For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to ESL students as those who were previously placed in ESL courses, now in ENG 101, and language minority students as multilingual students who may not have had an ESL designation but who have ongoing language and literacy needs.

Sources of Language Variation
The discussion of the student population led to a focus on the various forms of English that students use and are exposed to in their daily lives. In the opening discussion, one participant mentioned the adage "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." In other words, because they were in college, she and other instructors expected students to speak and write in standard U.S. academic English—as the "Romans" do, yet they persisted in using non-standard forms. This led to a discussion of some of the common sources of language variation: interference or influence from the L1, the language environment, and personal or cultural factors.

Interference from L1
From the outset these instructors were eager to know the sources of error and how best to help students move toward the academic norm. Participants were very interested to learn about some typical transfer errors from various languages to English: Koreans overuse the passive voice; Russians and the Chinese omit BE and articles; and Spanish speakers leave off the -s from verbs but then sometimes pluralize adjectives. While interesting, these examples represented just the tip of the iceberg of errors that ESL or language minority students might make in English. No workshop could adequately prepare instructors to deal with the array of the errors they might encounter, even the most common ones. Instructors began to acknowledge—with a sense of relief—that their primary role with regard to this population was not rooted in grammar.

Language Environment
Just as students' L1 may influence their writing in English, so may the language environment in which they live. Language environments include college, home, work, the media, and other social contexts as well. Students may have very little direct contact with users of formal or "standard" English outside of college. In fact, the English produced by students, seen as "non-standard" by an instructor, may be the English that students hear and use on a daily basis outside the classroom without any negative feedback whatsoever. That is, language variation may not result from their lack of language training or from first-language transfer but from their exposure to spoken English in their daily lives (Shafer, 2009).

Thus, some variations or errors may not be a matter of language transfer but perhaps students' application of forms they have internalized through interaction at school or in their communities. Students' "resistance" to correcting these errors may be more a case of their being confused over the correct usage, or a lack of awareness of any difference between the form that they used and the form that the instructor used. Shafer (2009) asserts that honest, informed discussion of these variations has a place in academic departments and in class with students. In the workshop, the gradual realization of the influence of urban varieties of English seemed to be eye opening for instructors.

Cultural and Personal Variation
Students' L1 and the contexts in which they use English are still just two possible influences on their writing. Another consideration is the extent to which students have had prior training in academic English, and specifically in writing, and how this training complements or interferes with their college work. In fact, students come to a college composition class with a wide range of training, experience, and interest in writing. They may have had minimal experience, or they may have been confident, proficient writers in their dominant language. However, the unsuspecting ENG 101 instructor may view cultural and personal rhetorical or stylistic variations as unacceptable deviations from the U.S. academic norm.

In the first session, participants were asked to think about how U.S. academic writing might be a representation of its culture. The instructors talked about a certain directness in U.S. culture that is evidenced in academic writing, which is

typically to-the-point and linear. In the canonical academic essay, a writer briefly introduces a topic, presents a thesis, and then develops and supports that thesis. The writer is expected to lay out all ideas in such a way that will be self-evident to the reader. However, this style of writing may be foreign or even counter to what some students have previously learned or to the way they personally want to express their ideas (Stalker, 1997).

In order to determine what students are thinking and feeling about the writing process and the typical U.S. rhetorical style, the most logical approach may be to ask students about their experience as college writers (Reid 1997). To this end, workshop participants watched an excerpt of the video *Writing Across Borders* (Robertson, 2005), in which international students talk about their experience of being L2 college writers. Specifically, they focused on the rhetorical differences, the differences in professors' expectations across cultures, and the connection between one's culture and one's writing style.

One important revelation for workshop participants was that L2 writers were aware of what professors asked of them–the standard U.S. academic rhetorical style, but that some students had difficulty, in a sense, "unlearning" the style that they had grown accustomed to. Some were trying to reconcile two styles, the American system and that of their home country. One writer recounted that in Vietnam she had been penalized for bringing in ideas from outside of the classroom context, a skill valued in U.S. academic settings. Still other students suggested that they were resisting the adoption of this American academic style because, by giving over to the U.S. way, they were giving up part of their academic or personal voice, or style of expression. One Japanese writer of English explained the influence of Japanese rhetorical patterns on her writing and her reluctance to let it all go because it was something she appreciated as being part of her own voice. She implied a wish that professors would be a little more flexible in their expectations for her writing and how she expresses her ideas. Furthermore, the directness of American academic English might even seem too simplistic, non-academic, or in some way "rude," a point echoed by several of the students in the video. In response, one workshop participant commented in his final reflective paper, "It had never occurred to me that the way Americans write academically is new to many foreign students." He added that he now realized students may use thought processes that are "different" but not necessarily "broken." Other instructors picked up on evidence of students' having an identity as individuals and as writers and expressed or reaffirmed their desire to help their students maintain these aspects of their personal and cultural identities.

Thus, in light of the various sources of language variation in ESL and language minority students' English, the adage "When in Rome,…" serves as a useful heuristic because it problematizes some important questions about instructors' expectations with regard to "standard" English. Stalker (1997) suggests that instructors may be assuming a certain level of consistency of academic English that does not exist. Thus, if "Rome" is where "standard" English is practiced, one might ask:

- Where is Rome?
- Do my students live in Rome?

- What do Romans really do?
- Are my students trying to be Roman?
- Am I realistic about how Roman they can be at this moment?
- What do I need to teach them about being in Rome?

If standard academic English is the language of the college environment, then community college instructors in all departments are wise to remember that their students—particularly ESL and language minority students—need patient, concerted instruction in how to adapt and thrive there. Instructors should also not react negatively when they encounter non-standard features in students' writing. They need to base their teaching on the realities of the students before them and the language and literacy skills students bring to class. Ultimately, instructors' awareness of and readiness to meet the challenges of teaching these students can make invaluable contributions to students' success.

Discussion
This workshop underscored the clear benefit of ongoing, hands-on professional discussions within and between departments by looking at assumptions, approaches, and materials across courses and disciplines to better understand the needs and experience of their students. Not only do instructors need to challenge their own assumptions about who students are day to day and year to year, but they must also challenge their tried-and-true practices so that teaching methods match the actual needs and skills of changing populations. This is particularly important at community colleges, where the range of student language and literacy skills is greatest.

Commenting on the value of the workshop, one instructor noted that it offered participants "an invitation to empathize" with ESL students. Another instructor added that the workshop had been an opportunity for him to ask himself, "What does my teaching look like to a non-native speaker?" In this question, the instructor considers the degree to which his teaching is accessible, helpful, or even stressful for students. The discussion fueled the instructors' determination to work with their ESL and language minority students in constructive ways. This awareness and determination is the starting point for change.

In fact, change should also begin with the ESL program. For their part, ESL programs need to look at their curricula and be sure that the student learning outcomes and assessments include an emphasis on critical reading and the integration of level-appropriate texts, and not simply the minimal standard of the written essay exit exam. ESL teachers should teach their students to deal with longer texts, challenge them with higher order thinking skills, and inform them of the expectations of ENG 101. The same considerations should be made with regard to basic skills English writing courses. College composition courses, then, could more seamlessly pick up where the highest level ESL courses leave off in terms of reading, writing, and critical thinking skills development. Instructors need to teach not only the skills of writing but also how to read, how to put ideas together, and how to express them in both speaking and writing.

