

ALL ABOUT

# MENTORING

A Publication of the Empire State College Mentoring Institute



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## From the Editor

### What is Mentoring?

This most basic question is important to us not only as we try to more carefully think about what we do, but as we wonder about the possibilities of and impediments to communicating the nature of this work to others. The question becomes particularly poignant at a time in our institutional history when seasoned and gifted faculty are retiring and new colleagues are joining us. Each more experienced mentor leaves ESC with his/her repertoire of practices and insights about working with adult learners. Each new mentor comes to ESC with his/her distinctive understanding of the art of teaching.

If we lose the memory of those who have been involved in what has been a thirty year experiment in teaching, we miss an opportunity to learn from those who have struggled to gain a new form of expertise. If we lose the insights and the previous experiences of those newer to ESC, we miss an opportunity to keep the experiment alive and to hear voices that might sometimes be critical of what many of us take for granted. We need to listen to both groups—not to mention everyone else in between! We need to find ways to talk and query each other. If “development” were ever to become a necessity for those who have recently joined the College but only an idiosyncratic luxury for everyone else, we would lose the spirit of keeping the question of mentoring alive. We would lose our need for each other.

### Is mentoring a technique? Can it be described as a set of observable behaviors?

These more specific questions are important for us if mentoring is to become a word that holds substantive and not only symbolic or even romantic value. They become particularly important when we confront the problem of whether mentoring can be taught and learned and how we evaluate whether it is happening. If mentoring can be defined as a series of pedagogical moves or a recipe of sorts, we could transform its practice into a checklist of things to do. In fact, in some of the current literature, the urge to reduce mentoring to just such an inventory is obvious. Whether in the corporate or academic worlds, mentoring has become formulaic. That is, it can be taught because its operations can be cleanly drawn. Mentoring becomes a particular list of questions to ask, activities to carry out, and functions to perform.

While such lists might offer us various clues to practice, they also more problematically reflect an instrumental prejudice and a workbook mentality. They move us away from wondering about principles and values. They deflect our attention from defining the underlying assumptions that inform whatever practices we take up. And, a focus on things-to-do pushes us away from the necessity to ask how our students best learn. In an important way, the very notion of mentoring-as-technique is exactly what mentoring as an alternative form of teaching and learning has sought to avoid.

If mentoring cannot be reduced to technique, and if it is more than a term of great emotional weight, how can it be described? Our long-term task has to become the articulation of principles of mentoring practice. We not only need to share with each other what we do but why we do it. Together, we need to look at cases, find opportunities to grapple with the ideas that inform our interactions with our students, identify, reflect upon the competencies we have gained as effective practitioners/theorists of adult learning, and question whether what we know is all we have to learn.

As colleague Lee Herman recently pointed out in a discussion on faculty development at ESC, we have to treat our mentoring experiences as we do the prior learning experiences of our students. For thirty years, we ourselves have been experiential learners, who now need to clarify what we have learned, how it compares with other kinds of learning, and why it is important to us and to our students. In this spirit, one key step in ESC faculty development is a college-wide “Credit by Evaluation Project.” Our own learning as mentors is our subject. To do this well, we need time, a willingness to listen to each other with care, a tolerance for differences, flexibility and imagination. Indeed, our efforts to define what mentoring is can best be guided by a learning process that is consistent with what we already cherish.

Alan Mandell

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## Scholarship

*In All About Mentoring #19, Lee Herman, Peggy Tally and Brian Koberlein offered reflections on scholarship at ESC. This has been a topic very central to the Academic Personnel Committee's agenda, to the Mentoring Institute, and to a range of efforts to focus more carefully on overall faculty development throughout the College. We thank Regina Grol for continuing that discussion here. We welcome other responses.*

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## Reflections on Scholarship at ESC: A Call for Action

Regina Grol, Niagara Frontier Center

Let me begin with a few extremely obvious statements. Despite the unique character of our work, when it comes to personnel decisions, ESC faculty continues to be bound and judged by the five criteria of the SUNY Board of Trustees. One of those criteria, and the most difficult to meet given the realities of our professional lives, is scholarship. The growing popularity in the academe of the “liberalized” definitions of scholarship (I am referring to the expanded categories introduced more than ten years ago by Ernest Boyer) gave hope to some ESC colleagues that much of what we do as ESC mentors could be subsumed under the label of “the scholarship of teaching.” Yet, mentoring — engaging, exciting, ennobling, and intellectually enriching as it may be — does not in and of itself constitute the scholarship of teaching. Generally, it does not constitute scholarship at all. Whether we apply the more traditional definitions or the newer ones, the term scholarship — of any kind — suggests sustained research, reflection, generation of new concepts, ideas or approaches. To be recognized as such, scholarship must be shared and reviewed by a community of peers. I doubt that any of us would accept the statement: “What I do is scholarship because I say so.” We would want to see and judge for ourselves.

While, theoretically, mentoring provides a fertile ground for engaging in the scholarship of teaching, especially for those inclined to do research on such topics as adult pedagogy, modes of learning, or independent and distance study models, serious research concerning these issues, or any other issues, is virtually impossible to reconcile with the many aspects and responsibilities of everyday mentoring practice. It is impossible primarily for two reasons. One is insufficiency of time, a problem addressed very perceptively and intelligently by Peggy Tally in the July 2000 issue of *All About Mentoring*. I wish to focus on the second reason, an obstacle equally — if not more — crucial and certainly equally detrimental to the pursuit of scholarship at ESC: The impossibility to disengage in a “clean” fashion; that is, without hurting our students, our colleagues or ourselves.

To illustrate my point allow me to share a personal story (a story, I am sure, very familiar to many a mentor). I applied for a PDQWL grant and was fortunate to get it. My request was for time off in June and July of the year 2000. I had hoped that, combined with the August break, I would have a three-month stretch to finish translating a book (a project I had started a year earlier and for which I had a publisher [Northwestern University Press] and a deadline), and to write a critical introduction to the volume. I could not begin disengaging from mentoring until I received the formal notification about the grant. It came, to be sure, but in the last days of May. All of June was consumed by a mad — and as it turned out futile — scramble to disengage from my work with students. Throughout the summer I was faced with a myriad of unexpected, yet predictable, intrusions (dozens of phone calls and e-mails from students, requests for recommendation letters, urgent requests for evaluations from students who had mailed me papers in July and needed instant evaluations to be reimbursed by their employers, etc. etc.). Having committed myself to teach two study groups in the fall, I also needed to spend some time on preparation for those. Determined to focus on my translation at least in August, I chose not to read any student papers during that month and to ignore my e-mail. As you can imagine, a mountain of papers awaited me in September and hundreds of e-mail messages. What is more, several of our Center procedures have changed, so upon my return I had the additional challenge of learning some new rules. Can one call this disengagement? I don't even wish to estimate what proportion of my time was actually spent on scholarship... I know the answer would depress me.

Throughout my “leave,” I felt a tremendous pressure of time. After all, professional reassignments are rare and precious, so I wanted to make the most of my “time off.” Much as I tried, however, and I tried very hard, I didn’t finish my project. Nor do I feel refreshed and refueled intellectually. I blame this outcome on inadequate provisions for disengagement, which is a major systemic flaw at ESC. Even when mentors attempt to carve some time to engage in research and find the external resources to do so, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to be truly successful. However we define scholarship, the two criteria of time and real disengagement are conditions *sine qua non*.

I do hope the ESC community will address these issues very soon. I don’t wish to be a prophetess of doom, but there will be negative consequences if we don’t. The vision of collective burnout looms large on the horizon. The proposals I’d like to advance for our collective consideration are neither new nor terribly original. We’ve talked about them for years, but we have done nothing. Now is the time, I believe, to address them seriously. Here are the proposals in my order of preference.

1. We fundamentally revise the College calendar. Perhaps for three months (either in the summer, or from December 1st on) we would primarily offer study groups. One third of the faculty could teach these study groups, while the remaining two thirds would gain time for their research for two years in a row. We would take turns being responsible for these groups. We could thus anticipate disengagement periods and plan accordingly.
2. The College might consider hiring a few “roaming” mentors, who would step in whenever a colleague is on leave. Again, the schedule of such replacements should be determined well in advance. Perhaps some part-time colleagues might be inclined to increase their loads from time to time.
3. At least a portion of the “departing” mentor’s student load would be temporarily picked up by an administrator, who would thus get a better sense of what mentoring entails.
4. We would institute a mentor “buddy” system, whereby two colleagues would periodically replace one another (like doctors who team up). I realize that this exchange may not always be possible, particularly in the units, but there may be circumstances when this option might work. Voilà my modest proposals! Let’s get the discussion rolling.



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## **Festival of Ideas: Introduction**

### **Mary Klinger, Genesee Valley Center**

A strange thing happened in June at the Genesee Valley Center. For two days there were no appointments with students. No learning contracts or evaluations were written. What did we do? We took an intellectual vacation and called it A Festival of Ideas.

What brought this about? One of GVC's governance committees, Professional Development, surveyed faculty and professional employees last fall asking for their ideas on professional development activities. We found that our subsequent discussions paralleled a college-wide conversation about the importance of professional development and the lack of time to support it. In our day-to-day lives, professional development often takes a back seat to other activities — student appointments, student documents, meetings, recruitment activities. As we all know continued scholarship is a synergetic relationship. It serves the interests of the College as well as the members of that institution.

To help solve this problem we planned a function that would allow professional development activities to become a priority, a get-together that would force us to plan and note it on our "to do" lists. Therefore, we initiated A Festival of Ideas. The purpose was to provide an opportunity to present ideas of interest to the GVC community. These academic exercises could be in the form of a lecture, discussion, performance, etc.; as simple as sharing the ideas of an influential book, to a presentation of research in which we are engaged. The goal of the festival was to encourage a more energetic climate of intellectual and professional growth among faculty and professional employees at GVC and to celebrate that growth.

We need intellectual interaction. We spend our days and evenings in our offices, in study group rooms, at different locations, separated from the rest of our colleagues. Often the only interaction is a wave in the hall or a short discussion about the needs of a particular student. We sit together at meetings but rarely can we eke out the time to discuss our intellectual pursuits.

So we embarked on a cerebral vacation. And what a vacation it was! Topics in physics, economics, management, ancient traditions and social policy were presented and discussed. We undertook interactive activities dealing with Myers-Briggs and aging issues. We were presented with activities on the Internet: online mentoring, NetMeeting, resumes designed specifically for the Internet, and evaluation of history-related web sites. Some presentations dealt with mentoring issues, predicting student retention, program and unit operations. Others were geared toward personal improvement in marketing and communication. We also had a sneak preview of a new PowerPoint presentation to be used at College information sessions as well as a student presentation. Each half-hour presentation was interesting and engaging. Questions and discussions flowed freely. The numerous breaks allowed for collegial interaction and professional sharing.

The Festival was a huge success. It received nothing but positive feedback. What a wonderful way to spend two days. The GV Professional Development Committee already has the dates set for the second annual Festival of Ideas. I have already placed a notation on my "to do" list.

“A learning journal is essentially a vehicle for reflection. Probably all adults reflect, some more than others, and for those who do reflect, being reflective can represent a deeply seated orientation to their lives. For others, the process would seem to come about only when the conditions in their environment are conducive to reflecting, perhaps when there is an incentive to reflect, or some guidance or a particular accentuation of the conditions. A learning journal represents an accentuation of those right conditions — some guidance, some encouragement, helpful questions or exercises and the expectation that journal writing can have a worthwhile consequence, whether at the end or within its process, or as a result of both.”

Jennifer Moon (1999). *Learning Journals: A Handbook for Academics, Students and Professional Development*. London: Kogan Page.

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## **What Do We Know About Aging? (Measuring Facts About Aging With Palmore's Quizzes)** **Margaret Clark-Plaskie, Genesee Valley Center**

In the mid-1970s, Erdman Palmore, a gerontologist at Duke University, wanted to give his students a brief quiz to see what they knew about aging and to stimulate class discussions. He could not find a short, documented quiz on aging in the literature, so he developed his own. In 1977, he published this quiz in *The Gerontologist* and it has since been referred to as "The Facts on Aging Quiz" (FAQ1, for our purposes).

The FAQ1 consists of 25 true/false items — (e.g., Question #1: "The majority of old people [age 65+] are senile [have defective memory, are disoriented or demented].") Palmore provided documentation from various empirical studies and Census data to confirm the validity of each item. Many studies have been conducted using this quiz (in fact, it has been reported to be the most requested reprint in the history of *The Gerontologist*) and, no doubt, countless educators have been using it informally with their own students. There is group reliability across studies, as the average score has remained fairly constant — just above half correct (57 percent), and higher for graduate students and faculty in gerontology (68-83 percent). Indeed, education seems to be the one consistent correlate of these scores.

Palmore proposed several uses of this quiz: (1) to stimulate group discussions; (2) to measure and compare the scores of different groups; (3) to identify the most frequent misconceptions about aging; (4) to indirectly measure attitudes toward aging; and (5) to measure the effects of relevant interventions.

In regard to this last usage, Palmore soon discovered the need for a second version of the quiz in order to counteract "practice effects." So in 1981, he published a second quiz (FAQ2), with another set of 25 true/false items (e.g., Question #1: "A person's height tends to decline in old age."). In his own work with the two quizzes, Palmore reports that individuals score an average of five points lower on FAQ2 than on FAQ1 (the equivalent of approximately one question). He reasoned that this difference was due to his students' relatively greater familiarity with the particular material included on the first quiz. He suggested using the forms for test-retest purposes, but with the addition of five points to the FAQ2 scores.

In 1980, Miller and Dodder noted that quiz scores might not be accurate due to guessing, and they proposed adding a third response option to the true/false format. In 1985, Courtenay and Weidemann did just that, adding a "don't know" option to both quizzes (DK, for our purposes). They found that this eliminated the effects of guessing, leading to a more accurate measure of knowledge (both the percentage correct and incorrect "A learning journal is essentially a vehicle for reflection. Probably all adults reflect, some more than others, and for those who do reflect, being reflective can represent a deeply seated orientation to their lives. For others, the process would seem to come about only when the conditions in their environment are conducive to reflecting, perhaps when there is an incentive to reflect, or some guidance or a particular accentuation of the conditions. A learning journal represents an accentuation of those right conditions — some guidance, some encouragement, helpful questions or exercises and the expectation that journal writing can have a worthwhile consequence, whether at the end or within its process, or as a result of both." Jennifer Moon (1999). *Learning Journals: A Handbook for Academics, Students and Professional Development*. London: Kogan Page. decreased). Also, the difference in mean scores on the two quizzes was eliminated. Palmore now suggests that all users of the quizzes provide that third

option.

In 1988, Palmore published a compilation of all known work with the quizzes. At that point, there were very few studies using the second quiz and no publications reported administering both versions of the quiz with the DK option to the same individuals. Since then, Duerson, Thomas, Chang and Stevens (1992) gave both FAQ1 and FAQ2 to medical students before and after a six-week clerkship. They found FAQ2 scores to be lower than FAQ1 scores at both times of testing, and a small improvement in knowledge and attitude on both tests over time. However, their sample was very specialized and the intervention did not involve any formal education about aging (just interactions with elders). In addition, the methods used to calculate the various scores were not the same methods of scoring set forth by Palmore and no reliability data were reported.

This led to my own research, which I conducted while I was working at a traditional university in the Northeast (prior to joining ESC two years ago). In general, my research questions were:

1. Are FAQ1 and FAQ2 equivalent measures of knowledge about aging?
2. What are the effects of a relevant educational experience upon individuals' knowledge about aging, as per FAQ1 and FAQ2?

Study 1 — Three hundred and eleven undergraduate students in Introduction to Psychology courses, ages 17- 29 ( $M=19.40$ ,  $SD=1.84$ ), participated in this study. Fiftyseven percent were female and 43 percent were male; 83 percent identified themselves as Caucasian, 8 percent as Asian, 5 percent as African American and 4 percent as Hispanic. Ninety-three percent reported having had no education about aging. On average, the participants reported having had "some/frequent" contact with elders (on a scale from 1-5,  $M=3.50$ ,  $SD=1.03$ ). Participants' open-ended descriptions of their interactions with elders were reliably coded by independent raters and 38 percent were "mixed - positive and negative," 28 percent were "positive only," 19 percent were "neutral" and 15 percent were "negative only."

Since the two quizzes were combined to form one 50-item quiz, split-half reliability analyses were conducted. The quizzes show at least a moderate degree of reliability, as alpha for all 50 items = .80; alpha for FAQ1 = .65; alpha for FAQ2 = .69; and alpha for between forms = .68. Three knowledge scores were calculated for each participant's two quizzes, yielding the percentages correct, incorrect and don't know ("ignorance").<sup>2</sup> The group means of these three scores for FAQ1 and FAQ2 were compared using paired samples t-tests. Participants answered a significantly greater percentage of items correctly and used the DK option significantly less on FAQ1 than on FAQ2. (Perhaps this difference was found, unlike in the study by Courtenay and Weidemann, because there were no significant differences found here in percentage incorrect.) The content of the second quiz may truly be less familiar to the average person and 4-5 points should be added to those scores.<sup>3</sup>

There were no effects of gender, race or amount of contact with elders. However, age was a significant correlate of both quiz scores — relatively older participants had greater percent correct and lower percent incorrect. Also, type of contact seems to be significant, as those with negative contact have a lower percent correct than those with positive or mixed contact and greater percent incorrect than all others. In conclusion, it seems that the two quizzes measure knowledge of aging at a comparable level, within a few percentage points, with the DK option. It is useful to consider the percent incorrect and DK, and not just the percent correct.

Study 2 — This study used a test-retest design to measure the effects of a relevant educational experience — namely, taking an undergraduate course on aging. Twenty-two students in a Psychology of Aging course, ages 19-57 ( $M=26.59$ ,  $SD=10.42$ ) participated in this study. Eighty-six percent were female and 14 percent were male; 69 percent identified themselves as Caucasian, 9 percent Asian, 9 percent African American, 9 percent Hispanic and 5 percent Native American. Seventy-seven percent reported not having any education on aging, and on average, they reported "some/frequent" contact with elders ( $M=3.41$ ,  $SD=1.14$ ). Raters reliably coded 43 percent of the participants' self-reported interactions with elders as "mixed — both positive and negative," 24 percent as "positive only," 10 percent as "neutral" and 24 percent as "negative only."

