

ALL ABOUT

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We Fret About the Word

“She said you can’t repeat the past, I said you can’t? What do you mean you can’t? Of course you can.”

Bob Dylan, “Summer Days” (2001)

“What worries you so much?”

“I think we’re losing our way.”

Because of a simple word?

It’s more than a word.

I think you’re exaggerating, as usual.

The word exists for a purpose; it wasn’t just chosen for no reason at all.

The problem is that for you the word has too much emotional resonance. You take it as part of a secret code, not as one of many pedagogical terms.

It’s part of our history; it links us to something more important than the practical whims of the day.

You’re missing the point. The word is a word; to be obsessed with a word only means that you’re **not** getting at what’s much more important.

And that’s what?

That’s what the faculty are doing and what our students are learning.

I agree. I think that’s the point. It’s about our decisions about our practices; it’s about the assumptions we make regarding what we are doing and why we do what we do. That’s exactly why the word is important.

Then forget your sacred vocabulary and get on with the discussion of teaching.

This is a discussion of teaching and learning too. But it’s not any kind of teaching; it’s about a particular kind of teaching and learning to which the college has been dedicated. The word is why we exist. It’s why we’re not some other place.

You can’t get stuck in some fantasy, in some belief system that probably had a lot less to do with faculty practice – even 25 or 30 years ago – than you think.

My point is that this institution made some pretty lofty claims about the role of the faculty and the experience of the student. And the claims grew out of a very specific critique of the academy and an analysis of how students learn best. First, it was clear that students were being excluded from the university. And second, the so-called learning that was happening wasn’t as rich or as deep as we knew it could and should be. Actually, I don’t think things have changed very much; in fact, I’d argue that the criticism of higher education is more relevant now than ever, which is why what we care about makes so much difference.

I’m struck by your rather strange myopia. The world has changed. Our students are different. And today, faculty, too, have different concerns.

Thirty-five years ago, how many faculty and how many students understood exactly what this college was up to? Yes, one of the largest state university systems in the country allowed this experiment to take place, but there was no avalanche of support. And any way, none of this means that the ideas on which the institution was built were wrong then or aren’t relevant now.

The school was always about responding to the practical needs of a student body that demanded access to a degree. No one even

knew that so-called “adults” would show up. Most people expected 25 year-olds who didn’t fit in any place else. There were even those who argued that a place like this one would be a great way to deflect so-called campus “unrest” of the early 1970s. Your “ideal” probably not only never existed, but also was never intended.

Now you’re missing my point. First, your historical revision needs some revising. Take a look at what Boyer was arguing and at Chickering’s formulations in the college’s prospectus. There’s more than practicality there. Second, I don’t think you have enough research to show anyone exactly what went on with those first students and faculty and what students wanted and what they got. It’s all anecdotal.

How ironic that you’re arguing about anecdotes. Your entire belief system is based on anecdotes from a handful of faculty who I think have always romanticized what goes on in their work with students. You have very little to stand on.

Let’s go back to the beginning. My point is that there is some meaningful vision of learning possibilities to which the institution should remain committed. And that is being chipped away. The vocabulary is part of that; it helps us remember the vision. And losing it is really a loss. It’s something that needs to be remembered and regained.

What needs to be “gained” is the opportunity for students to earn a degree in an increasingly mean and instrumental world. Their lives depend on that piece of paper. The rest is only a perk and not something that concerns most students at all.

You’ve exactly succumbed to the claims of the “instrumental.” How do you know what students want? Or how do you know what they would want if they knew what was possible?

I know what they ask for. I know what they desperately need. And I want to respond to that need and in an academically substantive way. That’s what I care about.

(continued on page 13)

Heteragogy: Mentoring as Intercultural Practice

Eric L. Ball and Alice Lai, Center for Distance Learning

We dedicate this essay to Elana Michelson and Bernard Smith because it grew out of ideas that arose in discussion with the latter about the 2004 All College presentation of the former.

Introduction

Long before an explicitly “cultural turn” in the humanities and social sciences would revolutionize the form and substance of much higher education and academic scholarship, founders of Empire State College showed remarkable prescience in composing documents that would erect this institution, in part, on what today might be called an intercultural principle. Anticipating the future popularity of critical pedagogies, multicultural, cross-cultural, and intercultural approaches to education, the founders focused attention on the academic institution as a progressive location where diverse systems of meaning converge as intercultural dialogues: “An intelligent person from the ghetto or urban area will not be excluded because he cannot communicate within that symbol system or reflect its cultural expectations” ([n.a.] 2003[1971]).

