

ALL ABOUT

MENTORING

A Publication of the Empire State College Mentoring Institute



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EDITORIAL



Divided We Fall

Alan Mandell

Our work is often overwhelming: Six contracts to write; a pile of student papers to read; a prior learning essay to review; some student phone messages to return; a conference call that needs preparation; a colleague's paper that I want to respond to; a new student whose transcript needs a once-over; four student evaluations that have to be done; the book and essay I want to get through before seeing two students tomorrow; a center committee meeting in the next hour; a back-log of e-mails that I just have to look at; an information session this evening; a review I wanted to begin to outline. The list that whips through my mind. Workload has never been solved. It is too much for most mentors.

We have responded to this reality in different ways. Who does what, how good-enough work is defined, what resources we use, and what hours people keep are usually answered by the culture of a center, a program, a unit, or sometimes by the rules and the ways of the college as a whole. Such deeply embedded modes of working shape our daily lives in ways in which we are often unaware.

They have a history. And, too, we try to solve these abiding problems with our quite private methods. We learn tricks of our trade, find little shavings, say no or yes based on our rules of the game, create routines of interaction, redefine our expectations, and measure our time based on our own learned patterns, most of which we are afraid to share with anyone at all. We worry about our own load; we know the disparities that exist; we create more distance from each other as a result of our efforts to preserve what freedom our work life affords us. Our experience of being a part of a community is hurt in every way.

Of course, there are many solutions to all of this, each one with its own impediments and ramifications. For example, we fantasize about more money, more academic resources, more time, a more reliable administrative infrastructure, maybe even different colleagues and, of course, students who require much less attention! But, in many ways, we have come to accept that there will never be major changes. We take for granted that what is left is a range of tinkering which may help or hurt, but that won't transform the whole – which won't get at the big picture.

But there is one tendency, one direction of trying to carve out a viable faculty life at Empire State College, which will, I believe, damage us by pushing us away from the heart of our fascinatingly complex and inherently difficult role. It is the urge toward a more finely tuned division of labor: through specialization our problems can be solved.

I am thinking about so many urges:

- limit the studies even within our area that we will offer to students
- imagine that there exists some precise distinction between the academic and the administrative and assume our obligation rests only with the former
- separate our role as advisors from our work as teachers
- call for a well-circumscribed academic planning process that can be separated from our true instructional responsibilities
- create a cadre of academic skills specialists who would do what we cannot or do not want to do
- wish for a community of scholars in which faculty would spend the bulk of their time doing “real scholarship,” teaching from that scholarship, and leaving the rest of the work to a variety of specialized clerks and professionals
- put our faith in ourselves as experts and dispense with the complexities, messiness, and sheer work required by educational planning and individualization

Obviously, given the context of our work and the dilemmas that we face, such urges are understandable. In one version or another, each can and has been argued for, sometimes quite persuasively. But each also misses the point about the richly complex amalgam of roles that mentoring is. And, at its core, each is grounded in the vision of an institution that is very different from what we proudly are: a highly decentralized, student-centered, nondisciplinary, adult-friendly, experimenting, teaching intensive, question-opening and resource-creating institution. In such an institution, a community of mentors – not just of professors or advisors or facilitators or course-builders going our separate ways – is what makes most sense.

Workload is a desperate problem. We agonize over it. We need to address it. Without doubt, mentors need time, resources, and, of course, the ideas and support of a range of specialists. We certainly should not idealize the model of a single faculty person taking on the responsibilities and burdens of an entire academic institution.

And yet, as the sociologist Emil Durkheim wrote in his discussion of “the division of labor in society” (1893), we can either “yield to the movement or resist it.” But, he warns, whichever way we turn, we cannot move “without profoundly affecting our moral constitution.” In our case, this means without “profoundly affecting” our understanding and practice of what teaching and learning can be at this college. This is our own “moral

constitution” in which the demands and possibilities of mentoring have to play a central role.

There is no simple and single answer to workload. But as we engage the topic together, which we surely must, it’s critical that we not give up on the mentor role by imagining some perfect division of our labors that will set us right and free us from the piles on our desks and the lists in our heads.

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Three Mentors and a Pastoral

Jim Case, Dean Emeritus, Hudson Valley Center



Jim Case

I wanted to look at significant past instances of mentoring to see if I could learn anything relevant to our present practices. I chose Locke and Rousseau and James Mill because I knew something about them already (always an advantage) but also because they are intellectually connected. Though Rousseau frequently defined himself against Locke, he was greatly influenced by him. Mill was a follower of Locke, as well as of Bentham. I don't know what Mill knew of Rousseau.

In the process of choosing, I also read Montaigne's *Of the Education of Children* (1575) and Milton's *Of Education* (1673), neither of which was useful to my purpose, though Montaigne's essay is worth reading. I also re-read Roger Ascham's *The Schoolmaster* (1570), from which I have stolen an anecdote.

Neither Locke nor Rousseau nor Mill were dealing with adult education, but with the one-on-one tutoring of children and adolescents. But education is a continuum, and it is a mistake to compartmentalize the stages of education so rigidly that you miss the connections. If you believe that the nature of the relationship between the teacher and the student affects what the student learns, you will believe that for students of all

ages and in all settings. Or, if you believe that students' feelings are disruptive to learning, you will believe that whether the student is four or 40.

In the times we are dealing with, tutoring and mentoring were not very distinct terms and often overlapped each other. Sometimes, also, they appeared in conjunction with, or as distinguished from, "father" and "governor" and "preceptor." Such is the case in the three significant instances of tutoring, or mentoring, we will look at here, one from the 17th century (John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*), one from the 18th (Rousseau's *Emile*), and one from the 19th (James Mill's education of his son John Stuart Mill). All three instances begin in childhood but extend into early adulthood; all three combine what we now call tutoring with what we now call mentoring. And all three are problematic.

Locke: The infection of bad company

John Locke, man of parts, bachelor of medicine and bachelor in fact, philosopher of considerable renown, a practicing doctor, a worldly and politically active man, wrote a treatise on bringing up children – what they should wear and eat, how they should be toilet trained, when they should exercise, and how they should learn. This treatise, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, which began as a letter to a friend, had a greater and more long lasting influence than Dr. Spock's *Baby and Child Care*. It went through 37 printings in England and America, and was translated into nine European languages, the first French edition appearing in 1695, only two years after the first English edition. Looked at one way, *Some Thoughts ...* is a practical application of Locke's epistemology, of *The Essay on Human Understanding*, to the education of children and adolescents; looked at another way, it is the first modern manual on child care; looked at still another way, it is a diatribe against 17th century educational practices (the almost exclusive focus on classical languages, for example, or the frequent beatings, or the lack of consideration of girls' education). But it is also one of the first examinations of what it means to be a mentor.

"In all the whole Business of Education," said Locke,

there is nothing like to be less hearkn'd to, or harder to be well observed, than what I am now going to say; and that is that Children from their very first beginning to talk, have some *Discreet, Sober, nay Wise Person* about, whose Care it should be to Fashion them aright, and keep them from all ill, especially the infection of bad Company. I think this Province requires great *Sobriety, Temperance, Tenderness, Diligence, and Discretion*; Qualities hardly to be found united in Persons, that are to be had for ordinary Salaries; nor easily to be found anywhere. [sec. 90]

This role had for some years been his own province, in fact, so we can assume he knew whereof he spoke.

The picture of the mentor that emerges from *Some Thoughts ...* is of a watchdog. The world is an evil place, a corrupting place ("the infection of bad Company"), and just as important as instilling right ideas in the minds of the young is preventing wrong ideas from creeping in. (If, as Locke argued, all of the mind's ideas come from the senses, and if the child's mind is at the start a *tabula rasa*, then what is written on that tablet is what matters, and indeed all that matters.) Wrong ideas come from nightmares, servants, and poetry, *inter alia*, and the mentor must nip them in the bud. Locke believed that we cannot be too careful or start too early: first impressions are the ones that matter, and development is irreversible.

It follows that the mentor has an awesome responsibility. If "the little, and almost insensible Impressions on our tender Infancies, have very important and lasting Consequences" [sec. 1], and if the infant is not an active participant in the process of learning, but a passive receptacle, then whoever is in charge of the child's learning is responsible for the kind of person that child becomes. "Of all the men we meet with, Nine parts of Ten are what they are, Good or Evil, useful or not, by their Education." [sec. 1] All of the blame – or

all of the credit – for the finished product goes to the educator, the parent or the mentor.

But that is not itself the problem. (Though it is a frightening prospect. Are your parents and teachers solely responsible for what you now are?) The problem is that Locke's child is not an agent in the process of her or his education. Locke knew that children were active and vital, but his epistemology got in the way of his seeing them as active in their own learning. He was so bent on denying that children had innate ideas – as Descartes had argued – and on insisting instead that all of their ideas came from outside, from sense data, that he could not see education as interaction. If education *were* interaction, then there had to be inside the child some idea or force or agency – or even desire – reaching out to the surrounding environment. And this Locke would not accept.

Rousseau: The appearance of freedom

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, also a philosopher, also politically active, an ex-schoolmaster and tutor, a musician, and father of five more or less abandoned children, also wrote a treatise on bringing up children. *Emile, or On Education* (1762) was scarcely less popular than *Some Thoughts ...* and was translated into English almost as rapidly as Locke's work into French. And the education of Emile was to be carried out, like the education

of Locke's friend's son, by a tutor. When Rousseau doubts that a suitable tutor can be found ("A governor! O what a sublime soul ..."), he nominates himself – or, rather, his persona, Jean- Jacques. "I do not speak here at all of a good governor's qualities. I take them for granted, and I take for granted that I myself am endowed with all these qualities. In reading this work, one will see with what liberality I treat myself." [p. 51]

Just before making that assertion, he asks – at the end of a paragraph that out-Lockes Locke – a very pertinent question:

The more one thinks about it, the more one perceives new difficulties. It would be necessary that the governor had been raised for his pupil, that the pupil's domestics had been raised for their master, that all those who had contact with him had received the impressions that they ought to communicate to him. It would be necessary to go from education to education back to I know not where. How is it possible that a child be well raised by one who was not well raised himself? [p. 50]

His answer is, Jean-Jacques, lui meme, but he is not happy with it. And shortly after his self-nomination, he makes an even more telling assertion: Emile "ought to honor his parents, but he ought to obey only me. That is my first or, rather, my sole condition." And then says:

I ought to add the following one, which is only a consequence of the other, that we never be taken from one another without our consent. This clause is essential, and I would even want the pupil and the governor to regard themselves as so inseparable that the lot of each in life is always a common object for them. As soon as they envisage from afar their separation, as soon as they foresee the moment which is going to make them strangers to one another, they are already strangers ... But when they regard themselves as people who are going to spend their lives together, it is important to each to make himself loved by the other ... [p. 53]

Think of this: life-long mentoring. But the problem with Rousseau's definition of the mentor's role does not lie in these impossible conditions, but in a fundamental dishonesty in the relationship. Rousseau is very persuasive in talking about the way children learn from *things* without adult intervention, and he prides himself on leaving them free to learn in this way. Children fall, they hurt themselves. Good – leave them alone. This is nature's way. Next time they will be more careful, says Rousseau. They should lead lives of freedom. This freedom, however, should be "well-regulated," [p. 92] and here is what Rousseau means by

“well-regulated:”

Let him always believe he is the master, and let it always be you who are. There is no subjection as perfect as that which keeps the appearance of freedom. Thus the will itself is made captive. The poor child who knows nothing, who can do nothing, who has no learning, is he not at your mercy? Do you not dispose, with respect to him, of everything which surrounds him? Are not his labors, his gains, his pleasures, his pains, all in your hands without his knowing it? Doubtless he ought to do only what he wants: but he ought to want only what you want him to do

In leaving him thus the master of his will ... [p. 120]

A similar deception appears in Locke: the disobedient child’s will is to be broken at such an early age that the child forgets and assumes he is obeying his tutor out of love. (Locke says that it may be necessary to beat the child in order to break his will – and this is the only situation in which he condones beating.) In both instances there is the kind of manipulation of the child that sullies and perhaps makes impossible the kind of clear, direct and honest relationship Locke and Rousseau both seem to want between pupil and tutor.

And think about this for a moment in terms of our own mentoring practice. We want a peer relationship with our students, an open, nonauthoritarian relationship. We work to maintain at least “the appearance of freedom.” But in most mentoring sessions we control the agenda, give the assignments and evaluate the students: we “dispose ... of everything.” Insofar as mentoring is a power relationship, the power is in our hands, and most of our students know it.

Mill: A well-equipped ship and rudder, but no sail

James Mill, disciple of Jeremy Bentham, follower of Locke, ex-Presbyterian minister, one-time tutor and author (later) of a compendious *History of India*, did not write a treatise on bringing up children. Instead he brought up and tutored children – his own – and particularly his eldest, John Stuart Mill, who was born in 1806. Our primary source for James Mill’s theories and practices is his son’s *Autobiography* (1873), the first five chapters of which deal with John Stuart’s education from birth to 21, an education carried out almost entirely by his father. (His father did write the *Encyclopedia Britannica* article on education for the supplement to the fifth edition, but that is not much help.)

We want a peer relationship with our students, an open, nonauthoritarian relationship. We work to maintain at least “the appearance of freedom.”

As a tutor, the elder Mill was demanding, energetic and totally focused on giving his son an intellectual and a classical education. Unlike Locke, he ignored social education and physical education altogether. He had no use for the emotions, unless they could be harnessed to theoretical goals (e.g. the greatest good for the greatest number). There are any number of accounts in the *Autobiography* of the younger Mill’s prodigious feats under this tutelage, but many of these feats are well known (reading Greek at the age of five, learning Latin when he was eight, etc.), and they are much less important, for us, than the major deficiency in his

father's system, a deficiency which John Stuart discovered in his early 20s.

The younger Mill's education had taught him to associate positive feelings with conceptual values so that he would find happiness in striving to establish these values as goals for society. "I had always heard it maintained by my father ... that the object of education should be to form the strongest possible associations of the salutary class; associations of pleasure with all things beneficial to the great whole, and of pain with all things hurtful to it" (p. 115). These associations did not arise naturally: they were created artificially by his father who determined which associations were beneficial and which were not, and who then carried out a consistent program of operant conditioning by using "the old familiar instruments, praise and blame, reward and punishment" (p. 116). But there were powerful external influences, such as the passions, other children, corrupt adults and sensual pleasures, ready to disrupt the process given half a chance. The forming of beneficial associations required, therefore, a tightly controlled environment, like a country estate or his father's study, from which the bad ideas and bad associations might be banned. Exactly as Locke insisted, the child must be protected. And this child was.

The trouble was, that at the age of 21, Mill discovered he did not give a tinker's damn about "all things beneficial," and this discovery brought on what he calls "a crisis in my mental history." What the younger Mill faced in his crisis was the failure of these induced feelings to provide motivation, and the concurrent knowledge that intellectual conviction was not enough. It did not make any difference that an association between X and Y was ironclad and impervious to the critical analysis his father had taught him. It simply did not work, leaving Mill with no commitment to his values. The values themselves remained: He still *understood* that "the greatest good for the greatest number" was desirable, but no feeling, no caring, no motivation to act accompanied the understanding. "To know a feeling would make me happy if I had it," Mill says, "did not give me the feeling," and he goes on:

My education, I thought, had failed to create those feelings in sufficient strength to resist the dissolving influences of analysis, while the whole course of my intellectual cultivation had made precocious and premature analysis the inveterate habit of my mind. I was thus, as I said to myself, left stranded at the commencement of my voyage, with a well-equipped ship and rudder, but no sail: without any real desire for the ends which I had been so carefully fitted out to work for: no delight in virtue, or in the general good, but also just as little in anything else (pp. 117- 118).

It is a telling and a powerful analogy. The problem is not no wind – the fault is not in the cosmos. It is no sail, no personal capacity to feel. It is "no delight in virtue," and therefore no motivation to act. "The education my father gave me was much more fitted to training me to know than to do" (p. 31). What the older Mill thought, of course, was that he could solve the problem of moral action by the inculcation of the "right" knowledge. The transition from knowing to doing would be the result of a logical analysis of alternatives, informed by appropriate associations of objectives with values. The idea that a mentally healthy and properly educated adult might see the logical course of action and then not pursue it was inconceivable to him, as indeed it was to Locke. But what John Stuart Mill learned through his mental crisis was that moral action is not so much the result of an awareness of certain casualties as it is the result of desire, that it is not simply the result of seeing the good, but of loving the good. And here we come to the crux of the matter. James Mill tried to arrange his son's feelings and to squelch any feelings he could not arrange. Rousseau, as con artist, made Emile his unwitting mark, and controlled all of his thoughts and feelings. Both learned from Locke, who himself had developed a consistent system of praise and blame to keep children on the right path and to protect them from the world and their own feelings. All three were rational, well-meaning men, and all three were wrong. The learner's feelings, far from disrupting learning, are what shape the experience of learning. The transformational element in learning is an emotional element, and transformation is internalization. The book becomes my book.

A Digression: Fair allurements to learning

Roger Ascham, Cambridge don, an authority on the long bow, tutor and secretary to two queens and author of *The Schoolmaster* (1570), found Lady Jane Grey, one of his patrons, in her study reading Plato “with delight” while her parents and the rest of the household were out hunting. When he asked her why she was not with them, she replied that “their sport in the park is but a shadow to that pleasure that I find in Plato.” Then he asked why reading Plato was such a pleasure to her, and she answered,

I will tell you ... and tell you a truth which perchance ye will marvel at. One of the greatest benefits that ever God gave me is that he sent me so sharp and severe parents and so gentle a schoolmaster. For when I am in presence of either father or mother, whether I speak, keep silence, sit, stand, or go, eat, drink, be merry or sad, be sewing, playing, dancing, or doing anything else, I must do it, as it were, in such weight, measure, and number, even so perfectly as God made the world, or else I am so sharply taunted, so cruelly threatened, yea, presently sometimes, with pinches, nips, and bobs ... so without measure disordered, till I think myself in hell till time come that I must go to Master Aylmer, who teaches me so gently, so pleasantly, with such fair allurements to learning, that I think all the time nothing whilst I am with him. And when I am called from him, I fall on weeping because whatsoever I do else is full of grief, trouble, fear, and whole misliking unto me. And thus my book has been so much my pleasure [p. 36]

This fusion of positive and spontaneous feeling with learning is conspicuously absent in Mill and to a great extent in Locke, even sometimes in Rousseau. And that is surprising, for often the one-on-one relationship encourages the formation of a friendship that makes learning a pleasure. When that happens, the student and the mentor come to the session, as did Lady Jane Grey (and, one supposes, Master Aylmer), with eagerness and high expectations. The result is often, as here, a love of the learning itself.

The Pastoral: Fair seed-time had my soul

William Wordsworth grew up climbing the mountains, wandering through the forests and rowing on the lakes of Cumberland, in the north of England, often with his brothers and friends. (“We ran a boisterous race ...”) He had no tutors or mentors, nor did he tutor anyone else. His mother died when he was eight, his father when he was 14, and his childhood, even before he was orphaned, appears to have been remarkably adult-free. He went to the village school, a “dame” school, and in 1778, when he was nine, he began boarding at a nearby grammar school.

So what is he doing here?

A central concern of Locke, Rousseau and James Mill is control, or obedience. And obedience remained a central concern for educators through the 19th and 20th centuries. In Ann Hulbert’s recent book, *Raising America*, an account of 20th century American child-care experts (G. Stanley Hall, Benjamin Spock, and others), this same concern emerges again, and again. It is not so much for these experts or for our three mentors that obedience is the goal of education – no one is claiming to want to produce obedient adults – as it is the crucial instrumentality of education. If you cannot break the child’s will, you cannot do with the child all those wonderful things you want to, ought to, must do. Control is therefore essential, and the experts hover over the child, and want the parents to hover over the child, and Locke’s parent or tutor hovers, and Jean-Jacques surrounds Emile, and James Mill is always right there with little John Stuart, until one begins to think that education is necessarily claustrophobic.