Participants were given the combined quizzes on the first day of class and they were collected without being scored or

discussed; the same measures were administered again on the last day of class. The scoring was the same as in Study 1. After having taken the aging course, students answered a significantly greater percentage of items correctly and a significantly lower percentage of items incorrectly on FAQ1; there was no difference in percent DK. FAQ2, given at times 1 and 2, revealed the same exact pattern of learning. Thus, according to both quizzes, the intervention was successful in terms of changing knowledge about aging. And what if students had only taken one form of the quiz at time 1 and the other form at time 2? Both scenarios (FAQ1 followed by FAQ2 and FAQ2 followed by FAQ1) showed the same pattern of results; thus, there is further evidence of the equivalence of the two quizzes.

It was very interesting that an informal quizzing at our Festival of Ideas seemed to yield a similar range of quiz scores as in the above studies and in Palmore's original inquiries. While this may be evidence of the reliability of the two quizzes, another interpretation might be that certain misconceptions (or lack of knowledge) about aging persist and we have not gotten very far in the last 20 years (with typical scores not being much better than chance). But then again, how many of us have formally studied gerontology? As this research indicates, formal education about aging is a key factor, as are positive interactions with elders and individuals' own ages. In all fairness, other issues to consider include the limitations of true/false questions (indeed, some individuals may "know too much" to simply answer "true" or "false"), generalized knowledge measures versus more domainspecific measures (which might have more predictive validity), and the need for continual updating of content, as facts and figures concerning aging are continually changing. (Refer to Palmore's 1998 book for updated information, including revised items on the FAQs and information about multiple choice formats and domainspecific measures, such as *The Facts on Aging and Mental Health Quiz*. A great resource for quizzes and learning activities about diversity and aging is the 1998 book by Fried and Mehrotra.)

Perhaps it is in our best interest, both personally and professionally (as mentors of adult students), to dispel some of the longstanding myths about aging. In fact, this is an area of great interest to me, as I am always amazed when individuals faced with contradictions to aging stereotypes continue to maintain their original views, dismissing the contrary evidence as "an exception to the rule." I look forward to investigating this as I mentor more and more ESC students in aging-related studies (including the recently revised CDL course, Aging and Society, and its new web version), as well as in future research.

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## Notes

1. *The Gerontologist* is a professional journal sponsored by The Gerontological Society of America, which is an interdisciplinary association.
2. Each FAQ can yield three attitudinal scores (proaging, anti-aging and net bias), as well as the three knowledge scores. However, the attitudinal scores depend upon respondents answering certain items incorrectly and are thereby confounded with knowledge about aging. While I did calculate and analyze these attitudinal scores, those results are not discussed in this article, since the FAQs are not the most valid measures of attitudes toward aging.
3. Some of the most common misconceptions (as per incorrect answers) included: overestimating the percentage of elders who are institutionalized; believing that older adults have more accidents than younger adults (at home, work and driving); perceiving older adults as being more bored, irritated or angry than they report themselves to be; overestimating the percentage of our population that is elderly; underestimating the average socioeconomic status of the elderly; and thinking that older adults have more difficulties adjusting to the empty nest than they actually do.

The role of the mentor is to facilitate learning in such a way that the knowledge, skills, or competencies connect to action in the present and possibilities in the future. This requires building on the learner's experience, providing a conducive environment for learning, and appropriately challenging, supporting, and providing vision for the learner."

Lois J. Zachary (2000). *The Mentor's Guide: Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, p.28.

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## **Online Mentoring: A Field Experience with NetMeeting**

**Charles C. Blocher, Genesee Valley Center**

As we explore the new frontier of interconnectivity between students and mentors, online mentoring has and will continue to be a developing means to work with students. Online mentoring has been with us since we all started using e-mail to work with students at a distance in our mentoring capacity. In this article on NetMeeting, an online Internet software program, I want to discuss what I think is a unique way to mentor students in mathematics online.

Online or electronic mentoring (e-mentoring) started with the telephone. In effect, using the telephone, we have been working with students to continue the efforts of mentoring between face-to-face meetings. ESC took another step in implementing e-mentoring with its mentors and students through the establishment of e-mail accounts on our original e-mail system, the VAX. Another project that demonstrated the use of e-mail was PipeLINK (Walker and Rodger, 1996), created in order to mentor young women through a relationship with professional women in the computer science field. Like our earliest efforts in using electronic mentoring, the primary means of communication in PipeLINK is e-mail in between face-to-face meetings. The results have been an increased interest in computer science among women (Walker and Rodger, 1996).

In another example, e-mentoring of elementary education interns provides opportunities for mentee and mentor relationships to continue outside of the face-to-face activities, using e-mail as well as video teleconferencing and teleconferencing (Floyd, et al., 1995). This example and others show that there is a "connectedness" that develops between the mentor and the mentee through the e-mentoring communication process. This deeper relationship, which is facilitated by continued e-mentoring, also helps to foster an increased trust. (Powell and Hubschman). And, there is no doubt that this "trust" is an important element in the learning process.

The use of e-mail within e-mentoring brings attention to a student's development of reflective and writing skills, and allows for collaboration between mentor (and other subject matter experts) and mentee. (Mihkelson, 1996). E-mail also provides opportunities for global interaction among mentors and mentees, which has been demonstrated by ESC's distance learning program as well as by the effectiveness of regular mentor/mentee communications between face-to-face meetings. No doubt, e-mail does have some drawbacks, such as the difficulty of expressing emotions and non-verbal communications. Another such disadvantage occurs in the area of the performing arts, where face-to-face interaction must be present to carry out the learning process (Mihkelson, 1997). A final drawback, and the reason for writing this article, has been the mentoring of students in mathematical studies. This kind of learning seems to be especially difficult via electronic means due to the nature of the language being used.

The difficulty of mentoring mathematics at a distance has been a concern at the Corning Unit at ESC. There have been many projects using electronic means to facilitate a mentoring partnership between two people. However, most of these projects have taken place in a context that uses the English language to facilitate this discussion. In the case of mathematics, the English language can, and has been, a difficult means to explain mathematical concepts, so symbols are used to represent the language of mathematics. This raises several issues, of which the number one is: How can one write in the language of mathematics through e-mail? One could use special fonts; however, they must be installed for all of

those that need to use them, or people must be given detailed written explanation for each mathematical problem or concept. This tends to be time consuming work. I have found that one solution to the mentoring of students in mathematics is an Internetbased software program called Microsoft NetMeeting.

The idea of using NetMeeting came about because students needed mathematical mentoring in subject material not bound by time constraint and face-to-face meetings. Most adult students have time constraints and the need to ask pertinent mathematical questions and have them responded to in a timely manner. Providing real answers to a student's question helps facilitate continued learning. By integrating the use of audio, video, chat and white boarding across the Internet for communications, NetMeeting seeks to do this (Summers, 1998). Typically a mentor mentoring in mathematics uses verbal and visual communications to transfer knowledge to the student. NetMeeting can facilitate this kind of communication so important to one-to-one mentoring and to learning mathematics.

The e-mentoring of mathematics using NetMeeting has several parts that are needed to ensure success between the mentor and student. There is at least one face-to-face meeting, appropriate hardware and software, training, and the need for some familiarity with computer technology. In this experience, the face-to-face meeting was used to establish a relationship, to discuss the student's need, as well as to assess the student's ability to use NetMeeting.

In order for a student and mentor to participate, each must have a computer; Internet connection; and the software, Microsoft NetMeeting. The process is described as follows:

1. Installation of NetMeeting must be performed on both the student and mentor computers. Sound cards are required for the real time audio communications.
2. An Internet connection must be established between the mentor and the student.
3. Either the mentor or the student must know the unique Internet address to establish the NetMeeting connection.
4. Once the NetMeeting connection is established, the session between the mentor and the student can begin.

The features of NetMeeting consist of those mentioned above, including file transfer and remote desktop control. (Discussion of the latter two features is not within the scope of this essay.) The two main features used with the mathematics e-mentoring is the audio chat and the white board. The audio chat mode provides for the real time discussion between the mentor and the student. The white board provides for the visual presentation of mathematics.

Some mentor and student facility with technology is necessary to facilitate NetMeeting's use. In the experiment at the Corning Unit, most of the students using NetMeeting had a technology background and the one that did not had a willingness to learn about technology. The training aspect consisted of NetMeeting introduction and installation, followed by an hour session to understand and work out any problems that might occur during the initial NetMeeting connection. If the student was not as familiar with computer technology, we had to develop a different form of training. In this experiment, the mentor was well versed in computer technology.

In this project, a session normally consisted of making the connection, discussing the concerns of the student (normally sent prior by e-mail), and the facilitation of learning. When making the connection with NetMeeting, the mentor e-mailed a unique electronic Internet address to the student in NetMeeting to establish the link.

Once the connection was established, student and mentor would discuss the nature of the problem or student concerns. This was accomplished by using the audio capabilities of NetMeeting via a microphone connected through the sound card. All verbal communication was done in this manner. Since mathematics is a visual language, the NetMeeting's white board was used to illustrate the problem in the same manner as using a white board in a mentor's office. This is a unique feature of e-mentoring using NetMeeting: The mentor is capable of illustrating the solution to the problem. The student is also able to interact with the mentor in "real time." Another aspect to NetMeeting is its success in enhancing learning by allowing the student to electronically save the white board screens and use them as reference material. Such a feature also helps the student to demonstrate his/her knowledge of mathematics to the mentor in the moment.



The success of e-mentoring using NetMeeting was realized through the increased learning acquired by the student, and by the student's demonstrated proficiency in the mathematical concepts covered in the study. This is only an anecdotal conclusion and more work must be done to enhance outcomes of e-mentoring students in mathematics. However, the advantages of using NetMeeting in the e-mentoring environment were: a) the ability to more immediately respond to a student's needs; b) less limitation on time and space; and c) growing familiarization with the computer.

The main disadvantage of this experience was the technology and its reliability. There were several times through the experiment that either the mentor or the student had Internet interruptions, NetMeeting installation problems and/or hardware failures. In spite of these disadvantages, the experiment was a success in developing further points for research, such as providing an asynchronous complement to NetMeeting and looking at different learning styles used by the student within the e-mentoring environment.

In conclusion, e-mentoring using NetMeeting has been an experiment in broadening our mentoring capabilities for our students. With the emergence of distance learning and the use of the Internet to facilitate this learning, e-mentoring will actually give mentoring an advantage. It will allow us to pay attention to individual students — to their problems, their styles and their particular interests. Since mentoring is at the heart of Empire State College, using e-mentoring and other newly designed software packages will serve as another way to enhance the mentoring environment and will also continue to propel ESC in the future.

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ALL ABOUT  
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## **Organizations and Diverse Populations**

**Mary Klinger, Genesee Valley Center**

For many years, diversity has been a major topic in management magazines, training workshops and boardrooms. There have been many legitimate attempts to integrate diverse and underrepresented populations into organizations. How best to accomplish integration has become an important and controversial issue.

Only in recent decades have attempts to diversify organizations been demonstrated, and a commitment by management to include those who have been traditionally discriminated against due to ethnicity, race, age, gender, or ability, been made. In my opinion, however, it has been a long hard fight with only mixed results. With the amount of time and energy spent by organizations on this issue, business should be seeing diversity problems abating. Instead there are disproportionate numbers of unemployed in many of these populations. For example, 67 percent of adults with disabilities and 74 percent with severe disabilities are not working. Among disabled minorities, the numbers are worse. According to the statistics from the 1994 U.S. census, 72.2 percent of African-Americans with disabilities and 85.5 percent with severe disabilities are not working, and 51.9 percent of Hispanics with disabilities and 75.4 percent with severe disabilities are not working. To add further insult to injury, those within these categories who are employed are likely to be underemployed.

Why is it important to employ these populations? First, through continued civil rights recognition and socioeconomic standing our nation believes that every person should be afforded equal opportunity. Second, these diverse populations represent a wealth of untapped talent while corporations are paying large sums of money to bring in foreign nationals to remedy the recent labor shortage. Moreover, there is a strong desire among discriminated populations to work and contribute to their own and society's well being. Seventy-two percent of Americans with disabilities, 16 and older, who are unemployed want to work.

If all these Americans want to work and there is a shortage of workers in this country and organizations are spending time and money in diversity training activities, it would seem logical that the problem should be approaching solution. However, it is obvious that it is not.

There are two reasons why we have not solved the problem of diversity in the workplace. The first is perceptual and attitudinal barriers. Stereotyping is a practice with echoes from an unenlightened past. It is also about fear. How do I act? What if I say the wrong thing? Parents teach their children not to stare, but when a person of color or someone in a wheelchair approaches them on the street the "Do not stare" order becomes equivalent to "Just ignore him." Many employers also perceive a legal barrier. They erroneously believe that hiring a person from an underrepresented population means he or she can never be fired because of legal entanglements resulting from a civil rights law such as the Americans with Disabilities Act. These are all perceptual/attitudinal barriers and are very difficult to overcome because what the perceiver sees is his or her perception of reality.

My research in recent years has focused on organizations and diverse populations, particularly the disabled population, which is the first underrepresented group I studied. Research shows that perceptual barriers towards the disabled exist in the workplace. It also shows that these obstacles can be ameliorated. Part of the problem is the affirmation process for the

disabled individual and the employer. People with disabilities often need better qualifications than people without disabilities to achieve comparable employment (Klinger 1996). Disabled individuals may also feel the need to neutralize their handicap by adopting a self-exacting attitude; exclusion often provides the impetus for the disabled individual to overcompensate. Through additional education or experience, they seek ways to prove themselves. In many situations once a person with a disability is hired, employers are normally satisfied with an employee's performance and encourage educational and promotional activities (Klinger 1996). I believe that further research will show comparable results with other underrepresented populations in the workplace.

It seems that educational internships might be a way to help accomplish this need for additional credentialing. Although internships have been viewed in the past as unsuccessful by some, recent well-managed internship programs have shown very positive results. At ESC, I attempted to apply my finding that meaningful experience can assist people with disabilities to gain satisfying employment. Although the on-site supervisors of the internships were impressed with the abilities of the students, perceptual/attitudinal barriers appeared. My interns encountered misperceptions of their abilities. They were treated as though they were not capable of quality work and due to their lack of shared experiences, no bonding among peers took place.

Jane is a good example. Jane (not her real name) is an ESC alumna who is blind. In her last contract for a B.S. degree with a concentration in business administration, she developed an internship with the principal of a local school. After discussions with the principal, Jane and I were comfortable that she would be doing suitable work commensurate with her ESC concentration and future goals. A few weeks later I found Jane answering the office phones and doing typing. After pointed discussions with Jane and the principal we worked through some obvious perceptual/attitudinal barriers. Jane eventually was doing work at the school that was akin to a business program developer and garnering rave reviews from the administration.

So why is this happening? Why do people with disabilities need to prove themselves in order to gain suitable employment? Why is it so difficult to set up a meaningful internship experience? I have identified one area — perceptual and attitudinal barriers. I also believe that there are other hurdles to overcome in what organizational behaviorists call the “culture” of many organizations.

According to Edgar Schein (1992), the guru in this area, organizational culture is:

a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group [organization] learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.

Most organizational cultures were formed from the initial successes of an organization, years before people with disabilities and other underrepresented populations were attempting to achieve equality in the workplace. For example, until 30 years ago, most people with disabilities were either in institutions or hidden at home and, therefore, not easily recognized in the cultures of an organization. I would contend that with the structure of most existing cultures and the ever-present perceptual/attitudinal barriers, an easy infusion of underrepresented populations into the workplace is not possible.

The techniques used today and in the past have only allowed for a person hired by an organization to assimilate into that culture; a process known in popular parlance as “learning to fit in.” This is difficult enough for anyone new to a job but it may be an insurmountable task for someone who is perceived as different and is not acknowledged by the culture. Placement services sometimes use the “beg, place and pray” technique (Fabian et al 1994). Counselors beg a company to hire a person with a disability, place them and then pray that it works.

I contend that there must be a better, more effective, and more successful approach. The burden needs to be placed on the organization rather than on the new employee. There needs to be a way to recognize diversity as an asset in organizations so that underrepresented populations can become part of the culture. Effective cultural change can be a slow process. I believe that good, solid internship-type experiences, which are sustained and promoted throughout the organization can begin to produce a cultural change that allows a more accepting atmosphere for people of diverse populations. A well-managed internship program will create successes and will effect change.

To that end, my recent research with the President's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities studied their summer internship program to collect data to evaluate and search out effective internship programs. Coupled with the research on organizational change by Schein, Chris Argyris, Peter Senge, Peter Drucker, R. Roosevelt Thomas, and others, I hope to find a model that could be useful.

The perceptual/attitudinal barriers and the culture of organizations both have a detrimental effect on the opportunities for underrepresented populations. Creating a model for cultural change, which will stimulate a new way of thinking in organizations, will assist organizations to readily accept all people into their ranks. According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, a severe disability means that a person cannot perform one or more activities of daily living, has at least one specific impairment, or is a long-time user of assistive devices.

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In my experience, many more learners are at the threshold of change than realize this fact. Even those who start out saying, 'I just want a piece of paper' or 'I need this for my job' often find that what they really wanted was to look at their life choices in new ways. I, therefore, see my task as more complex than simply providing information or skills training. How I approach the learner's real needs will affect what is really learned."

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ALL ABOUT  
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## Goals for Adult Degree Program Students

Capital University, Dayton, Ohio

*Note: In a paper offered at this year's conference of The Adult Higher Education Alliance (Alliance) and the American Council on Education (ACE), Roberta Hartmann and Andrew Carlson of Capital University discussed ways in which faculty from the Adult Degree Program (ADP) have attempted to articulate the overall learning goals of their program. The goals are included here as an expression of one institution's efforts to define its own learning outcomes and the "behaviors" associated with them. Thanks to Roberta Hartmann and Andrew Carlson for their permission to include this material in All About Mentoring.*

## Goals for ADP Students

In keeping with our mission, we believe that all learners in the Adult Degree Program should be able to demonstrate that they have an understanding of what it means to be a self-managed learner, a lifelong learner, a collaborative learner, self-aware learner, and an experiential learner.