For some of us working in culture fields and disciplines that are (some might say) obsessed with meaning – those of us whose academic heritage includes, for example, a Barthes, a Geertz, a Garfinkel, a Bourdieu, a Haraway, or a Derrida – this deceptively simple declaration opens up the possibility of bringing to our mentoring the critical lens(es) of our academic training. In fact, the prescriptive quality of this founding statement suggests that it is necessary that we bring such a perspective to our work as mentors, work which requires not only direct engagement with students, but also ongoing interpretation of what we even mean by “mentoring,” continual reflection about what we do as mentors and about how our conceptual models for thinking about mentoring condition what we do, and

an incessant disassembling of assumptions behind every characterization of mentoring.

Toward such ends, in what follows we would like to indulge in a brainstorming exercise. We want to posit an analogy between mentoring and the academic study of cultural “others.” At this point, our brainstorming will do little more than produce some questions. Further investigation into these questions, we propose, could help us understand mentoring better. We won’t be offering much in the way of answers. If our presentation does nothing more than spawn some new conversations about mentoring or reinvigorate old conversations in different terms or from new angles – especially, let’s say, those of the post-1990 culture fields and disciplines – then we will have achieved our immediate goal.

Mentoring as an Ethnographic Encounter

Let’s begin by looking at a fuller version of the quotation we began with. (Our thanks go to the panel organized by Jim Wunsch, Ed Warzala, and Alan Mandell for bringing this to our attention at the college’s Spring 2004 Evaluation Conference, and to Richard Bonnabeau for digging it up in the first place):

The faculty will be responsible for ensuring rigor and quality. One of the key elements will be their evaluation of accomplishment, of experimental skills, and of skills derived from the mastery (perhaps privately) of one of the creative or nonverbal arts. Each of these skills can be related to a particular life area of work, and academic credit will be given for such skills. An intelligent person from the ghetto or urban area or isolated community who is currently at a disadvantage in learning the predominant cultural symbol system in

our society will not be excluded because he cannot communicate within that symbol system or reflect its cultural expectations. [...] The ultimate evaluation of a student’s performance will still rest with the faculty. But the student’s own needs will shape the process within which the judgment will take place. ([n.a.] 2003[1971])

What an intercultural premise for mentoring! Let’s attempt a translation of the passage into contemporary academic jargon employed by the culture disciplines (into our “symbol system”).¹ We might say that the college, as an institution, sought to problematize certain hegemonic assumptions about faculty-student interaction in general, and about faculty evaluation of students in particular, via a sociocultural contextualization² of “learning” (“accomplishment,” “skills,” “mastery,” and the like). The college upheld the conventional educational distribution of authority wherein faculty are authorized to judge students’ learning, but it pointed out that the **justification**³ for faculty judgments should not be viewed as deriving automatically from faculty’s direct access – irrespective of “bias” – to each student’s learning (via the student’s articulation of that learning). After making the relatively unremarkable assertion that a faculty member may inhabit a different “language” and “culture” (academia) than a student whose learning might be recognizable in his or her *own* linguistic and cultural context, the founders took a quantum leap: They decided to lay part of the burden of translation onto the shoulders of the college faculty.

Conventionally, the founders implied, the burden of articulating learning would fall entirely to the student; the student would need to learn the symbol system of academia in order to communicate his learning to faculty who, already fluent in this idiom,

would be in a position to recognize it as such. Empire State College, on the other hand, would be different. It would acknowledge that not every potential college student would be (nor should be put) in a position to communicate in *academese* in order to have their learning granted college credit.⁴ The college would therefore strive to put extra effort into communicating with the student in his or her own symbol system, or at least it would try to meet the student part way, so that learning could be recognized (interpreted as such) and granted credit. It would seem, then, that the legitimacy of an Empire State College mentor's interpretation (and especially her evaluation) of a student's learning would derive only in part from her academic qualifications, her academic knowledge of a field. Legitimacy would also derive from the fact that the mentor was continually trying to apply her expertise in a translational context. The mentor's judgments about a student's learning would be justified when they were the product of active attempts to learn his language and culture. Her evaluations would be responsible only insofar as they recognized the learning delivered even, as it were, in a "foreign tongue."⁵