At the same time, a fundamental shift that must also take place is that col-

lege composition instructors see themselves not simply as teachers of writing, but as teachers of reading, critical thinking, and writing skills if they want to support their ESL and language minority students on their continuing road of language and literacy development. What is needed is not so much training in how to address specific grammatical or mechanical errors but recognition that student writers in a community college fall along a continuum of language skills, literacy skills, and even personal factors to which instructors need to be sensitive. This sensitivity is reflected in the types of materials and the tasks that instructors assign and the ways these materials and tasks are presented and followed up on. This essential reconceptualization of the instructor's role allows for a more informed view of the eight concerns or questions voiced by the workshop participants.

First, this shift in mindset allows instructors to view their teaching **methods** in new ways. The teaching of writing does not have to change radically to be more accessible to all students. Small changes are often the most lasting (Fanselow, 1987). Central to this discussion is scaffolding. As in the construction industry, scaffolding is a solid, stable but moveable foundation from which to work. A scaffold can be added to and parts can be removed, depending on the need. The same must be done in planning college composition courses. While many instructors think in terms of a beginning, middle, and end of their lessons or lectures, they may not be offering the gradual support and skills development that would benefit their students.

Typical scaffolding in ESL pedagogy involves anticipating a reading or listening text, identifying prior background knowledge and assumptions, and previewing important lexical or cultural information. Scaffolding also includes looking at the text first on a literal level and later on an inferential level to understand it more deeply. Next steps would include moving beyond the main text by comparing it to other texts or events in the broader world. Along the way, students are taught not just content but the language and skills they need to analyze content and express their ideas. Beaumont (2010) outlines a flexible series of critical thinking tasks that create a scaffold for a reading and writing lesson or unit. While written for ESL teachers, this sequence can be adapted to any teaching context.

Given the reading-intensive nature of the college composition course, an essential part of the scaffolding process is focusing on select cultural and lexical items—*cultural references, vocabulary* and *idiomatic expressions*. This involves teaching students to anticipate these items in readings and assignments and ways of determining that some items are not essential. It also involves including explicit instruction of these item in the lesson or lecture. What students do not know can sometime be surprising. One instructor agreed, noting that she had mistakenly assumed that all of her students were familiar with King's "I Have a Dream" speech, which she was using as a reference point for another text.

Changes in teaching methods also can impact class *participation*. Having stages in classroom interaction creates an environment in which students are able to anticipate questions and consider their answers, together or independently, before participating in a group or class discussion. If students do not speak in class discussions, instructors can put students into groups and ask them to accomplish meaningful tasks which allow students the time to process the content

and activate the language resources needed for success. For them to be useful and interesting—and interest is helpful if you want them to talk—these activities should have a clear purpose within the lesson beyond the interaction itself. If an instructor wants to have a discussion of the events in a reading, the homework could be to have students to prepare some basic answers, and in class the next day students could work with these answers and answer other related activities together. These larger questions can be the topic of a class discussion, which can then be expanded by the instructor. As an alternative, before participating in group or class discussions, students could do a short freewriting activity to activate their thinking on the topic and give them a chance not only to consider the content but also the language of the ideas they want to express.

When other supports are in place to aid comprehension of course content and build confidence, ***grammar*** becomes a more manageable issue. Rather than expecting their students to have native-like accuracy, college composition instructors can prioritize grammatical issues that are key to the topic (e.g., using correct past forms when writing about historical events) or those errors that interfere with the comprehension of the student's ideas. The reality is that adult learners of English have a difficult road to relative native-like production, if they even desire it. It is an ongoing process. Most college composition instructors are not trained as language teachers, nor is it their role to act as such to the extent that an ESL instructor would. If students are doing something in their English language production that has an effect on the intelligibility of their ideas, or if a repeated mistake becomes distracting, instructors should point these features out. If the students' grammar errors are not of this kind, then instructors should guide students to established department and college resources, such as tutoring and labs.

When one realizes that a large portion of the student population has similar needs, having varying ***standards*** may become less important. Grading and ***feedback*** may become less about mechanical correctness but the quality of the ideas. As a result, instructors will use fewer correction symbols, ask more real questions about content, give specific direction and guidance about sentence structure patterns, and point out patterns of grammatical errors that interfere with comprehensibility. Also important is to focus feedback and grading on what has been taught in the classroom, including: skills (comparing and contrasting, inferring meaning), structures (sentence structure, negative inversion, tense contrast), concepts (recognizing imagery and allusions), and strategies (concessions, refutation). Instructors' feedback should be focused on what has been taught and should encourage the development and clarification of ideas.

The question of what language points to teach and what feedback to give comes down to priorities. Hirsch (1995) advocates teaching students to filter what's important and what's not. In the workshop, the expression "not being able to see the forest for the trees" came up a number of times. One participant noted that marking every error creates a forest that acts as a barrier to improvement. Another took the expression another way and said that if she forced students to see too many trees (errors), they would miss the forest (the larger ideas or the essay as a whole).

When the day-to-day objective of a course is aimed more directly at stu-

dents' developing skills in reading, writing, and critical thinking, the need for outside **support** may be reduced. Still, ESL and language minority students do need additional support (Goldenberg, 2013). Such additional help can come from a number of sources: ESL labs can be made available to former ESL students, and lists of useful texts, websites and e-resources can be shared among students and faculty. Ideally, ESL and English department instructors will act as valuable, ongoing resources to one other.

Ultimately, support for student learning must also come in the form of patience from teachers and students themselves because the task is challenging. However, it need not be onerous. Describing a successful example of giving feedback to a heavily-accented ESL student, one instructor noted that she had realized for the first time that patience was "not only a virtue, but also a teaching strategy." She recounted that, for the first time, she did not hear the students' English as "broken." Instead she heard it as "different."

In light of their new awareness, workshop participants also realized that they might need to repeat themselves, review, and sometimes re-teach certain concepts or skills. After all, learning is a recursive process. This need for repetition does not necessarily mean that students are not listening or learning, or that they are "resisting." This need may be due to the fact that students are attending to something different at the moment of instruction; they may need to hear it a couple of times before processing it; they may misunderstand the instruction and/or think they are applying the rule but are not; or they may be struggling to unlearn something that previous schooling or experience had taught them.

When more of these factors are taken into consideration, student and instructor **affect** may also become less of a pressing concern. Instructors will feel more confident in their capacity to handle the challenges of working with ESL and language minority students. For their part, these students will see the work of college composition as less foreign to them and within their grasp.

At this college, a discussion of ESL learners allowed participants to see that the needs of a larger community of students. Labels such as ESL, language minority, generation 1.5, or native speaker may be inadequate, but they may also remind instructors that they need to tap the rich diversity of skills and potential and see it as an opportunity to reach all students in new ways. A student's advancing into a college composition class does not mean that the need for language and literacy skills development is over. Instructors cannot overlook the fact that students may enroll in a community college because they have not yet developed solid skills for college work. This is especially true for ESL and language minority students.

The challenge presented in working with ESL and language minority students will not go away any time soon. Departments need to have these conversations and make adjustments for the sake of teachers on both sides of the ESL-ENG divide, especially those who feel at a loss and/or who are working tirelessly with unsatisfying results. The ultimate goal, of course, is the academic success and timely graduation of students. The gap can be bridged, and the solution begins with the instructor in the classroom.