And tutoring and mentoring can be much more claustrophobic than the classroom, where silence and the back rows allow some anonymity. A typical mentoring session – two people alone for an hour in a small office, often with the door closed, one of those people the “authority,” the other often on the spot, the

necessity of dialogue – offers no escape.

In contrast, Wordsworth's "happy pastures, ranged at will" look pretty good.

Wordsworth's account of his childhood is in Books I and II of *The Prelude*, his long autobiographical poem. Three aspects of his account are relevant to our concerns here. First, his early education stems primarily from encounters with the natural world, and not the natural world in any metaphorical or abstracted sense, either – his encounters are with rocks, wind, birds' eggs, trees, ice. Second, his experiences with the natural world are interactive; they are the kind of full experiences that Dewey defines in *Art As Experience*. (Briefly, ones about which we say, "That was an experience.") Finally, the learning that he gains from these experiences is inseparable from the feelings that accompany them – the feelings that make experience into "an experience.

" For example:

... 'twas my joy

To wander half the night among the Cliffs
And the smooth Hollows, where the
woodcocks ran

Along the open turf. In thought and wish
That time, my shoulder all with springes
hung.

I was a fell destroyer. On the heights,
Scudding away from snare to snare,
I plied

My anxious visitation, hurrying on,
Still hurrying, hurrying onward; moon
and stars

Were shining o'er my head; I was alone,
And seem'd to be a trouble to the peace
That was among them. Sometimes
it befell

In these night-wanderings, that a strong
desire

O'erpower'd my better reason, and
the bird

Which was the captive of another's toils
Became my prey; and, when the deed
was done

I heard among the solitary hills
Low breathings coming after me

[Book I, ll.312 – 329]

He then goes on to say.

The mind of Man is fram'd even like
the breath

And harmony of music. There is a dark
Invisible workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, and makes
them move

In one society. [ll. 351 – 355]

It is hard to know what Locke or James Mill would have made of this – especially “the dark, invisible workmanship.” Even Rousseau would have had his difficulties. The younger Mill would have done better: reading Wordsworth’s poetry was instrumental in getting him out of his “mental crisis” because the emotions were organically, naturally connected to the events and objects in the poems, not artificially associated with them. (Notice, for example, that Wordsworth is feeling guilty, alien to his surroundings, even before he thinks of stealing another trapper’s bird. He is an intruder. Guilt is in the air as well as in him.)

It is clear here – and in some of his other poems (“Tintern Abbey,” e.g.) – that Wordsworth trusted his responses to the natural world, that he knew his experiences were beneficial and educative, and that he believed that his mind, the human mind, was in some not entirely mystical way attuned to the natural world. He did not need a tutor to discover this – he simply needed to give himself over to the experience.

This discovery is not itself useful to us: if our students have such experiences, they are to be envied. But beneath the discovery is a profound trust in the value of unmediated experience. Wordsworth, if you like, believed in experiential learning. He had faith in his own capacity to learn from living. He did not need a tutor to arrange his life so that he would have such experiences. He did not need praise and blame, rewards and punishments.

I am not sure that we share that faith. Don’t we, as mentors, become too much the managers of our students’ educations? Don’t we tend to err on the side of control, and fail to provide enough space – space for them, space for their feelings, space for the dark invisible workmanship? We feel we must instruct, point out and underline when often all we have to do is uncover what has been covered and stand back. My study of these earlier mentors has led me to feel that their charges might have benefited from more room to move, a little less manipulation, a little more neglect. I like what Steve Lewis wrote to me when I was working on another paper on Mill several years ago:

I have come to see us (teachers, especially English teachers) as well rewarded doormen and women, though without the neat hats and epaulets. We get to invite students into rooms full of all sorts of nooks and crannies, and then introduce these people to great artists and thinkers. That’s it. Just opening the books and approaching each text virtuously (i.e., wholeheartedly) is good enough to stir the best in someone else.

It is not so simple as this makes it sound. Well, it never is. But we can use Wordsworth as an antidote to Locke and Rousseau and James Mill, as a reminder not to over manage and not to hover, but to trust.

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ALL ABOUT
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Graduation Speech: Cyprus, October 2003

Xenia Coulter, Central New York Center and International Programs



Xenia Coulter (center) with Cyprus graduates.

Dean Ken Abrams, President Hiam Sakr, President Ghada Hinein, Assistant Director Richard Bonnabeau, Professor Betty Lawrence, Faculty from Empire State College, from the American University of Technology and the American University of Science and Technology, distinguished guests, parents, friends, dear students, and graduates:(1)

MAR' HABA(2)

I am honored to be here to represent the faculty of Empire State College and convey to you the congratulations of not only the faculty whom you see here today, but the several hundred Empire State College faculty in the United States whom you have not met but who know about you and this program. To the extent that faculty across the world share similar feelings about their students, I hope that in some small way I will also represent the sentiments of faculty from the institutions that you attend in Lebanon.(3)

We are very proud of your achievement. We know very well that in obtaining this degree, many of you were forced to read more than you would have liked, write more papers than you would have chosen, and studied more than you expected when you first began. We recognize that there may have been many times when you might have preferred to go to the beach or to a party or to work a few more hours in your jobs. We also are very aware of how difficult it is to think and reflect and imagine in a second, and, in some cases, a third language.⁽⁴⁾ And yet, you met these challenges and successfully engaged the many studies we required. As faculty, we did what we could to help you, but in the end, we know that it was *you* who struggled with meeting our demands, taking on the new ideas and ways of thinking that we promoted; and for your success, you should today feel as proud as we do as you march across this platform. Students, you have done well!

What you may not know is that as faculty, besides feeling proud, we also feel grateful. Our students, whether they are American, Czech, Greek, Albanian, Russian, Armenian, Syrian, Israeli, Palestinian, or Lebanese, are for us a constant source of intellectual stimulation and emotional sustenance. From you we have learned to rethink our singular understanding of the world, to appreciate cultures other than our own (but at the same time to notice how much we have in common), and to acknowledge certain challenges in teaching students foreign to us. You have made us think about how teaching methods and cultural values affect each other and to wonder about how teaching ought best take place when we are separated by thousands of miles. From you too we have been reminded of what it is like to be young and idealistic, angry yet hopeful, certain but impatient. By giving of yourselves at our residencies and in our on-line class discussions, you have helped us keep on learning, gain new perspectives and entertain new ways of thinking – an immeasurable gift from you for which we are grateful in ways we cannot fully express.

Of course, we hope this experience has been reciprocated and that you too have changed and grown through your educational encounters with us.

Graduation ceremonies in the United States are often called “commencements.” The term is used because when students graduate, it is considered a time not so much to look back at what they have accomplished, but to recognize that this ceremony marks a turning point, a place of new options, a new beginning. So let’s take a moment now to look forward and to think about what kind of life you will now be able to start, or commence. What will you bring with you from your educational experience with us that will help shape your new life? If there is one thing that all faculty, whether from Lebanon, France or the U.S., hold in common it’s that they value learning. Many of you believe that knowledge is important – often you tell us that in your rationales. But learning is not quite the same as knowledge, and for faculty it’s the act of learning itself that is so important to us – and not so much as a means of attaining success or of gaining power, but as a source of inspiration, stimulation, entertainment, even solace. We hope then, as you commence this new phase in your lives, you will continue to nurture and strengthen the habit of learning. Let the learning you’ve done up to now be only a prelude to what you will do as you continue to mature. We introduced you to new books, authors, ideas, questions, and sources of information – so now keep on reading and listening and reflecting. Seek out new information and new ideas; try out new thoughts. It’s lifelong learning, then, that we would consider the best possible outcome of your education to carry with you as you now prepare to move on.

Why is the idea of lifelong learning so important to us? Of course, we believe that continued learning will enrich your lives, offer you sustenance, and help you in dealing with the successes, and disappointments, that await you in your professional lives, your marriages, and your community commitments. But the world you will increasingly engage is complicated beyond your own personal life. Today, the globalized world has so shrunk that it’s no longer possible to be ignorant of or unaffected by the different beliefs, contradictory needs, and the opposing values of the world’s people. Biology teaches us that when confronted with such threats to our lives, we ordinarily have but two responses – flight or fight. We immigrate or displace

ourselves to some isolated space away from these conflicts, or we build walls around ourselves in order to eliminate the stress of living along side those holding opposing points of view. And if these options are unavailable, we then try simply to obliterate those with whom we disagree. But in today's world, fleeing or fighting are really no longer viable means of dealing with conflict. We must discover other ways of thinking about differences, of conceptualizing a world with many points of view, so mindful not to offend or suppress the lives of others, we can pursue our lives in peace. If we believe others to be wrong, or at best wrong-headed, then we must learn how to discuss or negotiate these issues without violence.

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I say *we* but in truth it is *you* upon whom the responsibility lies of seeking out and supporting peaceful ways of handling conflict. *You* because you are the new generation taking over for us, your teachers, and *you* because you more than most western and even middle-eastern students have actually experienced in your lives, and also in your education, different values and different ways of thinking without, at least for a while in your history, fleeing or fighting.(5) Who would be better equipped or more motivated to figure out what made that possible and how such a life might be reinvigorated and shared with others than you? And what is "seeking out" or "figuring out" but just other ways of saying that you must, not just for yourselves, but for the world, keep on learning?

On the plane coming to Cyprus I happened to read a short article by Emil Homerin, a professor of religion and classics at the University of Rochester in New York.(6) In recent years he has been called upon to explain Islam in general and contemporary Muslim movements in particular in order to help Americans, as he puts it, "unravel the dense weave of current events." He believes that the first step toward discovering new ways of resolving conflict is empathetic understanding – that is, knowing and appreciating the points of view of others. And he believes such understanding comes best not from philosophical discussion or studying social science research, but from reading literature, in particular, poetry. He argues that poetry helps us gain understanding, not by describing experiences but by evoking the feeling of those experiences.

I was reminded of our last residency, which included for the first time in my experience in this program a poetry hour to which many of you came somewhat reluctantly. Where does poetry fit in the lives of hardheaded business students or data-driven computer scientists, you may have asked. And yet I think the hour was unusually meaningful. We faculty learned a lot about you from the poems you chose to share and perhaps you too learned something about us in what we selected. In that spirit, and following Professor Homerin's lead, let me close by reading a very short poem written by a 13th century Persian poet, Jalal al

Din Rumi. I believe his words evoke the idea of lifelong learning and its value, but with expressions and images that could only come from a writer living in the Middle East. Here it is:

We can't help being thirsty,
moving toward the voice of water.
Milk-drinkers draw close
to the mother.
Muslims, Christians, Jews
Buddhists, Hindus, shamans,
everyone hears the intelligent sound
and moves, with thirst to meet it.

Clean your ears. Don't listen
for something you've heard before.
Invisible camel bells,
slight footfalls in sand.

So, dear graduates, once again congratulations. Thank you for enriching our lives as much as we hope we have enriched yours. As you commence your adult lives, keep your ears clean so that you quench your thirst for peace and justice by drinking up intelligent sounds you might otherwise not have heard. We love you, we will miss you, we wish you well, and perhaps some day, your voices will make up the intelligent sounds that quench the thirst of those who will follow in your footsteps.

ALLAH Y KOUN MA'A KOUN(7)

NOTES:

1. The students at the Cyprus Residency are from two different English-speaking Lebanese institutions with facilities in or near Beirut. They complete their first three years at the host institutions, and their fourth year of study is a combination of residency and on-line instruction with Empire State College.
2. "Hello" (or some equivalent) in Arabic.
3. Afterward, I was very moved when the Lebanese faculty assured me that I did.
4. Many Lebanese students are French educated.
5. Lebanon's population has long consisted of significant proportions of Christians, Jews, and other religious groups in addition to Muslims, and living as they do in a vulnerable but important crossroad between the western and eastern worlds, these different groups have historically lived and worked productively together in relative peace – that is, up until the Lebanese Civil War, which significantly impacted our students' lives when they were children.
6. From an article by Homerin, Emil (2003), "Homerin offers wisdom to new Phi Beta Kappa members," in *The Key Reporter*, **68**, 3, 6-7.
7. Roughly translated from Arabic as "May God be with you."

" ... a skilled teacher is a person who can open a number of different windows on the same concept ... (and) functions as a 'student-curriculum broker,' ever vigilant for educational prosthetics – texts, films, software – that can help convey the relevant contents, in as engaging and effective way as possible, to students who exhibit a characteristic learning mode."

Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice*
New York: Basic Books, p. 204.

ALL ABOUT
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Improving Writing: A Psychological Approach Jose A. Del Pilar, Metropolitan Center



Jose Del Pilar

This paper will discuss a project to improve the writing proficiency of college students at the Metropolitan Center. The stimulus for this project came from the fact that at Metro, many students registering for basic psychology study groups had significant writing difficulties. While there was little hard data about the writing problems at the college, anecdotal reports and informal surveys (e.g., Ariker and Folliet, 2002) indicated that about half of the student population registered in recent years was in need of developmental writing support.

Nationwide, about one quarter of all entering college students are in need of remedial studies (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998). Writing remediation is a problem faced by colleges across the nation, as reflected in a recent headline from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that read, "Why Johnny Can't Write, Even Though He Went to Princeton" (Bartlett, 2003). The *Chronicle* article concluded that attempts to improve writing among college students are ongoing with no definitive solutions in sight even at colleges with top students and abundant resources.

The literature about effective remedial learning suggests that a multi-dimensional approach is the best way to address the problem (McCusker, 1999). This type of successful remedial program is exemplified by

Mazur's (1996) "Peer Instruction" approach. Mazur calls for some peer-led tutorials and a more interactive style of teaching in which students are challenged to discuss course-related problems and arrive at consensus solutions to the problems.

This project at the Metropolitan Center took a multi-dimensional approach similar to that recommended by McCusker (1999). The study used elements of group psychology process, critical thinking dynamics, peer learning, and study group relevancy to enhance the writing competency of psychology students in study groups. The psychology study groups met for two hours weekly for 12 weeks. The first half-hour of the study group was set aside for the writing remediation aspect of the project. The study group relevancy resulted from the project being bound to a specific psychology study. The writing remediation project had as its goal the completion of the term paper for the psychology study.

The use of study groups and inexpensive materials made the remedial writing project easy to implement and cost effective. This kind of project also supported the college's ongoing initiative to encourage academic competencies such as writing across the curriculum.

Group Process

A major feature of this writing project was that of students talking to each other about their writing difficulties. The expectation in this project was that a semi-structured group discussion about writing would result in the establishment of a safe environment for confronting writing issues that had not been properly attended to. The students were introduced to problem-focused group work, listening skills, feedback techniques, and consensual validation. The study group mentor served as the group facilitator. These ideas are based on general psychological principles about groups (e.g., Moreno, 1932; Yalom, 1995), behavioral theory (Skinner, 1972), and cognitive psychology (Chomsky, 1975; Beck and Emery, 1985).

From a cognitive thinking aspect, the group discussions addressed elements that contribute to writer's block such as a tendency by some individuals to anticipate and exaggerate negative consequences. Behaviorally it was expected that individuals would benefit from the continual feedback loop that is part of group discussions. Such repeated exposures to feedback would additionally enhance the students' potential for coping with criticism about their writing and make them more resilient.

Critical Thinking

Experts on critical thinking have noted that many students have become very good at accumulating "facts" and were rewarded in their schooling for their ability to report information. However, it is possible for a learning activity to become increasingly difficult, such as remembering more facts, without becoming more complex such as engaging in a critical analysis of a topic (Sousa, 2001). In discussions with the students, it became apparent that many of them had become good at convergent thinking that involved remembering facts, but were uncomfortable with divergent thinking that called for critical thinking about the implications of an idea. Therefore, getting the students to learn about critical thinking strategies as a means of enhancing writing skills became a goal of this project. The critical thinking approach used in this study is derived from Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of thinking and learning.

The Final Paper

Using Bloom's taxonomy as a baseline, the students were asked to write a research oriented psychology final paper of 10 pages in length. The first third of the paper was to be an introduction or review of the literature on a given topic. In this section students would demonstrate their mastery of terminology and facts and their skill at summarizing the information (Bloom's "Knowledge" and "Comprehension" levels). The second third of the paper reflected the "Application" level of Bloom's taxonomy. Here the students were

asked to find a theme or focus from the articles they used in writing their introduction and explore it in greater depth as they might a case study. The final third of the paper was to be critical evaluation and conclusion to their work. The conclusion was expected to reflect the student's understanding of the source material and its implications for the theme of their paper (Bloom's "Analysis," "Synthesis," and "Evaluation" levels).

Working Hypothesis and Method of Approach

The working hypothesis was that students who were exposed to this psychological approach to writing improvement would submit final psychology term papers that were of better quality than the papers of similar students who had not completed such a program.

The plan for the project followed these procedures: a) the sample was drawn from students registered for basic psychology study groups. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained from the students who participated; b) the primary resource needed would be time. At the rate of half-hour per week, a total of six hours per study group would be devoted to the project; c) information would be collected on a voluntary basis in the form of brief questionnaires, reaction essays and the term papers; d) the limitations of this study were that the sample consisted of a very diverse group of students registered for psychology, and that formal pre- and post-testing of writing levels could not be carried out.

Results

The project ran for three years (1999-2002) and covered nine study groups in that span of time. There were 125 student participants in the project. Feedback was obtained from about 15 percent of the participants. These were responses to a 12-item questionnaire about their writing program experience. Some students also provided written essays about their thoughts and feelings with regard to the project. A review of this data reveals that students felt their writing had improved and that they had acquired analytical abilities that they could apply to papers in other studies. The judgment of the mentor was that the final papers submitted by the students showed better critical thinking skills than those of similar students who had not gone through the writing program.

Such repeated exposures to feedback would additionally enhance the students' potential for coping with criticism about their writing and make them more resilient.

Data was analyzed from a qualitative perspective since the heterogeneous sample of students did not allow for group-by-group comparisons on writing ability. This restricted the quality of the data that was collected. Thus, the results of this investigation have limited generalizability. It was to be expected that not all students improved their writing in the same way since they began at different writing levels.

The students generally welcomed participation in the writing project and the help that it offered in getting the final paper written for the psychology study. It should be noted that the half-hour per week allotted for this project was insufficient to address the requirements of the students. Consequently, there was a need to add

a significant amount of extra time devoted to providing individual attention to student shaving problems keeping up with the pace of the project as well as to more advanced students for whom the pace was too slow.

Discussion

An aspect of this project that is hard to convey has to do with the actual dynamics of the group discussion process. One needs to imagine 20 adult students with varying degrees of writing and research competence talking about their writing blocks. However, the group discussion format created the kind of safe and open setting that allowed the students to take risks when talking about their writing issues. The active engagement of the mentor as facilitator and empathic listener provided both boundaries for the expression of anxiety and license to think outside of the box. In addition, it was anticipated that some students might treat the group discussions as a psychological counseling opportunity. This did not happen, possibly because the availability of individual meetings with the mentor served as a safety valve.

From a behavioral view it was anticipated that the repeated discussions about writing problems would act like exposure therapy does for phobias. Indeed, the consensus of the participants was that the discussion of writing stress in the group helped to raise their tolerance for writing anxiety. The students also gained from providing peer support to each other. The result was enhanced resiliency in coping with writing problems including a better capacity for adaptively dealing with negative feedback about their work.

The use of Bloom's taxonomy as a tool for teaching critical thinking skills was engaging and interesting to the students and practical for the mentor. Bloom's taxonomy proved a useful tool that provided structure and rationale to the subjective task of evaluating student final papers and gave students concrete guidelines for addressing their papers.

The results of this project support the idea that a psychological approach can be an effective tool for writing remediation at the college level. The group discussion approach and the use of readily available tools like Bloom's taxonomy make this technique cost effective. A more formal research design to test the applicability of this multidimensional psychological model on a wider scale has been submitted (Del Pilar, 2003b).