1. ADP students will be self-managed learners, as indicated by the following behaviors:

- Establish long range and short range learning goals/objectives that are reasonable, clear and direct;
- Effectively manage their time for learning (observe university procedures and policies, budget time, discern and execute the steps required to complete learning tasks, complete responsibilities on time);
- Become able to design and execute interesting and worthwhile learning projects;
- Avoid duplicating learning and settings for learning by seeking out truly new situations.

2. ADP students will be lifelong learners, as indicated by the following behaviors:

- Learn how to keep current in major or professional field;
- Develop learning plans for their future academic and experiential learning;
- Identify skills and knowledge that needs to be developed in areas of new learning;
- Continue to reflect upon and learn from new experiences, and transfer skills and knowledge from one area of expertise to another, as appropriate;
- Adapt principles of college learning to future learning;
- Continue to develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes over their lifetimes;

3. ADP students will be collaborative learners, as indicated by the following behaviors:

- Identify collaboration as it occurs on the basis of authority in the organization, collaboration among friends or among strangers, collaboration through impersonal media, collaboration among conflicting members of a group where each shares different outcome goals, and collaboration with a group with a common goal;
- Identify learning that is best achieved in groups;
- Test one's newly developed ideas or theories with others who have trustworthy judgment;
- Assist others in learning;

- Acknowledge instructor as resource and collaborator rather than as arbitrary authority;
- Maintain focus and flexibility as needed in group processes;
- List and identify collaboration which they have experienced, and distinguish the kinds they prefer and the kinds they find difficult;

4. ADP students will be self-aware learners, as indicated in the following behaviors:

- Identify learning and teaching styles;
- Adjust to multiple learning situations/settings;
- Help others become aware of their learning;
- Identify and explore relationships between one's life and one's learning;
- Sort through the theoretical and the unfamiliar to find points of (dis)similarity to one's own situation;
- Understand the roots, the self-contradictions and the implications of one's own primary values;
- Identify the inadequacy of personal experience for drawing conclusions;
- Recognize one's relationship with the "other" — whether near and individual or far and multiple;

5. ADP students will be experiential learners, as indicated by the following behaviors:

- Identify, organize and articulate learning as it occurs in non-traditional, non-academic settings;
- Determine how to help others recognize or construct meaning from their learning activities;
- Identify the limits of knowledge acquired by experience and identify means of augmenting the experience to make it more meaningful;
- Assess other learners' experiential learning;
- Value interactive and active process and understand learning through group exercises;
- Reflect upon, compare and evaluate active means of learning.

ALL ABOUT  
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## Reflecting on Origins III The Experience of an Experiment: An Interview with Tom Clark

*Dr. F. Thomas Clark was a dean at Empire State College and then the director of ESC's Center for Improving Individualized Education. (Tom was at ESC from 1973- 1979.) This interview, conducted by Richard Bonnabeau, was part of the oral history project that became the foundation of Bonnabeau's book, The Promise Continues (1996). The interview was done on 16 March 1990 when Tom Clark was president of Rockland Community College, Suffern, New York. Thanks to Richard Bonnabeau and to Tom Clark for their patience and help in providing an edited version of the original interview for All About Mentoring.*

**Richard Bonnabeau:** So, you think that developing this historical review of ESC is a worthwhile project?

**Tom Clark:** Yes. I think it's an important project because ESC was such an important experiment. It was radical at the time of its founding in many ways — not only because of the population that it thought about serving, but in the way the instructional loads were developed to serve that population. And before too many of us who were involved in the early years of the College are no longer around, it's probably a good idea to capture our thoughts. That's why it's "worthwhile."

I also think that we've just been through a decade, certainly at the federal policy level, of incredible conservatism. The Reagan administration, from my perspective, was a very cynical, inhumane administration in terms of social policy, particularly its educational policy. Empire State College ran against the tide of that conservative social policy, which is another reason that it is important to capture and preserve its history. It's also timely because we may be seeing some renewal of interest in experimentation, which we haven't seen much of in more than ten years.

**RB:** When did you first join Empire State College?

**TC:** The simple answer is that I was employed by ESC in September 1973. But my first experience with Empire State College predated my employment. I was director of the Center for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. One of the projects, in which I was involved with a number of my doctoral students, was a study commissioned by the then governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Frank Sargent. The thrust of the project was a review of what was happening nationally in regard to post-secondary educational experiments that served nontraditional learners. I had written a grant proposal to undertake that project for the governor and it was a competitive RFP. Our center got the grant. Donald Dwight, who was the lieutenant governor for the commonwealth, chaired that committee. The goal of the study was to create the Massachusetts Open University. In putting together a plan, I thought it was very important to study ESC, among other experimenting institutions. It was then, really, a very, very new concept. There were very few students then. There was really only one center, which was the Northeast Center in Albany. There were centers being organized in Rochester and in other locations when I first visited the College with three of my doctoral students. We interviewed Art Chickering, Bill Dodge, Jeanne Brockmann; and we were very impressed with the quality of thinking, particularly regarding how you could serve students at a distance — students who were working. The idea of individual learning contracts seemed to be a very well thought out instructional mode and one that we could adapt for use statewide in Massachusetts. I was also, at that point in time, director of the University Without Walls program at the University of Massachusetts. We were also looking at other University Without Walls (UWW) operations. Skidmore College had a very

fledgling program at that time. We also visited a UWW program at the University of Minnesota, the New College at the University of Alabama, and others. It was a wonderful study. But, as often happens, elections came, and both the governor and the economy changed in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Open University is now an archival piece of American educational history.

**RB:** That was in 1971. How did your connection to ESC remain alive?

**TC:** I continued correspondence with Art Chickering because, as we moved toward completion of the Massachusetts Open University proposal, there were many questions and issues that created an opportunity for important dialogue. Chick (Chickering) called one day in June, 1973, and said: "Do you have any interest in interviewing and being a candidate for a dean's position at one of our regional learning centers?" I didn't really, because I didn't know the College well enough to really know whether or not I was qualified, although I had been director of the University Without Walls program at U Mass, which was a similar operation. UWW was similar in many ways, but also decidedly dissimilar. It was part of a big campus, and I was directing it while in charge of a doctoral program. I called Chick back and said, "I'm not really certain that I know enough or that I would be qualified. I would also be moving from a faculty to an administrative position." But he said: "Why don't you just come and spend a couple of days at ESC and go through the interview process?" So I came and interviewed with Chick, with Bill Dodge, who I had met before, again with Jeanne Brockmann, Loren Baritz, Jim Hall and the faculty of the Northeast Learning Center.

**RB:** Isn't it the case that the faculty didn't want to meet with you?

**TC:** Yes. The faculty made that quite clear in the interview process. It was thus a unique interview situation — to be told unanimously by faculty members you're to be working with that if appointed, they don't want you or anybody else in that position! It was a strange experience. But there was something that also drew me to the College. I was very intrigued by the philosophy and by ESC's educational values. And I thought at the time that the individualized contract learning concept was such an empowering mode of instruction for everybody. I was intrigued.

**RB:** And mentoring?

**TC:** The system of mentoring also seemed to me to be a very intentional and powerful modus operandi for going about the business of post-secondary education, or any level of education. It has its roots in a time-honored tradition of the tutorial. We thought that in many ways it was a very new and radical idea, and many educators thought that it was. But, of course, in many ways it isn't. It's a very old and very humane time-tested idea about the process of becoming learned. The bottom line is that learning about Empire State College did not come about for me by picking up the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, looking at an ad and saying, "Hmmm, Empire State College!" My introduction to the College happened in a very different way, and the invitation to be interviewed for the position came in a very different way as well. And I took the job, even though the faculty made it very, very, very clear in the interview, and even after I had accepted the position, that although I might be a nice person, they didn't need a dean.

**RB:** Did the center have a programmatic thrust as far as trying to reach certain student constituencies?

**TC:** I think there was some interest in that, but I don't think that it came to fruition at the level that was anticipated. We clearly had a much more diverse array of students than state government workers, for example. But, in a sense, mentors developed specialties. Mentors like Pearl Mindell and Sylvain Nagler were very involved in working with people who were in the social service sector. Bill Franconis, of course, was working with students in the performing arts particularly. At one point, I think Bob Morrison was working with 95 students, most of whom were state troopers. So, I think it's fair to say that there was some thought that students would be principally state workers, but many were not.

**RB:** Why do you think there was animosity, or perceived animosity, between faculty and administration at the center?

**TC:** The center had real enrollment problems, real morale problems, a real disdain for having administrators, and lots and lots of other problems too. But when I left the center, I think it was in good shape, at least in my judgment. We had a good record keeping system. Bobbi Kamil had done an excellent job in terms of identifying all kinds of adjunct instructors, tutors and sites for learning. Mike Plummer was a wonderful associate dean, and we had come together as a group of



people.

Part of the problem was that the Northeast Center was the guinea pig of the College in many ways. There wasn't a set structure. In other words, people were not employed with the notion that this was going to be a traditional kind of institution pedagogically, methodologically or necessarily in terms of governance. There were no precedents. So, I think it's fair to say that people would also assume that we would make up our own governance system and that it would be collegial. And, of course, the administration hired very independent, outspoken, liberal faculty — people who were very much anti-authority. So I don't think when you create a situation with no clear expectations, and then hire bright, independent, outspoken faculty, you should be surprised if there are problems with governance, as there certainly were!

**RB:** Why do you think the College was attracted to hiring faculty who were so independent?

**TC:** The late 60s and early 70s were a time of change in American society. It was a time of radical change in American universities. For example, several weeks before I came for the interviews at ESC, I had participated in a demonstration with students at U Mass. The structure of the university and of the curriculum were being questioned; so was what was studied. Authority and laws all over the country were being questioned. Look at the civil rights movements. I think if you set up an institution that is avowedly an experiment, you will attract people who are interested in experimenting. You're not going to get somebody who is interested in doing things the same way that they have been doing them for years. Educational radicals were attracted to places like ESC, to the university without walls programs, to The Evergreen State College, etc. These were people of all ages; people who had just completed their doctoral work and people who had been teaching for many years; people who were fed up with business as usual. And I think Empire State College looked like a breath of fresh air embodied as an institution. It attracted all kinds of free spirited thinkers, and most of those folks were independent and secure by nature.

**RB:** And these "free spirited thinkers" were in the administration as well as in the faculty?

**TC:** My experience, my impressions, were that there was a mixture. You had people like Art Chickering. He understood and was encouraging a kind of free thinking to a point. Any experiment has to have some structure. And I think that's difficult. Many people —including students — were attracted to ESC because they thought this was a place where they could "do their own thing" and get credit. In fact, we used to try and talk to people about the fact that that was not what we were about. You may do your own thing; and if there is serious, rigorous, demonstrated work that accompanies it, credit is granted. But you can't just do your own thing and say: "Hi, here I am. I'm breathing and I'd like a baccalaureate degree!" We were also experimenting with evaluating learning from work and life experience. Many, many, many hundreds of thousands of hours were spent on discussions of that distinction. Is it life experience credit or is it learning from work and life experience? It's obviously the latter, but the tension was always there.

But going back to your question, I believe there was a real split within the administration that later materialized. There was both a difference in philosophy and in style. Chickering embodied one position; Jim Hall another, and Loren Baritz still another. And even in my interview for the ESC position, I didn't see a lot of unity of philosophy. This was actually one of the reasons I almost didn't take the job. I didn't know if these key administrators were in agreement. I decided, for better or worse, that this situation might be a strength, because those differences might be complementary, as differences often are. In retrospect, I think they were unresolved and became very divisive.

**RB:** The original plan of the College anticipates a broad spectrum of "nontraditional" approaches to education. Couldn't the range of perspectives accommodate those differences?

**TC:** One of the reasons I was attracted to the College was because of that "range." However, the spectrum, particularly the difference between individualized contract learning and group studies, was the topic of incredibly heated debates among the deans at the time I was a dean. The wonder of Empire State College was that you can have students select. In fact, for students who are self-assured and self-structuring, we negotiate contracts and get out of their way. But for students who need structure, but for whom the traditional classroom at a college campus is not appropriate for many personal reasons — whether they're single heads of households or working, or they just don't like classroom instruction (lots of people don't and there's nothing wrong with them!) — workshops and seminars are appropriate. There's something wrong, in my judgment, with the way we structure education. At ESC we had a continuum from the classroom to the seminar or the

occasional seminar that might be more free wheeling, to internships or the job used as part of the learning situation, to the tutorial with a very well constructed guide. Proponents of group studies were seen as deviants. Some administrators said: “Well, you’re only trying to generate FTEs by putting people in groups.” I remember saying: “Hold it! Hold it! That’s not what we’re trying to do.” In fairness, I think the concern about groups was valid, although I didn’t see it as clearly or as much of a problem, because I knew our faculty. That faculty was not about to recreate the traditional classroom. They were a dedicated, excellent faculty who had some different ideas. But I think that was, for example, Art Chickering’s fear, and it may have been well grounded at the time, given where the institution was. By that point in time — by about 1973 — many “experiments” were starting to no longer be experiments or were just dying.

**RB:** Obviously, there were deans who supported individualized learning to the exclusion of structured learning.

**TC:** I’d like to call you on that one, because I think individualized contract learning is highly structured. It’s perhaps more structured than the typical classroom. Just because there isn’t a building and there aren’t seats in rows and it’s not Monday, Wednesday and Friday, doesn’t mean that there’s not a very, very elegant structure in a well done learning contract, in the same way that there’s a very elegant structure in a well done class. There are also sloppy contracts and, God knows, there are sloppy classes in which there may not even be a syllabus. To me, the learning contract is an intentional guide. The learning is negotiated between the faculty member and the student. So there is structure. It just means that the particular structure calls for a lot more self-discipline by the student, and an ability to be self-structured. That was an important learning for me. I was, and still am, very, very committed to this form of learning. But what I’ve learned since, is that contracts don’t work for everybody. Some people need the imposition of structure, because it enables them to learn. They need Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 9 o’clock. They may not need it forever, but at certain points in their lives, they need that structure.

We did an experiment at Rockland Community College with some of the students who needed remedial work in math. We let them elect when they would come to study. A wonderful senior faculty member told me: “You know, this isn’t working very well. The students aren’t coming, and I think they may need more structure.” So the next semester, we set up another experiment and there was no question that the group needed Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 9 o’clock. They achieved and succeeded with an imposed structure. I think I’ve learned a lot about structure. But at ESC, while I was dean and later when I was director for the Center for Improving Individualized Education, these issues about structure and individual learning contracts were never resolved. At least I don’t think it were ever resolved.

**RB:** Can we move to the Center for Individualized Education? How did it come into existence?

**TC:** I had been dean in Albany for over two years and I’d also worked with Chick on a grant proposal to the Danforth Foundation. The grant established five national centers for the improvement of undergraduate teaching and learning. One was at Harvard. It focused on the training of doctoral students to develop both a professional interest and expertise in teaching as well as research. The Stanford center focused on the development of interdisciplinary curricula in teaching. The center at Northwestern was really working on faculty development and was interested in teaching effectiveness at the undergraduate level. The center at Spellman was really a consortial effort of historically Black colleges in the Atlanta area. The SUNY grant was located at ESC. The idea was to individualize undergraduate teaching. I was persuaded by Chick to leave the Albany center and take on the position of full-time director of the center. The Penn State Center for the Study of Higher Education did an evaluation of all the Danforth Foundation Centers. In their judgment — this isn’t me talking — ours was the only one that reached national visibility, national prominence. The sad thing is that the grant had originally been issued for five years, but the Danforth board changed its mind and decided to no longer engage in national funding after three years. So our five year plan never really came to fruition. At the pinnacle, we had a national conference with 275 institutions participating. We had publications; we had funded faculty research, particularly at ESC; we had an active consortium of about 20 institutions. In one year, I did faculty workshops at 52 institutions, by invitation. And then, wham! The funding was gone.

**RB:** There was an important ESC faculty development component of this, wasn’t there?

**TC:** I always thought that faculty development at ESC is an essential ingredient. Faculty serve a very special role. You are not born a mentor. You may have some proclivities and some analogous experiences, but most people who are going through Ph.D. programs don’t find out very much about teaching in classrooms, let alone teaching one-to-one. So how can

we expect faculty to mentor unless we teach them how to do it? How do we expect them to be excellent in what they do? Too often, colleges like Rockland and Empire State, which are very different, sort of throw faculty in and say, “Well, look around and talk to somebody. Model some behaviors. You’re smart; you’ll pick it up; just do it!” I think it’s both very unfair and often lowers productivity and morale.

**RB:** Would you then say the primary purpose of the Center for Individualized Education was to help the professional development of new ESC faculty?

**TC:** That was only one purpose. Danforth was very interested in faculty development at ESC, but also within the whole SUNY system. For example, in the first year, our target in the grant was to have completed faculty development activities about individualized learning at eight other SUNY institutions, which meant that we had to negotiate entry and so forth. This was a bear. Interestingly enough, I think the first workshop we did was at Brockport. There were about 30 faculty there. There was real interest. And it was fun — a great two days. I was invited back for the next two years, and by the last time I did it, I think there were something like 125 faculty members who came to the workshop. So it was faculty development for SUNY, it was research on individualized contract learning, and it was dissemination of the model. Those were the three major purposes.

**RB:** Did you measure the impact that you had outside ESC?

**TC:** We tried to do follow-up research. One measure was simply a quantity issue. How many workshops did we do and how many faculty members were involved? That was relatively simple. In institutions in which we had the three-year consortial relationships and we saw the institutions really implement projects, we did more. We went back and interviewed faculty members. We also interviewed students to ascertain whether or not they found contract learning effective. We kept careful notes, but much of the research was anecdotal. I think that was valid, because it was really “action research.” We were working with people in the “now” time, if you will. We were working with their problems in moving their work forward. We had dozens of faculty and administrators who would call the center from all over the country and say: “I’m having this problem. What do you suggest I do?” So we did interventions.

**RB:** How did you help these institutions and the faculty working on individualizing learning and on contract learning establish any legitimacy?