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Teachable Moment Symosium:

ESL Across the Curriculum (ESLAC): Instructor Practices and Reflections

Introduction

John Beaumont and Judith Yancey
Developmental Skills

The following is a compilation of writings produced by faculty participants in the Spring 2013 workshop series, ESL Across the Curriculum (ESLAC). The overall goal of the ESLAC series was to familiarize faculty with teaching strategies appropriate for instruction of non-native English speakers (NNS) in their courses. Across three sessions, participants from various disciplines gained awareness of potential sources of their students' language variation and examined cultural expectations embedded in college classrooms and college-level assignments. They read and learned about specific pedagogical strategies for promoting class participation, helping students read and understand course texts and materials, providing effective feedback to students, and more. Instructors were asked to apply one or more of these strategies to their own teaching, to report on the outcomes, and to reflect in writing on their experience. This collection of writing is the result of those efforts.

BMCC has a remarkably diverse student population, and we believe that that diversity makes it important for instructors across all disciplines to give attention to the needs of NNS students. BMCC's student body includes **ESL students**, meaning those who are currently enrolled in Developmental Skills ESL courses, as well as former ESL students. But beyond these categories are many students who may never have been designated ESL, and yet they struggle with college discourse. The term **Generation 1.5** typically describes students who immigrated to the U.S. as children or teens, and find themselves caught between two languages and cultures. They may speak a first language at home, but have native-like oral/aural proficiency in English; for this reason, they may consider themselves bilingual, but in reality they lack strong literacy in either language. In fact, most students at BMCC have already met CUNY basic skills requirements, but many of them are still mastering academic English skills. They too benefit from pedagogical assistance with college discourse: taking notes in lectures, participating in class discussions, as well as discipline-specific reading and writing assignments. In brief, conversations about language and literacy skills development matter for more students than those officially designated as "ESL."

In compiling this publication, we as facilitators struggled with the question of what to call our learners. Ultimately, we have chosen to use the designation **non-native English speaker (NNS)** because it best encapsulates all of our students: those who are currently enrolled in ESL, those who have completed ESL, and those who may never have been in an ESL class. But as you read the pages that follow, keep in mind that the strategies described are applicable and beneficial to *all* of our students. Community college is, for many, a bridge to college discourse. As community college instructors, it is our special responsibility to guide all of our students across that bridge—and to do so, we must be ready to teach our students the skills that we expect them to have.

Engaging the Class Though Group Work

Anne Marie Basic
Business Management

In discerning the strategy that would most benefit NNS students in my classes, I decided to focus my efforts on my Business Law (BUS 110) class. This course is a core curriculum requirement for all business majors. It surveys the American legal system and, in particular, the basic law of contracts. Reference is made to typical business transactions and, by a study of pertinent cases, how the various principles of contract law apply to them.

The last four to five weeks of the course is devoted to contract law. To pre-pare for the final in the class, which focuses on contract law terminology and concepts, I usually give a quiz about halfway through to make sure the students are on track. As with the majority of topics in the area of business law, a big part of the difficulty for my NNS students, as well as my Generation 1.5 students, is coping with difficult legal terms, many of which are expressed in Latin, such as in *pari delicto*, which refers to a situation in which both parties are equally at fault in an illegal contract, or *scienter*, which is the knowledge that a representation of fact is false or that it was made without sufficient knowledge of the truth. As one can see, students are learning complex legal concepts in English and then must also memorize the vocabulary in a third language (e.g., Latin).

The strategy that I finally decided to incorporate in my class was a hybrid speaking activity, i.e., a combination whole-class/small group effort. A bit of back story: one of the things I endeavor to instill in my students is the need to become comfortable with speaking in front of a group, which is an asset in business, as well as in criminal justice. To that end, all my classes have as an extra credit activity—a current events presentation, in which the student must stand in front of the class, summarize a current events article, identify the primary issues put forth by the situation, and then speak to their point of view regarding the subject matter. I then put forth a series of questions and then lead a brief class discussion on the current events topic. As one can see, this might be a daunting task for those for whom English is a second language, although, depending on the class, sometimes my NNS or Generation 1.5 students are the first, and not the last, to participate and my native speakers are the reticent ones.

In any event, back to the hybrid speaking activity. During this particular class, we were to review the last quiz, which review normally proceeds with each student in attendance taking a question and answering it (correctly or not, clearly or not, audibly or not). To change it up, and to give students the comfort of a small group, I split students into four groups and told each group which ten quiz questions the members of the group were to answer and that all members should come to a consensus as to the answer and the reasoning behind the answer before responding. Once the groups had spent a few minutes in that un-dertaking, we went around the room, with my asking a different student in each

group the group's response for each one of the assigned questions.

I found that many students responded with more confidence; they were more audible and spoke more clearly. This was the case no matter if the student were a native speaker, a Generation 1.5 student, or an NNS student. It was clear that the majority enjoyed the activity, felt more at ease in speaking up, and often responded with more than one word. In fact, some were so eager to speak that, when we were discussing the concepts underlying a question, they would finish their classmate's thoughts or, at the very least, felt compelled to ensure that all concepts were wrung out thoroughly before moving on to the next question.

The incorporation of this small change, i.e., a small group dynamic into the whole class experience, enlivened the class experience and, for a moment, prompted some of my most silent students to speak up in class. I will definitely be incorporating this strategy more frequently in the future, with the caveat that, due to different courses having different needs, the strategy will be tailored to fit each course, as appropriate.

Unpacking Idioms and Colloquial Language in the Classroom

Bettina Berch
Social Sciences and Human Services (Economics)

I teach sections of Economics 100 and Economics 201. The intro class has a wide variety of students from an array of backgrounds, and many with only a passing interest in economics. Students more committed to economics, business, or criminal justice take Economics 201, which usually includes a large number of NNS students. Macroeconomics involves more technical language than a basic intro course, which may actually be easier for an NNS than a more general intro course, since specific terms can be looked up in dictionaries.

In ECO 201 there are students from varied language backgrounds. Their spoken English is sometimes hard to understand, and they have to work a lot to translate the assigned readings. Their written work takes some effort to decode. I have found a number of strategies suggested in this seminar to be very useful. In particular:

1) I realized that I use a *lot* of idioms and colorful expressions, mostly to 'soften up' the teaching of economics. Now I realize how they must sound to a non-native speaker! So, from now on, if I use an idiom or a folk-saying (portfolio diversification = "Don't put all your eggs in one basket.")—at very least, I explain immediately. In informal moments, I might ask an ESL-student for an equivalent idiom in their language.

2) I have started writing key terms on the blackboard more often. It seems an obvious thing to do, now that I realize how similar many English words sound to a non-native speaker, but I suppose I never wanted to interrupt myself to do this. I notice it helps *all* students, however.

3) I have also switched from asking, "Does anyone have questions?" to a less open-ended format. I devise an application of the principle and ask them what would be the outcome. A question like, "So, if I increase the money supply, what will happen to interest rates?" will actually produce hands in the air. "Any questions?" produces nothing.

4) I structured a classroom project for my ECO 201 class incorporating insights I have gotten from the ESLAC seminar and readings.