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ALL ABOUT
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Time: The New Commodity in Lifelong Learning Issues and Challenges for those in Work

Lore Arthur and Alan Tait, The Open University, UK

In March 2000 the European Union set out to promote lifelong learning as a major policy initiative. *The Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* states: "Lifelong learning is no longer just one aspect of education and training; it must become the guiding principle for provision and participation across the full continuum of learning contexts" (CEC, 2000, p. 3). Almost all policy statements made in this context emphasise the need to adapt and change. The notion of lifelong learning, therefore, is part of ongoing political agendas determined to shift the responsibilities away from providers towards the individual with corresponding effects on the institutions for the sake of economic competitiveness and increased efficiency. Work-related lifelong learning in the context of the learning organisation and knowledge society has therefore gained political and economic momentum, which affects individuals in their work and personal life, issues which we aim to address in this paper.

The Context

Propitiously or not, the term 'work-life balance' has gained wide acceptance in the British media. Numerous experts, politicians, scholars, union representatives have explained and debated the term in various contexts to the general public, particularly in relation to 'workers being stressed, Britain's overtime culture and many workers inability to work flexibly' (TUC 15.08.01). The Trades Union Congress (TUC) has campaigned for some time for all workers to be offered ways of working to allow them to get a better balance between work and personal activities such as learning, sporting, leisure and other interests as well as family life. This is actively pursued by a pressure group – the Paid Educational Leave Campaign – supported by Trades Unions and some universities including The Open University (Campaign for Paid Educational Leave 2003).

Any learning activity, however, is affected by working time arrangements within organisations, the balance and tensions surrounding unpaid work in the family and paid/unpaid work in employment, and the support both in financial and work-release terms individual organisations offer their employees. Many of these issues determine how individuals cope with increased pressures at work and at home in the name of lifelong learning. The assumption is that while many adults are keen to participate in formal learning activities, these increasingly compete with work-related pressures such as having to work overtime or spending time travelling to and back from work, coping with personal and domestic responsibilities, and the need to accommodate similar needs of colleagues, partners or family members (Tait 2002). Admittedly, individuals perceive the need for time differently. From the perspective of individual employees/students these issues raise some of the following research questions which underpin our research project:

- How do individuals manage the time they have available to study?
- Where do they study? At home, at work, elsewhere?
- When do they study? Evenings, daytime etc.
- How does such learning impact on their personal and professional life?
- What are the competing commitments?
- How, if at all, have lives changed under the banner of lifelong learning?
- Is the notion of lifelong learning a practical reality?
- Why do some people cope better than others do?

We assumed that most employees study either because the employers want them to pursue a particular course or because individuals follow a course of study because they think that it may be helpful for current or future employment. Such courses may be offered by small/medium-sized companies with no facilities for in-house staff development, by educational institutions (face-to-face), by private/commercial companies, and by agencies involved in open and distance learning.

Perspectives on Time

Social scientists have been attempting to construct social and economic developmental accounts for several centuries (Gershuny 2000). It was Marx in *Capital* who argued that capitalism created an ineluctable downward pressure on wages, forcing workers to work long hours in order to sustain themselves. Accordingly, working people made time 'a terrain of struggle.' Postill (2002) refers to CCT (clock and calendar time) which regulates the daily rounds of most people, artefacts and representation across the world. Clock and calendar time leaves little room for ambiguity. Its materials (clocks, radios, television sets, computers etc.) are virtually everywhere. Time Use research, too, recognises that each day has the same essential structure. Time Use studies, therefore, aim to look at individuals holistically, in and outside work. Such studies recognise the limitations of 24 hours in the day, of which about eight hours are allocated to sleep. In addition, most people work eight to nine hours a day, travel to and from work, have other routine activities which, at least in theory, should leave about four to five (weekday) hours for what is termed consumption time, that is time available for leisure or the family (Gershuny 2000).

Modern life exerts, it is argued, considerable pressures not only on time-use at work but also time-use for consumption. Pressures on work and consumption time compete heavily with time available for learning which may be work related, or oriented towards leisure time activities. Contemporary time research considers the following distinctions: natural, scientific and social use of time. Scientific time is associated with computational, mathematical time while social time is considered human, warmly imbued with meaning and signification. In our research we are concerned with 'social time' and not just with natural time.

Durkheim was the first to identify the social over and above the individual characteristics of time (cited in Freericks 1996:26), while Gershuny and Sullivan (1998) suggest that perception of time is simultaneously strongly dependent on and coloured by a host of symbolic meanings and emotional attributions, which accord specific significance and priority to particular events and activities. We experience time in a number of different and potentially simultaneous ways, all of which are imbued with sociological significance. The desire to have a better quality of life or more personal time for family and leisure is one frequently voiced in

most surveys involving employees, particularly in the UK with its long working hour culture (Arthur, 2002). The quality of life, however, diminishes when confronted with lifelong learning needs of individual employees, at least for some as our research findings indicate.

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Research Approach

In the research undertaken we were primarily interested in how adults cope with learning given that they face many, often competing, demands on their personal and working time. Adult learning can be defined in many different ways. Here we are concerned, however, with part-time, formal and nonformal learning; that is, learning that takes place in organised, structured settings including the workplace or by distance learning. We were not concerned with informal learning which, according to the OECD (2003) definition, may occur by chance and during everyday activities, or self-learning activities involving perhaps the computer or television. We wanted to find out in what kind of learning employees were currently involved, or had undertaken in the last three years, or intended to pursue in the near future, thus considering time frames prevalent in some research method approaches.

The project itself involved nine companies or organisations of which there were: three private sector companies, three public sector organisations, three voluntary organisations. We interviewed 31 employees with different levels of previous educational achievements and responsibilities, 13 men and 18 women. Each interview lasted for about 60 minutes and was based on semi-structured questionnaires. We intended that the researcher would go beyond the 'cut-and-dried' character of limited survey interviews and thus open the door to a more genuinely human relationship between the participants. In such an interview, according to Massarik (1997), the level of rapport is significantly elevated and the interviewer is genuinely concerned with the interviewee as a person, going beyond the search for delimited information input. However, we were also aware, that any qualitative research within the interpretative paradigm is shaped by attitudes and feelings at a particular point in time in which the researcher and the interviewee are located. Answers given should be seen in this light.

Initial Findings

All of the employees, and this should be stated from the onset, were 'successful learners,' that is they were chosen by managers or staff developers to take part in our research precisely because they were at that time taking part in some form of study, or had done so in the very recent past. We, therefore, did not interview those who had dropped out of studying for whatever reason or those who were either unable or unwilling to participate in formal learning activities. Of the 31 employees we interviewed, seven were in their 20s, six in their 30s, 10 in their 40s and eight were over 50 years old.

Of the 31 employees all but four worked full time. All stated that they had taken part, and continue to do so,

in numerous in work related training events, though these are not discussed here. In addition, however, one person is currently studying for a Ph.D. Others (five) are taking part, or have recently done so, in courses that lead to a master's and M.B.A. degree, or specific work-related certificate and postgraduate diploma courses such as those recognised by the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (eight), computer-training courses (six), and predegree university-entrance 'Access' courses (two). Ten interviewees were in the process of obtaining national vocational qualifications (NVQs). Three were engaged in NVQ level 2 study, which is aimed at careers in the community services, and five in NVQ level 4. The latter equates to first year undergraduate study and is pertinent to those with interests in staff development and training. A third of the interviewees were studying for more than one qualification at the same time. By contrast, only three employees mentioned leisure time courses in relation to a particular hobby. However, a few (four out of 31) managed to pursue either voluntary activities with, for example, the disabled or the church, or a hobby such as football, karate and riding in addition to study and work.

It is perhaps striking that in 26 instances it was the employer who was able and willing to finance the course of study. Of those, all gave additional time off for college attendance but with the exception of one, not for studying at home. In two cases employers also paid for books and travel expenses. Only three interviewees had paid course fees from personal moneys while funding was obtained from external sources for the remaining two. However, while all employers supported employees in their pursuit of further study, in no case did they reduce the amount of work to be done while at work.

Coping Strategies

In relation to our initial research questions we wanted to find out, how do individuals manage the time they have available for study? Of the full-time workers, only two stated that they were able to work most days to contract hours; about half of the interviewees indicated that they worked between 45 and 50 hours a week. Two employees, however, stated that these hours could rise to up to 80 hours when working on specific short-term projects. None of those interviewed received overtime pay, but most companies offered time off in lieu (TOIL) or had flexi-time arrangements. Commuting presented few serious difficulties. Nevertheless, almost all interviewees, with the exception of three, complained about 'being stressed,' 'not having enough time' 'struggling to cope' etc. In general, the amount of work undertaken for the organisations was not reduced to accommodate time needed for studying on course work. Apart from college attendance, interviewees stated that reading books and preparing and writing study-related assignments took on average an additional four to six hours a week, though these hours increased to over 20 hours a week at certain times during the course. Those studying for a higher qualification (postgraduate diploma, master's degree, M.B.A.s) usually studied over 10 hours a week at home. Given such workloads, it is was not surprising to hear frequently statements such as these:

It's very hard to fit it all in You know that you have got to do it and you want to get the course work out of the way, but it's just getting time to do it Yes, it's a real struggle (male, 20s, full-time worker, three young children, studying for a master's degree).

Actually I enjoy it, but getting into it and finding the time It is dreadfully difficult So in the end you either rise early in the morning or late at night, or I block off a whole day When I think about it, I am just up the wall the whole time, how to find time ... (male, 40s, full-time worker, teenage children, studying for an NVQ4).

Family commitments varied. Predictably, those with children still at home found it harder to cope (18 out of 31). We then asked: Where and when do you study? At home, at work? In the evenings, daytime? Most interviewees' studies involved college attendance, on a regular basis or at various intervals, during the day, in the evenings or the weekend. Those involved studying for NVQs were able to complete some tasks at the workplace. The preparation of portfolios, on the other hand, was usually done at home. Those involved in

other forms of study completed almost all their assignments outside work, usually at home, with the exception of two, who had found the workplace more convenient for study. Some preferred to work in the evenings, others early in the mornings, while yet others preferred leaving study to the weekend or holiday times, as summed up in the comment here:

I use holidays to do my assignments to be honest, and the reading I do each week, wherever it fits in, late in the evening, early morning, breakfast time (female, 50s, full time, studying on an Access course)

Few referred to regular hours and set routines. Most fit studying in where and when convenient at that point in time. Everingham (2002) refers to a multiplicity of temporalities. One might equally talk of a multiplicity of spacialities. As Giddens (1984) points out, geographical dimensions can be used in temporal contexts. He specifically acknowledges the interrelated nature of time-space-place dimensions. The new and developing ways in which these dimensions are flexibly articulated include the use of time in the workplace and at home; the breaking down of traditional gender roles within workplace and family; and the effect on distance of modes of transport and of communications technologies such as telephone and ICT. They provide the context in which individuals are able to create opportunities for themselves as well as manage demands in the field of lifelong learning.

Competing Commitments

There were, however, a number of competing commitments, which were investigated within the following questions: How does such learning impact on their personal and professional lives? Are there competing commitments? All but two respondents complained about the lack of a social life during the course of their studies. Sentiments such as having had to '*give up time with the family*' and '*letting things slip*' or '*my social life has gone out of the window*' '*my mind is full of guilt*' were frequently voiced from men and women alike and these often dominated the interviews.

In our research the age dimension had to be considered: employees in their 20s and without children seemed to cope better, particularly those who had only recently obtained university degrees and were still in studying mode. Those in their 30s and 40s seemed to struggle the most. Taken from psychology, the notion of life stages or phases related to work and the family influenced adult education theories, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s (Tennant 1988). Nowadays age-related events can no longer be described with the certainties of previous decades, people simply don't marry in their early 20s, for example. Irrespective of age, however, some interviewees managed to keep a range of additional commitments going. One 50-year old, for example, played football for his company team, which took up about five hours a week. At the same time he raised funds for charity while completing a master's degree – all of this on top of a demanding workload and family commitments. Strikingly perhaps, 10 out of the 31 interviewed were heavily committed to a range of social causes and activities while pursuing intensive courses of study and working full time.

I have the full support of my husband who has offered, and he does, he has taken over all the management of the house, so he does all the ironing, cleaning, shopping and cooking ...

Sustaining Motivation

A further question explored aspects of motivation. We were interested in why some people seemed to cope better than others. Were there any reasons? Were there differences between men and women? Gender research argues that one of the ways time is structured is through social relations and gender inequalities are reflected in the social organisation of time. Bauer (2000), however, points out that the divisions and consequences of paid and unpaid work involve the whole family, irrespective of gender, in various stages of decision making rather than just men or women. In other words, the term gender has to be seen in the wider and more complex domain of familial and social structures rather than in narrow dichotomies. In our research we found that the full support of the partner/husband/wife was regarded to be fundamental to any successful learning activity, irrespective of a possible gender divide. Unprompted by the researcher, 10 interviewees, men and women equally, described and praised the support given by their partners in considerable detail.

I have the full support of my husband who has offered, and he does, he has taken over all the management of the house, so he does all the ironing, cleaning, shopping and cooking (female, 40s, working full time, studying for a certificate in management)

... I actually got my wife and daughter to stay with her mum. You have got to have the support of your partner. Your partner has got to know what you're up to ... expect them to understand the pressure (41, male, full time, studying for an M.B.A.).

There are, however, other pointers to successful learning. Some people are addicted lifelong learners, it seems. One interviewee referred to his house being 'like a school,' since his wife was also studying for a degree. Others (20) mentioned a sense of achievement, personal satisfaction, a general love for learning, a deep interest in the course subject, immediate benefit in the workplace, not in terms of promotion or financial rewards but having more confidence make studying worthwhile, and that is, despite the time and work pressures referred to previously. Motivation theories refer to goal-orientated learning, extrinsic motivation, and to intrinsic motivation by making full use of one's talents and potentials (Smith and Spurling 2001). The following statements are perhaps indicative:

I wanted to better myself because I don't have a degree So that's really why' (male, 30s, full time, studying for a Diploma in Management Studies).

I am really proud of myself that I have managed to do it I tell people that I have done it I am really glad I pushed myself (25, female, full time, having just completed a postgraduate certificate in professional studies).

Nevertheless, only half of the interviewees wanted to continue studying following the completion of their course(s). The remainder did not rule further study out but needed a break from intensive time and workload commitments. This should not surprise given the work and study load they had just experienced.

Conclusion

The findings described here, though at early stages of analysis, point to a number of highly motivated individuals, who despite excessively long working hours and heavy workloads and demanding family commitments, are genuine lifelong learners, keen to professionally develop themselves. We also found that while many employers involved in our research, that is public and private ones alike, were sympathetic and supportive to individual learning needs, their understanding of the time pressures employees have to bear

while pursuing a course of studies was slight. In no case were workloads reduced. Further, the training and education that was supported through the payment of fees and in many cases college release was for the current role that the employee occupied: some employees regretted the fact that education and training for personal development beyond the current employment role was not within the normal framework of consideration. Thus the employer while paying for fees for training desirable or even necessary for the current job was achieving this at the expense of the invasion of considerable elements of employee private time.

The term 'time-management' which has been developed as an explanatory framework for practical activities reliant on individual self-management is, it is argued here, less than adequate. What is needed is the larger concept of 'time competence' (pace Freericks 1996), which not only individuals but also education organisations, employers and organs responsible for policy development and implementation such as government need to work towards understanding as an area of complex contemporary praxis. It suggests at least that considerably more could be done at government level and by employer organisations if the terms 'work-life balance' and 'lifelong learning' are to become meaningful in the realities of everyday working life.

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"After the euphoria of the 1960s and early 1970s, when educational planners felt that they could readily ameliorate the world's ills, we have come to the painful realization that the problems dwarf our understanding, our knowledge, and our ability to act prudently. We have become much more aware of the roles of history, politics, and culture in circumscribing or thwarting our ambitious plans and in guiding them down paths that could not have been anticipated. We are even more keenly aware that particular historical events and technological developments can mold the future in a way that would have been difficult to envision even a decade ago. For every successful planner and implementer, for every 'Sesame Street' or Suzuki method, there are dozens, perhaps thousands of failed plans – so many, in fact, that it is difficult to know whether the few successes are happy accidents or the fruits of rare genius."

Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*.
New York: Basic Books, p. 392.

ALL ABOUT
MENTORING
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Issue 27, Spring 2004

An Ecology of Degree Program Planning (something of a found object) **LeGrace Benson, Mentor Emerita, Center for Distance Learning**

Note: This piece was written as a draft in 1985 by LeGrace Benson, who served as a mentor at the Center for Distance Learning. Mary Klinger kindly passed this along to us. On the typed copy we received was a handwritten note from Victor Montana, then dean of the Genesee Valley Center, in which he wrote: "Dave and Walt: This might be of interest as you begin thinking about the degree program planning process. LeGrace Benson, a CDL faculty member, gave this talk at a recent Empire State College conference." And it is "of interest" today.

Degree program planning is being and becoming. Where have you been? What have you learned? What do you plan to do with your life? Who are you?

This person who comes to us has been on the road awhile and is on the way to somewhere else. There is a landscape already traveled, and an orientation to one lying ahead. We ourselves as mentors are located in the midst of the student's geography.

Without changing this metaphor of place and time, let us add the word "ecology." For both we and the student are engaged in giving and taking ideas and information in a cycle and recycle by means of which we hope to nourish and support growth and change.

The ecology of the adult student is much different from that of the person who comes to the classroom for the 18th annual September song, give or take a few years of unstrophen infancy.

The geography is more extensive and more complex. The relationship of the person to time and place is more elaborated. Relationships with others sharing the same landscape is more diverse, probably more reflective and pondered.

The student and mentor sit together over the task: create a degree program plan which conforms to SUNY guidelines, which OPRA [Office of Program Review and Assessment] will accept, which the Assessment Committee will approve, which fits my soul and will make my dreams come true. Two grown people together – not one adult and one youngster.

For the traditional freshman, the emphasis is on becoming. When an Empire State College student says, "I'm trying to figure out what I'll be when I grow up," it is with a laugh. In truth that student already **is somebody**. Yet in the planning contract we tend to focus on the planning ahead – the becoming. The somebody before us, that person is easier for us to deal with as a futurity than as a presence.

The presence across the desk or on the other end of the phone line may have been running a retail business for 15 years, may have been a secretary for five or six years in a government office, may have been an airline pilot, a nurse, may be a manager about to move up a notch, may hold public office. The student who comes to us very often is enormously competent in one or several aspects of adult life. The same person may not be able to pass a 10th grade math test. May have a fluent and even persuasive conversational style, but not be able to write a two-paragraph memo without error. May be able to handle a large amount of complex information if it is spoken, but is utterly unable to read a book to pick up the same information. We confront a distinctive terrain and an advanced ecology. The work of degree planning involves interventions for transformation of this landscape, which should be sensitively and intimately related to the developed time and place and personhood.

We need to do more than simply recognize that the adult learner has such characteristics. We know already that adults trying to learn a second or third language do so more rapidly with texts and visuals related to adult life. Yet a look at some of the materials devised to accomplish this, or to teach literacy within the primary language, are insultingly patronizing. In a sense, some of what highly educated adults do with peers who are not so highly educated is comparable to the American in Rome who slowly shouts, "I want to buy some apples," in the **frutteria**.

The primary principle of degree program planning may be like the first principle of medicine: first do no harm.

First recognize that the person who is the student has already become. The person planning to achieve a degree already has a great many highly developed surfaces, and moreover is in a state of change and receptiveness to change, as well as in a state of resistance to change with areas of deep-seated inertia. All of that is highly energized, or charged during the degree program planning process. The student is in a state of high vulnerability. Money is at stake, career, often family, always the individual sense of integrity of self. The opportunities for failure abound.

The degree planning process requires a massive amount of information, and needs to have that information in place in order and in time. Both student and mentor need to have clear and detailed answers to the questions: "where have you been, what have you learned, where are you headed, what do you hope to accomplish, how do you plan to do it? Who are you?"

Standardized tests do not answer such questions in an ecologically valid way. The initial interviews with students are dense with information, but much of what is relevant is missed by even very skilled interviewers, while key items may be inappropriate to the setting. How can we garner the necessary information in a way that respects the adult as a peer, is valid in and for the context, and sharply and accurately identifies the profile of accomplishments and needs.