As we think about the founding passages in this way, an analogy between mentoring and ethnography springs to mind, ethnography being an obvious example of academic engagement with cultural others. Just as the faculty member – not the student – has the ultimate academic authority to interpret students' learning, the ethnographer – not her informants – is ultimately authorized to produce academic interpretations of the particular cultures she studies. On the other hand, just as an Empire State College faculty member's interpretation of her student's learning derives part of its validity from that faculty member's self-conscious attempts to engage the student in a dialogue which is taken to be interlingual and intercultural, so the ethnographer's interpretation of a culture derives part of its legitimacy from its sensitivity to, and engagement with, the complexities involved in cross-cultural

interpretation. Or, to put it another way, again crudely: an ethnography produced by an ethnographer who merely required the people she studied to master her language to explain themselves to her would not be considered good anthropology. A potentially good ethnography would require that the ethnographer learned (however imperfectly) the language of the culture studied, inhabited that culture (however imperfectly) as a participant-observer, and engaged in (self-consciously) intercultural dialogues with informants – each learning about the other in the process.

We should note that while we find the analogy between mentoring and ethnography to be particularly compelling, however imperfect,⁶ we could construct similar analogies between mentors and other academic interpreters of "others." (For example, we might consider an analogy between mentoring and comparative literary criticism.) Still, there is something we find particularly productive about theorizing mentoring through the analogy with ethnography specifically – perhaps because ethnographers claim to be good listeners who seek to establish dialogues with their informants; perhaps because cultural anthropology's extensive self-critique of the epistemological and methodological grounds for ethnography has been so widely disseminated in academia. Whatever the reasons might be, for the rest of this essay we would like to pose two very broad questions and engage in further speculation about some of the things this analogy suggests to us.

Two Questions

Question 1: On the whole, ethnographers have let go of atomist, individualist, objectivist, essentialist, and positivist epistemological assumptions in favor of sociocentric, interpretivist, contextualist, and constructivist epistemologies for empirical social science.⁶ What relevance might this have for mentoring?

For instance, this migration of epistemological preference for empirical

research could have a fundamental bearing on how the "intercultural" relationship between mentor and student can be understood.⁷ Instead of seeing each mentor or student as a well-defined individual who belongs to a particular, definable sociocultural group (e.g., "the ghetto") with its own distinctive, shared language and culture (e.g., "academese"), we could view every student and mentor as located in multiple, shifting, interactive networks that produce sociocultural groups as *effects* as much as they constitute the interactions of their "members." From this vantage point, every student and every mentor can be viewed as "gendered," "racialized," "ethnicized," "sexualized," "geographically-placed," "geopolitically-located," "economically-classed," "collar-colored," "aged," "educated," or "professioned." From this perspective, every student is "other" with respect to various indices (not only the student who comes from a group widely recognized as disadvantaged). Yet we also recognize that this "othering" of the student is in some respects the product of the categories, practices, and discourses we are using to identify or locate her. The intercultural is no longer seen as a special case of mentoring (when it just so happens that mentor and student are from communities we typically recognize as distinct), but as an inescapable precondition of *all* mentoring. We inaugurate an understanding of mentoring practice as **heteragogy**.

Hence, a second possible consequence for mentoring of this paradigm shift in ethnography concerns how to view the communication of learning itself as a matter of "cultural translation."⁸ In an objectivist⁹ framework, "the learning" would be something objective, ideal, "out there." The "actual learning" could be viewed as something abstract, independent of its particular articulation in this or that "language." Or, it could even be viewed concretely, in a material sense, as nothing more than a certain "neurological state," independent of the multiple representations in human language that might correspond to

* There will doubtless remain the objection that ethnographers are primarily interested in understanding the other's culture, whereas the mentor is only incidentally interested in the student's cultural context as a means for understanding his or her learning. Informants are likely much less interested or compelled to learn the language or culture of the ethnographer than are students to learn academic language and culture. At any rate, analogies are useful not only in terms of the many parallels they suggest but also in terms of the questions they raise at exactly the points they begin to break down.

such a state. In such frameworks, the intercultural principle of mentoring reduces to getting the translation right: As long as the translation is an adequate representation of the same actual learning, then the student's learning – in this or that representational form – ought to be transparent to the expert evaluator.¹⁰