I realized that my style of 100% lecture classes may be difficult for non-native speakers. Our readings recommended that peer-to-peer learning may actually be more effective for NNS students, as they will be less intimidated to admit incomprehension to a peer. So I decided to assign a lively book on financial markets, *Man vs. Markets* (Hirsch 2012). In an easy-going, colloquial style, Hirsch

explains how various financial instruments are supposed to work and the impact they have had on our economy in recent years. I divided the class into selected groups, assigned a chapter or two of the book to each group, and told them they would be responsible for teaching the book to the class.

Students received the following instructions:

1. Each of the seven groups of five students will present to the class on one chapter to the class (10 min. per group) (Hirsch, 2012; chapters 1, 2, 4, 6/7, 8, 9, and 10).

2. Each member of the group will submit a written lesson plan summarizing the material in the chapter and outlining the key points. The group can decide among themselves *how* to present to the class.

During class hours for two or three sessions before the panels, I set aside some breakout time for groups to meet with each other. As they met, I circulated to the various groups, checking that they were getting along productively, and troubleshooting problems.

From our ESLAC readings, I had learned that it is recommended to distribute the NNS students among the various groups, so they might build relations with other students. Normally, there's a clump of NNS students who seem to work together to decipher the class. Distributing them in the different groups was very successful. I realized the native speakers were very generous with help to the NNS students, and I also saw some new friendships developing. I was impressed with how easy it was to get some chemistry started.

To avoid unequal work-sharing, and to ensure that I understood each student's presentation, I required all students to give me what I called a "lesson plan"—something in writing that they were teaching from—their notes, an outline, whatever. One student did not understand what this involved. Another student asked her if she'd taken speech class yet. When she said yes, they all told her it was like your notes for giving a speech in speech class. Perfect!

In the end, only two students still seemed to have significant difficulty expressing themselves. But since they each had to turn in their written lesson plan, I could see that one student did know the material. Going over what he wrote, I came to an uncomfortable realization, which was only confirmed when I discussed the choice of book with my class afterwards. The native speakers found the colloquial style and the idiomatic flair of the book engaging and rather fun. Since this is a book about financial markets, this is a real plus—reading about derivatives and collateralized securities can be pretty deadly. But what made the book so appealing for native speakers was exactly what tripped up the inexperienced NNS student. The forest of idioms made the reading doubly incomprehensible.

Thinking about this, I have decided that in the future I may want to shift to a less idiomatic text—not a stiff book, but something a bit less idiomatic or colloquial. And yes, I do need to require all students to hand in a written summary of the material to their group (and to me) on their second meeting, so they know they are all on the same page, comprehension-wise. If anyone is lost, there will

still be time to get them back on track before they present to the class.

All in all, this seminar has provided me with a lot of useful insights into the problems of NNS students in the mainstream classroom, and some useable strategies for helping them to learn. I have become more accustomed to writing important terms on the board as I talk. I translate my idioms immediately. I am also going to make a real effort next semester to address all students by their full names, even if I mangle them at first. When it was pointed out in the ESLAC seminar that this makes people feel included, I realized I needed to make this effort. It's better to sound incompetent than to appear to ignore someone.

This seminar has taught me some strategies to use with my NNS students to help them feel more included in the classroom, and to give them more opportunity to learn the material. At the same time, I see that my native-English-speakers benefit too—they write down the terms I write on the board, just as often as anyone else. So everyone gains!

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Eliciting Non-Native English Speakers' Participation Through Advanced Preparation

Margaret Dean
Mathematics

I teach MAT 303, the third semester of calculus. This course requires fairly sophisticated mathematical thought, as well as fairly sophisticated mathematical skills. Most students are concurrently taking two or more other demanding courses, as they are nearing graduation and transfer to a four-year college. Many students are struggling to accommodate both practically and emotionally the many hours of work that are required outside of each class in order to learn the material successfully. On the positive side, many students are seeing one another in several of their classes and are forming bonds that include study groups as well as camaraderie.

In my Calculus III class (and, indeed, every class I have ever taught), I often find out only when I grade an exam that many students have not understood some definition, explanation, concept, hint, etc., that I have given in class; although I had no indication of this lack of understanding prior to the exam. Often these students are NNSs, although sometimes they are what I would describe as struggling MLLs (Math Language Learners).

Students in my classes have a range of challenges: limited proficiency in academic English, difficulty in note taking from lectures and textbooks, difficulty with new vocabulary, and economic and prior educational disadvantages. It seems that these challenges might be very common for NNSs. Other difficulties that many NNSs face, I would say, apply equally well (in a mathematics class, at least) to many of my women students: non-participation in class; speaking infrequently because of feeling inhibited by other, more verbal students; or low self-esteem. These are challenges I would particularly like to help my students overcome; if they cannot, they may continue to struggle in their efforts to be successful math students.

As my project for the seminar, I decided to try to encourage my non-participatory students, both NNSs and MLLs, to speak out more in class. One of the suggestions given in the ESLAC workshop to increase participation in large group discussions was to give a student advance warning that he or she would be called on in class. For my first try, I e-mailed six or seven students (individually) a day or so before class. In this course, student grades are based on a point system laid out at the beginning of the semester: so many points for tests, so many for homework, and so on. Class participation is one of the categories in which students can accrue points, so I had a natural opening to say that I wanted to encourage them to earn some points for class participation. I suggested that they prepare a question they had from the previous lesson; or if not, that I would plan to call on them to answer a question about new material.

The result was not overwhelming. One NNS student had prepared a question, which was good. During that class period I told the students that rather than having them call out the answers to my questions, they should stay quiet, think, and raise their hands if they had the answer. None of my quiet students raised their hands, but I saw that some had been working on an answer, so I asked one student if she had an answer, which she reluctantly gave. It was wrong, but I commended her for her effort and tried to work out with her where her calculations had gone astray. While that was good, several other quiet students stayed quiet.

My next effort was to e-mail one student in particular who is a math major. I wanted to ask a theory question from a topic they learned at the beginning of the previous semester, and I informed this student that I would be asking this question, that I did not imagine any non-math majors would remember the theory, nor many of the math majors; but that if she could review the topic over the weekend and be the one with the answer, that would be great! Sadly, she remained silent in the next class.

From then on, at some point in each class, I would ask students to remain silent when I asked a question, and let me call on somebody after a minute or so who had an answer. This worked out tolerably well, but still no amazing results. Some students just remained silent.

I was somewhat discouraged with my results, but on reflection I feel somewhat better about the effort. One NNS who has a very hard time expressing himself in English, although he remained silent during class, began to stay after class to talk about the lesson with me, and also to drop by my office more than he had previously. Another student who appeared to have only minor difficulty with English and who mostly talked with me to negotiate for additional points on quizzes, homework, etc., came by my office to work on math, and shared with me that he began by speaking Portuguese, then learned Spanish, and finally English – so I began to understand that he was having more difficulty than I imagined with the English language. It was certainly a pleasure to talk about math with him rather than battling with him about why I had deducted this point or that.

I also realized that due to the newly implemented policy in Blackboard that students had to use a CUNY e-mail address, all student Blackboard e-mails had been reset within the system, to the very first CUNY e-mail the student ever had. As a result, many students never received the e-mails I sent through Blackboard, and this was why they remained silent in class.