At CDL, we have received a grant from SUNY to begin to get a purchase on this subtle and many-faceted problem. We call our effort PROLOGUE, in recognition of its place at the beginning of the student's experience at the college.

Although we, like all other centers, have a degree planning contract for each student, with PROLOGUE we begin the process as soon as a student matriculates, whether or not he or she enrolls formally for a degree program planning contract at this time.

To gain a first level of information for the student and the mentor, we will use antique technology for information transfer – writing letters. Each incoming student who does not yet have an approved degree program will receive a letter from the advisor/mentor, with a response requested. It asks the student for

information about previous educational experience, for a description of learning resources available, and for a discussion of how the student now spends and manages time. We expect to receive two types of information from this initial letter: (1) data and affective evaluations about education, resources and time; (2) an ecologically valid writing sample – valid because it will be an authentic response to an inquiry for practical, immediately apparent purposes.

Where do we go from here: (1) ACT and ETS assessments. Possibilities and problems. E.g., the Detroit major newspaper reporter who will send in a predictably excellent letter, but whose immediate educational need may include some pinpointed instruction in basic arithmetic and algebra before or when he takes statistics. E.g., the person who responds to the questions in correct American English, but who cannot create or critique a logical sequence. The person who tests well in computer or standard tests but who can't really read a textbook or a newspaper (two different reading skills).

Tracking. After identified – which has to take place over time [with] no batteries of tests; how do we keep in touch with the changing picture?

Structuring the degree program to include what is really needed. Offering what is really needed. At CDL we already see that our findings are going to generate a new thought to incorporate in contact planning.

Creating the pinpoint, skill/knowledge specific modulettes, which can be structured into CDL courses or into learning contracts.

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Technology and the Soul

Anne Breznau, Office of Academic Affairs

Note: This piece was offered as part of a panel on “Technology and the Making/ Breaking of Our Community” at the October 2003, All Areas of Study Meeting.

The poet, Adrienne Rich, calls human communication “The drive to connect. The dream of a common language” (7). I’m going to address technology in the act of human communication; specifically, e-mail and online course activities. I want to share some thoughts and pose some questions.

Let’s start with the act of human communication itself. Face-to-face, we see the smile, the twinkle in the eye, or the flash of anger in the cold raising of an eyebrow. On the telephone, we hear the sudden uncertainty in a hesitation or a stammer; we hear the joyful confidence, or the arrogance, which gives way to softening and then apology.

We are not the first to wonder what technology can do for and against that which makes us human, the soul. Gary Zukav defines “soul” as “a positive, purposeful force at the core of your being. It is that part of you that understands the impersonal nature of the energy dynamics in which you are involved, that loves without restriction and accepts without judgment” (31). It is that which is best in our human nature.



Anne Breznau

Technology, simply defined, is a tool. In the best possible world, it is a tool used by humans to create a better world. Wendell Berry is among those who question the tools we have made – which tools “preserve the household of life” and which tools “destroy it,” he asks (50). Mikhail Bakhtin, Russian philosopher and linguist, worries about the power of technologies to take on a life of their own, to be “perfected according to their own inner law,” and adds “All that which is technological, when divorced from the . . . unity of life and surrendered to the will of” its own development “is frightening” (7).

We know the destructive power of technology run amok, of technology “divorced from the . . . unity of life,” and we know it well. From the A-Bomb to the airplanes flying into the twin towers, images of bad uses of technology are emblazoned on our collective consciousness. What we, perversely, may forget is what technology contributes to our human experience at its most profound, “when the best of the new is grafted to the best of the old” as Wendell Berry says (18). When a technological miracle enables someone to live longer and with more soul, the image does not live as deeply within us. Or, as Adrienne Rich writes, what will it be like when I “call you from another planet/ to tell a dream/ Light-years away,” and “you weep with me” (52).

So, within the assumption, that technology *can* enrich the human experience, *can* deepen that which is best about us, when I call you *and* you weep with me, let us consider those two little things I mentioned at the beginning: e-mail and online courses.

Our own Bob Carey said once, “I get to work, switch on my computer, and turn on the world!” I think, like me, he found that both amazing and somewhat troubling. It’s amazing that all of us in this room can be in constant and immediate contact with each other because of e-mail. It’s amazing to me that my son in California can contact me by e-mail, that my entire family can be on a list serve together and with one mouse click, I can contact all of them. I use that word “contact” advisedly, because contact and communication are not the same thing. E-mail technology enables us to contact one another quickly, to contact each other in groups, to be in contact with the world, as Carey described.

Communication, however, is soul stuff; it’s us trying to find common ground, trying to create something worth creating together, through all the mediums we have for reaching each other. This e-mail phenomenon is a medium that, it’s fair to say, connects us as a college and a community. Do we use it more for contact or to communicate? Do we use it to communicate in ways that make it *our* work, yours and mine together? I

don't know if we do, but I know that we can.

The particular excitement of e-mail technology for me is that it brings the world back, oddly enough, to the *written word*. There is a cultural value to written language that the visual technologies of television and movies had diminished. E-mail, if you think about it, has brought back the power of written language. Why is this important? As Wendell Berry says, written language has the ability to “resist glibness – to slow language down and make it thoughtful” (28).

The tension of e-mail, then, is that it makes written language once again have a powerful role in the creation of culture and community, and yet it speeds written language up to such a point that we can fall into a pit of hasty judgment and triviality that resides way below “glibness.”

So, the challenge is to use e-mail from the core of our humanness, to express our thoughts about our areas of study and about learning, to express our hopes for our college community. On the flip side, the hazard to be resisted in e-mail is the easy seduction into superficiality of thought and interaction, the quick slide into coldness born of distance and not having to see another's pain. So, the first question I pose is: How do we assure ourselves that this wonderful medium which has brought the written word home to us is used by us to make the written word in some new way a major cultural food once again? How do we remember to write respectfully, thoughtfully, and well – when we now write so much and so quickly?

The contact or communication in online courses faces much the same hazard and potential. The potential is (1) students engaged with the written word; the potential is (2) students in the abstract, unfettered by group bias based on appearances or visible, cultural cues. The homeless student at an Internet café instantly has the same reception as the well-dressed, suburban student, or as the soldier working out of a tent in Iraq, or the skinhead in Chicago; the potential is (3) the time that we have to read the written words of our students and they ours, to linger over these words (as Bakhtin says), to ponder the meanings implicit in the words or missing from the words (to take a cue from Derrida). And, to answer from that pondering, that lingering over a whole string of communications from one student or from multiple students on the same topic, and they from us. As mentors, we have the ability both to give quick and instant encouragement – the “good for you” cheerleading response that students need sometimes. And, we have the ability to give the thoughtful, evocative response that will move students to deeper and broader consideration of the subject matter.

The hazards are, to name a few, (1) that we will not know or be known by our students, (2) that lack of time will push us towards cheerleading or hasty, ill-considered responses. I am teaching my first online course and I see the possible pitfalls – how easily and quickly I can respond, how that could substitute for a careful, thoughtful response. I would be lying if I said I didn't miss the physical presence of students; I do. However, on the potential side, I find an odd joy in the distance that requires us to craft our language in ways that make us real to each other and in the fact that we create mutual, visible learning of substance which stands there in front of us as a text.

So, the questions I pose regarding online courses go something like this: How do we create rich and meaningful human connection within the life of our course? How do we build a community of learners online and develop concepts and applications that deepen and broaden our lives as learners?

In sum, how do we use technology for soul purposes? How do we avoid the hazards and create from the potentials?

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ALL ABOUT

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Winter in the City

This frigid New York Sunday morn
smoke stacks emit speeding clouds
wafting up and away into the pale sky
white writing which dissipates
dissolving vapors like breath
winter thoughts thrust up
from high rise dwellers' dreams
sequestered in overheated homes
alienated from the inner and outer weather
of fin-de-siecle discontent.

What satisfactions and comforts remain
require arduous effort to vanquish
seasonal inertia and ennui
while hibernation beckons and escape –
fantasies of exotic journeys
far from routine of duty and self
adventures in the warm world of abandon
seascapes of languorous beaches
bright sun, bold strides toward
a pristine horizon of joy ...

In harmony with the sighing smoke stacks
across the cold city beyond my window
I, too, sigh, longing to dissipate:
by memory and reveries compelled
into contemplation of then and when
love and loss across the dying decades
redeemed by fleet moments of bliss
in consciousness frozen now
ice floes awaiting fire music
along the dream river of transcendence.

*Mary Folliet
Metropolitan Center*

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Metropolitan Museum of Art Series **Renée O'Brien, Center for Distance Learning**

The selection of photographs represents an ongoing series that takes a look at places and communities through a tiny pinhole. The pinhole process, staged with an obscure viewing device and an unconventional allotment of time, is a photographic event that is both intuitive and contemplative. The pinhole images of these ordinary sites and people unfold in multiple minutes, not decisive moments. The soft-focused renderings link me to the 19th century Pictorialists who bantered about the way one experiences the world, and the relationship between perception and reality. My work plays on the subjective nature of reality. I use pinhole because the resultant images imply a reality skewed and undefined.

About the *Metropolitan Museum of Art Series*

The pinhole photographs were made on July 12, 2003, along the front entrance to the Metropolitan Museum of Art on Fifth Avenue in NYC.

Trips to New York City seem to include not just the museum and gallery collections but time sitting on the steps of the museum. As for other New Yorkers and tourists, this is often a meeting place or a place to recover from the gallery trek, muse by the misty fountains, listen to the sounds of the city, and watch the people and pigeons. My 1924 Brownie camera, converted to pinhole, shared the experience with me. It was an overcast day and required “guessing” between eight and 15 “clicks.”

I brought back the TMax 120 film and processed it in my upstate darkroom. In January, snowed in and 16 below, I scanned the negatives and printed them in duotone with the Epson 2000P and archival matt paper. While the printer was working, I read from my 1909 leather-bound guidebook, *The Art of the Metropolitan Museum of New York*, and came across this passage:

But a museum need not confine itself to ministering to the pride and luxury of spiritually aesthetic and artistically developed minds – a mere plaything for the few. Belonging to the people, it may, and by rights should be, the best resource for their relaxation from strenuous labour, and also the most efficient educator to sharpen the taste and the artistic sense.

Excerpt from *The Art of the Metropolitan Museum of New York* by David C. Preyer, Chapter 1: The Metropolitan Museum of Art – Its Aim and History, (Boston: L.C. Page and Company, 1909. p. 2).

List of pinhole photographs (6" x 9" duotone archival inkjet prints)

1. Woman Sitting on Steps
2. Two Women Sitting on Steps
3. Man on Steps
4. Woman Crossing Street
5. Pigeon on Platform
6. People on Steps
7. Fountain

About the Artist

Renée Creager O'Brien is an artist-photographer-educator who exhibits her lensless (pinhole) photographs regionally and nationally. She lectures and writes on both art and photography. Her articles have appeared in the *Pinhole Journal* and in the *NYSTA News* (New York State Art Teachers Association). O'Brien's doctoral dissertation, *The Post-Romantic Vision of Contemporary Pinhole Photographers*, is a seminal study in the field of lensless photography. Dr. O'Brien is a mentor/tutor/course developer in the Center for Distance Learning



Woman Sitting on Steps



Two Women Sitting on Steps



Man Sitting on Steps



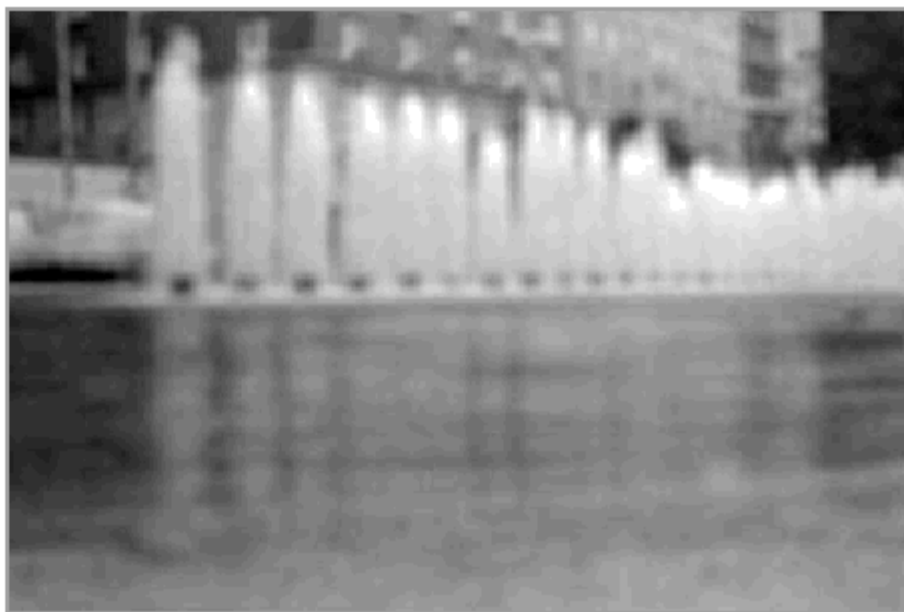
Woman Crossing Street



Pigeon on Ledge



People Sitting on Steps



Fountain

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Sabbatical Report **Joanne Corsica, Central New York Center/Fort Drum Unit**



This sabbatical has allowed me to rediscover my disciplinary roots in social anthropology and to hone research and field work skills. The research that I did, though anthropological in nature, was a collaborative effort with my daughter (an artist engaged in photographic journalism) to explore Christian fundamentalism through a systematic study of road and church signs.

My daughter's work was focused on the southeastern United States. Thus, I began my sabbatical with a road trip through the south, following the route taken by my daughter three years ago. I really was not familiar with either the south or with Christian fundamentalism. The deeper south I explored, the deeper I realized my ignorance of both the south and Christian fundamentalism to be. Due to the price of gas (a function of the war with Iraq), I spent much less time investigating the southern states traveled, but did discover a host of road signs, road side religious crosses and displays, and church signs that were of ethnographic interest. I attended a church service and interviewed a congregant family.

After returning to Jefferson County, I decided to delve into the research literature on southern culture, religious fundamentalism, evangelical movements, and denominational growth and differences among different protestant sects. These were all new areas of study for me.

A secondary area of study to be undertaken during my sabbatical was a more intensive investigation of social class and the marginalization of lower class youth in Jefferson County and in North Country in general (I had done some work on this subject prior to the sabbatical).

As I worked on both parts of the research agenda I had developed for myself, I found that the two areas of

interest were merging in interesting ways. I started researching the ethnohistorical record of evangelical movements in the county and in North Country, and this research provided insight into what I was observing in a contemporary arena. Evangelical movements and social class are related phenomena. Fundamentalism and evangelism are not new to North Country. Church-based youth ministry has reached out to lower-class youth in a manner that in some ways has been more successful than agency sponsored programs.

Note: I also learned that substance abuse, drug and alcohol smuggling, and juvenile delinquency are not new to North Country, nor are such phenomena unique to lowerclass youth. However, community concern (moral panic) tends to be focused on such youth in a manner that further marginalizes them. Through interviews and participant observation, I have learned how important kinship connections are in this small face-toface community. Family connections allow individuals to be socially located; it is also through family connections that one moves up or down in social class as a function of marriage. Church membership and geography also play very significant roles in determining social relations as well.

In conducting research on religion and social class in Jefferson County, I interviewed several people who were native to North Country as well as people who moved to North Country with the expansion of Fort Drum. I also started to monitor church signage in the area and found that some of the signage was the same as that observed during my tour of the southeastern U.S. I have started a systematic analysis of that signage, noting what churches display messages, when the messages change and the content of the messages displayed. Additionally, I am in the process of analyzing interview data.



I have been involved as a participant observer in the implementation of a countywide substance abuse intervention effort that is human service agency based and have started to analyze the social class politics inherent in this effort. This aspect of my research has required meeting attendance and staff interviews.

I am still reading about religious fundamentalism and how the fundamentalist and evangelical movements are related to the growth of conservative politics and cultural conservatism.

Prior to conducting interviews, the purpose of my research was explained in depth and informed consent was obtained as detailed in my IRB request. Interviewees were identified through snowball sample techniques.

My specific objective in undertaking a more traditional social anthropological approach to community study was to gain a deeper understanding of cultural conservatism and social change processes. I believe I have achieved my objective and have a much clearer understanding of institutional resistance to change and the cultural tradition of community insularity and independence. Clearly, social class underlies the moral panic associated with wayward youth in this community. Evangelical churches in the area, responding to marginalization of lower-class youth, are providing youth with opportunities for recreation, socialization, and community. It is my observation at this point in my research that some church-based efforts to reach at-risk youth have been more successful than many agency-based efforts.



I will be continuing to explore the research literature on my subject and to analyze the ethnographic data collected to date. I hope to publish the results of my research in the near future.

While I have found significant similarities between church signage in the northeast and southeast, I have also discovered significant cultural differences in these areas. Similarities are principally grounded in the rural history of each geographical area; the differences are principally grounded in the history of slavery and the civil war. My daughter and I are still trying to collaborate on an article about the religious signage of the south.



ALL ABOUT
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Despite an Asian Sage **Robert Congemi, Northeast Center**

Henry had had the most difficult time getting permission to visit the great old man. He had had no idea. Getting to talk to Frederick Thomason had seemed feasible enough – Henry was not asking for an extraordinary amount of time with him – merely an afternoon. Nor was it as if Thomason’s genius had yet been fully appreciated by the world. That triumph was still to come.

The thought of an interview with this man who had written books which charted other men’s lives had come to Henry nearly a year ago. He knew that he had to do something special with regard to strengthening his candidacy for tenure, and the possibility of original research on Thomason was a very promising idea. At last he had located Thomason, and written him, but Henry’s first letters had gained no response. Indeed, Henry had nearly given up hope, and wondered if he shouldn’t look for another way to secure his professional life. But, finally, a few days previously, there was a response, apparently from Thomason’s sister, who agreed that Henry might see Thomason briefly at his home in the east the following week. Without hesitation, Henry agreed, bid adieu to his busy colleagues at the university, told his fiancée Jessica not to marry anyone else while he was gone – it was a joke – and took a plane to the coast.

“When I get back, Jess, maybe I’ll finally be able to propose to you.”

When Henry looked back on the interview, he remembered the day was a miserable one, a nasty day of hard rain, never stopping, the kind that unnerved everyone. His flight had been, well, quite frankly, terrifying, and one heavy black woman, in mid-flight, had stood up in her seat, waved her arms and said:

“Sweet, Jesus, spare this sinner!”

On the plane, Henry had thought much of Thomason’s career. There was the child prodigy, the youthful professor of philology, the books that had turned the intellectual world upside down.

“Our society is totally wrong-headed, absolutely mad,” Thomason had written. “Everything that exists is the product of corrupt masters, fools of self-interest, with the power to completely gull the populace.”

How Thomason had been mocked, especially for categorical remarks such as these, pushed aside, ignored! The man was a fool himself, they said about him, to think in such broad and negative terms.

“Professor Thomason, would you accept such generalizations from any of your graduate students?” a critic, in *The Atheneum*, had asked, rather mordant.

And then the years of furious work, volume after volume detailing the insight behind his pronouncements – the endless arguments to support them, in order to defend as best he could against his detractors, against those who would compromise his message. These books had been followed by others. If he were to criticize the way the world was proceeding, it was only fair that Thomason replace it with something else. Hadn't he somewhere wisely written:

"I will not take away from the world, and then make the mistake of ending my work with just a diagnosis. That is a moral mistake, as well as an intellectual one. I must offer a solution, a positive programmatic strategy instead."