In an interpretivist or constructivist framework, however, we would not assume a priori that there exists such an entity as the “actual learning,” independent of its articulations, its representations, and its contexts. The mentor would not conceive of her intercultural work as arriving at the right translation in order to see through to the learning “as it really is.” Rather, she would view the student's learning and her own expertise as always already mediated by language, as interpretations through the particular lenses of one's ever-changing contexts. Neither the student's learning nor the mentor's content knowledge would be seen as entities possessed, but as always emergent from dialogical interpretations and counterinterpretations. There would be no assumption of an unproblematic insider/outsider (or etic/emic) dichotomy – either the student manages to express “the same learning” in the mentor's language (imposition of the etic) or the mentor manages to penetrate the student's language and see “the same learning” in his terms (achievement of the emic). Nor would the mentor presume that she could “stand outside” of this dichotomy, outside of the dialogue, in order to judge whether a transparent-enough translation has occurred. Instead, she would view the mentor-student dialogues (including their uncircumscribable contexts) as “all there is,” realizing that neither she nor the student can ever interpret the other's articulations entirely independent of their own locations.¹¹ In this framework, we would ask, “[W]hat is it that your very body is screaming that no judge or legal scholar or feminist theorist of the state can know?” (Michelson 2004:11). But in asking we would also have to keep learning how to ask, recognizing that every failure “to see **how** native communicative patterns [...] shape responses” leads to the asker misconstruing the meaning of those responses (Briggs 1986:3).

Question 2: What can mentors learn about ethnography as a kind of writing?

The shift away from objectivism has also foregrounded ethnographic representation itself. “Above all, ethnography is now to be regarded as a piece of writing – as such, it cannot be said either to present or to represent what the older and newly discredited ideology of former ethnography claimed for itself: an unmodified and unfiltered record of immediate experience and an accurate portrait of the culture of the ‘other.’” (Vidich and Lyman 1998:78). Many ethnographers have become highly sensitive to their uses of language for providing sound, value-laden, empirical interpretations. In fact, quite a few have experimented with the techniques of literary modernism, hoping to formulate adequate rhetorical modes that avoid suggesting to readers that their accounts depict absolute truths, but rather, rigorous, situated interpretations.

At the very least, most ethnographers now write in the first person, thereby foregrounding their own role in the interpretive process. Many situate themselves in the text explicitly by offering reflexive passages that consider their own role in constituting knowledge about the other, or by writing introspectively about certain subjective qualities of their ethnographic experience.

Should mentors, for example, follow suit and find rhetorical modes to foreground the narrative evaluation as a similarly partial, situated account of the student's learning? Should mentors write their narrative contract/course evaluations (CE) in the first person? Can mentors emulate the ethnographers by not writing evaluations so that they sound like “summaries” of “the

learning itself?” What would such evaluations look like? Should they seek to summarize the mentor's interpretation of the student's learning and simultaneously offer a first-person account of her understanding of the grounds for such an interpretation?¹² Should a CE or a credit by evaluation (CBE) recommendation resemble an ethnographic monograph in the miniature? If so, might the fact that it is “miniature” pose other problems? For instance, how would mentors reconcile their production of relatively short narrative evaluations with ethnographers'

production of the “thick descriptions” called for by Geertz? Or, would the entire transcript be the proper analog of the ethnographic text? If so, might it not outdo the anthropologist's thick description in that a transcript is authored by a group of ethnographer-mentors as opposed to the lone ethnographer-hero in the field?

Should mentors write their narrative contract/course evaluations (CE) in the first person? Can mentors emulate the ethnographers by not writing evaluations so that they sound like “summaries” of “the learning itself?”

Taking this issue of writing evaluations even further, some contemporary ethnographers maintain the importance of showcasing in their ethnographies the informants' interpretations of their own culture. Thus, we might also ask what role the student's interpretation of his own learning should play in an evaluation. At first glance, this might look like a nice way to “give the student a voice” or to “share power.” Perhaps, but the logic behind such conclusions would be seen as hasty, or at least as too self-flattering, by some ethnographers who have considered it at length in their scholarship. Instead, one might claim that it is not a matter of *sharing* power, since power does not “reside” in individuals per se, but rather in institutional relations (only faculty are authorized to evaluate).

In this view, student self-evaluation is more accurately described as the mentor trying to

keep herself attentive to the student's interpretation of his own learning. In an interpretivist framework, this means the mentor remains open and attentive even to other *grounds* for interpreting the student's learning, grounds that she might not even have conceived of, let alone bought into, beforehand. (They might arise out of the student's own cultural contexts and assumptions, for example.) In doing so, the mentor is not exactly sharing power, but she is welcoming the student's self-interpretations to potentially influence her own interpretations of his learning. This welcoming can potentially affect what her ultimate evaluation of the student's learning will be. And, if we view mentoring as an intercultural practice, then it is arguable that this method of welcoming further justifies or validates the evaluation.