**TC:** Principally through conversations about outcomes and looking — always looking — for analogies. We used to ask people to be very careful with illustrative samples that we used in our workshops, and to parallel learning outcomes to courses in traditional institutions. That was deliberate because I didn’t want the critics to be able to attack contract learning by saying that it was watered down and superficial in terms of learning outcomes. It’s interesting to study traditional course catalogs and syllabi from that time. One didn’t find out very much about what learning outcomes were! But it was possible to create analogs in terms of themes. So we developed a whole array of these hypothetical courses in contract format. A faculty member could pick one up and say: “Well, the mode may be different in terms of how we interact with students, but this is good stuff!”

**RB:** One of the things that came out of our recent Middle States activities in 1989 was that, time and again, faculty would say how much the Center for Individualized Education meant to their professional development and how it served to bring the faculty together.

**TC:** Our early faculty development seminars were a week long. The faculty came on Monday and they left on Friday. I did not see the seminar as any indoctrination to Empire State College. It was an orientation to ESC. And there’s a big difference. Those were rich times. Activities included panels of students, panels of faculty, role plays that were real role plays in which the “student” and the “mentor” had to negotiate a contract, write a contract and then describe what kind of criteria they were going to use for evaluation. A lot of this was new stuff for a lot of people. So, often days were 12 hours in length. You could go through the lounge at midnight, one or two o’clock in the morning and see people that had never met each other really going at these issues. They were rich, very rich, academically challenging faculty development activities. My goal was that, at the end of the week, mentors would feel comfortable when they went back to their centers — sitting down with students and having a sense of self-confidence engaging in the dialog, which is involved in negotiating a learning contract. It was also important, when they sat on their first center assessment committee, that they

knew what a portfolio was, that they had been through the process of review. We took actual portfolios, and we loaded them with all kinds of issues that were intentionally meant to raise discussion. By the time they left this orientation, they had been a member of an assessment committee, they had negotiated at least three different contracts, albeit in role play; they had met actual Empire State College students; and they had met the president, vice presidents and some of the deans.

**RB:** That sounds like what a meaningful faculty orientation should be.

**TC:** I also believed that what we were doing, perhaps idealistically, was welcoming people into a special community of scholars, to a special kind of college — a very unique and important institution that had to make it, had to prove itself not simply as an organization, but had to say that this is an important and viable way to serve people who very often don't have other options. That was a very real driving force. They were exhausting times, but they were full, good times. I think that those seminars for faculty, done by faculty, made a difference.

**RB:** So would you say that the center has a legacy inside and outside of ESC?

**TC:** Many of the collegial relationships developed during the years at the center were rich and were also sustained. In fact, many of the institutions where I, as the representative of the center, did development work, still have a model of contract learning in place. So the Center for Individualized Education does have a legacy. And I think that some of the materials we developed still hold up, 15 years later, which isn't bad. I have missed it. Many faculty at ESC and at other institutions contributed to the work of the center, and many individuals were critical to its success — among them Art Chickering, Rhoda Wald, Lois Lamdin, Bobbi Kamil, Jack Lindquist, Tim Lehmann, Bill Laidlaw. I was sorry when the decision was made that the funds were not available to continue the work. It was an important part of the experiment

ALL ABOUT  
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### **Submissions to *All About Mentoring***

If you have read a book or article that interested you; if you have attended a stimulating conference; if you have had a valuable, surprising or difficult mentoring experience you would be willing to describe; or if you have a comment on any part of this issue or on topics/concerns relevant to our mentoring community, please consider writing about them for *All About Mentoring*.

If you have developed written materials for your students that may be of good use to others; if you have a scholarly paper-in-progress or a talk that you presented (however informal); or if you have a short story, poem, drawings or photographs, please consider submitting them as well.

Please send *All About Mentoring* reports on your reassignments and sabbaticals. Descriptions of what you did and reflections on your on-going professional work offer us an opportunity to learn more about the interests of colleagues, and about the range of scholarly activity around the College.

Also consider interviewing a colleague. These interviews can become an important way for us to remember the insights of those who have been working at ESC for many years, and those who are soon to retire.

Please send submissions to Alan Mandell (ESC 225 Varick Street, NYC 10014-4382), and note that it is most convenient if your submissions are sent via e-mail or on disk.

We very much look forward to your contributions. The next issue of *All About Mentoring* will be published in March, 2001. Please send your contributions to Mandell by 15 February.

ALL ABOUT  
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## **The Making of a Mentor** **Steve Lewis, Mid-Hudson Unit**

*Note: The following essay also appeared in the Summer 2000 issue of Dutchess Magazine.*

As a rule, I quit writing several times a year. I mumble. I pout. I scowl. I quit. “I quit!” And then pour myself two fingers of Wild Turkey in prelude to spending the night wrestling with the couch. Of course, it’s all for show. The next morning I inevitably rise with a stiff neck, climb the stairs to the cold third floor like a Sisyphus and turn on the computer.

I only quit teaching once, though. And it wasn’t for show. And that’s not to say that I came to it virtuously. Here’s the chronology:

— September 1964: My freshman roommate at the University of Wisconsin informs me that to save my suburbanized soul I should write poetry. I shrug.

— October 1964: At a local cafe I scribble a poorly constructed, self-absorbed, whiney poem about — what else — despair. Not much happens to my soul, but several girls dressed in basic black seem to like me for no other reason than I wrote a poem. So does my 22 year old Freshman Comp TA.

— January-May 1965: I write more bad poems on napkins in dark coffee houses all over Madison hoping to meet more girls who like miserable boys — and it works!

— May 1966 and beyond: After reams of progressively less bad poetry and a brief affaire de coeur with the aforementioned English instructor, I stumble and then lurch into declaring myself an English major ... and discover that I like writing and have some meager talent for it ... whereupon, finding myself at the edge of the baccalaureate cliff, I dive into a creative writing master’s program ... and two years later land my first college teaching job.

No one was more shocked than I.

Yet I liked teaching, just as I liked writing — and just as I loved being somebody’s daddy after entering that particular estate in an equivalent state of cluelessness. However, while being a father seemed unquestionably right from the crowning, I felt a nagging sense of emptiness about this whole business surrounding the writing and teaching of literature. As Marianne Moore wrote, all that “fiddle” seemed so irrelevant. And I was privately relieved two years later when the job was budget cut because I didn’t understand why anyone needed to study — or teach — the great works.

When we moved east in 1973, I joined the local rescue squad. In truth, it was more to meet people than to be a good samaritan, yet it was as an EMT that I discovered something akin to relevance ... helping people stay alive. And it wasn’t long before I was a zealot: teaching first aid for prospective members, securing a faculty position in emergency care at Dutchess Community College, procuring a contract to write a textbook, enrolling in a graduate health education program, eating granola. I loved the idea of telling people how to live well, even if I didn’t particularly live well myself.

That love affair ended rather abruptly, though, while researching my thesis on effective public health promotion. Sitting in a diner in upstate New York, chugging black coffee and inhaling my daily dose of RingDings, I suddenly understood firsthand that behavior is not altered to any significant degree through logic but through experience. You can document the

dangers of smoking to a smoker until you're blue in the face (as my smoking mother used to say), but she will not stop smoking until she experiences its wrath herself. And, I realized, lightbulb please, one way to gain experience without actually experiencing it is through metaphor.

Ahhhhhhh ... so we really need poetry!

I dropped all plans to be a health guru like a cold slab of tofu and turned instead to teaching advanced placement English in Millbrook, N.Y. My classes were full of high school seniors who were far more interested in sex, drugs and rock and roll than why Jane Eyre would consider a life without sex or drugs or rock and roll. That was the first lesson. Then my young and beautiful narcissistic charges taught me that my job was not to teach literary analysis per se, but to enable them to experience something of importance beyond themselves. The problem was I was too much of a narcissist to know how to do it well.

As a former Empire State student once informed me, however, doors open when you are ready to walk through them. For me it was on a particularly frigid afternoon in February 1990. I was nearly despondent as I drove over the frozen Hudson because most of my beloved AP kids hadn't absorbed my brilliant analysis of "Othello" and did miserably on an impromptu quiz. Then that night at a group study of my wonderful adult learners at Empire State College, I was assaulted with some of the most bizarre interpretations of "A Doll's House" that I had ever heard. They, too, apparently hadn't gleaned anything from me. And all that was just prelude to traipsing home to find a note from a local teacher saying that one of my kids hadn't been doing his homework. A teacher's nightmare.

With some of the leftover Wild Turkey from the previous "I quit writing" night, I grudgingly acknowledged that I was an abject failure as a teacher. That dark evening I saw that it was all about me in the front of the room — or me at the seminar table — or me at the head of the dinner table. And I just wasn't getting through to anybody.

Yet in the sleepless hours after midnight, when I masochistically revisited the dismal quizzes — and repondered all those ridiculous perspectives on Ibsen, I began to see the venerable playwrights in new and vibrant ways. Infused with my students' dreams and genes and idiosyncratic ways of looking at this incomprehensible universe, each essay opened a door for me into another room of self-discovery. And I found that the more I meandered around each incomparable space, the more I understood that each of us discovers, in his or her own way, a remarkably divergent path to the same truth.

So I swallowed my considerable pride with a toast to experience and decided then and there to quit telling everyone what I thought they needed to know. I quit teaching. And woke up the next morning on the couch with a remarkably loose neck and a compelling desire to open doors of all sizes, thicknesses and textures.

For the last ten years, while maintaining the fiction of myself as a teacher, I have come to see mentoring at Empire State College as akin to being a well-rewarded doorman (minus the fancy epaulets and the stripes down the sides of the trousers): I open doors with a smile for seekers who want to rub elbows with thinkers and artists of every kind. I introduce each one around by name. I offer them comfortable chairs — or an arm if they prefer to walk around the grounds. I listen intently to each one's stories and offer stories of my own in return. I ask a lot of questions and deflect, as best I can, the ones that come back at me. I hail a cab and tip my hat when they're ready to move on.

As Robert Frost might have said, one could do worse than be a doorman. Or a mentor

### Scholars Across the College

As has been previously announced, mentors Barbara Kantz of the Long Island Center and Mel Rosenthal of the Metropolitan Center have received this year's Scholars Across the College honor. This means that Barbara and Mel are available to the ESC community as "guests," interested in sharing their scholarly work with us. Barbara Kantz is prepared to offer presentations, workshops and consultations on the topic of disaster studies. Mel Rosenthal can provide talks, slide presentations and workshops on the history and uses of documentary photography. Please free to contact Barbara or Mel directly.

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## **ESC Graduate Students' Final Projects**

**Meredith Brown, Graduate Studies**

Each ESC student in the Master of Arts programs is required to complete a final project as a part of his/her studies for the degree. Between June and the beginning of October 2000, 39 projects have been approved in ESC's business and policy studies (BPS), social policy (SP), Master's of Arts in Liberal Studies (MALS), and labor and policy studies (LPS) programs.

The final project is certainly a major academic undertaking for the student. Few students who reach this point have had experience in sustained intellectual activity of this sort. Because of this, and because mentors are mentors, the undertaking frequently represents a significant scholarly investment for the student's readers, as well.

The final project is expected to be a "near publishable" work and culminating experience in the program. While there is a range of quality, length and depth among these works, most are impressive pieces, which have been reviewed, edited, and formally defended. The defense consists of an hour (plus) conference between the student and two readers. The project itself is a public document, although we do not require copyrighting, microfiching or other copy requirements of most Ph.D. programs. Our library of current student final projects (all in their classy uniform black binders) is open for viewing at the graduate offices in Saratoga Springs. In addition, many samples have been copied and distributed to various College locations.

As the following table on pages 20-21 describes, students have completed creative projects (CP), position papers (PP), a series of interconnected essays (S), theses (T), or case studies (CS), in order to complete their degrees. Only MALS students may opt to do a creative project. Typically, these are novels, short stories or other creative fiction, although students sometimes produce musical or visual arts and write reflective papers on their experiences. Students in all programs may chose to complete the other types.

We thought that a list of these projects, as well as the names of both first and second readers could offer us a glimpse into the range and depth of work in which our colleagues and students are engaged.

**Final Projects**  
**SUNY Empire State College Graduate Studies Program**

**June-October, 2000**



<b>Student</b>	<b>Program</b>	<b>Form</b>	<b>1st Reader</b>	<b>2nd Reader</b>	<b>Title</b>
Salacain	MALS	CP	Rothstein	Brunschwig	Online Course in Electronic Pre-Press
Small	SP	PP	Israel	Wells	African American Juvenile Crime
Williams	SP	PP	Brown	Collins	The Use of Herbs as Remedial Alternative
Muller	MALS	CS	Couglan	Andolina	Religion in National Thought: Israel/Palestine
Giordano	MALS	PP	Coulter	Corsica	Animal Assisted Therapy
Ohrestein	MALS	T	White	Sherer	Facts and Myths of Voice Pedagogy
DiGesare	BPS	PP	Angiello	Temsky	Family and Medical Leave Act, 1993
McCarthy	BPS	S	Weiss	Kennedy	Sexual Harassment
Pleickhard	BPS	T	Weiss	Ghent	Regulation and Jurisdiction of the Internet
Rouh	BPS	CS	Weis	Finn	Impact of Business Strategy/Bell Atlantic
Jenkins	BPS	P	Angiello	Oaks	Affirmative Action Policy
Smith	BPS	T	Musoke	Weiss	Real Estate/Competing Invest. Theory
DaCosta	MALS	CP	Temsky	Michelson	Awakenings and Transformations
Handler	BPS	S	Angiello	Temsky	Training Technologies for the Future
Miskell	MALS	T	Mandell	Bunch	High Risk Students — Training Programs
Bushong	MALS	T	Wood	Southwood	Science in Science Fiction
Stever	MALS	CP	Robinson	Goss	Playwriting and Play Production
Trembly	MALS	CP	Morrison	Oringel	The Search for Authentic Voice
Fales	SP	CS	Tally	Brown	Privatization of Morningside Gardens
Grey	BPS	CS	Rufer	Weiss	Telemarketing-Inbound Call Center
Bolton	MALS	CP	Scriber	Kravec	My Tree of Life (quilt)
Peavler	SP	PP	Corsica	Kravec	Social Construction of Addiction
Weekes	MALS	CP	Wells	Robinson	Queen Mother Moore
Finn	SP	CS	Tally	Brown	Media Literacy in Chautauqua Cty.
Scotfield	SP	CS	Brown	Aldrich	History Preservation in Alfred, NY

Sinclair	SP	T	Brown	Tally	Use of GI Bill Educ. Benefits by Women
Belfield	MALS	T	Gadbow	Anderson	Women's Perceptions of Role in Family
Terry	MALS	PP	Tischler	Goldman	Value of Physical Education in the Schools
Troiano	SP	S	Corsica	Andolina	Integrated Treatment for MICA
Richardson	MALS	PP	Wunsch	Carey	The Arts in Our Schools
Allen	MALS	CP	Cirigliano	Wilde	The Ideal Athletic Male Figure
Frank	SP	T	Morgan	Levy	Early Childhood Education Policy
Diggs	SP	CS	Brown	Faulkner	Welfare to Work for Non-Custodial Parent
Youngs	BPS	CS	Lill	DeLong	Oneonta and Cooperstown — Economic Development
Greco	SP	T	Finn	RyanMann	Graduate Medical Education Financing
Jetty	MALS	CP	Herman	Wolstenholme	Quest: A Novella
Nowhitney	SP	T	Tally	DiNitto	Moral Poverty: A Debate
Golio	BPS	CS	Giordano	Angiello	Business Plan for an Upscale Restaurant
Obasih	SP	Pract.	Milton	Hawkes	Youth Violence and Prevention

ALL ABOUT

# MENTORING

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## NCAL News

The Council of the National Center on Adult Learning met in Albany on 19-20 October for its annual gathering. Important to this meeting were the presentations by those fellows who had received awards from NCAL for the 1999-2000 period. As described in *All About Mentoring* #19, Stephen Hundley of the Purdue School of Engineering and Technology, Susan McGury of the School for New Learning at DePaul University, Frances A. Mahoney, FIPSE project director at the College of Lifelong Learning in the University System of New Hampshire, and Marsha Rossiter of the University of Wisconsin at Oshkosh, all received fellowships for their practitioner-based research.

Fellowships for 2000-2001 were also announced. John Booth from University of Maryland University College will conduct research on “early detection of highrisk students in distance education.” Luisa Deprez of the University of Southern Maine and Sandra Butler of the University of Maine will focus their work on: “Parents as Scholars: A Model of Higher Education Programs Under Welfare Reform.” Paul Ewald and Laurien Alexandre from Antioch University will explore the personal and professional identities of faculty as told through stories. And Herb Shapiro of SUNY Empire State College has been chosen to continue his practitioner-based research on peer tutoring at the Genesee Valley Writing Center of ESC.

### Looking for Readers

Over the last nine months, Jossey-Bass has published four books, which could be of good interest to us. One is called: *Developing Adult Learners: Strategies for Teachers and Trainers* by Kathleen Taylor, Catherine Marineau, and Morris Fiddler. A second is: *Lifelong Learning at its Best* by William H. Maehl. A third is Lois Zachary’s *The Mentor’s Guide: Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships*. Finally, Jossey-Bass just published *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* by Jack Mezirow. Nancy Gadbow will be offering her thoughts on the Zachary book for the next issue of *All About Mentoring*. We welcome other thoughts on Zachary, and responses to the Taylor (*et al.*), Maehl and Mezirow books as well. If you are interested, please contact Alan Mandell. We would like to arrange for you to receive a reviewer’s copy

ALL ABOUT

# MENTORING

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## **RPL and Transformation: Principles and Practice**

### **Elana Michelson, Hudson Valley Center and Graduate Studies**

*Note: Elana Michelson has been deeply involved in the rethinking of South African higher education as it seeks to restructure itself in order to respond to the needs of adult workers in the post-apartheid era. Much of her work there has focused on developing policies and procedures for what the South Africans call the “recognition of prior learning” (RPL), which in South Africa is done in both academic and workplace settings. What follows is a keynote address she recently gave in Johannesburg for a conference titled “RPL Challenges Higher Education and Workplace Practice.”*

It is a great privilege for me to speak to all of you this morning, just as it has been a great privilege to work in this country for the past five years. I have been involved with RPL for almost two decades, as a trade unionist and as an academic. But it is only in South Africa that I have encountered a broad public debate about RPL. Elsewhere in the world, RPL is seen as a rather minor activity at best, helpful to adult learners but hardly a major social imperative. Only here is RPL understood as fundamental to social transformation, to the restructuring of many social institutions, from workplaces to universities.