But these actions of his had only worked partially, even less so. The thieves, who knew themselves, would not be converted of course, and ordinary souls, just as surely, would be too timid to accept Thomason's insights. Only those among the timid who secretly agreed would change their lives, perhaps perceptively, but certainly on the quiet. True and great rebels, who carried Thomason's banner, remained few. So the great man slipped out of sight, presumably to await the world, to have it catch up with him at some, tragically, later decade, when suddenly he would be known to be very much needed. Henry himself had lost sight of Thomason – there had been so many distractions, just to live, just to "get on" with a bit of decency. But now Henry would visit Thomason, learn from him, be ignited by him, and perhaps find himself in the vanguard of a cultural discovery and honoring. Wasn't that the classical, dialectical way? Who had pointed it out? First, the tragic misunderstanding and vilification from the vested interests; the lack of will from the masses; then the tragic, comic, celebration of the world-historical individual when he has been conveniently long gone, or nearly so?

These thoughts so excited Henry, and he remembered again the first time he had read Thomason's words. How laughable they were, but how courageous, audacious, and true!

As his plane roared towards the east, Henry pulled along by the plane's great engines through the rain driving down upon them, thoughts of his own life careened before him. The woman who had been so frightened earlier was hardly calmed, but sat stiffly in her seat, ready to cry out again at some reasonable provocation.

"Please, missus, please, you'll be all right," a man who sat next to her cooed, stroking her arm, trying to comfort her.

Reaching for his cell phone, Henry called his office-mate Acker. They had been together for three years now. Surprisingly, Acker answered his phone from his home – Acker lived near the university, in one of a set of old houses that had provided homes for faculty over the years.

"What are you doing home, Acker?" Henry asked him.

"Babysitting. My wife's sick."

"It's okay? Don't you have office hours today?"

"I canceled them. I am my own man, you know. You almost there?" he asked Henry.

"I'm late. Real late."

Henry's own life had been so safe and modest. He had had a flair for scholarship; his teachers had early seen that. Thank God. He had been crazed. Henry's father had said there'd be no university for Henry.

“You’ll go to work, and help pay some of the bills around here,” his father had said, after Henry had finally gotten up the courage to ask about his future. His father had been a furiously unhappy man, who had worked as a salesman in a department store most of his life.

But his teachers had gotten together and directed him toward a state school, with a scholarship. A young woman teacher of his had put it best, Henry thought, had put it so helpfully. She had been at his school only one year:

“Henry, we all have been watching you. You deserve encouragement and support. You work so hard, and do quite well, actually. You will make a fine academic.”

Henry could have fallen to his knees – he was that worried. Almost since grade school, he had known that there was no room for failure, and had made the most of his one chance, to be more than the poor, sad boy. He had done all the right things, kept out of trouble, making a specialty, he might be proud to say, of attaching himself to those who could help him, for there was no shame in that – not only to his teachers, not only to the brightest in his classes. Once he had said, “I only read geniuses. I have too much to lose. There’s no room for error. Why waste my time with people whose thoughts are just like those who already surround us?”

If he was ambitious, so be it. Why, he didn’t even let relationships get in his way – he had kept a good lid on wildness; that was for another time. No love-sick adolescent willing to sacrifice everything for a pretty girl. Not that it was easy. There had been one, Ariel, long, long before Jessica. She had almost done him in.

But she had known. She shocked him one evening, in her parents’ little sedan, dropping him off at his house. He had been wondering about their relationship for some time.

She was in tears, a pert, little girl, who had always stood by him.

“What is it? What is the matter” he kept asking her.

“You ... you,” she told him.

And then there was his attaching himself to his professors, not something he was particularly proud of, but something he found himself doing nonetheless – Dr. Carlyle, a pleasant man always eager to help anyone; Dr. Durant, so sensitive to Henry’s particular needs; Dr. George, who had needed a substitute son. And then there was Phelps, who had never liked Henry. How Henry had catered to Phelps – anything to keep the man happy

“Of course, Dr. Phelps. Whatever you like, Dr. Phelps. Whatever you think best, sir.”

One evening, not too long ago, at a restaurant, Henry and Jessica and Acker had talked about Henry, over drinks. Perhaps Henry was a little tipsy, for he simply babbled on:

“I admit,” he said, wanting to be honest. “I admit, I took part in, say, for instance, political demonstrations, but it was only *tentatively* – I always worried if I was doing the right thing, if I was going to get into trouble. But I feel all that is starting to change now. I feel more sure of myself, more sure of myself every day. I feel as if I’m really going to start moving out in my life. After all, as they say, if not now, when?”

Jessica had put her hand on his. She was absolutely wonderful. Did he deserve her? What did she want from him? What did she see in him? “Oh, Henry, you’re too hard on yourself. You really are.” Was she just

feeling the effects of wine, too?

“Hey, Henry,” Acker had told him. Acker was a studious-looking man, also in his early 30s, who wore round glasses. “You do what you have to. We’re all like that. But you’re succeeding brilliantly. And you can be more wild after tenure.”

Perhaps Henry was more drunk than he thought. “What a world to be in – when you always have to be so careful.”

When Henry’s plane finally landed at the airport, he took a cab to where he was told Frederick Thomason lived. The weather, which had somewhat abated to mere rain, had delayed him terribly. Now he was worried if his being so late would abort his mission, and there was the concern of his flight back to worry about, too.

Thomason’s neighborhood was a shock – perhaps not an extraordinary one, but where Henry was finding the great man was certainly nothing he would have predicted. Standing in the rain in front of the worn, turn-of-the-century apartment complex he had been directed to, Henry couldn’t help but wonder, Is that what it comes down to? Is this the kind of thing that others have endured? The neighborhood, so old and tired, seemed to be made up of a mix of people, at least, at first glance – at the moment mostly working-class whites, underclass blacks in the rainy streets. Finding Thomason’s building, behind a few others in the complex, Henry rang a bell underneath which was written **Thomason**, and held his breath.

The woman who finally answered the door to Thomason’s apartment had a pleasant enough air about her, a stocky woman, perhaps in her late 60s. Henry guessed immediately that he would like her. He could see that she was worried, a bit concerned.

He identified himself and apologized before anything else.

“I am so sorry, Miss Thomason,” he explained as she led him into the apartment, to a sofa in apparently what was the living room, somehow both spare and cluttered, just behind them. Could he be in a tenement? Henry wondered. “The weather ... the plane in the rain storm ... ”

Miss Thomason waved away his responsibility. Able to look at her more, study her more, Henry decided she looked very tired. “I had him ready, earlier, Mr. James. But he is resting now. I wasn’t sure what to do, but Frederick has his schedule. We try to keep it, my niece and I.”

“Of course. That’s no problem.” Had he lost his chance? His great chance, because of a stupid rain storm? “But ... ” Henry could hardly ask the question. “But ... will I still be able to see him? Interview him, Miss Thomason, if only for a little while? I promise I will be no burden to him. Indeed, I have the utmost reverence for your brother. He is a personal hero of mine.” For some reason, Henry resisted adding that, also, he hoped someday, in his small way, to help make Thomason a hero to all the world.

Miss Thomason did not answer him immediately, she seemed to be considering his question, but Henry intuited that he would get his way with this woman. This was a kind, good person in front of him – was Thomason’s whole family like this? She would do the right thing, after a bit of consideration, probably not even because she wanted her brother to be helped, but because it was the gracious thing to do!

“ ... All right ... all right ... ” she finally told him. “ ... In a little while. Will that be satisfactory?”

God, but Henry’s heart already went out to these people and their situation in life.

Henry lost no time. “Of course. Absolutely.”

As he and Miss Thomason began to talk a little, Henry was aware that there was someone else nearby in the apartment, and presently a young woman cautiously made her way into the living room – no, not cautiously, but **delicately**, if that word was in any way appropriate to someone entering a room. It was Thomason's niece, Henry learned. She was a slender, pretty girl, perhaps 19 or so.

“Catherine helps me care for Frederick, Mr. James. She is very good to me, and to her uncle. I don't want to think how things might have been without her.” But Miss Thomason's face grew fixed. “But she is leaving now, soon. She has spent enough of her life with two old people.”

Catherine started to protest, but her aunt stopped her.

“No, darling. We've been through it a thousand times. You are on your way.”

When Catherine had gone, not forever, not just yet, but just for a few hours on this particular day, Henry finally got up the courage to ask Miss Thomason about her brother. After all, that was why he was here. “How ... how has he been, ma'am? I mean, how has life been for him ... has it been hard? Has he survived?”

Was it a lifetime before Frederick Thomason's sister was able to answer this question? Henry watched her closely. “Please, tell me, Miss Thomason.

Please tell me exactly how it has been. After all, that's one of the reasons why I am here.

” “ ... yes ... of course ... I see ... ”

“Well ... ?”

She did not look at Henry at first. “No, it has not been easy for him, Mr. James. I wish I could tell you otherwise, but I cannot. It has not been easy for Frederick.”

Henry waited patiently.

“It has been so difficult, actually.” Now she looked at him. “I don't think Frederick would mind my telling you that. You see, he worked so hard, so hard. That is all he ever did. Work, work, and more work. He wanted so much to say what he needed to say, what he must say. Does that sound melodramatic to you?”

“ ... You see, he worked so hard, so hard. That is all he ever did. Work, work, and more work. He wanted so much to say what he needed to say, what he must say. Does that sound melodramatic to you?”

“No.” Henry spoke so weakly.

“He wanted to get it very clear, he wanted it perfectly right. And then everyone was quite hard on him.” She was quick to add: “Oh, please, understand, Frederick knew that would happen to him. He was supposed to be an insightful man, after all. But that fact must not fool us. On some level, on some level where even Frederick did not go, could not go, it hurt him terribly. To be made such fun of, to be ridiculed in that way. No one can work a lifetime and receive such derision from his peers, and not, in some deepest, hidden room of one’s mind, be terribly wounded. At least, not Frederick.”

Did he dare interrupt her?

“You mean he was not able to see what **finally** was going to happen to him? You’re sure of that?”

Miss Thomason looked at Henry curiously.

“Aren’t there people who can manage that? People who somehow can transcend all their troubles ... ” Henry went for it all: “And reach a kind of serenity, an absolute peace?”

“You mean, like some kind of Asian sage, Mr. James?”

“Yes. Something like that.”

Miss Thomason shook her head. Did she smile wryly? “Well, it has not been that way for my brother.”

Henry did not immediately answer her back. His mind was a riot of feelings and ideas. Finally, he told her: “Well, I am here, Miss Thomason, to start to set things straight. **That** is why I am here.” He marveled at his rhetoric and passion. “This wrong shall not go uncorrected.”

Again, she looked at him so curiously.

Henry leaned forward, toward this wonderful woman, this devotee. “Miss Thomason, may I see him now? Is it time? May I? Please, dear lady.”

Slowly, Miss Thomason brought herself to her feet. “Very well,” she said.

As he waited, Henry already began to plot, as audacious as it seemed, to do everything he could in his life to help Thomason. Certainly, there was his tenure, but, now, it seemed there was so much more. He had found his calling – he had found his life’s work. Frederick Thomason was a great man, and Henry, alone, and with thankful others, would make that clear.

When Miss Thomason brought her brother into the room, when the moment of meeting at last had come, Henry saw that Frederick Thomason was wheelchair-bound. It was something of a surprise to Henry, but – of course – not inexplicable. And it changed nothing. Thomason seemed so vulnerable. Old, yes, but so vulnerable. Why, what a sweet-looking, little, vulnerable old man he was! White-haired, slumped over a little, his hands clasped in front of him, a blanket across his lap and legs. This was a man one could easily give over one’s life to. Immediately, Henry felt his heart swell in love for Thomason. Swinging the wheelchair, positioning her brother in front of where Henry was sitting, Miss Thomason applied the machine’s brake at the side, and backed away. She sat herself away from the two men, so that they might talk, communicate, identify with each other.

“Dr. Thomason, it ... it is a pleasure, sir,” Henry told the little, old man before him. “A great, great pleasure. I am very honored, sir. You have no idea.”

Thomason said nothing.

Henry cared nothing for the fact that he was effusing. There was an occasion for any kind of human behavior. "To think, I might not have ever gotten the chance to meet you. To talk with you."

Thomason smiled benignly.

"I am so fortunate."

Thomason looked back at his sister, perhaps as if for verification, and then returned his attention to Henry. "You ... are ... very kind." Thomason's voice was so thin, that fact alone might have broken Henry's heart.

Henry shook his head. "No, Professor, no."

"My sister has told me about you. She told me you were coming."

Henry got right to the point, without in any way, he felt, being inappropriate. "I had to see you, sir. You have been so important to me in my life. And important to others. Surely, you know that?"

Again, Thomason looked back at his sister.

Henry switched a little his approach, his dealing with this great man. "I see, you are well taken care of. Your sister, and your niece, I understand, must be a great benefit to you. That is very clear."

Thomason fiddled with his chair.

"Well, now, in some infinitesimal way, Professor, you have me, too. That is, if you will allow it." Henry moved closer. "You see, I am preparing for tenure, at my university, and I want very much to interview you." Henry was quick to make himself perfectly clear. "Not to do anything that will trouble you in any way, but only to make ... things better. Do you understand, sir? I just want to ask you some questions – at your leisure. Get to know you better. Catch up on your career. Detail out all that has happened to you." He was bold: "Let the world know **everything**. Would that be all right?"

Thomason just continued to stare at Henry.

"I know I am presumptuous, but you would have the most helpful of followers in me, sir. I assure you, I pledge to you, I would cause no harm, in any way."

Thomason's sister watched, so quiet. She would make the best of colleagues!

Henry was now so close to Thomason that he convinced himself that they would some day become intimates. It was true. He would make it so.

"I would like to talk to you about your books, Professor. About all those books. About all the things in them. With others far more capable than myself, I will help bring them back more to the world's attention. Will you let me do that? May we talk? May we? It is time to take your rightful place. May we talk about you and your books?"

Thinking back on the next moment, Henry would always be astonished at his behavior. Ashamed. How could he have been so unseeing? So self-aggrandizing and foolish? So **presumptuous**? How could he

have dared to approach Thomason with so little insight or grace?

“May we talk about your books, Dr. Thomason?” Henry asked the great, old man again. “Please.”

At this, at this most important of requests, Thomason said, “Books? Oh ... yes ... books.” He half-turned to his sister. “They have told me I wrote books, didn’t they, Dorothea?”

Dorothea Thomason smiled – truly, a saint.

Thomason looked back one last time at Henry. “They told me I wrote many books,” the old man said. “They told me ... that they were good books. Didn’t they, Dorothea? They told me they were very good books.”

As his body flushed, as his soul seemed to swoon, Henry understood the depth of his misunderstanding.

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Confronting the Enemy: Knowledge, Technology and the Construction of Thought
Robin Voetterl, Graduate Studies/M.A.T.

Note: A version of this essay was originally presented at the October 2003, All Areas of Study Meeting on the panel, "Technology and the Construction of Thought."

Knowledge is power. Frances Bacon, 1597

We have met the enemy and he is us. Pogo, 1971 (1)

If today were a typical day during an average year on earth, the perceptions, thoughts, and actions of average human beings that are reinforced in institutions of education throughout the United States would add 15 million tons of carbon to the atmosphere, destroy 2 1/2 acres of tropical rainforest per second (2), eliminate 137 species (3), erode 71 million tons of topsoil, add approximately 15,616 pounds of chlorofluorocarbons to the stratosphere (4), and increase human population by 209,782. During the past year, the perceptions, thoughts, and actions of average human beings that are reinforced in institutions of education throughout the United States created 12 million hectares useless for cultivation – this is equal to 10 percent of the total area of South Africa or 87 percent of the area of cultivated lands in the United States (5). Since the beginning of this century, the perceptions, thoughts, and actions of average human beings reinforced in institutions of education throughout the United States have aided in the disappearance of more than 90 of Brazil's indigenous tribes (6); have ignited a gold rush there (7), which brought disease to the Yanomami culture, killing a quarter of the population in a single decade while leaving many of the 8,500 survivors hungry and destitute (8); have saturated the delta of the Niger River (homeland of the Ogoni indigenous culture) with pollutants from the oil industry impoverishing the once fertile soils (9); and have reduced to rubble some 6,000 ancient Tibetan temples of wisdom and veneration.

These are not isolated events but complementary and complex elements of a global phenomenon that is increasing exponentially. As unemployment, poverty, and inequality continue to increase, the social fabric of community is disintegrating, and the ability of ecosystems to support human life is being systematically destroyed. The manipulation and destruction of the natural environment, the extinction of biological species, and the elimination of languages leading to the disintegration of cultures and ways of knowing are more than just alarming statistics. They are the physical, psychological, and political manifestations of the interconnectedness of knowing and being, and of thought and action. According to physicist and social activist Vandana Shiva (1993) and educators Gregory Bateson (1973), David Bohm (1991b, 1994), and C. A. Bowers (2000, 1997, 1993a) they are also the symptoms of a wider process held together by several factors, including errors in the epistemological orientation and patterns of thought of Occidental culture,

coupled with the myopia of its institutions – including higher education.

The relationship between higher education, the construction of thought, the types of technology that have contributed to the extinctions and atrocities outlined above, and other issues related to cultural and ecological diversity is complex but nonetheless require careful consideration. In recent decades, numerous scholars including Yale University historian Yaroslav Pelikan (1992) have questioned the readiness of the university community to address the underlying intellectual issues of having responsibility for the earth and its myriad inhabitants and wondered whether it can do so with the same intensity and ingenuity shown by previous generations in obeying the command to acquire dominion over the planet. Similarly, C.A. Bowers (2000) has grave reservations about whether the prevailing metaphor of knowledge as technologically mediated information exchange is a constructive one, given the contemporary atmosphere of “relentless optimism, inevitability, and universality” of computer-mediated instruction embedded in contemporary institutions of education (p. 5).

Thus, there is a pressing need for inquiry focused on the connections between the origins of knowledge (including the manner in which it is produced, archived, retrieved, and distributed), the patterns of thought that are produced and reproduced by the modern university, and the state of our current cultural and ecological crises (Apffel- Marglin, 1998; Bowers, 2000, 1998, 1997, 1995, 1993a, 1993b; Semali and Kincheloe, 1999; Schwartz, 1997; Shiva, 1993; Simon, 1998; Tierney, 1992).

By way of illustration, C. A. Bowers (1998) notes that an examination of the deep cultural assumptions encoded in the educational “root metaphors” present in the modern Western academy reveals that higher education’s view of an educated person is as dependent upon the marketplace of ideas, expert systems, and consumerism as were our predecessors’ at the outset of the Industrial Revolution.

Bowers points out that: ... the influence of traditional, self-sufficient communities would have to be undermined in order for the individual to become ‘educated.’ The Industrial Revolution required a radically different form of individualism, one that took for granted the following assumptions: that education leads to the individual becoming an autonomous, rational thinker capable of judging the merit of community traditions; that progress is linear and that the high status knowledge learned in the classroom represents the more evolved stage of cultural development; that decontextualized print-based knowledge and forms of communication are more reliable and culturally advanced than what is learned in face-to-face relationships; that the veracity of ideas and values should be determined in an open, competitive environment; that the narratives, processes of inquiry, and technological innovations learned in classrooms should be based on an anthropocentric view of the world; that the epistemology of science and the systems of expert knowledge provide the more reliable forms of knowledge for rationally managing the internal and external world – and that the resulting systems of commodification should be globalized (p. 7).

What is emerging among scholars dedicated to exploring issues of social and ecological justice is the realization that the price one pays for the conveniences and goods industrialization and modern Western forms of technological development bring is not only environmental destruction and social fragmentation but the “colonization of the mind” (Shiva, 1993). The disappearance of local knowledge systems through their interaction with dominant Western thought patterns and forms of knowledge production takes place at many levels and through many steps, argues Shiva (1993).

First, local knowledge is made to disappear by simply not seeing it, by negating its very existence. This is very easy in the distant gaze of the globalising dominant system. The Western systems of knowledge have generally been viewed as universal. However, the dominant system is also a local system, with its social basis in a particular culture, class and gender. It is not universal in an epistemological sense. It is merely the globalised version of a very local and parochial tradition. Emerging from a dominating and colonising culture, modern knowledge systems are themselves colonising (p. 9).