This sense of "welcoming" in mentoring-as-heteragogy sends us to Derrida's philosophical notion of "hospitality." Following Derrida, we would need to ponder a distinction between inviting the student's self-evaluation into our own – of *tolerating* it – from its unanticipated, uninvited arrival, or visitation. "The *invitation* maintains control and receives within the limits of the possible; it is not thus pure hospitality, it rations hospitality, it still belongs to the order of the judicial and the political; *visitation*, on the other hand, appeals to a pure and unconditional hospitality that welcomes whatever arrives as impossible" (Derrida 2002:400).¹³ It also sends us to Murphy's ecofeminist reading of Bakhtinian dialogism as promoting the concept of "**anotherness**, being another for others" (Murphy 2000:99). "[I]t is time to move toward a relational model of anotherness and the conceptualization of difference in terms of I and another, one and another, and I-as-another" (Murphy 2000:96). It echoes Papastephanou's (2003) notion of a democratic and caring "pedagogical ideal of learning **with** and **for** the Other within and without" (401), of a post-empathy-based, post-Habermasian "symmetrical reciprocity." Might not the mentor's welcoming, upon its arrival, of the student's self-evaluation into her own authorized narrative, ensure the mentor's being another for an "other?" And can't we conceive of such hospitality as applicable

across a broader spectrum of mentoring practices than simply those which are formally evaluative? Are we now, then, in the vicinity of thinking about mentoring "dialogue as cognitive love" (Herman and Mandell 2004:117-139)? Does not heteragogy presuppose allelagogy?

A Third Question

Already we find ourselves too hastily digressing from our original analogy between mentoring and ethnography and into analogies with other areas of academic engagement with (an)others. And, we find ourselves without sufficient clarification or explanation speeding through too many different conceptualizations of otherness. We might attribute this to our own impatience, but no doubt it is also due to the exciting yet daunting conceptual considerations that immediately come into play whenever one thinks about ethnography nowadays. After all, anthropologists have been calling into question even the notion of "the other" itself, citing not only the multiple ways that it has functioned to make ethnography complicit in the colonialist and imperialist domination of those who are labeled as such, but also the manner in which it draws attention away from contexts in which an other may not be so other after all. Let us conclude, therefore, simply by asking:

Question 3: How might the recent anthropological critique of the concept of "other" problematize the way mentors conceive of their dialogues with students? What are the implications of this critique for thinking about mentoring as heteragogy?

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someone much more fluent in that culture than herself. In other words, mentoring may require hiring an appropriate translator, not mastering the other language oneself.

⁶ See, for example, the account given by Schwandt (1998).

⁷ At this point we ought to confess that we are empirical pluralists: We do not assume a priori that there must be only one true or even one inherently “best” epistemological orientation for the study of cultures, let alone for the sciences in general.

⁸ On ethnography as cultural translation, see, for example, Asad (1986).

⁹ or a “Platonic” or a “Cartesian realist”

¹⁰ See also Michelson (2004) for critique of this position.

¹¹ This also suggests that, for heteragogy, a critique is in order of the word “dialog,” so often used to characterize mentoring. The philosopher Derrida states, “I prefer the word negotiation to the word dialog. It takes into account the relations of nondiscursive forces. [...] The word [dialog] [...] leads one to believe that, with dialogue, one will rediscover transparency and what is equivocal will be made clear. [...] I am not speaking of a dialogical order that could function in other contexts but of an alleged ethics of dialogue” (Derrida 2002:32). In this sense, the dialogical process of mentoring as an intercultural practice would be have to be distinguished from the idea that dialogue in itself guarantees that mentors can “see through” to the students’ “actual learning.”

¹² Here, of course, we are speaking of the grounds in terms of the intercultural communicative processes per se, not in terms of the mentor’s content knowledge.

¹³ See also Derrida (2003:127-129) on the contrast between hospitality proper and the “conditional hospitality” of invitation and tolerance.

Footnotes

¹ The “culture disciplines” might include parts of sociology and anthropology, critical theory, cultural studies, literary studies, linguistics, or folklore studies.

² or, “relativization,” depending on your epistemology – see Longino (2002:138).