There are many public documents that capture the importance of RPL at this moment of South African history. RPL, according to the Department of Education White Paper, will “open doors of opportunity for people whose academic or career paths have been needlessly blocked because their prior learning . . . has not been assessed and certified.” It is the answer, according to the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), to “apartheid policies and practices [that] denied qualifications to many South Africans and functioned as an exclusionary mechanism.” But perhaps our colleague Slo — Lyn Slonimsky of the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) — said it best at a seminar held at Wits last year. RPL, Slo said, “is an attempt to intervene in history, to go back and give people what a just society would have given them as a matter of course.” My guess is that a lot of us in this room today understand that.

And yet, at the same time, there is the assumption here in South Africa that, if we could only get the details right, RPL could become a rather simple activity. Set the standards, train the assessors, get the educational institutions on board, and RPL can deliver the most exalted of social visions through largely technical procedures. So I would like to begin with a cautionary tale, a story that some of you have heard me tell before. It was told to me by Joe Modikwe, a human resource manager from Spornet (the national railway company), about an RPL exercise done with railway station maintenance workers. As part of the assessment of their knowledge of safe practice, the workers were asked the purpose of a “derailment,” the apparatus that is used between stationary trains to keep them from running into each other. None of the workers could answer the question. This was taken as an indication of a quite low level of conceptual understanding, which didn’t seem to surprise the assessors — workers are typically assumed to have quite low levels of conceptual understanding. When the poor results of the RPL exercise were revealed, it was pointed out that the word “derailment” was the word used by managerial and engineering staff and that the maintenance workers called the same apparatus a “tortoise.” All the workers knew the purpose of a “tortoise.” Yet management refused to re-administer the RPL exercise or adjust the results accordingly.

Joe told this story at a workshop on RPL I was giving at the University of the Free State, furious at the stupidity of it and saying he had come to the workshop to find an “idiot-proof” way of doing RPL. I told him there was no such thing. I wish

that the lesson to be drawn from Joe's story was that some people really are fools and shouldn't be in charge of RPL exercises. But I think the reality is more complicated. The tricky part of Slo's notion of RPL as an intervention in history is that history is a messy affair. It always comes trailing values and assumptions, power relationships, and entrenched social interests in which different people always call things by different names.

What I'd like to do this morning is to focus on that RPL exercise. I want to take a photograph of it, to try to freeze-frame that moment, as it were, to see if we can't catch history in the act.

For the moment, let's put a close-up lens in our camera. When we look through that lens, we see two sets of people: the railway station workers and the assessors. Who are these people? What kinds of relationships do they have to each other, and how are those relationships structured within various social divisions: labor and management, black and white, informally and formally educated? How do they feel about each other? Do they speak the same language? Do they inhabit the same culture? Do they think of each other with affection or respect?

Let's look at the learners — that is, the workers. What kinds of pride or insecurity do they bring to this moment? How free do they feel to speak? What do they think is happening? What are their fears and dreams?

And what of the assessors? What kinds of pride or insecurity do they bring to this moment? What do they think is happening? What are their fears and dreams?

And, finally, how did these two groups — learners and assessors — get defined as such? Within what contexts did those roles evolve? Who is judging whom? On what basis? For what purpose? What would happen if they switched roles?

The answers to some of those questions are obvious. Clearly, the two groups don't speak the same language. One calls something a tortoise; the other calls it a derailment. In this case, the difference is between two words in English, but the issue is still one of different languages: the language of the shop floor vs. the language of the head office, the mother tongue of experiential learning vs. the terminology of the technikon, everyday speech vs. IsiSAQA, the twelfth official language of South Africa. (1)

But this is not just about language in a narrow sense. Different vocabularies reflect different communities of knowledge and practice, different understandings of how and why things are done. Embedded in the issue of language is the issue of what knowledge we recognize and value. Workers are often the ones who know what knowledge and skills are required to do a given task, what safe practice and socially useful knowledge mean in a given context. Yet, if we are not careful, RPL can serve to keep that knowledge hidden, branding them as "learners" in a perhaps unintentionally insulting sense, erasing their knowledge rather than help bring it to light.

The answers to some of the other questions should also be obvious, but they aren't obvious because they refer to people who, in technicist views of RPL, get airbrushed out of the photograph. I'm thinking, for example, of the people who wrote the standards, the people who trained the assessors, the people who developed RPL policies at educational institutions. If we widen our lens a bit to see a broader picture, we see that the encounter between learners and assessors is taking place in a pretty crowded room.

So let's ask some questions about those people as well. Who were the people who wrote the standards against which the learners are being judged? How were those standards generated? What kind of knowledge was defined as valuable, and who had a say in that definition? Who decided what methods of assessment were appropriate? What was the role of academics and educational institutions, and how did their values, assumptions and curricula influence the RPL exercise?

Thus, to return to Joe Modikwe's quest for "idiotproof" RPL, there is no such thing as "idiot-proof" RPL because RPL is not just about how clever we are at policies and procedures. RPL is about values, power relationships, definitions of knowledge, economic and social agendas, and visions of the good. I think the question for this conference is, not how do we make RPL idiot-proof, but: How do we structure this difficult, important, all-too-human encounter in a way that promotes such social goals as fairness, equity, equality?

I am not going to try to answer that question this morning. We will together spend the next two days attempting to answer

it. But I want at least to identify some of the issues that we must engage in, in order to answer that question. I have four specific ones in mind.

First, we must address ourselves to how standards are set, whose standards they are, what forms of good and safe practice they embody, and who is at the table when they are written. And I mean really at the table, as a full participant. That means that we must talk very seriously about how to provide the occasions for equal participation, and we must be honest about what “equal” participation means and doesn’t mean. It doesn’t mean one overworked and under-briefed shop steward sitting across the table from five full-time human resource professionals. Nor does it mean one practitioner in a room filled with senior lecturers, a practitioner who speaks neither academic English nor Isi-SAQA and who is not recognized as a co-expert in that room, even by that practitioner herself.

Second, we must ask who is selected to be trained as assessors and how those assessors are trained to understand that they are part of a social process, not a technicist exercise. And that means more than teaching them to observe a worker and fill out a form. It means helping them to understand that history runs through them, that the task of unlearning racism, sexism, classism and the rest is a difficult, life-long process but that they must conscientiously and honorably learn to keep those biases under control. It means ensuring that the pool of assessors is broadly representative of the workers who will be assessed and of the workforce in this country as a whole. It means helping them to enter into the logic and discourse of the workplace and of the worker; to learn to listen for competence, not just in what is most familiar, but in all its multiple languages and forms.

Third, we must investigate the relationship between the experiential learning born of the many forms of labor and the organization of knowledge known as an academic curriculum. That is, we must turn the assessment lens around, look at a curriculum as a man made thing that names some knowledge and not other knowledge as important. Here again we must explore how those judgments are made and how they relate to other judgments, other knowledge, other ways of coming together to construct shared practices and truths. One of the things that tends to happen when the learning of ordinary people is recognized is that the so-called learners look at the so-called experts and say obstreperous things like: “But that doesn’t actually work out in the field,” and “We don’t have the resources to do it that way, so this is what we’ve figured out instead,” and “You’re joking. We haven’t done it that way for years!” Some of the RPL projects that we’ll be hearing about at this conference are wonderful examples of the relationship between RPL and curriculum. They’ve learned at Pentech, for example, that if you ask an experienced community health nurse what she knows, you are likely to learn something about what to teach student nurses who will not spend their careers in high-tech hospital settings. RPL is the other side of curriculum development because it allows for, indeed demands, a broader and betterinformed consensus about what “knowledge” means.

Fourth, and finally, we need to look at ourselves. We need to take advantage of the next two days as a timeout, as a breather, as a moment of self-scrutiny. It is no exaggeration to say that the people who are gathered in this room are together positioned to determine the future of RPL in South Africa. If we don’t want stories like the Spornet workers to be the norm in the future as they’ve been in the past, we need to take a look at what we are and aren’t doing, decide what needs to be done, and what needs to be done better. We need to make real plans to follow through once the space provided by this conference is over and we return to the unbelievable pressures of our everyday work and lives.

In the spirit of that self-scrutiny, I am going to be presumptuous for a moment, and I hope that you forgive me. I am going to take the liberty of speaking specifically and a little bluntly to three groups of folks in this room of whom I am part: the international contingent, the academics and the trade unionists. Those of us from abroad are here because JET and its funders rightfully believe that we have something to contribute. We have models of international practice in RPL and adult learning that South Africa can learn from and we have a lot of experiential learning about what works and what doesn’t work. But if we are going to be helpful here, we need to accept how hard it is to adapt a model developed one place to another. Our models come out of specific social and institutional histories. The assumptions we make about the structures of higher education, of labormanagement relations, of individual and collective social mobility often don’t apply here. We need the humility to remember how much we don’t know, how hard we need to listen, and how much we have to learn.

To those of us who are academics — RPL is a hard one for us, both intellectually and often emotionally. It challenges the only kind of power we tend to have, which is the power to name what counts as knowledge and how that knowledge should be demonstrated. We have a lot invested in the gate-keeping function of the university. Some of that investment is a

loyalty to honorable traditions of thoughtfulness and learning. But some of it is a defensiveness, a wish to keep hold of social privilege and our own comfortable habits of mind. Our challenge is in learning to tell the difference between the two.

And to my trade union comrades, it's really easy to make RPL a low priority. Workers are being retrenched and their families are being left with a terrifying lack of resources. There is still too much injustice and dehumanization and even death on the job. Even in the field of education, the endless bureaucratic demands of SAQA and the NQF leave little room for anything else. But if RPL policies are left to managers and academics, then they will reflect the beliefs and serve the interests of managers and academics. All too soon, it will be too late to complain, and we will have nobody to blame because those folks will have simply done their job while we didn't do ours.

I want to end by changing lenses in the camera one more time, to an even wider-angle lens in order to locate RPL within the broad sweep of South African history. RPL has been placed at the center of the attempt to put down the unspeakable inequities of the past and create a democratic civil society and a capitalist meritocracy. To some of us in this room, that isn't an unproblematic good. Part of the critique of RPL, in fact, is that it turns experiential learning into a commodity that workers can sell on the ostensibly open market. The move, as Linda Cooper names it, is from "rolling mass action" to RPL, from experiential learning as the basis for a collectivist movement to individual upward mobility. I think that's true. In the current historical context, upward mobility for individual workers is one of the things that RPL legitimately and importantly does. There is nothing inherently reactionary about that.

But it is a problem, I think, if that is all that RPL does or, rather, if it does it in a way that erases rather than celebrates the hard-earned knowledge of people as a whole. I once asked my friend Jonathan Grossman what he thought the collective recognition of workers' prior learning would look like and he said: full employment at a living wage. Well, RPL policies can't provide that, much as we might want them to. But what they can provide is a recognition that the knowledge and skills with which we sustain the human world come in many forms and speak many languages. RPL makes the case that the lives of ordinary workers are sites from which important knowledge is generated. It therefore provides an opportunity to remake the power relationships within which human beings are valued or devalued based on highly weighted, highly interested assessments of the value of what they know.

Mokubung Nkomo has argued that, difficult as the political and economic transformation out of apartheid will be, what is even harder is what he calls the "reconceptualizing of the knowledge-power relationship," that is, our assumptions about what knowledge — and whose — has value and how we use those assumptions to support equality or inequality. I think RPL can help us reconfigure the relationship between the work that people do in the world and the ways in which they are valued and rewarded. And that is indeed an intervention in history.

## Notes:

1. SAQA refers to the South African Qualifications Authority, which set up the NQF, the National Qualifications Authority. The standards and criteria for vocational qualifications are articulated in a bureaucratic jargon that has been dubbed Isi-SAQA in an ironic use of the preface that indicates a South African language such as Isi-Sotho or Isi-Zulu.

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ALL ABOUT  
**MENTORING**  
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## Learning *What* During Discussion?

**A Review of *Discussion as a Way of Teaching*  
by Stephen Brookfield and Stephen Preskill  
Xenia Coulter, Central New York Center**

*Author's Note: What follows is a slightly edited version of a review that was published in the Summer, 2000, Adult Higher Education Alliance Newsletter for an audience of educators who teach largely in classrooms. To the extent that Empire State College is increasingly making use of groups and residencies as part of our educational offerings, an analysis of discussion as a means of learning is certainly relevant to our college. More importantly, since the authors generally conceptualize discussion as an adjunct or alternative to lecturing, many of the ideas presented in the book under review could also be regarded as readily applicable to the kind of dialogue a mentor has with a student.*

If you believe that student learning is likely to be enhanced when students are actively involved in the process, you are probably also attracted by the idea of class discussion. How much better when students actively try to conceptualize and make use of new information through discussion than when that information is passively delivered to them through lectures. Thus, the recent book by Stephen Brookfield and Stephen Preskill, *Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for Democratic Classrooms* (Jossey-Bass, 1999) would seem on the face of it to be an excellent resource for those interested in active learning. Indeed, as a compendium of ideas about preparing students for discussion, getting discussion going, maintaining a high level of interest in the discussion, and dealing with a variety of problems that can emerge in discussion (e.g., shy participants), the book is indeed very useful. But the question of how discussion promotes learning seemed to me, at least, to be rather elusive.

Certainly, the authors make strong claims about the benefits of discussion, particularly for self-development and for the democratic process. As they put it, “[d]iscussion and democracy . . . both have the same root purpose — to nurture and promote human growth” (p. 3). As they state in the preface and reaffirm throughout the book, they are preoccupied with the idea that “a commitment to discussion and an honoring of the democratic experience are inseparable” (p. xv). Throughout the book, they claim again and again that discussion is a form of “respectful engagement” (p. xv) that “emphasizes the inclusion of the widest variety of perspectives and selfcritical willingness to change” (p. xv). Although it would be difficult to disagree with the value of such outcomes, it is obviously not true that discussion just by virtue of its occurrence is automatically democratic or developmental. Clearly students must learn how to engage in democratic discussions, and this book is concerned primarily with how to teach them the necessary skills. The expectation is, I presume, that these skills will then transfer outside the classroom to their personal and professional lives.

Thus, the book presents two problems to the ordinary teacher of undergraduate students. First, it is not primarily concerned with the kind of learning that occupies the attention of most teachers, such as developing the student’s literacy in a particular discipline. For example, a teacher might want to know how discussion in itself could be used to help a student learn to seek out, recognize and ultimately create connections between concepts and ideas presented in a text and another text, between a text and the student’s experiences, and/or between a text and carefully presented abstractions. My own experience suggests that this learning can be stimulated through conversation, but only by means of a carefully



considered and closely monitored dialogue between student and teacher. Such learning can also, of course, be stimulated by means of thoughtful written assignments. But the reader of this book will want to ask how these learning outcomes can be stimulated in a discussion with no fewer than five people and as many as, say, 36. And as a disciplinary learning tool, the reader will also want to ask what are discussion's special advantages? The authors do not engage these questions. They do not engage these questions because, in truth, they are not interested in that aspect of discussion — only in its potential for critical or transformational development. This absence is quite frustrating for those of us who work primarily with undergraduates whose ability to articulate, much less engage in a democratic and respectful discussion, may be very primitive indeed.

And that leads to the second problem. The authors do not even consider the question of differing developmental stages. The kinds of outcomes the authors are seeking — e.g., a humble acceptance of other points of view while still respecting one's own position — according to William Perry and others who have studied undergraduate intellectual and cognitive development, come rather late in a student's educational career. Furthermore, this level of development grows out of a number of earlier and less enlightened stages that are arguably necessary for subsequent development. Thus, students differ not only from their teacher but among themselves in their ability to understand, much less engage in, a democratic discussion.

For example, Robert Kegan in his book, *In Over Our Heads*, provides a heart-wrenching description of what happens when a parent or teacher or counselor expects a level of understanding through dialogue or discussion that the child or student or client cannot achieve. The disparity between the level of teacher and student understanding is no more apparent than in college, particularly in the early years. Although a teacher who simply lectures is usually spared this knowledge (at least until he or she evaluates the students' learning), those who work closely with students come face to face with this inequality and are forced to recognize the importance of taking these disparities into account when engaging their students and planning their curriculum. The assumption throughout the Brookfield and Preskill book seems to be that if students are exposed to various techniques of discussion and if the teachers continuously model and describe the necessary dispositions for successful discussion, then somehow the students will acquire the necessary maturity for the expected level of discussion. The truth is that the students must already be mature, or at the cusp of the necessary level of maturity, for this approach to work.

That it does seem to work for Brookfield and Preskill is probably because their students are, apparently, all graduate students. The advanced intellectual levels of their students may also be one of the reasons why the authors are able to convince themselves that a truly democratic classroom is within their grasp — that it is possible for them to create a space where student ideas are considered equal in value to those of the teacher and where the participants can genuinely learn from each other. In an undergraduate classroom, such a claim would be impossible to make. The knowledge, cognitive skill and power differences between the teacher and most undergraduates are not only self-evident but these differences are what distinguish teacher from student. (This is by no means to suggest that teachers can't learn from their students or that students shouldn't be treated with respect; it is only to make the point that democratic equality is not a reality in the typical college classroom). Since the differences between graduate students and teachers in level of knowledge, sophistication and communicative skills are considerably less, it may be possible for teachers to ignore or minimize the power difference between them and their students.

However, to claim that equality is a feasible condition, even in a graduate class, deserves a more thoughtful discussion than is given in this book. After all, Brookfield and Preskill are imposing their idea of education upon the students. Just because they believe that this idea is "right," does not render unimportant the fact that they have the power as teachers to make this imposition. Furthermore, although they make little of it, they wield considerable power in that they must eventually evaluate their students. It is naïve to suppose that the apparent equality of their relationship with the students is not affected by the necessity of evaluation no matter how respectful the teachers are toward their students. Just consider a situation in which it could reasonably be claimed that a truly democratic discussion can take place — a meeting of tenured faculty. That democratic or even respectful discussions rarely occur in that setting (or, dare I say, in our center meetings?) surely ought to give one pause. Are tenured faculty simply untutored in the ways of democracy or is it possible that democratic behavior is only assured when someone with power controls the situation?