The next time I try this project, I plan to (a) make sure that all e-mail issues are resolved at the beginning of the semester; and (b) begin much earlier to give certain students advance warning that I want them to speak out in class. This will give me a better chance to scaffold. I plan to start off letting each student know very specifically what question I plan to ask, perhaps the meaning of a new vocabulary word we have learned, since there is lots of confusion especially about the words we thought we knew, that have suddenly been given a different meaning for this area of mathematics. (For instance, a "cylinder" in Calculus III means something very different from what a "cylinder" means in Geometry.) From there, I can help my students build up to more spontaneous class participation. I think

that with more time, this experiment could prove extremely valuable for individual students as well as the class as a whole.

All in all, I am looking at a lot of slight changes I would like to make in my class; nothing major, just minor tweaks based on a different way of looking at my NNSs, and my MLLs. This workshop has been very valuable to me. Thank you!

Classroom Adaptations for NNSs: Sensitivity to Time Pressure and Vocabulary

Maureen Keenan
Music and Art

My initial interest in the ESLAC workshop was motivated by my experiences teaching Basics of Music (Music 105) at BMCC. In Music 105 students with little or no musical background learn beginning piano and music theory, and the course has no English proficiency requirement for enrollment. Because there is no language requirement, nearly every semester there are challenges communicating with students who seem to understand the course material (often quite well), but simple communication can be problematic. I thought this workshop would help me in communicating with these students, but actually it proved more valuable than that. I may have difficulty communicating with Music 105 students, but (surprisingly to me at times) the language barrier doesn't necessarily adversely affect their grasp of the material. From the discussion of linguistics and the video of students describing experiences as NNS learners in the first workshop, I realized that I could utilize what I learn to assist the students in my writing-intensive Music and Western Civilization (Music 103 or "music appreciation") courses at BMCC.

What I gathered from the workshop was not just a single strategy but an even more valuable over-arching awareness and sensitivity to the challenges of NNS students and the Generation 1.5 students that we discussed at the first meeting.

In one semester students in Music 103 are presented with western European music from the medieval period to the twentieth-century. My strategies for teaching this course all hinge upon three goals to be reached by the end of the semester:

1) Students reinforce their knowledge of western European historical context and can place the music history within that context.

2) Students are able to develop basic listening skills and can use a handful of terms meaningfully to describe what they hear in discussions and in writing.

3) Students become more confident and adept writers.

The first and most substantial lesson I learned from attending the workshop was the realization that most of my students could and should be given consideration for being either NNS learners or Generation 1.5. Before the workshop I hadn't realized the ongoing struggles of the large number of students whose first language is not English or those who grew up speaking another language in the home in which they are not literate (a significant a population at BMCC). Before this realization, my expectations were that since they had reached the level

of proficiency required to enroll in a writing-intensive course, I expected the two afore-mentioned groups of students would be able to achieve academically without amending my approach to make language differences a consideration. I found by implementing two strategies in my teaching methods—an emphasis on clarity and flexibility with time--these students had better learning outcomes.

With regard to clarity, I made an effort to make sure that students knew the vocabulary that I was using that may or may not be specific to the course. I realized that many words that I have been using on handouts for years were not necessarily clear, especially if they had more than one meaning. The funniest example of how my efforts at clarity resulted in positive learning outcomes was when I was introducing the class to Bizet's opera *Carmen*. I mentioned that the libretto was based on a novella and when I asked the students what a novella was, there was a very confident consensus in the room that it was a Spanish-language soap opera! Prior to my emphasis on clarity, I would have asked if the students knew what a novella was, but I would have stopped short of asking them to define it for me.

The changes I have made which helped the students' grades the most had to do with time. Because we were a bit behind schedule fairly early this semester I changed an in-class quiz into a take-home quiz. What I noticed (and I don't think I would have been sensitive to before the workshop) is that the two students who did exceptionally well, especially on the essay section, were both NNS students. Prior to this, both of these students' work had been mediocre to good on in-class quizzes. Because of this experience I made the tests that involved writing take-home and I was very pleased with the work that I saw. I already give the students non-graded in-class informal writing nearly every week and I realized that there are better results when students have time to contemplate their writing for grading. The group of students whose work improved the most dramatically from in-class to take-home work was that of the foreign-born NNS students.

I am looking forward to beginning next semester with the sensitivity to NNS and Generation 1.5 students that I have gained from this workshop. I am re-examining my course materials with regard to their clarity and contemplating instituting changes of policy to allow each student the time they need to effectively deal with the course material.

Anticipating Vocabulary Challenges in a Math Course

Susan Licwinko
Mathematics

I teach a remedial Quantitative Reasoning class. The course in general is designed around a strategy called "productive struggle" which seems fitting for an NNS student, who probably experiences that in every class. The class revolves around whole class discussion, group work (3 to 4 students per group) and individual work. This class is especially difficult for NNS students since it requires a lot of reading and specific language (not necessarily mathematics related) that they may not have seen. In this lesson, students will work on solving proportion problems. A proportion is an equation of two ratios (such as 1/2 = 2/4 or 3:1 = 12:4).

The lesson opens with a picture of Paul Rudd and me. We want to put this picture on t-shirts, coffee mugs, and a life size portrait. However, the dimensions of the picture need to stay intact so that Paul can retain his beauty without being stretched or shrunk. We discuss the current dimensions (3.5 length by 5.32 wide) and figure out what the dimensions should be appropriate on the mug, t-shirt, and life-size image. These require the use of proportions once we determine an appropriate size for each.

The introduction of this lesson does not require the need for vocabulary, but we do talk about the various vocabulary words in the lesson. I write them on the board, connecting them to the introductory example, and write out a definition for each word. The word list includes: *ratio*, *rate*, *proportion*, *constant*, and *cross-product*. The students might remember these words from prior mathematics experiences or might know alternate definitions for them. I think it's important to connect the new words to existing ideas to help them make connections. When I taught this lesson, the students did know most of the words already, and we just polished their definitions. I try to keep the definitions on the board for as long as possible but, with such limited board space, they get erased soon. Once we finished the lesson, I encouraged the students to keep a list of vocabulary words and NNS students should keep the translation handy as well so they can refer back to it as needed.

The lesson progressed into another word problem example about dimensions of a billboard so we could use the vocabulary in this application as well.

> Problem Situation 2: You are a graphic artist hired to make a billboard for a college. The original logo is 2 1/4 inches wide by 3 3/8 inches long. You need to enlarge it to a length of 6 feet. How wide will the enlarged version be?

This situation has a good deal of vocabulary that the students may not have used before such as *billboard*, *logo*, and *enlarge*. I made a PowerPoint ahead of time with a picture of a billboard and a potential college logo on individual slides just in case. The students then worked in their groups trying to answer the question they were given. They did not have much difficulty getting the information set up into a proportion and were able to generate an answer within a few minutes. They were then given a worksheet with additional practical applications of how proportions can be used in a variety of settings. Once each group had sufficient time working through the problems, each group then presented one answer. The groups were encouraged to involve each person, although what most groups did was designate one person to write on the board while one or two people talked about the problem they were going over.

It seemed that by the end of the lesson most students felt comfortable with the material. I ended the lesson with an "exit ticket" where I gave each student one additional question to see how well they were able to solve it.

The NNS workshop has helped me become more conscious of idioms and lesser-used words as well as to be better about explaining them. While it is time consuming to "prefect" each lesson, I am sure the students are grateful for it. I will try to use the strategies discussed in the workshop with all my classes and be respectful of other cultures where student-centered classrooms may not be familiar to them.