³ A better phrase than “justification” might be Longino’s “epistemic acceptability:” “The notion of ‘epistemic acceptability’ (akin to justification) incorporates both the traditional empiricist norm of justification by empirical data and the social norms applying to those discursive interactions constitutive of reasoning” (Longino 2002:136).

⁴ It turns out that this position has been particularly well-suited to adult learners, especially those who are “full of college-level learning” but who best articulate this learning in professional or other non-academically-welcomed idioms.

⁵ For simplicity of presentation, we have pared the mentoring process down to a one-on-one relationship. In practice, this translation may be facilitated in many different ways. For example, a mentor who has learned “just enough” about the student’s culture to recognize she has potentially creditable prior learning might seek a “Credit By Evaluation Recommendation” from

A Piece of History: On the Origins of Areas of Study

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In the very first years of the founding of Empire State College and in keeping with the intensely individualized approach to learning set forth in the *Prospectus for a New University College*, the founding charter of Empire State College, faculty chose “to work inductively ... testing the expectations and requirements imposed by students in seeking their educational goals ...” (*Prospectus*, p. 4; *Self Study* 1974, p. 19). Student goals, therefore, were paramount and served as the organizing framework of study, not prescribed curricula. This was the driving force – the ethos of a pioneering faculty which gave mentors purpose and direction in their work with students.

The revolutionary course established by the *Prospectus* for the new college was reiterated in the *Master Plan* 1972. It boldly challenged the “language of compulsion,” the “compartmentalization of knowledge,” and the “traditionally defined ‘major’” of American higher education (pp. v-viii). The authors declared, “Our requirements must never be arbitrary, must never be allowed to shape people’s behavior because of hushed reverence towards an echo from another time” (p. v.). There was no need therefore to define fields of study except in the broadest of terms and no desire on the part of the faculty to subject students to prescribed curricula. Nevertheless, the *Prospectus*, despite its pronouncements about individualization, had clearly stated that the academic program would include “the old ... traditional academic disciplines” (p. 14). And the New York State Education Department, which gave the college time to flesh out its mission those first few years, began to seek more accountability about



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academic quality, as did the State University of New York (J. Jacobson, 11/10/04).

Area of study guidelines, consequently, came into being as a response to mounting external pressure. A college without a curriculum needed to define itself in ways that connected with traditional higher education. In 1973, as Empire State College approached the registration of its degrees with the State Education Department Bureau of College Evaluation, the college administration brought “the faculty ... together from across the college ... to clarify curricular areas and modes of study in light of its experience with students” (1974 *Self Study*, p.19). The faculty were organized around nine areas of study that grouped them into loose confederations of related fields of interest rather than into separate

departments defined by specific disciplines and curricula. Each area of study prepared its own set of guidelines.

The guidelines, which also were ready in time for the 1974 Middle States accreditation review, were broad-gauged statements heavily laced with taxonomic language – more intelligible to peers than to students – but importantly absent of any references to specific courses (*Empire State College Bulletin*, July, 1974, pp. 24-29). The guidelines, therefore, became a compromise between a highly energized faculty committed to individualization and the accrediting bodies of the American academy who were in search of references to more taken-for-granted academic demarcations. The latter needed assurance that at some level attention to the principles underlying curriculum were part of the faculty discourse of what many perceived as this radical institution. The college, therefore, “managed to do a window dressing that was accepted as a

compromise for our premise of individuation, ... a rather superb tactical, practical, and educationally sound solution at the time” (J. Hall, 12/21/04).

Though a compromise was reached, the demand for specific content as well as competencies remained a steady and, what Arthur Chickering might call, a regressive force (*The Promise Continues*, 1996, p. 24). Following a thorough review of Empire State College’s academic program in 1974, the State Education Department expressed serious concern that “the academic concentrations of Empire State College are elusive and need clearer definition” and recommended that the nine “concentrations should be further defined in terms of content ...” (E. Carr to J. Hall, 3/24/75, p. 5; p. 36). In 1979, after a site visit for the

purpose of registering programs, the State Education Department, strengthened the language of its request – from recommend to “must” and gave the college a specific timetable “to submit an acceptable description of curricular guidelines ...” (D. Harrison to C. Wharton, 10/12/1979, p 1). The 1979 Middle States evaluation team also had stressed the importance of more specific guidelines as well as their importance to students (*Periodic Review Report*, 11/1/1984, p. 27-28). From 1979 to 1981, Academic Vice President John Jacobson and the Academic Policy, Learning Programs Committee worked energetically and in concert with the faculty area of study committees to produce guidelines for State Education Department approval (G. Bragle, 3/11/05).