This “colonised mind,” Shiva (1993) asserts, has prized, among other values, human independence and individuality, the control over nature, and unrestricted progress and material growth. Furthermore, it has exported these proclivities, via the technology networks that are embedded in globalized industry, trade, and educational organizations, into even the most remote areas of the world. Yet, as argued by Macedo (1999), in terms of knowledge production and distribution, the colonial experience as described by Shiva and Bowers is not restricted to the context of subaltern countries alone. This colonizing experience can also be found within inner cities, throughout rural communities, and on the reservations of the United States as well. Computers and the technologies that drive them, which are currently valued and reinforced by the scientific structures and mechanisms of the modern Western university, have historically undervalued and sabotaged (both consciously and unconsciously) those knowledge systems and ways of knowing that fall outside their purview. And this dynamic occurs even when these “alternatives” manifest themselves as positive actors in the world.

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The problem, according to Bowers (2000), is that the prevailing metaphor of knowledge as information exchange hides the multilayered cultural and ecological aspects of what constitutes knowledge and ways of knowing. Uncritically reinforcing mechanistically-oriented knowledge systems, Bowers (2000) argues, is irresponsible at best. More damaging to cultural and biological diversity, however, is how computers are currently represented in education. By emphasizing the inevitability of computerization and irreversibility of mechanistic ways of knowing, while simultaneously equating the adoption of mechanically mediated forms of instruction and knowledge dissemination with evolutionary progress and advanced forms of civilization, educators are highlighting (and thus privileging) forms of symbolic culture that have few connections with ecologically responsible patterns of interaction and that reinforce habits of thought incapable of traversing disparate cultural traditions of social and moral obligations.

Equally problematic for Bowers (2000) are the many ways in which a taken for granted orientation to computers and their place in our lives ignores the ways in which computers accelerate the globalization of commodified relationships and knowledge. Said differently, global organizations, like the modern university, have historically defined their goals in terms of growing one-dimensional economies to provide jobs and to increase the commodities subject to the forces of the marketplace rather than to developing healthy sustainable communities of individuals capable of thinking in complex ways and who are proficient at participating in multidimensional dialogues about the difficult and often paradoxical nature of issues such as sustainable development, technological progress, ecological and cultural diversity, ethics, and equity. Consequently, writes Korten (1997), the habits of thought nurtured by institutions of education in this country that have spurred the economic growth patterns of the past have primarily benefited a tiny elite while leaving the rest of humanity, present and future, with the bill. It is time, Korten (1997) insists, “we

recognize that we are getting the wrong answers because we are asking the wrong questions” (p. 70).

If, as Macedo (1999) warns, this colonial legacy remains unexamined, we will fail to find value in other ways of knowing and perceiving reality, thus, forfeiting our ability to comprehend fully the human potential for growth and transformation. Bowers (2000) and Tierney (1998) have echoed Macedo’s concerns and suggest it is only through the decolonization of our minds that we can begin to develop the necessary epistemological, political, and personal clarity to reject the enslavement of a technologically driven, mechanistically oriented colonial discourse. Tierney (1998) posits, that if academe is to go to the root causes of our problems, we need to rethink and, of consequence, restructure what we do. Change ought not to come from around the edges, but rather go to some of our core activities. We can see that many previous managerial remedies were more concerned with improving systems that already exist than with inventing new ones. ... Instead, ... we want to challenge old ways of thinking and acting in academe by proffering suggestions about new ways of thinking, and hence acting, in postsecondary institutions (p. 3).

It would be disingenuous to suggest that the “simple” act of “turning off the box” as a way of transforming the epistemological patterns and assumptions that undergird adult learning orientations in higher education will single-handedly solve the many social, cultural, and ecological ills that plague us.

I am convinced, however, that higher education must, as an institution that plays a key role in producing and reproducing the everyday perceptions, thoughts and actions of its participants, create opportunities for critical inquiry, political awareness, meaningful participation, and habits of intellectual curiosity and creativity that are necessary for understanding and (hopefully) transforming our current predicaments. In short, it can take steps to institutionalize epistemological and pedagogical structures that will enable its participants to ask different questions; questions like the one raised by my fellow panelist, Alice Lai, who wonders what kinds of human experiences are allowed or disallowed by the technology and tools we choose to use in our teaching environments.

How should this tool be judged and evaluated? Or who benefits from the amplification of knowledge as information exchange? Or does technology as we currently conceive of it and use it in our educational practice enhance or inhibit our students’ opportunities of transforming information into knowledge and knowledge into wisdom? Given the extent and complexity of Pelikan’s challenge, I believe it is our responsibility to inquire into questions that move us beyond mechanistic technological remedies or budget oriented objectives into realms inspired by an expanded understanding of how teaching and learning interact with how we perceive, think about and interact with ourselves, with each other, and with the more-than-human world.

Notes

1. “Pogo” the opossum hails from the Okefenokee Swamp. Cartoonist Walt (Walter Crawford) Kelly debuted Pogo in 1948 as a cartoon character with moxie. By the late 1960s, Pogo’s commentaries on the human condition and the ecological crisis appeared in 450 newspapers and publications worldwide. “We have met the enemy and he is us” first appeared on a poster Kelly drew for Earth Day, 1970 and later (1971) appeared as a two-panel version of the Pogo comic strip. This is perhaps Pogo’s most famous statement and an apt metaphor that succinctly captures the contemporary understandings of spirit of our dilemmas.

2. Almost half of the world’s original four billion acres of rainforest are now gone. The lost area equals the combined size of Washington, Idaho, California, Nevada and Arizona (<http://www.crunchtime.org/destruction.html>).

3. Using conservative estimates, this figure drops to 9,000 extinct species per year, a rate that represents the largest mass extinction since the demise of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago, which is occurring at a

much faster rate (<http://www.crunchtime.org/destruction.html>). The higher rate, estimated at 137 species per day, equals a loss of 50,000 species per year (http://www.ran.org/info_center/factsheets/03b.html).

4. This figure is for CFC-114 only. Yearly this figure is estimated at 5.7 million pounds (<http://www.courier-journal.com/localnews/2001/05/29/ke052901s30057.html>).

5. About one third of the world's land surface is arid or semi-arid. It is predicted that global warming will increase the area of desert climates by 17 percent during the next century (<http://www.botany.uwc.ac.za/Envfacts/facts/desertification.html>).

6. In 1500, there were an estimated six to nine million indigenous people inhabiting the tropical rainforests of Brazil. By 1900, that number had dropped to one million. Today, there are less than 250,000 indigenous people left in Brazil (The Raintree Group, 2001).

7. Current exploration targets suggest that an estimated 50 percent of the gold produced in the next 20 years will come from indigenous people's lands (French, 2000). The toxic byproducts from mining poisons the rivers that local people drink from and destroy forests and fields that indigenous cultures rely on for sustenance. In addition, prime extraction sites in the United States are often located in previously undisturbed forests or "wilderness" areas affecting nearly 40 percent of threatened forests (French, 2000). For every kilogram of gold produced in the United States, for example, some three million kilograms of waste rock are left behind (French, 2000).

8. Similarly, Japan's timber trade has resulted in the exploitation and devastation of the Penan culture. In 1970, for example, there were 13,000 Penan tribes-people living in the forests of Sarawak. Two decades later there were fewer than 500 (Davidson, 1993; Bevis, 1995).

9. Likewise, recent decades have seen rapid growth in what has been termed "nontraditional" exports in flowers, fruits and vegetables. These crops command higher prices than more traditional agricultural exports making them targets for subaltern countries. One of the most serious byproducts of this trade is exposure to harmful levels of pesticides. A recent study of nearly 9,000 workers in Colombia's flower plantations indicated exposure to 127 different pesticides, 20 percent of which were either banned or unregistered in the United Kingdom or the United States (French, 2000).

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ALL ABOUT
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Learning About Our Northern Neighbors
Justin A. Giordano, Metropolitan Center

Note: The following article was published in a Canadian weekly newspaper, The Canadian Citizen/Cittadino Canadese, primarily written for the Italian-Canadian reader. It was published in a five-part series in April and May of 2002.



Justin A. Giordano

Canada is the United States' largest trading partner. From the Canadian side, its ties to the United States are not only tremendously important but essential to its very existence. For while we on this side of the border occasionally hear about grumblings from some Canadians about what they perceive as the overbearing American power and its international policies (as embodied by the recent Iraqi episode where the Canadian government chose to oppose – at least partially – our policy and accompanying actions), the reality is that Canada's economy is inextricably connected to the United States. In fact, the United States accounts for approximately 75 percent of Canada's trade. No wonder there's an old saying in Canada that goes something like this: "When the United States sneezes, Canada catches a cold."

Canada's historical approach regarding the seminal issue of biculturalism still permeates its contemporary politics, threatening its future prosperity and for that matter its very existence as a country. Americans have generally little knowledge of this or other aspects relating to Canada, its history, and/or current situation, and consequently it is difficult to evaluate the validity of Canada's policies and their implications. Thus a socio-historical analysis could provide the necessary framework and perspective to shine some light on Canada's evolution and place in the world and most importantly vis-à-vis its relationship with the United States.

The Canada-Quebec Saga: Nationalism vs. Pragmatism

As a native of Canada, having chosen many years ago to make the United States my home and my country, I nevertheless make it a point to keep abreast of the major political developments pertaining to my former domicile and home. I've often pondered the core issues that have brought a nation enjoying the fruits of peace and prosperity to the edge of a precipice known as "separatism." The following analysis is thus offered without claim to having discovered uncharted territory. On the contrary, the facts and circumstances surrounding the Canada-Quebec dilemma appear so amply plain to this writer as to be self-evident to most serious observers of the scene. Just the same, "separatism" as a political and socioeconomic concept presents the most pivotal and challenging threat to Canadian nationhood. Thus, Canada's and Quebec's prospects vis-a-vis this most thorny dilemma must be evaluated within a framework encompassing not only its current and evolving realities but its root causes as well.

Canada has been trapped in a love/hate relationship with the province of Quebec dating back to its formal inception as a nation in 1867. Of course, bad blood between French and English Canadians has long predated the contemporary Quebecois versus Canadian feud. Indeed, its roots stretch all the way back to colonial times when the yet to be born country of Canada was divided into two regions, Upper and Lower Canada.

In fact, the hostility permeating the current political arena can trace its origins to the struggle between the British and French as both powers eagerly sought to colonize North America and expand their respective empires. This deep seeded antagonism was never quenched, as the British Empire having vanquished the French (following the decisive military British triumph at the plains of Abraham in Quebec City) proceeded to impose British rule over the remaining French population, which principally resided in the Province of Quebec.

Unlike their neighbor to the south who adopted a policy of Americanization (i.e. imposing English language and a healthy dose of patriotic indoctrination) whenever they added new territories to the United States, including the territories acquired in the famous Louisiana purchase, as well as Texas, New Mexico, California, Nevada, Arizona, et al., the British never embraced the former French colonists as full blown British subjects.

In all fairness, it must be pointed out that the comparison is not an entirely legitimate one given that Canada, unlike the United States, was not set up as a nation from its inception. In fact, it is essentially an artificial construct of non-American colonies in North America.

Nevertheless, most historians tend to agree that the French populace was generally treated with scorn and derision, and seldom allowed to forget that their French forebearers had been militarily bested by their arch-nemesis, the English. They were thus treated as second-class citizens and consequently were routinely exploited by the English-speaking minority in the Province of Quebec. Whether the treatment of the Quebecois was intentionally malicious is still subject to debate, yet what remains undeniable is that at the very least a policy of "benign neglect" towards the Quebecois (and the French Canadians in general) went

into effect.

This in turn resulted in a population left largely uneducated and in relative poverty until the latter half of the 20th century. The plight of the Quebecois was often made worse by a compliant Catholic Church which sought to protect (perhaps wrongly in retrospect) their flock by urging compliance and submissive obedience to British rule. As time marched on, compliance led to the emergence of a dominant culture, a hierarchy of power that squarely placed English Canada and English-speaking Canadians at the top of the heap, including in the predominantly French-speaking province of Quebec. This hierarchy became solidly entrenched through economic dominance and effective political power.

Nevertheless, the Quebecois have endured, and arguably even thrived, through the last four centuries. This achievement was not necessarily the end product of the Quebecois' inordinate bravery or irrepressible courage. It was in fact mostly due to their English majority's afore-stated policy of "benign neglect" towards their French-speaking countrymen. Perhaps inevitably then, a collective thirst to correct real and perceived wrongs developed until that resentment eventually led to the acquisition of real political power, the culmination of which was the victory by the separatist "Party Quebecois" in the 1976 Quebec provincial election.

This was no minor achievement since it placed at the helm of the second largest province of Canada, a Prime Minister (René Levesque) and a government whose political mission was to commence the process of separating the province of Quebec from Canada. This was followed by referenda, which while unsuccessful (although the last one failed by a mere 50,000 votes), clearly demonstrated that the "separatist" movement in Quebec could ultimately win a mandate for separation from Canada.

As the latter third of the 20th century unfolded, the proponents of Quebec's separatist cause also formed a separatist Federal Party, the "Bloc Quebecois." This party mirrors the mission and ideology of its provincial party, the Party Quebecois. The Bloc Quebecois quickly rose in status, even attaining the level of official opposition party in the Canadian Parliament, thus underscoring the strength of the separatist ideology/movement in Quebec. These events have served to rightly convince the Quebecois that they indeed hold a card that Canada can never hope to outplay. Namely the one element Canada as a nation has always been willfully lacking in, that is an historic and strongly felt sense of "nationalism." Indeed the socio-political entity known as Canada could be aptly and fairly described as a "fragmented society."

As a result, when the Canada–Quebec discussions regarding sovereignty arise, it becomes imminently evident that the two parties are talking at cross-purposes. While Canada is arguing the logic of Quebec's economic prosperity being directly linked to its evolution within the Canadian nation, Quebec remains essentially unfazed, unimpressed and even unafraid. In effect, it retorts that its (Quebec's) overriding wish is to govern itself as a separate and distinct people. Thus, economic reasoning and the calculus of dollars and cents, lose a great deal, if not most, of their impact during such a discussion. Thus on this level, Canada's "pragmatism" can never hope to effectively compete with Quebecois nationalism.

Furthermore, as the nation of Canada is currently structured (i.e., its fragmentation), another concern it must contend with (although the probability of its occurrence is rather low at this time) is the possibility that Canada could ultimately disintegrate as a nation if Quebec were to leave the Canadian federation. This is not only due to the tremendous economic void Quebec would create, but also and mostly because of the cultural identity deficit that would ensue for Canada.

Essentially Canada has, even since it severed most of its ties (official and otherwise) to the British Crown, operated under the self-proclaimed mantra that it is the "un America." Namely, it likes to refer to itself as a bicultural (and increasingly multicultural), bilingual society. Canadians often like to contrast their approach against the "melting pot," "rah-rah" patriotism of their American neighbors, traits that they [Canadians] often

characterize as gauche, and perhaps even a bit juvenile. However, therein lies the Canadian dilemma since without Quebec, Canada would unquestionably be deprived of its claim to official biculturalism and bilingualism, thus setting it adrift in a vast English-speaking North American cultural sea, overwhelmingly dominated by the United States.

This concern is certainly not solely based on irrational tribalism, but is in fact premised on raw data. Canadians are by far much larger consumers of American pop culture (as evidenced by the fact that they consume American television programs, films, and music products) than their own home-based offerings. In fact, to counter the cultural invasion, for decades Canada has taken measures via legislation mandating a minimum percentage of Canadian content, not only for its television programming, but for broadcasting in general, as well as music, films, and the myriad of other entertainment products.

Economically speaking, the United States constitutes a vital link to Canada's high standard of living. As noted, roughly 75 percent of all of Canada's trade is with the United States. In terms of the U.S.-Canada defense/military alliance and relationship, through NORAD (North American Air Defense), Canada is essentially under the direct command of the United States Strategic Command Center located in the mountains of Cheyenne, Colorado. This is further evidence of the inextricable link that exists between Canada and the United States, which in turn gives, if indirectly, greater validity to the notion that Quebec's role provides Canada with its much needed sense of bicultural identity.

Therefore, one of the most feared scenarios (as far as the survival of the Canadian Federation is concerned) centers around the possibility that any number of Canadian provinces could vie for a merger with the United States, the most likely candidates being the western provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

At the other geographic end of Canada, the Maritime Provinces might also be tempted to plead their own case for a union with the United States, given their high unemployment and poverty rate. In all likelihood, the United States would decline such advances given that the end of the cold war no longer necessitates it nor makes it advantageous for the United States, particularly in light of numerous other internal political pressures mitigating against extending the welcome mat to the aforementioned Canadian provinces.

Quebec, on the other hand, is not saddled by any such concerns nor limited by any substantive constraints. Quebec's biggest problem would be economic, at least in its early stage as a sovereign state. However, in the not too distant future there is every indication that this could be remedied through stronger economic ties with its American trading partners, especially since it already engages in extensive trade with the United States, principally with border-states such as New York and Vermont. In addition, logic dictates that trade with Canada would also be re-established to pre-separation levels (or very close thereto) within a very brief time period following said separation. Consequently, one could conclude that Quebec could "have its cake and eat it too."

To sum up, Quebec's "nationalism" has enabled it to survive over the last four centuries and has brought it to the point where it can extract a princely ransom for remaining within the Canadian Federation. In fact, over the last three decades Quebec has been increasingly exercising its newly found political muscle through the use of its de-facto and de-jure veto power over cultural and constitutional matters in Canada. Thus the current state of affairs seems to mandate that whenever Quebec's demands from the federal government go unmet, the unflappable trump card – the threat of separation – is invariably played.

Furthermore, the Quebecois can now play their game of upsmanship with ever-increasing confidence, given that the economic risks have been substantially diminished, in fact more so than at any prior time in their history. Pragmatism still dictates that Quebec and Canada would greatly benefit from their continued association within the boundaries of one unified nation. Nevertheless, Quebec's nationalism and its

historical circumstances have finally yielded it the upper hand in this nearly half-a-millennium saga.

Nationalism and the staunch desire to establish a “distinct Quebecois society” have proven to be most potent elixirs. Yet, in spite of the troubled and adversarial relationship between French and English speaking citizens, the Canadian experiment, be it an artificial construct or not, be it lacking a true sense of identity and patriotism or not, has managed to survive since its inception in 1867 as a peaceful and prosperous nation. On the international stage, Canada is a member of the “Group of Eight” (the world’s most prosperous and powerful nations), while domestically it is a democratic nation governed for the most part in a just and equitable manner. Indeed if Canada as a nation did not firmly and with a quasi-religious fervor adhere to the its belief in civility (arguably constituting the greatest common trait Canadians share), a full fledged civil war would have been all but inevitable over the fundamental issue of “separation.” Instead while the arguments over the matter have been heated and passionate, neither side has resorted to bloodletting nor have the leaders of both factions ever incited violence to resolve their differences.

Therefore, while Quebec may arguably be justified in its aspirations for sovereignty and independence, it would nonetheless be a shame to have Canada disintegrate for the sole purpose of settling old grievances, especially when other arrangements might prove far less radical, more productive, and in the long run much more beneficial to all concerned.

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The Body and the Body as Technology **Leslie Satin, Metropolitan Center**

Note: This piece was presented as part of a panel on “Technology and the Construction of Thought” at the October 2003, All Area of Study Meeting.

1.

In dance and performance scholarship and practice – worlds in which I live – there is considerable debate about the dancing body. Some of the questions are obvious, others less so. As dancers, we wonder and worry about virtuosity: what our bodies might be called on to do, what our bodies *can* or *will* do in a particular moment or over the years. As choreographers, we search for movement that makes sense to us, that moves us: we are philosophers-in-motion of an art form that is famously ephemeral, even if its participant bodies are dauntingly material. As scholars, we wind through convoluted paths of history, science, aesthetics, and theories – literary, cultural, narrative, and performance, among others – to simply figure out – if not once and for all at least for the right-now moment of analysis and synthesis that passes as quickly as the sweep of an arm or the raising of a bent knee – what the body *is*, where it starts and ends, what (if anything) is natural about what it does, how or whether it interacts with the discursive ways of knowing we emphasize in intellectual life, and how we experience it from the inside – the parameters of our own skin – and the outside, looking at and responding to other people’s bodies. Racy stuff, this last, to bring to the table at an academic conference – but that’s how it is with technology.