Thus, although the book makes strong claims for the value of discussion, those claims are not carefully analyzed.<sup>1</sup> And for the most part, they are not particularly helpful to the teacher of undergraduates whose abilities to express themselves,

much less understand the subtleties of what other students may be trying, unsuccessfully, to say, may be very weak. Clearly discussion can provide an opportunity to inculcate civility in a group setting, certainly an important precursor to the democratic process. And in this regard, the suggested exercises offered by Brookfield and Preskill to address common problems faced by teachers working with groups of students may be very helpful. As to the question of how discussion may also help undergraduates actively engage the subject matter with increasing sophistication and an openness to new perspectives, this book is not the place to look for very satisfying answers.

## Notes

1. Let me provide an interesting example. In Chapter 5, “Keeping Discussion Going Through Questioning, Listening and Responding,” the authors describe discussion techniques that can certainly be applied to conversations with individual students. Indeed, mentors will clearly recognize methods they often use when talking with their students about what they have read or written, such as asking for more evidence or clarification, asking open or hypothetical questions, asking for extensions, and so forth (p. 87- 90). In another section of the book, where the authors focus upon the importance of “recognizing, honoring, and celebrating [student] experience,” they also point out that “[f]or a discussion to be considered educational, students should be encouraged to subject their experiences to critical analysis” (p. 31). What illustrates an unwillingness by the authors to grapple more deeply with the issues they raise, is that in yet another section of the book, they strongly condemn the concept of guided discussion (p. 54), claiming that a discussion which moves students toward certain acceptable outcomes “is an oxymoron” or “counterfeit” (p. 25). The democratic ideal, they say, occurs only when the “heart of discussion is the open and unpredictable creation of meanings...” (p. 25). Yet, how are we to distinguish between asking questions or encouraging critical analysis because we have judged a comment or position to be inadequate, and engaging in an “intellectually dishonest” (p. 25) guided discussion? It is my feeling that once we make a judgment about a student’s response, no matter how respectfully we communicate this judgment, we are in fact guiding the conversation and not behaving democratically in the sense of valuing equally every contribution that each person makes. This book, in my opinion, would be much more valuable if such quandaries were scrutinized (rather than condemned) because ultimately only by recognizing just how undemocratic the educational enterprise is do we have a chance of trying to better understand what we are doing and why.

ALL ABOUT

# MENTORING

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## Starting Over

**Bob Carey, Metropolitan Center**

**Clark Everling, The Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies**

*A prefatory note. This article falls into two parts. The first deals with some readings I used to explore the issues of student skills and readiness that came up in the course of developing the College's Self-Study and that link to what independent learning involves as an activity and intellectual style; the second part of the article grows out of Clark's experience in developing an educational planning approach for steelworkers. We have fussed with the prose in both sections so that both pieces work as a coherent essay. We leave it to you to judge if they do.*

- Bob Carey

### I. Reading and Writing

We as a faculty value independent learning. We want our students to be independent learners and understand ourselves to be contributing to that end.

In what follows, we want to look at the term and what it might be said to describe. We want, as well, to explore what we think the doing of independent learning involves and how (and if) students learn to do it. We are uncertain about how well we form independent learners. Do we know if we have been successful? What is it that we do — or should be doing — to contribute to that end? (These last questions are research questions, but that is another, slightly future, discussion.)

In the course of exploring what the term, “independent learning” embraces, we will be talking about students and teachers — our students and ourselves. We start with our students. What do we know about them? More specifically, what do we know about them as readers and writers? Where do they locate these activities in their world and their daily lives? How much do they value them or see them as routine activities? We begin with these questions because of the centrality of these two activities to the work of independent learning.

Answering these questions is as difficult as it is interesting. What follows is a beginning, the result of reflecting on our experience of working with Empire State College students and testing that experience against the work of authors who deal with the issues of literacy and the acts of reading and writing.

*Literacy in the United States: Readers and Writers Since 1880*, a volume of essays authored by Carl F. Kaestle, Helen Damon-Moore, Lawrence C. Stedman, Katherine Tinsley and William Vance Trollinger Jr., is a good place to begin.<sup>1</sup> One important service that Kaestle et. al. perform is skewering the arguments of those who announced in the 70s and 80s that the republic was about to sink because test scores for students admitted to college showed that standards were non-existent and that we were tottering toward mass illiteracy. In a case by case analysis of those claims and the evidence adduced to support them, Kaestle and his co-authors show that they were grossly overstated when they weren't wrong.<sup>2</sup> The comfort he provides for educational practitioners is, however, a bit on the cool side. Even if the “decline” of the 70s was not the disaster that official viewers with alarm claimed that it was, it remains the case that American schools continue a “long-standing failure ... to teach higher-order skills and to reach the lower third of students,”<sup>3</sup> a conclusion

that Stedman and Kaestle reiterate in another essay, “Literacy and Reading Performance in the United States from 1880 to the Present.”<sup>4</sup>

Works dealing with the history of reading, literacy and culture stress that something like a “revolution” in reading occurred in Europe in the late 17th century and again in the 19th century as rates of literacy rose. A similar pattern emerged in the United States, shaped by the particularities of American economic and political development. The availability of schooling contributed (and continues to contribute) to the growth in literacy, though how people sought and used literacy is a question that remains open. The ability to read does not tell us much about what or how people do read, so while there have been real gains in literacy, what those amount to is a presenting question with every student we meet.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that the country seems not to be heading off the cliffs into the roiling waters of illiteracy, and that gains in overall literacy correlate positively with the spread and availability of schooling, should be grounds for modest rejoicing. If progress seems grudging, there is a kind of progress nonetheless.

It would seem to follow that the effects of all kinds of schooling would create a population that used its disposable income to do what they have learned to do — read books. But this turns out not to be so. More than that. The percent of the population that reads books regularly is slowly dwindling. The numbers of book readers are growing because of population increase, so there are more book readers than there were in the 20s and 30s but the percentage of the population that routinely uses its free money to buy books is smaller, angling downward from an earlier high point in this century.<sup>6</sup> Even more disturbing is the conclusion that Kaestle and Hollinger draw in a discussion of the reading demands of different kinds of magazines. It is worth quoting at length from their conclusion because it points to a cluster of issues that are central to what we do:

There is no question that many readers of the popular press succeeded in their jobs and led virtuous intelligent lives, and perhaps it does not matter that most people could not read the *Atlantic Monthly*. But the fact remains that the educational system equipped only a limited number of people with sophisticated reading skills, reading skills that also acted as an entry qualification and a necessary prerequisite to participation in many commanding institutions of society. In this regard, educational stratification contributed to the stratification of American society and was reflected in the varying complexity of publications read by adults. In spite of expanded education opportunity and vastly increased school attainment, recent functional — reading assessments suggest that literacy is similarly stratified today.<sup>7</sup>

How much can we make of this? The people Kaestle *et al.* are talking about went to or started college in the 70s. Those students would be our students now. Are they likely to be readers? Kaestle’s figures on book readership should caution us. We should not be in a hurry to think that because they didn’t, in fact, do terribly poorly on their SATs and did some (or a lot) of college that they became readers as a result. They might buy books because that was what a person did in college. (A question that Kaestle and his co-authors, unfortunately, do not address is how much college-based purchases shape the gross figures for book use in the U.S.). But we cannot assume that they have become readers, as the conclusion from the study of magazine readership indicates.

We do know that our students can “read.” They hold jobs — most of them — that require them to master the language of the workplace — solving problems, sorting things out, conveying information, decisions and the like to fellow workers, superiors or subordinates. They read memos, reports and whatever else floats by in the form of daily newspapers, hobby or devotional reading. Why then, is reading — the type of reading we ask them to do — so difficult for some, even though they arrive with transcripts that have the course titles and grades that tell us that the bearer of this document can read whatever you ask her to read? But what and how well? How much is print a part of everyday experience? More than that — to what degree is reading and writing a means of reflecting on and exploring that experience. When we say to students, “Read this and write a short essay about it,” what are we asking them to do? What do they hear us asking them to do?

If our students are readers at all, we still do not know, at the outset of their work with us, what kind of readers they are. Using terms from studies in the history of reading, we can also ask: Are they “intensive” or “extensive” readers? Though they should be used carefully, these terms provide a framework for looking at styles of reading and their concomitant intellectual formation.<sup>8</sup>

The most common “intensive” reading would be that of religious texts or devotional literature: repeated reading, reading of what one already “knows” but to which one returns for solace or out of devotional duty. While a commonly accepted and largely untested stereotype is that people thus formed are good readers, there is little evidence to warrant such a conclusion, inasmuch as devotional concerns routinely override, or negate, or even hold in abhorrence any critical or analytical approach to religious texts. “Extensive” reading, on the other hand, describes a style in which a person moves through a rich mix of reading possibilities, welcomes novelty and is inclined, perhaps, to explore. Extensive does not tell us how thoughtfully or reflectively a person reads. The Civil War buff is an example. Here is someone who has read a standard history, maybe Bruce Catton, gone to Gettysburg, watches “Civil War Diary” on the History Channel, but has not moved to the point of having a coherent understanding of what the Civil War was. The “extensive” reader is one who collects impressions, factoids.

So, at the very least, we should be curious about where reading, as an activity, is located in the world of our students. Is it something to be done because it is an assignment? Is it a way to reflect on and deepen understanding? Does it concern enriching one’s sense of human possibility? Is it entertainment? Some of the above or all of the above? Even more to the point is to ask about how at home students are with seeing the world “on paper,” to borrow part of a title of David Olson’s.<sup>9</sup> That is, how often do they have to frame a written response to what they have read? What kind of a response? How familiar is the routine of reading in order to write about what has been read? How often do they experience reading and writing as a single integrated act, and not as two distinct tasks? This is where the issue of writing and what students understand that to mean enters this discussion. As Wayne Booth has argued in “What is an Idea?,” an education is about learning to live with and through ideas and writing about them.<sup>10</sup> Most of our students do not think of their life activities as unified with ideas and writing in this way.

It would seem to be the case that independent learning means that a person can write about what has been read in order to clarify and explore the substance of what she wants to say about that reading. The rhetorical center of the work is the student’s giving voice to what reading and the analytical work of writing has yielded. That “center” is found only by means of the practiced exercise of knowing how thoughtful reading gives rise to and informs writing that has substance and direction.

If we hope that students will become readers and better writers after being with us for a season or more, we have to take the full measure of the past they bring with them. Each of them has an educational history, that from the beginning and with rare exception, has separated reading and writing and made writing an exercise in handing papers in and getting them back emblazoned with “corrections” or no indication that the instructor has read it closely. Or, more commonly, students write papers that are taken up in large measure with summarizing the text and end with a conclusion in which an opinion about the reading is offered. This kind of writing served to suggest that the material has indeed been read, with an opinion added at the end as a signal of seriousness. (Cf. the discussion of this issue in Melanie Sperling, “Teachers as Readers of Students’ Writing,” in *The Reading-Writing Connection*, eds. Nancy Nelson and Robert Calfee, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998.<sup>11</sup>)

We want something else when we hold up independent learning as a value and as a goal. We are after a style that David Osborn describes in the following:

The comprehension and production of texts requires the management of both content and force — what is said and how it is to be taken. The experienced reader and writer is conscious of both. The experienced reader can recognize the mind behind the writing and the mind of the putative reader that the writer has in mind. These two minds the reader must coordinate with his or her own. Subjectivity is the recognition that each of these minds may have a different perspective on the world. Coordinating them is what initiates the internal mental dialogue which ...[is]...thinking.<sup>12</sup>

We should also be clear that the kind of reading we are asking students to do takes it for granted that they are leaving home, that they are prepared to test kitchen knowledge against the testimony of other witnesses, other writers, other fellow travelers. They are going to have their village sensibilities jarred at points. They will have to reason and offer evidence and say, in writing, what an author is about. Opinion, as E.B. White crisply observed, must have good reasons for showing up in writing and usually doesn’t. In one way or another, we are not about ratifying received opinion but working with students in reading and writing to get behind and beyond its bland façade.

So, if this is what we are inviting students to do on their side, performing in particular ways so that review and evaluation can strengthen performance, what is a teacher doing in this exchange? What does faculty performance in this context contribute to a student's learning to be an independent learner?

The most immediate answer is that faculties enact ways of meaning. The first way is to do what we all learned to do in graduate school, a necessary precondition for working with students. Graduate school, the American adaptation of a German model of research education, was the gateway to the discipline. A graduate student was to be a researcher, a creator of new knowledge, a contributor to the discipline and thus eligible for the rewards of the profession — promotion, tenure, recognition as an expert in “the” field. One taught what one had become expert in. Those who sat and listened were, themselves, catechumens, preparing to be received into membership and carrying out the tasks associated with being a new member of the community. The bargain was that you could read what you loved to read and do research, and you would have to do some teaching. You would present what scholars in the field were doing and your own reading of the material and sense of what mattered most, of what it was important for students to understand. Teaching served the ends of professional self-development.

What does teaching the subject in this way mean? There are a baker's dozen of answers, but certainly among them we would list something like what follows. I teach biology/history/English/sociology because students need to know: How the modern world came to be; how to think about human experience, their cultural past, the sources of their ethnic or religious identity; how to become well-rounded individuals; how to appreciate the best and the brightest and the achievements of human culture; how to understand the workings of the cell. We teach in the belief that our individual disciplines are crucial to a student's development, self understanding, feelings of empowerment, experience of transformation, intellectual maturation, or finding out what really happened as opposed to what they have been told.

I think it unlikely that students have the same list. I imagine theirs (and ours at one point) was less august and had to do with getting on with one's life or figuring out what to do with it. Finishing college was also a bit like getting a passport or a character reference (the bearer is trustworthy and will show up for work). It might very well be the case that there is more concern with getting a degree as a necessary credential than there was in the past, though one should always be suspicious of assertions that the present is rotten with mendacity unlike a remembered past when only a higher curiosity informed going to school.

Still, it is the case that we all experience the reality of people who “take” courses and complete degree requirements (“Tell me what you want”) and then move on — increasingly to the next degree, the one that will take them into the profession/job category they want. We all experience this instance of the commodification of learning. Even with those presenting circumstances, we are still obliged to explore what the student and teacher gather to do. At the most fundamental and time-honored level, the teacher imparts what she knows based upon her work in the field. If she is a very good lecturer and passionate about the timeliness of the discipline, she will find some students responding to her enthusiasm and passion and really diving into the subject for a term or beyond. If she reads her students' papers with care and responds to what they are attempting to get said, she will have helped a few, maybe more, begin to discover how to use writing to think.

If the class is a seminar and driven by the discussion of readings, findings and first drafts of projects that students are working on, exploring the demands of writing to find out what one thinks might be even more richly experienced. And, indeed, over the course of studies organized in this fashion a student can/might encounter a wealth of good reading and become more at home with what analysis and thoughtful written and oral presentation require. At the very least they will remember having had a good “course” in a subject. An Empire State College student might look back remembering some good contracts with different mentors and a study group or two that was lively and engaging.

The old question of whether we are teaching the subject or the student is pertinent here. What is the residue of our teaching? What do we want it to result in? I would argue that we are teaching people to read and write, that we use the disciplines we teach to develop the capacity to explore what others have thought and felt and said, and to develop a coherent statement about it. When we “cover the material” or settle for a student summarizing a text and ending that summary with a paragraph of opinion, we are no longer performing meaning. We have joined in the commodification we deplore.

In the example just given, the teacher “performs” the discipline and the student responds. If the student’s response is not clear or is seen to be poorly written, the student will be referred, in all likelihood, to a composition tutor or to a writing lab. This is a curious moment. Writing, it seems, is not part of a discipline. Writing is a problem that has been professionalized in 20th century American higher education. English as a discipline concerns itself with interpretation and critical theory; composition, perceived as a more onerous, less rewarding work, is given to adjuncts — the dayworkers of the teacher corps. It is not only English that lacks a rhetorical center. That charge could be made concerning most of the humanities and social sciences. People outside the discipline worry about the cogency and completeness of how a student goes about writing about what it is she wants to say about what she has read. Yes, there are instances, probably more than a few, when a student needs coaching on grammar and vocabulary and the like, but a poorly written paper in a subject is not “a writing” problem. It is evidence that reading, and comprehension and thoughtfulness have not quite joined hands. Inviting students to be independent learners would thus seem to require us to explore, with the students, how prepared they are to march into that country and what further equipping might have to take place. We should not begin by assuming that they already know the way and are ready to go.

## II. Learning from the Steelworkers

In this section, I want to discuss how developing an educational planning contract for steelworkers — a distance learning course offered through ESC’s Center for Distance Learning (CDL) — forced me to grapple with the issues we are discussing in this essay. At the center of all that follows is the idea that becoming effective at doing independent learning requires a student, working with a mentor, to understand her own learning style, using that as a beginning point that will lead to mastering the art of critical reading and the writing that follows from it.

As I began working on the course, I came to see that steelworkers should focus first on the skills they needed to study independently and at a distance. Helpful in this initiating round of development was Chris Round’s advanced course in Independent Learning Strategies and his insight, echoed in my experience, that all study is, in some ways, study at a distance. In any learning situation, however supportive or interactive the environment, a student has to decide about the meaning of what has been read. The student has to be responsible for her learning. Learning how to claim for themselves the knowledge that they want and need is where we begin.

There were a number of circumstances in particular that course design had to take into account: The first was time management. Always an issue in education, it is a particularly urgent question in distance learning, especially in the start-up weeks when students will not uncommonly say “I can’t do this. This was a mistake. Why did I take this course? I don’t have the time to do this.”

The problem of finding time, structuring time, being alert to how to use time is compounded in the steelworkers’ case because of working shifts. It is not at all uncommon for students to work long shifts, 16-hour days for three weeks. In this scheme of things leisure time seems the last thing to be used for study — which is work by another name.

Steelworkers are used to dealing with technical information and instrumentalist learning. The College’s liberal studies orientation — the problematising of things — pushes back against the student in new and often uncomfortable ways. “What do you mean by that?” “Where do you see that in the reading?” For many students, classroom learning, both technical and nontechnical, did not engage them as persons: it was really about being told something definite, concrete, detailed and being able to repeat that in kind. Memorization was synonymous with learning and mastery. Being asked to give reasons for the answer they have served up is often very new.