The guidelines were also a response to student expectations. Faculty rejection of prescribed curricula and the corollary of students creating their own curricular maps ran counter to those students, especially older adults who had practical, less than idealistic educational goals in mind, and who felt the press of time to complete their degrees. By 1973, less than two years after the first wave of enrollment, the average age of students had reached 34 and was climbing (*1972 Master Plan*, p. 12). So, as it happened, “most of our students were rather traditional and wanted to complete degrees with ‘majors’ that their friends and society would easily recognize” (R. Barylski, 11/19/2004).

In time, the area of study guidelines began to function more as helpful guides for students, mentors, and assessment committees and not just broad statements to appease an external audience. They began to offer practical advice and discussed the relevance or importance of specific subject content to concentrations within given areas of study. But, importantly, 31 years after the founding of the college, the guidelines still honor those students who use them “as a point of departure in defining their own distinctive approach to their studies” (*AOS Guidelines*, 1993, p.2).

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Building Online Communities of Practice

Clark Everling, Metropolitan Center

The following paper was given as part of a workshop at the Graduate Retreat in Albany on 30-31 May 2002.

The paper is based primarily upon Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott, and William Snyder, Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge (Harvard Business School Press, 2002). All information and quotations are drawn from there because it is the most complete discussion of creating communities of practice. Additional works are cited in the bibliography. My special thanks to Pat Lefor for introducing me to these concepts and to Bob Carey for his insights.

What is a Community of Practice?

“Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis.”

Theory and Practice Grow Out of One Another

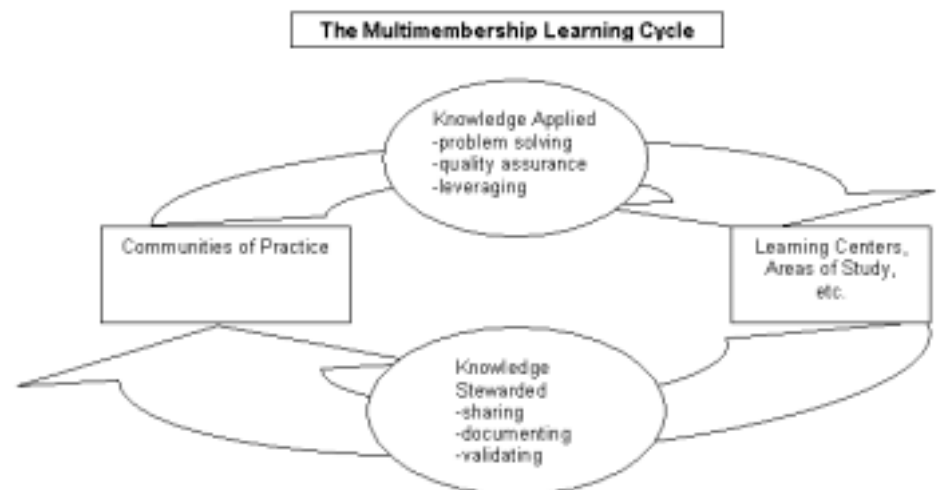
Practice is social interaction and theory grows out of social interaction. Through their interactions, people say things and create meanings based upon their practice. Those meanings then become the premise for further practice and the creation of still deeper and more meanings.

Take mentoring, for example; face-to-face mentoring involves more practices and meanings than just that connection. Mentors talk to other mentors, students to other students. There are times that students study and interact with family members and friends. Students produce papers which are responded to and that shapes their future papers as well as how the mentor organizes future contracts. Mentoring at a distance involves still more connections. The

graduate residency and independent study is still another dimension of practical activities and theory. All of these are practices, which can be discussed as communities. We identify issues of concern and interest and further define our theory and practice.

no one retained the knowledge or kept current with the technologies. As they say at Hewlett-Packard: “If only HP knew what HP knows.” The knowledge is in the individuals, but not in the community. Recently, *All About Mentoring* said:

Communities of Practice are about Learning



In the Online Community, Form Follows Function

People go online to extend what they are already doing. People do not go online to create a new activity, but to extend their practice involving an existing one. The web is a form of communication. What form of communication you use depends upon what you have to say. Online communities of practice within Empire State College would involve our communication about concerns and interest growing out of center and program activities, such as teaching students critical reading and writing.