2.

Stelarc, a performance artist, wrote in 2000 that “**The Body is Obsolete.**” He imagined adding to his head – which came, like most, equipped with two ears – a third ear, digitally rigged to augment his “natural” hearing apparatus, or to “emit noises ... to speak to anyone who [got] close to it.” Earlier, he had actually added a third hand, which responded, robotically, to electronic stimuli. Other artists have similarly crossed the borders of what we typically understand to be our bodies, our physical baselines of being. Orlan, another performance artist, has repeatedly remade her own face, surgically altering her appearance not simply to acquire a prettier nose or wider eyes but to render her face – that part of the body we typically understand as the site of expression, the part most vividly individual – malleable, interchangeable, as though the self, too, were endlessly renewable, a simulacrum whose original is merely a suggestion.

3.

The material body is the currency of dance, the animator of its concepts. For some choreographers, that is limiting and regressive. In the 1970s, Yvonne Rainer became a filmmaker when she found the real time/real space/real body of live dance too binding. Sally Silvers references science historian Donna Haraway, noting how the cyborg crosses “boundaries of ... male/ female [and] mind/body.” Choreographers bypass assumptions of the “abled” body: Bill Shannon – the “CrutchMaster” – bounds and balances on the sticks he needs to stand; Homer Avila, who lost a leg to cancer, continues to choreograph and perform. Merce Cunningham, choreographer and *eminence gris*, has been generating movement for over 50 years that catapults us into thrillingly unfamiliar territory. Like his partner, composer John Cage, he demonstrated from his earliest days a delight in untested sounds, movements, and juxtapositions, prompted by the employment of chance choreographic operations. Always, his own body was the testing ground, alone or in collaboration with new video, film, electronic music. Now, at 84, his body is weakened with arthritis, and he walks with a cane, but he still choreographs – with a computer. His dances are alive, complex, his “real” dancers executing fiercely difficult movement conceived with keystrokes and sharing the stage with virtual companions generated by their movements and brought to “life” by graphic design wizard Paul Kaiser.

4.



5. One especially provocative element concerns the word “the,” casually tagged on the word “body” as though it neither defined nor confined that delightful, capricious, powerful materiality of the bones and muscles and blood we wear beneath our clothes. Across scholarly disciplines, we speak and write of “the body,” even of “the explicit body,” “the queer body,” “the transgendered body,” with the pleasure of indulging, albeit by literary proxy, in its most illicit, most delicious offerings. But which body are we talking about? Whose body are we theorizing? In “The Legs of the Theorist,” I remarked on those scholars who write passionately and brilliantly about “the body” but refuse to remove their socks. In 1984 poet Adrienne Rich proclaimed, “To write ‘my body’ plunges me into lived experience, particularity” – her “scars [and] disfigurements,” middle-class teeth, white skin. But at a recent conference, I was awestruck by the way Stelarc, to whom I referred a moment ago, described his body/art ordeals. As we watched films of him hanging 100 feet in the air, suspended from hooks embedded in his bare skin, he spoke not about pain, pleasure, or anguish, anything located in his intimate cells. He spoke, instead, about “the body.”

6.

How do we know what we know? We depend on a web of epistemologies that join the literary and linguistic

to the visual, aural, electronic, virtual, cultural, and other systems. All of them are integrally tied to our embodied experiences. Audiences “get” dances through kinesthesia – the system through which we feel and internally reproduce the movement we see – just as infants “get” the world through overlapping preverbal systems, or “get” their own subjectivity through the physical presence of their mother. When I give myself a solo ballet barre or stretch my muscles alone, I have particular experiences; in class, stretching with sweaty witnesses, I have access to an entirely different set of experiences. Before leaving dance for film, Yvonne Rainer wrote, “My body remains the enduring reality.” At 69, she is choreographing again, rethinking dance, returning to work that directly integrates what we know, today, about “moving and being moved:” the technology of the body, the body as technology.

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A Variety of Writing Problems

Mark Peters, Niagara Frontier Center

Empire State College, like this publication, is “all about mentoring;” that is, about the mentor-student interactions that comprise the bulk of Empire State College culture. But the bulk is not the whole. Mentor-to-mentor communication at meetings, in correspondence, on the horn, and in the hallway is also part of our mentoring culture. This article is my crack at capturing one of those elusive moments.

An education mentor I call Emily started this mess by knocking on my door to ask for language advice. Another education person had asked her to look over some writing, and Emily was unsure of what verb should follow the phrase “A variety of people.” I’m making up these examples, but the choice was between two sentences like this: “A variety of people are quacking like ducks?” And “A variety of people is quacking like ducks.”

(You might want to make up your own mind now, before the issue is [un]settled).

My immediate response to Emily was that “A variety of people are” sounded better to me, even though it seemed to break the rules for subject-verb agreement, since “A variety are quacking” would clearly be wrong. We both agreed that “stack of papers” should be followed by “is,” but our agreement didn’t help much, since we weren’t discussing “a stack of people” (or a stack of ducks for that matter, which sounds quite tasty, especially if we’re talking Peking ducks).

“Somewhere, linguists are arm-wrestling over this one,” I claimed, though truthfully I’m not sure how linguists settle their disputes when cold reason just isn’t enough. Anyway, I told Emily that I suspected there was no one correct answer. She didn’t seem to like that answer much.

Emily went back to her office, and I went back to mine, supposedly to read student papers, but I promptly shook off my work ethic, neglected my work, and started investigating this grammar problem further. Though I trust Microsoft Word about as far as I can throw my desk, I typed the two “variety” sentences in a Word document, and the Squiggly Green Line of Ungrammaticality appeared under “is,” supporting my view that “are” was

Right or wrong, fair or unfair, the “prescriptive vs. descriptive” distinction made sense to me, brought order to the chaos, and soothed my fragile ego.

correct. I walked over to Emily’s office and said Bill Gates and I were voting for “are.” Emily then remembered that the original phrase was actually “a variety of forces,” and that the sentence may have been “A variety of forces is/are fostering fear in the schools.” I said I thought that was a pretty good tongue twister, but that “are” was still the best answer – whether we’re talking about a variety of forces, a variety of people, or a variety of penguins.

At that point, another writing mentor walked by; to protect the innocent, I’ll call her Beth. I asked Beth what she thought, and she quickly and emphatically favored “is.” Emily agreed with her, and I became so cheesed off that I petulantly turned my back on Emily and Beth while exclaiming “conservatives!” and retreating to my dark hole, I mean office.

Beth followed, and we began a half-hour long conversation in which the two of us tore into the issue like two rats fighting over an old sock. Beth insisted that the rules for subject-verb agreement don’t change and that a verb can never agree with the object of a prepositional phrase. I said that I thought this was an exception to the rule and maybe it was an idiom, or something.

As we went round and round the grammar bush, Beth compared grammar to math, and I said grammar was nothing like math. I found Beth’s certainty – and belief in the rules – kind of irritating, and I’m pretty sure my attitude (and opinion) burned her waffles too. I was surprised at how angry the whole discussion made me. As the battle raged, I insisted again that there was no right answer, and at some point I had a little epiphany as to the root of our difference: Beth is a prescriptivist and I’m a descriptivist. (In my ongoing attempt to become an amateur linguist, I had been reading Robin Lakoff’s book *The Language War*, so these terms were fresh in my mind.) Beth didn’t like these labels, and I can’t say I blame her, since, true to my own descriptivist nature, I was reducing her to a pithy one-word description. After further review, I still think the labels accurately describe how the two of us think about language, though I’m probably guilty of at least a small simplification (maybe even a big one).

Almost immediately after I thought of these labels, my mood brightened. Right or wrong, fair or unfair, the “prescriptive vs. descriptive” distinction made sense to me, brought order to the chaos, and soothed my fragile ego.

About an hour after Emily’s original question, I had a real epiphany (D’oh!) when I got the bright idea of looking up this problem in *A Writer’s Reference* by Diana Hacker, the writing handbook I use with most of my students, a little book that had been silently waiting for attention just inches from our overwrought debate. In the section on subject-verb agreement, there’s a subsection with the title, “Treat collective nouns as singular unless the meaning is clearly plural.” A little lower on that page there’s a listing of correct sentences for different usages of “number” to illustrate the difference between “the number” and “a number.”

Singular: *The number* of school-age children is declining.

Plural: *A number* of children are attending the wedding.

Aha! Now, it seemed clear that “a variety” works the same as “a number,” and that’s why “are” sounded right to me. Beth conceded the issue, and though I considered doing the dance of joy right there in my office (possibly while pulling out a cell phone or Sharpie, NFL-style) this “victory” seemed a little empty.

I felt like I won the banana but lost the monkey. My whole (incoherently argued) point was that there could be more than one “correct” answer to this and other grammar problems. I didn’t think any one book or expert could settle some debates, and I was guessing that we had stumbled on one of those irresolvable, two-grammarians-in-a-steel-cage issues. I had asked Emily and Beth several times why there had to be one right answer, and I was extremely disappointed when they insisted that there did have to be one right answer.

So how did I win the argument? By pulling out a grammar book, locating a rule, and finding the one right answer. Almost immediately, this ended the whole conversation, smushing the trivial issue under discussion like a cockroach and laying waste to my own nontrivial, philosophical point that I still cling to, like spandex.

With the end of my essay approaching like a lightpost at 4 a.m., I’m now wondering how I can tie this anecdote and issue back to the job of mentoring.

As an undergraduate student, I had a wonderful music teacher who said he often wondered whether he should hide some of his own questions and concerns from us. Since he was supposed to teach us the canon – Bach, Beethoven, etc. – maybe it was better to keep his own questioning of the canon in his pants, so as not to baffle our brains needlessly before we grasped the basics. This notion seems closely related to the old chestnut that “you gotta learn the rules before you break the rules.” Indeed, many of my students struggle horribly with the rules, and what in the name of Zeus would they think if they heard two writing mentors having a throwdown about one of these divinely-delivered rules?

Other questions come to mind: Do beginners really need to be shielded from “expert-level” problems, like Superman needs to avoid Kryptonite? Does sharing confusion just cause more confusion or can it help create deeper understanding? Is uncertainty cause for celebration or cause for a migraine? And does keeping things simple also keep them from getting interesting?

In conclusion: a variety of language issues are driving me bonkers.

ALL ABOUT
MENTORING
A Publication of Empire State College

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Rethinking the Letter of Transit **David Bleich, University of Rochester**

Note: David Bleich was the keynote speaker at this fall's college-wide gathering on "Evaluations/Evaluating." What follows is a version of the talk he gave to begin our workshop.

This is a moment in history when the arbitrary character of social institutions becomes clearer. I grew up and entered this profession in what could be called the "Roosevelt Window," the period between 1933 and 1980 that marked the development of progressive social policies in America. Abruptly in 1980, the president of the United States, a former paid employee of one of the largest corporations in America, busted the air traffic controllers' union in peacetime and well before terrorism struck; the era of government-encouraged corporate hegemony began. I felt this change, but because the Roosevelt Window seemed like the outdoors to me (and thus not a mere window), I did not understand its actual meaning. (Perhaps I was still following the juvenile fantasy that what happened before I was born did not matter very much.) This actual meaning, it now seems, is that the window had closed, and America had returned to what it had been before 1933, to what most societies still are today: millions of people's lives shaped by a relatively small group of extremely rich and powerful men acting only according to their own interests. I use the term "power" here in the sense wryly suggested by Michael Herzfeld (more of whose work is discussed shortly): power is the right to be unaccountable (122). This situation was less visible to many for a long while; then it became more visible, and now we are all feeling its touch.

Why is this fact relevant to the practices of evaluating and certifying students, and particularly to the custom of assigning evaluative letters "of transit" at the end of courses? The arbitrary character of elite rule is reflected in the history of testing and grading, which has been traced to the Chou Dynasty in China, three millennia back, by F. Alan Hanson. His account suggests that the degree of stability in most societies is related to the continuing functioning of a large bureaucracy which answers to the ruling groups while seeming to serve the majority. In these roles, bureaucracies are too ungainly or cumbersome to change rapidly. Their inertia keeps order and continuity during the transitions between different styles of rule. David Gordon's 1996 study of corporate downsizing documents how, while workers were released, the corporations built up a much larger bureaucratic managerial staff to keep remaining workers in line. The turnover of personnel in bureaucracies is regulated by testing, a practice that seems fair, since working in a bureaucracy (or for the state) usually means "more secure employment" and thus a higher likelihood of sheer survival, as compared to occupations like indentured servitude, apprenticeship, or independent farming and trade. In modern times, the value of bureaucracy may be seen in how it sustained France in the mid-20th century, when its government repeatedly changed hands after only months in office.

Like the pass-fail option and the student evaluation questionnaires, narrative evaluation as practiced here falls into a political context, one of whose ideals is teaching without domination and coercion.

Bureaucracy and its practices and values are part of society as we have always known it, regardless of when we were born, and testing and grading have been, seemingly of necessity, part of the bureaucratic stabilization of society. Because this is so common in every society – and I daresay uniform in character – testing and grading are common in the administration of schools, and ever more so as increasing percentages of the population gain access to schools and postsecondary study. On the one hand, testing and grading have been used as a gatekeeping function when college was only for the well-to-do; on the other hand, testing and grading seem to be needed to keep track of the growing populations seeking formal certification. From an administrative standpoint, there seems to be very little to think about.

Empire State College is a recently formed institution which had the luxury of having a “minority” constituency: adults. In a sense, it began as removed from the rapidly growing stream of college-age students, removed even, perhaps, from the rush of open admissions which started at CUNY and at community colleges at about the same time; the adult constituency was so various that its independent, narrative evaluation system was appropriate and effective. Of course, narrative evaluation was not altogether new. It had been a common form of commercial and military evaluation; later, different forms of it were present in progressive schools and in more mainstream universities during the turbulent 1960s, which questioned even the progressive government’s arbitrary drift into war. It is important to mention that colleges such as Alverno, Evergreen State, Hampshire, Brown, and perhaps a few others, which had adopted some form of narrative evaluation in the 1960s, had the political purpose of encouraging the growth of a more emancipated general population. Like the pass-fail option and the student evaluation questionnaires, narrative evaluation as practiced here falls into a political context, one of whose ideals is teaching without domination and coercion. An analogy could be drawn: grading is a humanization of corporal punishment in schools; narrative evaluation is a humanization of grading.

However, few would argue that narrative evaluation served this purpose of humanization in industry or in the military. The merits of techniques of evaluation of students, workers, or soldiers cannot be argued as if they were separate from the larger institutions which they serve. The same point might be made (by some) about letter grading (though I am not making it). The point before me, therefore, is how to understand the institutions – this local one, the SUNY system, the academy – and their roles in American society in such a way that practices of evaluation can be adjusted to serve specific student constituencies.

This does not mean simply doing what the students ask for – it does not mean, in other words, honoring students’ requests just because they come from students. We need to think, rather, of our schools in their total pedagogical population – the teachers and administrators as well as students, a form of thinking, by the way, that I think accounts for the success of Deborah Meier’s experimental school, Central Park East, in Manhattan. My impression is that Empire State College has some important points in common with that effort. Both might, could, and ought to augur the future of education.

Before turning to the fundamental issues for guidance on how to conduct discussions at this meeting, let me briefly describe what seems to have taken place for Empire State College. From my discussions with Anne Breznau and my review of the web site, only a small change seems to have taken place. In the section called "Guided Independent Study," the short description of "Contract Evaluation" had ended with the statement: "You may request a letter grade equivalent of the narrative evaluation . . ." This has been changed to something like, "You may request not to have a letter grade equivalent for the narrative evaluation." The majority of the 20 or so sample contract evaluations that I read had requested the letter grade. Under the new plan, a minority of students who did not request a letter grade will get one willy nilly, unless they ask not to have one assigned. If one is not assigned, the student will have trouble getting one assigned should the need for it arise after the course is over.

Regardless, whatever formal evaluation system is used, it can not finally escape its bureaucratic function. Therefore, the question is whether any ritualized evaluation system can exist without dominating the processes of teaching and learning. The answers to this question depend on our views of bureaucracy, of teaching and learning, and of society. In reading the sample contracts, I was struck by the fact that narrative evaluation is indeed ritualized. The instructors followed the rules on the web site meticulously, first reviewing the requirements of the contract, then offering a judgment as to how well the students fulfilled these agreements. Only one teacher wrote something like "Jones did great in this course." The teachers' range of expression seemed constrained by the bureaucratic function served by their narratives. The grades matched the judgments very reasonably: I think that there would not be much variation in the letter grades if other readers were to read the narratives and decide on a grade. I thought that even when the narratives were relatively brief, it must have taken considerable effort to work up and articulate such a judgment for the many students each teacher likely has. I think that even in their bureaucratic status, the evaluation processes were difficult, that the ritual was not empty, that the grade could well be helpful, and that finally, students could view them as positive contributions.

Yet certain unpleasant facts survive this relatively progressive aspect of going to college at Empire State College. One of them is, as Phyllis Teitelbaum observed in her 1989 essay, "Feminist Theory and Standardized Testing," "most people hate to be evaluated or graded" (324). Another is that the uniqueness of the Empire State College learning experience is compromised by the bureaucratic character of the evaluation process, regardless of whether there is a letter grade. A third is that a one-way judgment is always in danger of becoming a hypocrisy. Even if there are student evaluations of teachers, those are also one-way judgments having drawbacks comparable to those of evaluations or grades. The teacher hides behind authority; the student behind anonymity. In an October 2003 essay, Mary Gray and Barbara Bergman call student evaluation of teachers an "inaccurate, misleading, shaming procedure." These unpleasant facts follow from the same forces that have kept testing and grading so close to bureaucratic power for the millennia. Teitelbaum, whose subject is standardized testing rather than letter grading, reaches the following conclusion: "Because tests tend to reflect the social and education system much more than they shape it, it seems likely that tests will change only after society does" (333). Teitelbaum's stance, however, is not of despair: she says that the society must finally move away from androcentrism for testing practices to become fair: if society is fair, then tests and other evaluation processes will become fair. Teaching, learning, and mutual judgment, are all implicated in the character of society, and we cannot avoid the challenges that arise if we acknowledge this inter-implication.

In previous work on this subject of grading, I commented on Kathy Ferguson's 1984 study, *The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy*, a work that outlines how bureaucracies are androcentric and are servants of other androcentric institutions. Michael Herzfeld's 1992 anthropologically oriented study, *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy*, discusses the ritualization and fetishizing of language which takes place in bureaucracies. He notes that a bureaucrat always needs a "legitimizing text" (124; such as the learning contract instructions on the web site) which becomes what he calls an "official pedantry" (124) which measures, yes, a worker's loyalty to the institution

served by the bureaucracy. Furthermore, a bureaucrat always has a *signature* which, interestingly enough, marks his or her anonymity, as when a prospective reader of the student's dossier sees the signature but has no sense of the person it represents. (Jacques Derrida noticed this same fact and carried it a long distance in his articulation of the materiality of language, early in his career.) Bureaucrats are forced to pretend that legitimating texts (and national laws) are transparent and readily comprehensible by anyone, a stance which encourages both bureaucrat and client to lie systematically to each other (Herzfeld, from Michel de Certeau, *the Practice of Everyday Life*). A teacher adhering to a written standard in this manner usually knows quite well that the actual case to which it is applied is not necessarily suitable; yet there is no other choice explicitly permitted by the bureaucratic necessity of evaluation. Herzfeld writes, "Total clarity is a literalist dream ... but bureaucrats act as though the law were clear, and accept the fetishistic quality of its language" (118). The assaults on language by bureaucratic values and practices utilized by tyrants and fascists have been observed repeatedly – they demand fundamentalist readings of texts. Yet such assaults continue regardless of how true our complaints are. As Franz Kafka envisioned in his novels, *The Trial* and *The Castle*, bureaucracies make a point of seeming unconnected with either their supervising offices or their clients: but they enact the unaccountability of the rulers, and the fate of each individual client is arbitrary.