Facilitating Reading Comprehension: Asking Questions and Activating Background Knowledge

Marci Littlefield
Social Sciences and Human Services (Sociology)

This class was useful for me because it helped me to understand and identify the challenges NNS students face. Language is connected to the way others assess your abilities and in a real way is connected to the way in which your ability to use language plays out in the dominant social structure. In my classes I noticed that my students are afraid to speak because of how they may be perceived, and I believe this is connected to their prior experiences of speaking, communicating, and not being heard. While I always encourage my students to speak and express themselves, I realize they are ambivalent and afraid to expose their deficiencies.

As professors, we make determinations of student abilities but the lens through which we understand language differences is not always considered. It was extremely valuable for me to understand some of the cultural and linguistic differences in how students interpret and comprehend materials. Before I had not considered that some of the materials I used were not an effective way for NNS students to grasp content. NNS students are challenged by the way language is used, and I learned I can help them in this process by developing better assignments with multiple learning strategies and assessments.

In my courses students can take Introduction to Sociology course even if they are still enrolled in developmental courses, which explains the wide array of learners in my classes. I also teach Family and Society, an upper division course, which includes a large number of NNS students. This course helped me to understand some of the challenges facing my students and the ways in which I can influence student comprehension and literacy. I tried a number of different strategies, and I plan to implement these, and more, to help students do better in my courses. The next few paragraphs outline my strategies.

Lesson: Structured questions on in class reading exercise

I often bring in additional information for students to read to add to the current issues in Family and Society. I am always mindful of the use of considerate and inconsiderate texts, and I often have to judge where prior knowledge is adequate. After we have completed a few chapters in the text, I assume any articles I bring in for the class to read will add to their current knowledge of issues related to marriage and family. For this assignment I brought in an article entitled "Culture Class and the Decline of Marriage" (Douthat 2013). Although this was a considerate text in most respects, the way the author compares the "Soul Mate Model" and the changes in Marriage in American Society to the Gay Marriage movement

made it difficult for students to readily draw the correlation between what the writer said in the article and the broader themes and conclusion he was making. After I realized only parts of the article's themes were understood, I began to ask students structured questions concerning the article. I asked question like, "What do you think he meant by this statement", and then when I received a response, I went on to ask more questions. Then after going through the main themes of the articles and having students respond to certain questions, I asked them to now summarize why they thought the author made that link. Then it was obvious to them, as opposed to them just being able to pick out details; the main theme was more apparent.

Before we went to the next reading in this class, I activated background knowledge by asking them to comment on any personal experiences they had with divorce and to discuss how some of the changes in society led to a difference in attitude related to divorce. I then used a timeline to discuss how divorce and issues around marriage have changed over time. This also helped the students to better understand the article.

This experience was effective for me because I often assume students understand new materials when they are relate to topics we have discussed in class. Asking students to summarize the main points was a great method for me to access students' comprehension and their ability to apply what they learned to new materials and ideas. I believe there is a range of students who read and students who do not, and this makes it difficult for me to access how much to expect they should know.

Reflection: Student Objectives and Outcomes (Reviewed by Chapter)
I had to redefine my student objectives to give a clear sense of what I expected from my students. The daily objectives need to directly coincide with the materials. This exercise helped me to better prepare students for the assignments and the tests. I plan to develop matching exercises for each chapter to make sure students understand and are able to apply the material. Overall this class was really good in helping me as an instructor to think through and plan more effective assignments and better plan my objectives and how important it is to understand and appreciates differences and not to attach stigma to the ways NNS learners use and understand language.

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Increasing NNS Students' Class Participation

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Social Sciences and Human Services (Sociology)

Over the last several years, I have participated in numerous pedagogical seminars where the issues and challenges around teaching NNS students have been part of the discussion. I was very interested in participating in the ESLAC seminar this semester because I felt I would benefit from learning more about this population of students and learn new strategies. My training in Writing Across the Curriculum and my work with Developmental Skills/ESL experts prepared me for many aspects of working with multilingual learners, but one area I felt was deficient in my teaching was strategies to increase class participation of these students. Prior to taking this seminar, I felt uncomfortable about calling on students because I did not want them to feel uncomfortable. However, the reading by Ellen Johnson (1997) about oral communication in the classroom convinced me that I needed to find ways to have my NNS students speak while being sensitive to the cultural contexts from which my students were coming. As the semester progressed, I used principles from the seminar to engage and encourage participation in my Writing Intensive introduction to sociology course. I was especially interested in my reluctant NNS students and wanted to create a class culture in which students were comfortable speaking.

After the first seminar session, I decided to work on getting all my students to participate, including reluctant NNS students. I let my Intro class know what I learned in the seminar and how I planned to get full participation over the next few weeks until the end of the semester. It was really important that I shared my goals and let them know that their participation was valuable and that I wanted to create an environment where they felt comfortable sharing their ideas. The first activity I tried involved an informal writing activity since it was a WI class. I gave my students a short in-class writing activity asking them about gender roles. Then I asked them to do a "pair and share" with a student partner—reading their partner's work, writing down a comment or question and discussing what they wrote. I felt that it gave them a chance to talk to a peer and that it would "warm them up." As they did this, I walked around the room and joined their conversations, paying special attention to students who were especially reluctant speakers. Then we had a report-back. Some of the students were still reluctant but did report back; others got very excited—one pair were two Dominican American (Generation 1.5) women who never spoke, but got very excited talking about contradictory gender roles in their culture. The biggest surprise was a young Chinese woman, Chloe, who had never said a word—I had chatted with her and her partner as I walked around and she was very interested in talking about changing gender roles in China. During the report back, she spoke to the class about gender issues in China. The class came to an end and she still had more to say.

After the second seminar session, I continued to try to encourage participation. This time, I had students do a reading activity in class. We read a piece by Anthony Giddens (2002) on the global revolution in family and personal life. I chose this reading because he talks about gender role, family, and relationship changes not only in the U.S. but in other parts of the world—he spends time also specifically discussing family trends in China—to try to engage non-native students. I asked students to start the reading in class and finish it at home. As they read, I asked that they annotate the reading and while reading, come up with at least 3 questions or comments that they could share with the class. The students spent 20-25 minutes reading and annotating; most got through about half the reading, which gave them a good sense of the author's main points. While they read, I went around the room to make sure that they were on task. As I went, I asked students to share what they had noted. Everyone had to make some written notes so everyone had something to share. Chloe was especially talkative. The most annotated fact, in case you wanted to know, was that you could get a divorce in China for only $4!

I've already noticed in the last weeks of the semester that a few more students were participating that had previously not done so. One is a very good student, a young woman from the Republic of Georgia who said to me in office hours earlier in the semester that she didn't feel confident participating. She has since started participating through the end of the semester. Chloe is now a regular contributor to the class and now even the reluctant students know that I am not letting them hide out in the back—they expect me to call on them. Interestingly, at the end of the semester, many students commented on how they admired one particular international student and his regular, insightful participation—they noticed that even though he would sometimes pause or take time to articulate his ideas, he made a special effort to share them. In future semesters, I hope to use this experience to create a classroom culture of participation and engagement right from the beginning.