In designing *Educational Planning: Independent Learning Strategies for Steelworkers*, I wanted to introduce students to their own learning processes so that they could begin to see that what they were embarking on is not entirely foreign to their experience, that they had a base on which to build.

One beginning point was to introduce students to learning as a process, as something that goes on all the time. It is not that the skills and learning requirements for independent study are so new and different. We tend to make a really false distinction between what we know and learn and so-called formal learning which happens in a school. So learning in this instance begins not with assigning a text right away, but with having the student sort through and reflect on how she goes about learning something, how much she knows about that process, and how aware she is of her own reasoning. Students

need to learn that the process of decision making, something they do everyday, is shaped by handling facts and information judged to be relevant to the task at hand. This exercise in reflection, a kind of personal inventory, also provides a way to have students think about time and how they can or will use it. The more aware a student is of what study involves, of how she studies and sorts things out, the more effective she is as a manager of time. This can become a self-reinforcing cycle. Like anything involving practice, the more you do it, the better you get at it. The better you get at it, the more you get out of it.

This brings us to the learning journal, one of the defining features of the course. After having done an audit of their study time and learning experience during a given week, and using this to develop a weekly study schedule, students then begin working on the learning journal. One part focuses on the content of learning, and the second focuses on how they are learning.

The organizing questions that students use in sorting out how they are learning are the familiar who, what, when, where, why and how. These are everyday questions; journalists use them, and steelworkers may be familiar with them as they are used in investigating grievances in the workplace. They are remarkably helpful in having the student see herself as a reader, as someone who is devoting time to exploring what something means.

What? What am I doing when I am reading; listening to the radio, watching TV, lying down, sitting up, reading with a pencil in hand and with a notebook? Where am I when I am studying? Do I have a place and a time or am I doing it here and there? When do I study? How do I study? Am I listening to the author? Is my head full of noise? Am I trying to memorize what I am reading? Am I taking notes? What kind?

The questions are equally useful as a way of exploring the content of their reading. The quotidian quality of the questions means they are useful. That they are powerful devices, though homely, simply makes them that much more attractive. They are terms that are utterly familiar. They bridge to what is central to the course, using a text in a variety of ways to explore how to identify and get at concepts and to explore when, how and in what circumstances they think about and develop those concepts as part of their own thinking. The goal is to develop the skill of “thinking on one’s feet.” To see the rhetorical structures of ideas and to sift their meaning and worth — not just as a school exercise, but because that is how a critically shaped “eye” works.

What was alienated or simply formal knowledge becomes, in this way, personal knowledge, a personal style. The design of the course and the use of the learning journal and its open ended character provides the students with specific tools that they need for critical analysis and for working out, in their writing, the kind of response and positions that analysis has fostered. The students’ growing mastery of this skill and the development of their responses enables them to feel an ownership over their knowledge and to understand the effectiveness of their academic learning as something that is not remote from their everyday lives, but as something that can leaven it in new and unexpected ways.

•••••

What we have learned from the separate experiences that have converged at the point we have described in this essay is that the discussion of independent learning needs to be informed in a variety of ways by a deeper understanding of our students’ educational history, by what they have experienced, come to value or rejected. It needs, moreover, to explore how students can be taught to see that reading and writing are tools that belong to them, not burdens to be endured.

## Notes

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3. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
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5. See Robert Darnton, "History of Reading," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), p. 158 ff.
6. Kaestle *et al.*, p. 149 ff.
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9. David Olson, *The World on Paper* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
10. Wayne Booth, "What is an Idea?" in *The Practical Stylist*, 6th edition, Sheridan Baker and Robert E. Yarber (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), p. 205.
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ALL ABOUT  
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## Twelve Core Concepts of Adult Education

*As part of a dissertation, “The Core Concepts of Andragogy” (1981, Teachers College, Columbia University, unpublished), C. Suanmali conducted a study in which 174 adult education professors in the United States and Canada unanimously agreed to the following 12 core concepts of adult education:*

1. Progressively decrease the learner’s dependency on the adult educator;
2. Help the learner understand how to use learning resources, especially the experience of others, including the educator, and how to engage in reciprocal learning relationships;
3. Assist the learner to define his/her learning needs, both in terms of immediate awareness and in terms of understanding the cultural and psychological assumptions influencing his/her perceptions of needs;
4. Assist the learner to assume increasing responsibility for defining learning objectives, planning his/her own learning program and evaluating progress;
5. Help the learner organize what is to be learned in relationship to his/her current personal problems, concerns and levels of understanding;
6. Foster learner decision making, select relevant learning experiences that require choosing, expand the learner’s range of options, and facilitate the learner’s taking the perspectives of others who have alternative ways of understanding;
7. Encourage the use of criteria for judging that are increasingly inclusive and differentiating in awareness, self-reflective and integrative of experience;
8. Foster a self-corrective, reflective approach to learning — to typifying and labeling, to perspective taking and choosing, and to habits of learning and learning relationships;
9. Facilitate posing and solving of problems, including problems associated with the implementation of individual and collective action, and recognition of the relationship between personal problems and public issues;
10. Reinforce the self-concept of the learner as a learner and doer by providing for progressive mastery and for a supportive climate with feedback to encourage provisional efforts to change and to take risks; by avoiding competitive judgment of performance; and by appropriate use of mutual support groups;
11. Emphasize experiential, participative and projective instructional methods, and use modeling and learning contracts where appropriate;
12. Make the moral distinction between helping the learner understand his/her full range of choices and ways to improve

the quality of choosing, and encouraging the learner to make a specific choice. (This was the only item challenged by some professors.)

(Thanks to Jack Mezirow for this material.)

ALL ABOUT  
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## **Sabbatical, Research and Lecture Report MaryNell Morgan, Northeast Center**

From September 1998 to August 1999, I was on sabbatical, working on a multi-media, interdisciplinary project to develop learning resources based upon extensive research on the life and work of Dr. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois. While my focus is mainly on *The Souls of Black Folk* (first published in 1903), Dr. Du Bois' most popular book, I make use of his numerous publications, including his 21 books and hundreds of essays, articles, editorials, reviews and speeches. I also use numerous biographical, theoretical and editorial publications by past and present scholars who are a growing school of experts on one of the U.S.A.'s greatest and most productive intellectuals and social and political activists.

By doing content analysis of the 14 chapters in *The Souls of Black Folk*, I am developing a study guide that provides definitions or explanations of key terms, people, events and metaphors, and making suggestions on how each chapter may be used in several social science and humanities disciplines. In order to make the results of this project more broadly accessible, I am collecting appropriate illustrations, poetry and prose for dramatic presentation, and traditional spirituals for use with college and general audiences. Most of the materials I have used are archived among the Du Bois Papers at The University of Massachusetts, Amherst; Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee; The Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; Clark-Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia; The Moorland-Spingarn Collection, Howard University, Washington, D.C.; The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; The W.E.B. Du Bois Memorial Center for Pan African Culture, Accra, Ghana; and The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York.

In this brief report, I provide a print version of a lecture/performance, which offers a) a brief look at Dr. Du Bois, the person; b) an assessment of the core purpose and meaning of *The Souls of Black Folk*; and c) a discussion (and performance) "Of The Sorrow Songs." This lecture/ performance has been presented on three occasions:

1) the Saratoga County Arts Council's "Wiles, Women and Songs" concert series that featured women artists; 2) a conference held at Mercer University, Macon, Georgia, that examined *The Souls of Black Folk* as a multi-disciplinary resource for undergraduate teaching; and 3) a SUNY Empire State College faculty lecture series organized by Dr. Charles Fox and held in Saratoga Springs in the spring of 2000.

I prefaced my ESC faculty lecture/performance by singing "Go Down Moses." Dr. Du Bois prefaced each of the 14 essays in *The Souls of Black Folk* with bars of music from a traditional spiritual and lines of poetry that signal the theme of the essay.

"When Israel was in Egypt Land;  
Let my People Go.  
Oppressed so hard they could not stand;  
Let my People Go.  
Go Down, Moses; Way Down in Egypt  
Land; Tell O' Pharaoh, To  
Let my People Go!!!"

— Traditional

A. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois was born on February 23, 1868 in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. His parents were Mary Silvina Burghardt Du Bois and Alfred Du Bois. He was raised, virtually as an only child, by his mother, although he had an older brother named Idelbert, who was raised by his maternal grandmother. Willie, as he was known in his childhood community, was educated in the local schools and graduated, as class valedictorian, from Great Barrington High School in 1884. He was the only African American in his class. His mother died shortly after he finished high school. Despite his wish to attend Harvard in his home state, with his community's financial help, he traveled south instead, to attend Fisk University, an historically Black college founded by freedmen in Nashville, Tennessee.

Willie was a "Motherless Child" when he arrived in Nashville. For him, it was a kind of "culture shock." In Great Barrington, there had been about 50 Blacks. In Nashville, there were thousands, and he learned firsthand the trials and tribulations of a segregated society. While studying at Fisk, he dedicated himself to making his "a life that shall be an honor to the Race."

In 1888, he graduated from Fisk University, again as class valedictorian, and in 1890, he completed a baccalaureate degree in philosophy, with honors, at Harvard University. Also at Harvard, he completed his master's and doctoral degrees in 1892 and 1895, respectively. He was the first African American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard University. His dissertation, *Suppression of the African Slave Trade*, was published as the first in a series on slavery in the U.S.A. Prior to completing his studies at Harvard, he received, after considerable effort, a Slater Fund Fellowship and studied at the University of Berlin.

From 1894 to 1896, Du Bois was a professor of Greek and Latin at Wilberforce University in Ohio. There he met and married his first wife, Nina Yolande Gomer with whom he fathered a son, Burghardt, who died as a toddler; and a daughter, Yolande who lived to middle age and predeceased Dr. Du Bois. Yolande had one daughter, Du Bois, who is the mother of five children. Du Bois, the granddaughter and three of her children and grandchildren are Dr. Du Bois' family of direct lineage in the year 2000.

Dr. Du Bois' second academic appointment was at the University of Pennsylvania where he completed the research for his second book, *The Philadelphia Negro*, which was published in 1899. Beginning in 1897, he was on the faculty at Atlanta University (this was the first of two tenures at AU, now Clark-Atlanta University). While there, he supervised the research and publication of monographs (from 1897 to 1911) on various issues of African American experience. These included education, business, health, housing, religion and crime.

During those first years at AU, Dr. Du Bois became increasingly concerned about Booker T. Washington's growing control of the Black press, Black political appointments and Black education — the so-called "Tuskegee Machine." Washington was the founding principal of Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University, Alabama), and probably the most powerful African American political leader the U.S.A. has produced. At first, Dr. Du Bois congratulated Washington on his Atlanta Compromise speech in 1895. However, by the early 1900s, race relations were at a low point and "Jim Crow" was so firmly established that voting rights were practically nonexistent for Blacks. Dr. Du Bois and many others blamed Mr. Washington for not using his influence to vigorously work for social change. Essay number three, "Of Mr. Washington and Others," in *The Souls of Black Folk* provides an assessment of Mr. Washington's leadership, in particular, and leadership in general, especially for African Americans.

I will conclude this discussion of Dr. Du Bois, the person, with a rapid overview. Dr. Du Bois was a founding member and the only African American among the initial officers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (1909). He founded *Crisis Magazine*, the NAACP publication, still published in the year 2000, and edited it from 1910 to 1934. He organized and participated in the five Pan-African Conferences from 1900 to 1945, served as an NAACP delegate/consultant to the founding convention of the United Nations, served as chairman of the International Peace Information Center (IPIC), and was a candidate for the U.S. Senate from New York in 1950. Due to his involvement with the IPIC, he was publicly handcuffed, indicted, tried and acquitted of a charge that he was an "unregistered foreign agent." After several years of being denied a passport, he regained the right to travel abroad in 1958,

and then spent most of 1958-59 traveling extensively in the Soviet Union and China. He traveled with his second wife, Shirley Graham Du Bois. In 1961, Dr. Du Bois moved to Ghana, West Africa, at the invitation of that country's president, Kwame Nkrumah, became a naturalized citizen of Ghana, and worked as director of The Encyclopedia Africana. When *The Souls of Black Folk* was published in 1903, Dr. Du Bois was 35 years old. He lived an active and productive life until his death at age 95 1/2 on August 27, 1963, the day before the Great March on Washington. He was given a State Funeral in Accra, Ghana, where he is buried.

B. Dr. Du Bois clearly states his core purpose and meaning in the Fore- and Afterthoughts of *The Souls of Black Folk*. Addressing the "Gentle Reader" — learned Whites — in the "Forethought," he presents a faithful and passionate discussion of "... the strange meaning of being Black ... at the dawning of the Twentieth century" by sketching "in vague, uncertain outline, the spiritual world in which ten thousand thousand (sic) Americans 34 live and strive." In 14 essays, Dr. Du Bois provides deep philosophical and practical discussions on the meaning of emancipation and its aftermath; leadership; education and training; racial segregation; race relations; poverty and work; religion; traditional spirituals; and human sorrow and struggles. These essays contribute to human knowledge in virtually all social science and humanities disciplines as well as in inter- and multi-disciplinary programs such as African American Studies, Ethnic Studies, and Women's or Gender Studies.

"The Afterthought" echoes the passion and reasoned pleading found on every page of Dr. Du Bois' little book. The "Gentle Reader" becomes "O God the Reader" and the "Gentle One," whom he chides and with whom he pleads. "Let the ears of a guilty people tingle with truth ... in this drear day when human brotherhood is mockery and a snare." And let "this my book fall not stillborn into the world ... and these crooked marks on a fragile leaf be not indeed — THE END."

As testament to its enduring value, the Dover edition notes that *The Souls of Black Folk* "remains unparalleled in its scope. (Dr.) Du Bois achieves ... a rare combination of pathos and dignity, presenting a portrait of Black (experiences) that commands respect. (Dr.) Du Bois' prose is at times painfully poignant, but it does not lapse into sentimentality. After almost a century, the book is still a powerful, relevant source on American experiences (not just African American experiences)." He wrote for educated White Americans; he used the concept of "The Veil" (his metaphor for segregation or the color line), and the concept of "double-consciousness" (the necessity of "two-ness" in African American identity — at once an American and a Negro) to provide glimpses of both sides of "the veil." "One ever feels his two-ness — an American, a Negro; two Souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."

Along with his powerful examination of life within and outside of "the veil," Dr. Du Bois offers visionary and accurate predictions about the future. "The problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color line, — the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea." In noting the continuing relevance of *The Souls of Black Folk*, some scholars wonder whether the book might be updated by simply changing the historical references and examples, and replacing 20th century with 21st century.

C. Turning attention now to the "sorrow songs," note that Dr. Du Bois called them the articulate message of the slave to the world. In telling us about the sorrow songs, Dr. Du Bois develops a typology that first places them in Africa. He ultimately makes the claim that they are "the sole American music ... (and) the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the seas..." These songs have developed from their "primitive" African origins to a second level a step removed from the more primitive types. This second level is Afro-American. The third is a blending of Negro music with the music heard in the foster land. The result is still distinctively Negro and the method of blending original, but the elements are both Negro and Caucasian. A possible fourth step would be where the songs of White America have been distinctively influenced by the slave songs or have incorporated whole phrases of Negro melody. As is characteristic of Dr. Du Bois, he notes that side by side with the growth of these songs has gone the debasements and imitations — the Negro "minstrel" songs, many of the "gospel" hymns, and some of the contemporary (@1903) "coon" songs, — a mass of music in which the novice may easily lose himself and never find the real Negro melodies. Dr. Du Bois' "two-ness" concept is veiled in his essay "Of The Sorrow Songs." At once, these songs are sorrowful and joyful; expressions of power and the lack of power; hope and hopelessness; fear and courage; peace and agitation or struggle; and defeat and triumph! My latest insight on *The Souls of Black Folk* is that it is a sorrow song, Dr. Du Bois' articulate message to the world.



At this point and sometimes in other places throughout the lecture, I insert an acappella performance of traditional spirituals. A partial list of the spirituals I sing — with audience participation strongly encouraged — includes “Nobody Know The Trouble I See,” “Motherless Child,” “Steal Away,” “Raslin’ Jacob,” and “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.” Through my Mother, Frances Morgan, now deceased, I have the gift of a voice which can capture meaning and feelings in the songs that nurtured me in my formative years in rural Georgia, U.S.A during the 1950s and 60s. When I realized that *The Souls of Black Folk* features these songs, I became further convinced that our nation and world would benefit from knowing this book. Performing the spirituals and talking about the book and Dr. Du Bois make this classic work a more accessible and powerful tool for transforming one’s life.

Now I need a sabbatical to finish what I have started!

ALL ABOUT  
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## **Assessing Prior Learning Assessments in Canada**

**Joy Van Kleef, Policy Consultant Prior Learning Assessment, Toronto, Canada**

One of the wonderful things about being a private consultant in adult education is that you get to set your own hours, which means you have a chance to build time into your day for reflection about the things you are working on. This, of course, has consequences too. As a result of my reflections, I now have a list several pages long of subjects that I would like to investigate — that I will investigate. I have found a way, and am returning to school for another degree, this time in adult education. Much of what I would like to do stems from a study in which I was recently involved on prior learning assessment. In Canada, we call it prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) to highlight the recognition that adults returning to school are looking for, as well as the assessment in which educators are engaged.

The Cross-Canada Study of PLAR was an opportunity to explore many questions we had about the impact of academically recognizing prior experiential learning. We set up a partnership of seven colleges from across Canada and went out in search of funding to support our work. The federal government agreed as long as the colleges also made in-kind contributions. This was no problem, so off we went. And what a job we did!

We conducted a modest literature review (governments don't seem so interested in funding these) and found that although there has been little formal research on PLAR in Canada, and limited international literature, findings are consistent that PLAR is a sound academic practice that benefits adult learners and institutions. We wanted to build on these findings.

Through a combination of statistical data collection, analysis and focus groups, we gathered extensive information on PLAR at the seven partner institutions over five years: characteristics of PLAR learners, PLAR activities, the impact of the experience from the learners' and institutions' perspectives, and the costs. We were able to examine how learners who had experienced PLAR compared to traditional students in terms of demographics and academic achievement.