In canonical curricula, 18th-century critics (such as Vico and Hamann) of Enlightenment rationalism and of a rationalistic view of language as essentially referential, are mostly out of view, though they too have their place in our libraries. However, contemporary feminism and rare men such as David Riesman, advanced the critique of liberal individualism, a social philosophy which assumed that an individual (but tacitly an individual European heterosexual man) was the fundamental unit of society: the family was something he, a descendant of the Roman *paterfamilias*, founded. The term "family values," as used by conservatives, promotes this tradition. But in spite of the relative stability of this philosophy, the feminist critique of it focused on the inertia of its fundamental hypocrisies – its toleration of and often enough its championing of slavery, its concealment of domestic violence and abuse of children, its tacit continuation of the tradition of trafficking in women, and today, in case anyone watches 60 Minutes (November 2003), its transformation of pornography into a mainstream industry. The pornography moguls explained the spike in demand for its product by citing the replacement of one thousand movie theaters with 80 million computers and cable TV accounts all located in individual homes and myriad hotel rooms. The porn industry is a triumph of liberal individualism, and it is no surprise that outspoken feminists such as Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon have been its major opponents. Yet two of my female and feminist students who studied pornography came to the same conclusion as Teitelbaum did about testing: if the society were different, the visualization of sexual activity would not be pornographic. Family values have served individuals, mostly men, and not the large constituencies in society with minimal access to a healthy, peaceful life.

So let me now consider grading, contract learning, and narrative evaluation in the light of the still prevailing individualistic values. By most measures, the individualized attention available to the adult students at Empire State College could be considered to be a salutary accomplishment of liberal individualism. Yet, I do not credit individualism with that achievement. What has happened in this school is what Tom Fox has identified as "access" in his book, *Defending Access: A Critique of Standards in Higher Education* (1999). I have been working on a book that includes study of the history of the university from the 12th century to the present. While most scholars have agreed that the university over this long period has been a relatively stable institution, it has been so at the expense of access: only now during the actual lifespan of Empire State College, has access to the university changed significantly in terms of percentages and demographics of the total population. For the first time, large numbers of women, nonwhites, non-well-to-do students have access to postsecondary certification. Of course, these groups also have at least some access to education in more traditional senses – becoming acquainted with texts and technologies that are needed for high-income professional careers – but I am thinking of the processes of achieving a degree of upward mobility through access to postsecondary education. In schools like Empire State College and others, standards are not used to keep students out, but, in fact, to help them toward better lives. The individual character of the

learning contracts is partly the result of liberal individualism, but it is also, perhaps mainly, the result of recognizing that access to postsecondary education creates a widely varying school population, recognizing that the machinery of learning must be other than the “all students are equal” model that applied during the times when the typical student was an 18-year-old white man.

This population is not exactly a “diversity” population either: that is ethnic difference may not be the main mode of difference, as adult education means that people are studying while they are raising children, maintaining households, and holding full or part-time jobs. The differences among individual students may be better understood as differences resulting from each person’s position in the life cycle, so that age, health, and social relationships are also factors that play key roles in each student’s study and certification trajectory.

What this means from a historical standpoint is that we have modes of teaching, learning, and study that are unprecedented in the history of the Western university. For one thing, we have modes of inquiry that revoke decisively the qualities of Western university life that derived from the mores of Greek and Roman pederasty (Eva Cantarella, William Armstrong Percy III): the fraternal training that required subordination and humiliation of the aspiring young male student/warrior/lover. There was an almost mystical sense that only these elite males could do any learning. These mores were still in effect, though often symbolically, in the all male, monastery- and church-influenced medieval universities, and they continued into the 20th century; they are now seen most clearly in apprenticeship graduate study and college fraternities. While a certain personal element remains in the individual learning contract, the match-ups are determined by nonpersonal professional and subject matter factors. Erotic factors are, finally, not important here as they were to Plato! This perhaps brings us to the issue of why this conference was convened: the small, yet large, change in the process or evaluation that has provisionally added a compulsory letter grade to the narrative evaluations traditionally in use at Empire State College. My first thought was to consider that this is a small change relative to the major changes in post-secondary social relations – between teachers and students and among both teachers and students – found in Empire State College. But while I bear this in mind, I also know the political meaning of “compulsory letter grade.” The meaning is this: *comparison of students* on the part of the teacher immediately becomes a more prominent factor in the evaluation process. I can not imagine any teacher giving a letter grade without making such comparisons. The problem with this mental gesture is that the comparisons are scalar – the letter grade scale – but the differences are far more complex, three dimensional instead of one dimensional. Imperceptibly the schemata of *ranking* creep into the teacher’s thinking, and what was gained in a celebration of individuality is lost through the scalar comparison of individuals.

Of course, if a student is in school to become certified, what does it matter if the teacher is wringing his or her hands over letter grading: students are in school to begin with as part of their enriching their lots in life, and if their employers need grades toward that end, why shouldn’t they get them from the school? Most people will not turn to a life of crime if they get a B instead of a B+. If there are diapers to change and meals to prepare, these parents will be disappointed with a lower grade (and possibly a lower income), but it is not the end of the world.

But this isn’t the point, is it? The point is that for any student, loss in a competitive arena is a loss of self-esteem and perhaps of motivation. I am certain that competition works productively mainly in narrow and good-natured contexts, like games, and rarely in the search for a secure, healthy life. The humiliating psychology of the meritocracy is at work: only if you are good by bureaucratic standards do you deserve success. I agree with those feminist economists and anthropologists who have claimed that competition is *not* the law of the jungle, but the invention of men (I mean *men*). Some have suggested a psychology of plenitude to answer the alleged certainty of economic scarcity and the Darwinian “struggle for existence.” Some people believe, and I am one of them, that this so-called struggle was invented as a scientific principle, a theodicy, a rationalization, perhaps, to justify hoarding and greed. The question of grading

causes dispute because its long history says to some that it is endemic to social existence; while others say its long history is a reflection of traditional but unfair social and political values that, we now see in institutions such as Empire State College, can indeed move toward a fairer distribution of justice and opportunity.

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change and meals to
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The field of rhetoric and composition is now overwhelmingly populated by women. I will not go into why this is the case just now, though it certainly matters. I want to say, rather, that in this field we find moves, gestures, gambits, attitudes, values, offered by both men and women, that could possibly provide guidance as to how to assimilate the recent changes in the grading system in ways that take advantage of the unique and progressive identity already established by Empire State College.

This field did not develop its progressive cast as a result of following a political cause, not even the cause of feminism. It came to its insight and social understanding as a result of dedication, simultaneously, to its subject, which is the use of language, and its constituency, students, teachers, and the total population of society. The academic discipline most closely related to this one is anthropology, a discipline which, recently, has been demoted in status almost as much as rhetoric and composition has. The key feature of interest in rhetoric and composition for us is its having developed its professional identity through many years of interaction among the subject of language use, the nature of the student constituencies in a variety of schools and periods of history, and the values of society as a whole. I consider this to be a new sort of identity adaptable to other academic disciplines, and a basis for envisioning how the many centuries of academic inertia might finally change.

As a result of development along these lines, the discipline of rhetoric and composition has spontaneously reduced the time spent by teachers on grading. It has been the pioneer in portfolio evaluation, which, usually, yields only one grade at the end of the semester, sometimes arrived at by the instructor, sometimes by a committee. More importantly, perhaps, this subject has pioneered the use of collaborative techniques in classrooms. These began, in part, with Ken Bruffee's uses of peer editing. However, thousands of other teachers have taken students' cooperative work in the classroom to be an essential part of the process of studying the use of language. This initiative helped to formalize what law and medical students have done for a long time on their own: gotten together to teach and learn from one another. These activities have created, de facto, the pedagogical principle of *classroom socialization*. Those, like myself, consciously following this principle recognize that classrooms no longer need be considered to be collections of individuals each with a private relation to the instructor, a practice that follows, clearly, from the ideology of individualism. We must recognize that learning proceeds in every direction, and that many, perhaps most, teachers have entered this profession because of the pleasure in learning from younger generations, a pleasure that must be subordinated and suppressed, or at best, marginalized, in order to comply with the bureaucratic standards that keep us employed. One of the meanings of teachers' practice of "closing the classroom door" is that they are thus securing a zone where socialization can act more freely than if the classroom is overseen by the administrative bureaucracy.

Classroom socialization counteracts the debilitating effects of the atmosphere of competition created by the need to give letter grades. Socialization counteracts students' temptations to turn in fraudulent work, something easily done in isolation. Most importantly, however, socialization honors the fundamental practice, as old as classical times, to learn collectively and from one another, not just from a single authoritative source, whether it is a text or a teacher.

At Empire State College, there are many classes that meet weekly as study groups – students having subject-matter-related learning contracts. Because of its distinctive population, inherently diverse in almost every conceivable category, the potential for the uses of active classroom socialization is enormous. True, many don't want to work with others, and many fear that others will take advantage of their own more disciplined work habits. Yet this should not prevent the organized sharing of work among students. I have done this for about 20 years, including 10 years before e-mail became available for this purpose. In the 1980s I duplicated all the essays, asked the students to read and study them, and urged them to write about one another's literary responses, writing styles, tastes, hang-ups, and "issues." Recently, because of the relaxed atmosphere created by worksharing, I have urged students to "steal" from one another, to overtake deliberately other people's work and language, to rework it, to play with it. I have urged students to do similar things with both literary and nonliterary texts, to overtake the language, treat it irreverently, and see how deeply it remains in their minds along with the established work from which it came. I feel certain, for example, that my current class will remember for the rest of their lives the line: "Fancy letting yourself be tortured like this" from Kafka's ultra-short and relatively unknown parable, "The Vulture," because students "stole" it not from Kafka's text, but from the students who cited it before they did. Anyway, does it matter who stole what from whom, when it comes to language? The students were socialized with one another, and they began developing references and uses of language common to their own group.

Yes, these students have continued to ask about their grade, even though this, like all my undergraduate courses, functions with portfolio evaluation and the "A/B" system I have used since the 1970s: B if you do all the work conscientiously and come to class almost all the time; A if you do this well. The grading categories are thus reduced from about nine or 10 to two, as the pluses and minuses, as well as the C through F grades, are not there. Competition is not eliminated entirely, but it is diminished to almost none. Those who don't work are urged to withdraw, and they usually do. I have had perhaps four cases of cheating in 30 years. I would like a system of "satisfactory/no credit." I think all students work for credit, rather than for high grades. Doing something well can not be motivated by rewards, as I believe, with Alfie Kohn, that rewards are, finally, punishments for those who get them, as well as for those who do not. Doing well is motivated by one's relations with others. Sometimes these others are parents, sometimes teachers, sometimes friends and loved ones such as children, sometimes hope and personal confidence in one's total social situation.

I think it will ease the burden of those who don't like letter grades to emphasize and to search for ways to socialize each class they teach, for ways for students in purely individual learning situations to do socialized work such as ethnographic inquiries, things I know are already done. In any teaching situation, however, I urge teachers, if only provisionally, to ask themselves what they can learn from their students, how the interaction with each student, including modes of mutual address, can be truly reciprocal; I ask how such mutuality can be made to count. Would such a move not cast a different light on the grading process? Might it not create a certain attitude about judgment in contexts of learning that would move the letter grade farther from the social psychology of winning and competition that is corrupting our society? Might not even the present narrative evaluation change its form, by giving teachers a basis for departing from the bureaucratic instructions in imaginative directions? New language uses and genres in the narrative evaluations could well influence attitudes about grading. It could well help minimize or eliminate students' fears of the arbitrary judgment in grading. Fostering reciprocity in all directions in classrooms could provide enough experience to find the means to develop a basis for mutual judgments to be rendered, to develop social relations among teachers and students that create the trust needed to accommodate fluent exchange

and authentically reciprocal judgment. Pursuing reciprocal social relations will honor the need for people in different zones of the life cycle to step into the shoes of those in other zones, especially if such moves were part of a course's curriculum.

I think I was considered for this role in this conference because, in spite of my lifelong opposition to grading, I have nevertheless always practiced it in minimal form in my undergraduate courses. (My graduate courses at the University of Rochester do give me the option of satisfactory/no credit grading, which I have used every time I have had a graduate seminar.) I am not on the side of grading, but I am not on the side of fighting either. I am on the side of talking in a way that makes it synonymous with what Elizabeth Minnich refers to as thinking: crosstalk, backtalk, babytalk, cartalk, pillowtalk, boytalk, girltalk, shoptalk, trashtalk, and doubletalk. These different forms of talk are also features of social relations and are learned within these social relations. This is where we see what our students have brought to class, where we see what we can learn from them, and where we see how to build academic and professional social relations. It has always been the case for me that the social relations of teaching and learning, especially the nurturing conversational events in classrooms, have transcended the unfairness of grading, and, over the years, I have found ways to communicate this configuration of values to my students. And so, I am passing them along to you now.

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"What is the alternative? One possibility is individually configured education – an education that takes individual differences seriously and, insofar as possible, crafts practices that serve different kinds of minds equally well."

Howard Gardner, *Intelligence Reframed* (1999) New York: Basic Books, p. 151.

ALL ABOUT
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International Mentoring Moment Judith Gerardi, Metropolitan Center and International Programs



Judy Gerardi

Children are especially sad victims of war. At minimum, safety and the freedom to explore and play are lost. Students in the Cyprus Residency Program are traditional age college students and were children during the war in Lebanon, a war which exceeded 15 years, from the mid-1970s to the beginning of the 1990s. Although it often is called a civil war, writers and citizens alike sometimes refer to it, as did one of my Lebanese students, as “the war of Syria, Palestine, and Israel on our land.” Memoirists, novelists, and journalists provide vivid accounts of the intransigent conflict in Lebanon. By all accounts, unpredictability and shifting factions characterized the war period. Who was one’s enemy could change from day to day and even from street to street. Further, of an apartment bomb that killed 19, journalist Thomas Friedman (1995) in *From Beirut to Jerusalem* wrote that the victims “died a Beirut death, which is the most absurd and scandalous death possible: death for no reason” (p. 27). Sniping and shelling might occur at great distances, hitting unknown targets.

In her evocative memoir *Beirut fragments*, Jean Said Makdisi (1990) describes her determination not to abandon Beirut by fleeing to safety, leaving her to constantly worry about her three sons and the long-term effects on them of violence. “As my children grew, I had to defend them from one life-threatening situation after another ... ” (p. 21). At the sound of bombs, parents asked themselves: Should we go to the shelter now? Children read parents’ “faces to see how scared they should be” (p. 37).

What is the impact on our Lebanese students of a childhood lived in a war zone, in a country that had become emblematic of unpredictable conflict and danger on one’s own street? Last October, after a two-and-a-half year absence, I resumed my work with Lebanese students. Part of that absence included a sabbatical year in which I researched contexts of thought, especially war as a context of thought and learning for Lebanese students in the Cyprus Residency Program. I was eager to interact face to face with the students. Word of my research had spread a bit, and a student wanted to talk with me. That is how I met Rock Sfeir.

Students in the Cyprus Residency Program meet with the mentor or tutor during a residency in Nicosia for opening and closing sessions of each study. Learning activities between residencies take place online. Students take proctored exams in Beirut and also prepare and present a senior project in their final contract. A musician, Rock had written and included a song in his senior project presentation. For him, the song provides emotional context for the academic work he had done in business. After attending his presentation, I met alone with him to discuss his song and what lay behind his song. He calls it *The Phoenix Rebirth from Ashes* because of Lebanon’s Phoenician history.

The Phoenix Rebirth from Ashes

by Rock Sfeir

Bombs, bombs, bombs and total chaos
Still hope remained in candlelights
In our shelters praying at nights
Afraid of death and desperados

Those thieves sitting in the government
Not fearing God nor punishment
Shalom, Salam, Peace, nothing!
Even when achieved by bombing
Deals sculpted in the air
Nothing real, nothing fair

Every night they promise
Every night they lie
The taste of pain’s so bitter in our veins
Like poison with no cure in vain

Too much love and too much hate
All combined in people’s fate
Bankruptcy’s reached with no scent
With no mercy and no judgment

Chorus:

Most of us standing in the middle

*Sitting and smiling on a needle
Some people get with the flow
The others are taken below*

Expecting what's to come
Accepting what was done
Having no blame and no name
And dying slowly without fame

Chorus:

*Most of us standing in the middle
Sitting and smiling on a needle
Some people get with the flow
The others are taken below*

Jealousy in the eyes of our neighbors
Waiting for their prey like vultures

They take a piece from here
Another one from there
Our land was torn apart
And everyone got his part

Except every good Lebanese
That owes nothing more to tease
Nothing but memories from the past
Nothing else, nothing more to last

Once again we will flourish
Cuz our souls, they'll never banish
We always live we always die
And forever the phoenix flies ...

A citizen of the world, Rock was born in France while his parents were in graduate school. The family returned to the Middle East and lived in Iraq from 1981 to 1986, then returned to Lebanon and lived there from 1986 to 1989. The parents and their two sons lived in Cyprus for a year and the United States for a year, and then settled in Lebanon again in 1991, at the end of the war. Such moves are not uncommon for Lebanese with sufficient funds and connections. Now age 24, Rock was a young boy in Lebanon during the war.



Rock Sfeir

We talked about his song. After he'd performed it, when he and I were alone, he handed me his song, and I read it aloud slowly, pausing often, and we talked. The air was thick with focus and the emotion of things not said. The silences were essential to our communicating, to our determining what would be said, when to probe, how to ask both about some lyrics and about his experience and also for me to introduce my own questions. Here, for the first time, I was talking with a bright, articulate, thoughtful manchild who had lived the war that I had read about for a year. We talked about what was real and what imagined.

I asked Rock about:

In our shelters praying at nights
Afraid of death and desperados

Yes, it was an actual memory. He went on to tell a story, always slowly, calmly, his gaze direct and relaxed and full. The family was in the shelter and there were soldiers outside in a tank. Gunfire. Then, the soldiers' machine gun jammed. They became afraid, knocked on the shelter door, were let in, were cleaned and fed. This seemed to please Rock very much. Here we see the quick movement from enemy to guest. We see soldiers and civilians alike, victims of government's promises and lies. We see the weighty importance of children seeing their parents in control; here the parents became hosts, not victims.

Rock's imagery and analysis contain themes seen in my research: bombs, chaos, unpredictability, shelters, fear, government victimizing people, elusive peace, people caught in the middle with unanswered questions, unable to make a difference, and victim to pain. But told by an artist, a poet, an international student, now an Empire State College graduate.

I like the hope and resilience in Rock Sfeir's final stanza:

Once again we will flourish
Cuz our souls, they'll never banish
We always live we always die
And forever the phoenix flies ...

In Nicosia, I had told Rock that I'd like to stay in touch and that he could contact me at any time. He did so recently. I was happy to hear from him and also took the opportunity to tell him that I'd like to submit his song to a college publication. Sure, that would be fine with him and please send him a copy of the journal.

ALL ABOUT

MENTORING

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Peter Birckmayer

August 19, 1930 – December 22, 2003



Peter Birckmayer

Peter Birckmayer was a sweet, gentle and generous man. He seemed to genuinely love his work with students, especially finding ways to engage them in lively discussions about economics, health care, and related business and political topics. As a colleague he was always available and welcoming, never a sense that you were somehow burdening him with a request. He gladly shared his knowledge and experience and found no reason to say “no” to working with a student or sharing his expertise in developing a program of

study. Humble is another character trait that comes to mind. His participation in center meetings was typically greeted with anticipation. He did not speak as often as some others, reserving his comments when he had a significant contribution to share. That is what we came to expect from him – insightful, pithy analyses, articulately presented. Yes, Peter was a sweet, gentle and generous man; unassuming, kind and fair minded. Being fair minded was important for him. It is the legacy he leaves us.

(This reflection also appears in the current issue of the Empire State College/UUP Chapter Newsletter.)