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Making Key Concepts Accessible

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Social Sciences and Human Service (Sociology)

I teach Introduction to Sociology. The basic goal of the course is to expose students to the most common concepts and ideas within the field of sociology, to help them develop a sociological eye, to take a perspective on their social world that enables them to grasp the unseen forces of social structure, history, and power at work in everyday life. They work with a textbook, in class writings, oral presentations, formal written assignments, and exams. I find that my NNSs are particularly challenged by the sociological vocabulary, the writing, and by grasping the main point of the readings.

As is typical at BMCC, the class attracts a wide range of abilities, especially since it is a required part of the liberal arts major. I have students who can easily discuss the concept of *heteronormativity* in the same classroom with those who have asked for a definition of the word role. One of the ways I deal with this discrepancy in abilities is to use a textbook that is more conceptual than fact-based, which differs from the approach most sociology textbooks tend to take.

The typical text tends toward teaching the ins and outs of the field through case studies. In one such study, *Tally's Corner*, the author observed the behavior and interactions of African-American men on a street corner in their neighborhood. He discovered they had a far more organized life than was assumed, and the joblessness wasn't due to laziness; they either couldn't get jobs, or the ones they could get didn't pay a living wage. Using case studies such as these teaches facts, but using this method also can overwhelm students with data, causing them to lose sight of the big picture. In addition, students from other cultures have trouble grasping the significance of many of these famous studies, as they are usually American-based, dealing with problems specific to the U.S.

The text I use approaches sociological ideas differently. It uses a series of questions, such as 'Are Human Beings Free?' and 'Why is there Misery in the World?' This approach works well to catch all skill levels, and seems to work for people from vastly different cultures. I have been hard pressed to find anyone who, given the chance to reflect a bit, *hasn't* wondered about these things. This conceptual approach solves some pedagogical issues; however, through my ESLAC training, I've realized that it might be the origin of the potential for problems for my NNSs. Since the text is organized according to these broad questions, some of the major concepts are woven throughout, and there isn't just one section in which students learn, definitively, what each concept is.

Concepts, such as 'rationalization,' for instance, thread through several chapters, framing the argument and discussion vis a vis the causes of misery in the world, whether or not the individual can make a difference, and the diminishing importance of organized religion in modern life. By this point in the semester,

in addition to needing to be able to do this broad conceptual work (conceiving of relatively complex social processes is especially challenging for students), the students' efforts are usually complicated by the fact that many sociological terms sound like everyday words, such as 'rationalization' as mentioned above, and 'socialization,' which I always like to say does not refer to going to parties and hanging out!

Here is where my ESLAC training came into play. Usually, when I teach about the rationalization of life, in which human beings turn increasingly to science and technology to solve life's problems, I do a wide-ranging lecture in which I talk about how life used to be in those ancient times, the 1970s, when we didn't have ATM machines, but had to interact with a real live human bank teller, and if you didn't make it to the bank by Friday afternoon and write a check to 'cash' you were out of luck for the weekend, as you had no money to pay for your Saturday night out. We discuss the rise of the use of cell phones, and how easy it is to avoid face-to-face communication if you want to. We talk about rationalization and the possibilities for alienation (separation from meaningful work, oneself, and others). Sometimes we talk about the students' employment, and whether or not they feel that rationalization of the work process has led to their own sense of alienation in their daily lives. Most semesters this approach has worked well, but I have always had one or two who just can't get past the familiarity of the word and think it has to do with thinking of rational reasons for doing something, to justify your actions. They just don't make the connection.

In the ESLAC training, we read quite a few interesting articles over the last few weeks, and through our lively training sessions, learned about and discussed many useful techniques, including methods for finding and catching those students who are not coming along with others. We learned about how NNSs can often hide in plain sight, seeming as if they are following along, too afraid or uncomfortable to ask the meaning of a basic word that forms the spine of the discussion at hand, without which none of the rest of it makes sense. One technique in particular seemed to be something I could incorporate right away: making sure every student 'gets' it before moving on.

This semester, I used this method when teaching about rationalization. First, I paused the lecture, and asked the students to write a definition, in their own words, of rationalization. I gave them about 2-3 minutes to do this. Then, using prior knowledge to brainstorm on the board, students volunteered bits of what they had written, to try to approach a definition, after which they searched the book for a definition and raised their hand once they found it. After a minute or two, I asked those who were finished to help neighboring students who were still looking. Finally, we worked out a definition of the concept on the board, combining their words with the text's to come up with something that worked for all of them. It was only then that I ran through all my examples and stories about what it was like to be twentysomething without a cell phone in the big city, compared to the culture of "I'll text you" in which they now live, for instance, or what dating was like before the market economy of emotions which comprises the online dating world. Finally, I showed them typed lecture notes that I had uploaded to Blackboard, which followed along the same lines of what we had

been discussing.

When we were finished, a student raised her hand and said, "Thank you so much for this professor. I don't think I've ever experienced anything like this. I wish all my professors taught us things this way!" I have to say, it was a gratifying experience to see even my stonily silent non-participants raising their hands, catching on, and really seeming to get it, without having to ask questions they might find embarrassing, which might arise due to their status as a NNS. I am definitely going to try to use these techniques in the future, as well as many of the others about writing as a second language, or giving helpful feedback, which we treated in our ESLAC training. I recommend this program for all BMCC professors!

Teaching Strategies to Improve NNS Students' Learning in Mathematics

Lina Wu
Mathematics

NNS students face many challenges as they try to assimilate to their new environment. Understanding the English language will be a challenge for them to overcome. Since school lessons are taught in English, they have to be able to understand the English language. NNS students who speak "poor English" or "broken English" may not feel comfortable in participating in class discussion. They may shy away from asking questions, and therefore may not do as well in class. As a math teacher at BMCC, I have NNS students in my class. I observe and compare NNS students' comprehension skill and academic performances to students who speak English as their native language. NNS students who have difficulties in English are more likely to have difficulty with understanding math assignments and are less likely to do math research. NNS students struggle with oral communication whenever they need to share their ideas with classmates and their class participation is limited. NNS students have difficulties in putting their thoughts in words. Poor writing skill will hinder their ability to write math research articles. Developing good communication skills in English plays an important role in NNS students' academic life.

As an educational researcher, I realize that one of the greatest challenges is to help NNS students to succeed in their academic studies.

1. What are the appropriate and successful teaching strategies to teach NNS students?

2. What are supplementary tools to enhance NNS students' comprehension abilities?

My Teaching Strategies for the NNS Student Body

• *Providing Background Information to Overcome Cultural Background Difference*

1. Different Measure Units in Different Countries
In the spring 2013 semester, during the math course Quantway Literacy, whenever I mentioned the space area by square feet, inches, or yards, I found that students from the other countries were not familiar with the measure units in feet or inches. In particular, Asian students in my class told me that they use square meters and centimeters to estimate areas. Another example was the difference in measuring weights. In this country, we use unit weight in pounds. In some other countries, people use kilograms. Obviously, NNS students have to convert their way of measuring things to ours.

In this case, I found that it was necessary for me to explain dimensional

analysis at the beginning of my class. Dimensional analysis is a method of setting up problems that involves converting between different units of measurement. The advantage of using dimensional analysis is that an educator can make sure that every student with different cultural backgrounds will have the same understanding of the problem clearly.