We set up a large central data database on the courses and programs taken by more than 3,500 PLAR learners from 1993/94 to 1997/98. Quantitative data included information on 7,900 assessments in over 1,400 courses as well as the 40,000 courses and over 360 programs PLAR learners took through traditional delivery. Data on almost 12,000 traditional students in 58 programs were also included in order to compare them with the PLAR learners. The records of over 237,000 courses taken by traditional students were incorporated into the database. One of the colleges compiled additional data on PLAR assessment of military training programs during one of the five study years. Qualitative data were compiled from focus groups we conducted across Canada with 65 PLAR learners in 22 programs and 50 assessors from 37 programs. We also conducted a financial analysis on the costs of PLAR and traditional course delivery.

Since we were all spread across the country, we communicated mostly via the Internet. We debated everything vigorously! One of the more humorous debates we had during the three years of conducting the study was on what we should call the report. Most of us were happy with the title we finally selected, "A Slice of the Iceberg" but others were afraid it would reinforce the world's existing misconception that we are the Great Frozen North. But as I sit here in October in southern Canada writing this morning with a current windchill of 20 degrees Fahrenheit outside, I'm thinking that perhaps it's not



such a misconception! In any case, the title of this report is based on a metaphorical “iceberg” created by Tough (1976) which is now used by many Canadian adult educators. It depicts the concept that only a small percentage of adult learning is recognized in our society but most learning exists below the surface where it is more difficult to identify, assess and recognize in any formal way. Through our study, we hoped to observe whether PLAR lowers the waterline on the “iceberg” by increasing recognition of informal learning. We hoped that the information we gathered would assist institutions, governments, adult learners and workplaces with their decision making on the funding, development, delivery, use and evaluation of new and existing PLAR services.

To accomplish this, we collectively analyzed and synthesized the statistical data, focus group reports and financial information. Two levels of PLAR activity were examined: the national and institutional levels. Three types of analysis were conducted: descriptive, comparative, involving findings related to two or more sets of data, and interpretive analysis involving the integration of several data findings. The analysis was conducted in relation to two time frames: annual and the five-year study period. We also examined the limitations on the study’s data collection and data analysis activities.

What did we find out? The following sections illustrate some of the study results.

Findings we rejoiced in:

- Adult learners did have educationally relevant, college-level prior learning that could be successfully assessed and recognized within post-secondary educational settings.
- PLAR learners were successful students. The evidence indicates that PLAR learners earned solid grades in their courses acquired through PLAR and in their courses delivered through traditional delivery. Their average course grades were as high or higher than the average course grades of traditional students in the same programs. Their pass rates were higher. They took more courses than traditional students over the long term and graduated at a considerably higher rate. Their graduation grade point averages were slightly higher.
- PLAR strengthened adult learners’ confidence in their own capacities to learn and motivated them to pursue further education.
- PLAR represented important efficiencies for part-time adult learners by shortening their programs, reducing course loads and reducing costs. It was particularly beneficial to part-time students who decided to return to education to achieve employment-related training and occupational credentials.
- A motivating factor behind support for PLAR at all participant institutions was a strong faculty-based commitment to adult learning.

Findings that surprised us:

- Overall, the level of PLAR activity at the institutions was low given the hundreds of thousands of adults who passed through the colleges’ doors over the course of the five-year study period and the fact that all the colleges had proactive PLAR offices.
- The single most active age group that accessed PLAR was 20 - 24 years. Wasn’t this supposed to be for experienced adults?
- Most PLAR learners were women, but the gender ratio was the same among traditional students in the same programs.

Findings that concerned us:

- The low number of PLAR learners and programs involved in PLAR over the five-year study period appeared linked to our findings around low marketing activity and the fact that PLAR was not paying for itself within the institutions. Government ceilings on fees colleges could charge for assessments and inadequate funding for development and delivery were the primary causes.

- Although there were exceptions, the “new learner” for whom PLAR was a motivating factor in returning to college, did not materialize to the extent originally anticipated. We did not appear to be adequately tapping the external adult population.
- Lack of agreement and clarity around faculty remuneration for conducting assessments had a detrimental effect on learners and on faculty support for PLAR.
- Opportunities for full-time learners to benefit from PLAR through shortened programs, lighter course loads or lower costs were impaired by rigid program delivery structures and government regulations that eliminate eligibility for student assistance.
- There is a need for further research into several issues cited but not addressed in the study, including more comprehensive financial analyses, the role PLAR plays in motivating learners to return to formal study, short-term and long-term incentives to provide PLAR and the role of volunteerism in providing PLAR services.

We finished the study at the end of 1999, but it was no sooner over that we realized we had to do a couple more things. I wanted to make our amazing data collection tool available to other institutions, so we fixed some of its bugs; I wrote a user manual and put it all on a CDROM along with the database for any institution who would like to use it. (It is now available at no cost but mailing and the completion of a formal request.) We also wanted to follow up with some of the questions we still had not answered. So, there is another proposal sitting with the federal government today, proposing a follow up on the PLAR learners in the five-year study and a survey with new questions about their experiences with PLAR.

Additional questions emerge: How do PLAR processes in Canada compare with those in the United States? To what extent do we use mentoring in our processes? Why do Canadian colleges seem to have an aversion to standardized testing in assessing prior learning while Americans use it daily? Why have business and industry been at the table with education from PLAR's inception in Canada, unlike other jurisdictions? Does this stem from different senses of the purpose of adult education? What can we learn from each other in developing the best PLAR practices possible? I sincerely hope we will have opportunities to share perspectives on these and other questions on PLAR in the future.

Copies of *A Slice of the Iceberg: Cross-Canada Study of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition* are available for \$25 U.S. (cheque or money order only) from the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment at: P.O. Box 20135, Belleville, Ontario, Canada, K8N 5V1. The CD-ROM data collection tool and user manual are available at no cost from Joy Van Kleef, 33 Harbour Square, #409, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5J 2G2. Joy can be reached at: [vankleef@idirect.com](mailto:vankleef@idirect.com).

ALL ABOUT  
**MENTORING**  
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## **"Maria Montessori" Comes to Monsey** **Mayra Bloom, Hudson Valley Center**

As a long-standing admirer of Vivian Paley, preschool teacher extraordinaire, I was particularly excited when she came to visit Rockland County in September. The planning for this gathering began shortly after the schoolyard shootings in Littleton, Colorado, which on the one hand were so dreadfully shocking, but which also had such an air of inevitability. It was as if this was what American childhood had finally come to — as if this is what American children were really all about. At that time, we were beginning to think about the first Phyllis Helbraun Memorial Leadership Symposium, in honor of the founding director of Child Care Resources of Rockland. As we talked, we realized that we lacked a definition of “leadership” in the context of early childhood. Were we talking about the leadership that a teacher demonstrates in the classroom? About becoming community advocates for young children? Were we addressing people who already considered themselves leaders in the profession? Or people who did not yet think of themselves in those terms? And was it an oxymoron even to talk about leadership in terms of a field, which is so commonly underpaid, ignored and underappreciated?

Although our conversations were active and engrossing, they yielded little in the way of results. We finally decided, however, that even if we could not define leadership in the context of early childhood, we knew it when we saw it. So we called Vivian Paley, and we were delighted when she accepted our invitation, even though her busy schedule did not allow her to come for nearly two years.

Fortunately, this gave us some time to prepare for her visit. ESC colleague Marianne Arieux and I did this by designing group studies on both sides of the Hudson for Empire State College students and for members of the early childhood community. Together we read and discussed books by Vivian Paley, including *The Boy Who Would Be a Helicopter: The Uses of Storytelling in the Classroom*, about a child named Jason who knew only one story — about a broken helicopter — and who knew very little about how to play with other children.

In the book, Vivian Paley describes the creation of a narrative community, which eventually draws Jason into classroom life. In *You Can't Say You Can't Play*, we discussed fundamental aspects of the democratic classroom and, by extension, democratic society. What are the competing needs and rights of the group and the individual? Is there anything “you can't say” in a democracy? Do children have the right to exclude one another from free play? Finally, we came to Paley's newest book, *The Kindness of Children*, which brought us full circle to Littleton.

During our group discussion, one student described her own reaction to the book. “When I first saw the title,” she recounted, “I said to myself, ‘*The Kindness of Children?*’ Yeah, right!” And in this, she was not unusual, because one of the deadliest aspects of the society which created Columbine is that it has convinced us that the true measure of childhood is not kindness, but cruelty. We are told all the time about how cruel children are — how they hurt and ridicule those who are not wearing designer jeans; how they pull the wings off insects. We are presented daily — hourly — with images of children as demonically possessed murderers; as sex objects; as insatiable consumers; as hyperactive, illiterate delinquents who ought to be tried and incarcerated — even executed — as if they were adults. Another student described a moment in the infant-toddler room. She was feeding one baby while another was holding unhappily on to her leg. A little girl came

over to the sad child and was trying to comfort him by patting him on the back as she had often seen the teacher do. A parent, passing by, exclaimed, “Oh no — she’s hurting the baby!” In other words, unconscious images which we hold about the cruelty of children prevent us from seeing what is right in front of us. They lead us to believe that the natural life of childhood is not, in fact kindness, but cruelty.

If we are to prevent future repetitions of the Littleton tragedy, it will not do to merely blame the media. Each of us must also look at the ways in which our own professions — our own lives — perpetuate lies about children. Even early childhood educators need to think about the assumptions and language of our own profession. We are proud, for example, that we have given up feeding infants according to the clock; we now feed them “on demand.” But there is a big difference between viewing an infant as “demanding” rather than merely as “hungry.” Similarly, what adjective persists when we describe two-year olds? “Terrible.” And what word naturally follows the word “sibling”? “Rivalry,” of course. The result is that when we see demonstrations of affection between brothers and sisters, for example, we think that this is somehow something miraculous, as if siblings all over the world do not love and care about one another all their lives.

Given the need to clean up our own act, however, it was not immediately clear what to do. It’s at times like these that one looks to “leaders” for assistance. Unfortunately, “leadership” is not a word that particularly appeals to Vivian Paley; it is not a concept she applies to her work. “Before you talk about leadership,” she said the evening before her presentation, “you need to talk about two things. First, listening. You need to listen to the children’s stories, and help them to act them out. Secondly, you need to be curious about what you see and hear. You need to ask yourselves, “Why this and not this? How does this story connect to other stories in the classroom? What am I seeing and hearing?”

I think she meant that if we watch and listen carefully enough, we will see evidence that contradicts the messages we receive from everywhere in our society. And if we tell others what we have seen, we will hear, in turn, other stories of kindness — of adults as well as children. In this way, we will begin to gain the confidence to proclaim that contrary to popular opinion, cruelty and violence are not the natural state of children — of humanity. And in this way, we will, like Vivian Paley, become leaders.

It is often disconcerting to meet one’s heroes. Paley, however, more than met our hopes and expectations. Not only did she offer an extremely generous set of three presentations on Saturday, but in order to accommodate our Orthodox Jewish students, she agreed to demonstrate her method on Sunday in Monsey with a small group of children. After many efforts to find a classroom that could accommodate such an unorthodox gathering, we met at the Belz Head Start in Monsey at the kind invitation of Director Chany Krausz. I had explained to the students that it was as if “Maria Montessori were coming to Monsey,” and it moved me greatly to see men and women, African Americans, Asians and others in the same room with Orthodox Jewish early childhood professionals.

We were all concerned about placing the children in an unfamiliar situation with lots of strangers watching. Paley, however, worked her usual magic. Down on all fours in a skirt borrowed for the occasion, she patted masking tape onto the floor to stake out a stage for acting out the children’s stories. Although they were obviously interested, the children were understandably shy. Without betraying a trace of impatience or anxiety, Paley acknowledged even the slightest gesture of participation, and she began to evoke tiny little stories (e.g. “tree”), and act them out. It was easy to see that with a day or two of practice, these children, like children all over the world, would be eagerly dictating stories from their play, from their dreams, from their lives, and acting them out with concentration defying adult diagnoses of ADD or learning disabilities.

As the children began to understand what Paley was driving at, one boy told a full-fledged story about a robber who saw the rings on a woman’s finger and pulled and pulled until he pulled her finger off!!! It was wonderful confirmation that even in a community which does its best to banish giants, witches and robbers from the nursery, these creatures will take their place on the stages of children’s imaginations as they construct narrative meanings for the events and feelings in their lives.

After her demonstration, Paley answered questions from the audience. Asked about why she had “overlooked” one child’s “obvious” speech defect, Paley seemed genuinely puzzled. “I never noticed that his speech was not within normal limits,” she said, and went on to discuss the dangers of pathologizing childhood. It was precisely this insistence on seeing and listening to the child as a person, rather than a diagnosis, which enabled her to chart Jason’s journey from Helicopter Boy

to member of the classroom community. It is her intellectual curiosity, her passionate desire to hear the children's stories that makes her the leader that she is.



*Vivian Paley has written many wonderful books about the subtle and rich interactions among children and between teachers and their young students. The following excerpts offer a taste of her work and may even suggest her relevance to us as adult educators.*

*Boys and Girls: Superheroes in the Doll Corner* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986)

I often watch the nursery school children next door "at work." The youngest boys and girls start at about the same place; that is, they are equally unskilled. Delighted by the novelty of messy, colorful art materials, they draw, tear paper and smear paste without regard for the finished product. It seems splendid enough that crayons make marks on paper, that paper can be torn or cut, and that paste makes paper slippery. The paints drip and flow and change colors in magical ways. The children are not making "something;" they are simply making. (p. 103)

*White Teacher* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989)

My uncertainties about labeling behavior and intelligence in general have been exposed by my dilemmas concerning black children. My attempts to help black children feel more comfortable in a white environment have made me more aware of the discomfort every child experiences as he realizes he is being judged by someone who does not know him? As I watched and reacted to black children, I came to see a common need in every child. Anything a child feels is different about himself which cannot be referred to spontaneously, casually, naturally and uncritically by the teacher can become a cause for anxiety and an obstacle to learning.

Mrs. Hawkins (a black parent) told me that in her children's previous school, the teacher had said, "There is no color difference in my classroom. All my children look alike to me." "What rot," said Mrs. Hawkins. "My children are black. They don't look like your children. They know they're black, and we want it recognized. It's a positive difference, an interesting difference and a comfortable natural difference. At least it could be so, if you teachers learned to value differences more. What you value, you talk about." (pp. xv, 12)

*The Boy Who Would Be A Helicopter: The Uses of Storytelling in the Classroom* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990)

Put your play into formal narratives, and I will help you and your classmates listen to one another. In this way, you will build a literature of images and themes, of beginnings and endings, of references and allusions. You must invent your own literature if you are to connect your ideas to the ideas of others. (p. 18)

*The Girl with the Brown Crayon* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997)

In the course of the morning, the [kindergarten] children have taken up such matters as the artist's role in society; the conditions necessary for thinking; and the influence of music and art on the emotions. From Reeny's simple assertion, "That brown mouse seem to be just like me" has come a preview of the introspective life. (p. 8)

*You Can't Say You Can't Play* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992)

Thinking about unkindness always reminds me of the time-out chair. It made children sad and lonely to be removed from the group, which in turn made me feel inadequate and mean and — I became convinced — made everyone feel tentative and unsafe. These emotions show up in a variety of unwholesome ways, depending on whether one is a teacher or child. We are all cut from the same cloth. The time-out chair was my means of punishment. "You can't play" is the child's way. If it is wrong for me to exclude, then it is equally wrong for the children. "In your whole life, you're not going to go through life never being excluded," a fifth grade boy will tell me. "So you may as well learn it now." "Maybe our

classrooms can be nicer than the outside world,” I suggest. (pp. 95, 22)

*The Kindness of Children* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999)

“The moral universe rests upon the breath of schoolchildren.” (Epigraph)

ALL ABOUT

# MENTORING

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## MI News

Members of the Mentoring Institute Advisory Board have been involved in a number of on-going activities: A committee made up of Mayra Bloom, Robyn Silverman, Susan Oaks, Frieda Mendelsohn and Alan Mandell is revising the *Mentoring Handbook* as an online resource. Many of the components of the print-based handbook are now available on Mentorsite, new pieces are being added, and a group of new mentors have access to it. The site also includes a discussion area for new mentors. The long-term goal is to create an accessible gathering of resources for all ESC faculty, which is relevant to the practice of mentoring more generally.

As described over the last year, members of the MI Board are also involved with the Academic Policy Committee (APC) in an effort to think more systematically about “faculty development” as a college-wide endeavor. The APC and the MI, along with Joe Moore and Joyce Elliott, met on 19 October to devise some practical steps to widen the College conversation and create a meaningful and appropriately funded plan for faculty development. As a follow-up, small groups are focusing on such topics as: faculty development learning contracts, individualized faculty development plans, video exit interviews, online discussions about mentoring, resources and supports, and the articulation of an overall strategic plan. We are hoping to extend this conversation to the centers and programs, and to provide an opportunity for an even broader discussion at the spring 2001 All College Conference.

Another MI committee made up of Barbara Kantz, Mayra Bloom, Duncan RyanMann, Richard Bonnabeau and Alan Mandell is working on plans for regular new mentor workshops. This spring we expect to hold a twoday College-wide new mentor workshop (in the Albany area), and a Saturday regional workshop, particularly focused on the needs of newer part-time mentors (at the Genesee Valley Center). More details on these two events and on longer-range plans will soon be available.

In October, we were pleased to welcome Marie Eaton to ESC. Marie is professor at Fairhaven College of Western Washington University. During a study leave, she has been researching the connection between “reflective practice” and the quality of student learning. At ESC, Marie Eaton met with a group of mentors at the 225 Varick Street location and at 28 Union Avenue. She also spoke with a few students at the Ithaca Unit. We look forward to hearing about the results of her work. Thanks especially to Robyn Silverman, Xenia Coulter and to the colleagues who took the time to speak with her at ESC.

Members of the MI Advisory Board are very willing to help think about and guide center and program discussions on relevant areas of our mentoring work. If you believe your local conversation could be stimulated by ideas and perspectives from outside of your program, please let us know. We would be very glad to participate in that conversation with you.

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## Graphically Speaking...

Jim Robinson, Hauppauge Unit