2. Different Life Style

Not only does cultural difference affect NNS students' ability for comprehension, they also affect NNS students' problem-solving skills. In the spring 2013 semester, during the math course Quantway Literacy, I wanted to develop students' quantitative skills based on problems from their daily life. I talked about the cost of driving by car to get to where they want to go. I asked students to make a list of all possible costs of driving their car from point "A" to point "B". I noticed that American students with driving experience solved this issue very easily. They made a comprehensive list including all possible cost factors, such as price of gas, mileage of the trip, insurance, car maintenance, and others. However, some Asian students who never had driving experience because owning a car is not part of their life, were unable to list all the cost factors of using a car. NNS students who never owned a car are not familiar with the cost of driving. They even asked me what would be considered car maintenance. They told me that they were familiar only with bicycles.

I realize NNS students studying in this country will need to adjust to the cultural differences and to develop better language skills. Providing background information as the preparation for a lesson study is one of the most effective and efficient teaching strategies for an educator to enhance NNS students' comprehension.

• *Providing a Guideline Including Key Words and Vocabulary as Supplementary Study Materials*

3. Providing a List of Well-Connected Vocabulary (Mathematics Terminologies)

Based on my observation, I have noticed that limited vocabulary affects NNS students' level of comprehension. For example, during the spring 2013 semester, when I taught the advanced math course of Calculus 3, NNS students could not recognize that math terminology of "Derivative" and "Differentiation" meant the same math concept and had the same meaning. They thought that these two words mean different things because they are different spellings. Another example is the words "Sequences" and "Series," which also confused NNS students in my class. The spelling of the word "Sequences" and "Series" have the same two letters of "Se" at the beginning of the words, consequently, they thought these two words were similar when used in a math lesson. However, the math concept of sequences is quite different from the math concept of series. Series are the sum of elements in the sequences.

In my math classes, I will provide and explain key words in the textbooks to NNS students. This will help them to understand math lessons as they read the textbooks.

4. Providing a Step-by-Step Demonstration Model

During the end of the spring 2013 semester in my Calculus 3 class, students were asked to use all of their learning in this class to sketch the graph for a function. I made a checklist of key words as a cue card for students to recall what they had learned during this course of study. I divided the whole project of curve sketching into a step-by-step practice, as below:

Example: Project of curve sketching for a polynomial function y=f(x)
a. Domain (that is, all possible value of x) and Range (that is, all possible value of y)
b. Asymptotes (that is, the behavior of y when x goes positive infinity or negative infinity)
c. The First Derivative of f
d. The Interval of Increase (that is, the positive value of the first derivative of f) and The Interval of Decrease (that is, the negative value of the first derivative of f)
e. The Maximum Value and the Minimum Value
f. The Second Derivative of f
g. The Interval of Concavity Upward (that is, the positive value of the second derivative of f) and The Interval of Concavity Downward (that is, the negative value of the second derivative of f)
h. Points of Inflection (that is, points of changing the concavity sign)
i. Combining the above information and Sketching the curve of f by hand

This tool was very useful to help NNS students to work on complicated problems, such as the subject of curve sketching. By following this checklist, it helped NNS students to summarize their math knowledge and to understand the key words by decoding math concepts. The teaching method of dividing the complicated tasks into small steps will increase students' success rate. This method is also effective to help educators to evaluate students' progress at each stage.

Emphasis on Previewing: Numrich's Sequence of Critical Thinking Tasks

Shirley Zaragoza
Business Management

I chose to focus my ESLAC project on the first of the three categories named in Numrich's sequence of critical thinking tasks (Beaumont 2010). The first category focuses on the tasks that are done before presenting the main text material. This task can be associated with the term "previewing." The additional time spent towards leading and preparing students with a stronger orientation can be seen as "previewing." The absorption of the class content material is usually relayed with a series of pedagogical tools including reading text material, reading handouts, interacting with group projects and listening to class lectures. I have found the most difficult of these learning tools for ESL and other students is the reading of the text material. Therefore, the previewing was focused on the students' ability to read and retain content material.

I decided to prep my students differently this semester by bringing the attention and focus of my semester's 12 visuals up front to the first three classes. Normally, I would present them one at a time as I move from chapters 1 through 12 in chronological order. The students got an overview of the entire course in the first few classes and got to focus on their listening and interpretative skills first. This also gave the students some lead time to get their textbook purchased. Inevitably, I also would have students missing the first class, registering late or switching classes within the first week of classes. By delaying the reading assignments a few classes, the late students were given an opportunity to start the course reading along with the rest of the class.

This previewing strategy also promoted the idea that content can be better communicated and retained with pictorial or visual associations. The simpler the visuals, the more universal the communication would be; therefore, the cultural barriers might be avoided and transcended at the beginning of the semester. After presenting the 12 finance visuals in my Introduction to Finance class, I have the students digitize them for themselves and add a value statement under each one. Our ESLAC workshop taught us the importance of "rehearsing" and having the students establish a "connection" with the basic material. This second step of previewing added value to these rehearsing and connecting tasks. Spending additional time and focus on "previewing" resulted in: 1) sparking interest and personal connection to the content and 2) gaining an understanding of how to best manage one's time on reading assignments. Reading is not merely a task of content analysis; it also involves the knowledge of how to break down reading in digestible bite-sized portions. The learning process of how to distribute the reading tasks is well complemented with a strong overview of the content material of the course.

By setting a precedent and pattern early on during the semester that participative learning was essential, students would learn to coordinate a work habit that was more incremental and fit to a weekly schedule. It was very important to teach the importance and practice of incremental reading; too many students are in the habit of cramming all the reading at the last minute before an exam. My Finance 100 students are now asked to preview, connect and better retain their textbook material by applying themselves with this assigned interactive project.

By this time, we had covered Step 1 and Step 2 of the previewing process, which led the students to take ownership of the visual concepts. The third and last step of the previewing process included having the students find articles in the newspaper that would relate to the visuals they just learned. The students were asked to both briefly annotate and cite the articles. Reading articles gave the students opportunities to read short reading assignments and helped to give them a sense of context for the newly acquired content material.

After these three steps were assigned in this previewing process, the students were ready to start the textbook readings. The students had been given a context reference, visual frameworks, and a minimal level of organizational management skills that would set the tone for the rest of the course. The twelve visuals eventually evolved into a semester portfolio but the task was incremental and not one that had to be pulled and scrambled together towards the end of the semester, when students are preparing for final exams.

I completed the ESLAC workshop with an added level of confidence and sensitivity to the challenges of NNS students at the college level. From this reordering of tasks and added attention to the concept of "previewing", I believe my pedagogy will forever be impacted by the importance of preparing students for the challenges of reading new textbook material.

As an answer to the question regarding whether I had suggestions for future ESLAC workshops, I would say that I would like to learn more about the NNS student that is not self-identified as an NNS student----maybe they have been in this country a long time and there is no detection of an accent in their speech patterns, but they come from a foreign language home. There has been research on these types of students, so it would be interesting to learn more about this learning group, also.

Other than that, I found the time, given resources, and interaction helpful, informative and collegial. I thank the coordinators and sponsors of this NNS Program and look forward to future opportunities for us to expand our professional teaching skills.

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Inquirer is a journal devoted to teaching, learning, and scholarship at BMCC. The editors welcome manuscripts on any number of topics, including but not limited to the following:

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