The main goal of any community of practice is to generate knowledge. This means the retention of knowledge as well as its development. If the U.S. wanted to go to the moon today, they would have to start from scratch. Why? Because all of the people involved have now left those positions and

“history is walking out the door” with the retirement of mentors. Why should we let that happen? Why aren’t we generating the history of mentoring as well as building upon it and generating new learning about it as a community online focused on that topic or several related topics?

Communities of Practice have Multiple Uses and Values

Communities of practice are multiple and overlapping. They may be large; they may be small; they may have ongoing or limited purposes. They operate publicly (e.g., with everyone interested online). They operate privately (e.g., private communication between two people).

Communities of practice may:

- connect local pockets of expertise and isolated professionals

- diagnose and address recurring problems whose root causes pass other organizational boundaries (e.g., involving all areas of study)
- analyze the knowledge-related sources of uneven performance across units and create guides to best practices
- link and coordinate unconnected activities and initiatives addressing a similar knowledge domain.

The Three Fundamental Elements: Domain, Community, Practice

The domain of knowledge is the focus of the community's discussion. It defines the sets of issues that they deal with:

The *domain* creates a common ground and sense of common identity. A well-defined domain legitimizes the community by affirming its purpose and value to members and other stakeholders. The domain inspires members to contribute and participate, guides their learning, and gives meaning to their actions. Knowing the boundaries and leading edge of the domain enables members to decide exactly what is worth sharing, how to present their ideas, and which activities to pursue.

The community consists of the people who care about this domain:

The *community* creates the social fabric of learning. A strong community fosters interactions and relationships based on mutual respect and trust. It encourages a willingness to share ideas, expose one's ignorance, ask difficult questions, and listen carefully. Have you ever experienced this mixture of intimacy and openness to inquiry? Community is an important element because learning is a matter of belonging as well as an intellectual process, involving the heart as well as the head.

The shared practice is what the community is developing to be effective in their domain:



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The *practice* is a set of frameworks, ideas, tools, information, styles, language, stories, and documents that community members share. Whereas the domain denotes the topic the community focuses on, the practice is the specific knowledge the community develops, shares, and maintains. When a community has been established for some time, members expect each other to have mastered the basic knowledge of the community just as biochemists expect members of their discipline to understand basic chemistry. The body of shared knowledge and resources enables the community to proceed efficiently in dealing with its domain.

Seven Principles for Cultivating Communities of Practice

1. Design for evolution

Communities of practice are organic. They arise from the practices of the participants and their need to focus upon a particular domain of knowledge. Consequently designing them is really a matter of shepherding their evolution rather than designing them from scratch.

2. Open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives

Insiders within a particular practice and domain of knowledge are the heart of the community. But they can gain new knowledge and new angles on their experience from the perspectives of outsiders. These differences are almost inevitable since communities of practice consist of members of differing levels of experience and across organizational boundaries as well as having members of differing levels of participation.

3. Invite different levels of participation

Participants include those in the core group, those who are active, and those who are peripheral. The key person in a community of practice is the coordinator. It is she who keeps the group going and encourages participants at all levels. The key to community participation is a healthy

degree of movement among levels of participation.

4. Develop both public and private spaces within the community

Private communication, such as between two individuals, is essential to the health of the community. It is these conversations that help formulate and energize the discussions of the whole community.

5. Focus on value

Initially value concerns primarily the needs and interest of the immediate participants. But this also means that value needs to be allowed to evolve and be redefined and expanded. In other words, value should not be entirely predetermined by the community.

6. Combine familiarity and excitement

As communities mature, they often settle into a pattern of regular meetings, teleconferences, projects, web site use, and other ongoing activities. The familiarity of these events creates a comfort level that invites candid discussions. Like a neighborhood bar or café, a community becomes a "place" where people have the freedom to ask for candid advice, share their opinions, and try their half-baked ideas without repercussion. They are places people can drop by to hear about the latest

tool, exchange technical gossip, or just chat about technical issues without fear of committing to action plans. And, at the same time: Like a well-planned, challenging conference, vibrant communities also supply divergent thinking and activity.

7. Create a rhythm for the community

Vibrant communities of practice also have a rhythm. At the heart of a community is a web of enduring relationships among members, but the tempo of their interactions is greatly influenced by the rhythm of community events. Regular meetings, teleconferences, web site activity, and informal lunches ebb and flow along with the heartbeat of the community. The rhythm is the best indicator of how alive the community is.

A Practical Guide to Development

Domain. The work of negotiating a shared domain is critical to community development. A community must ask itself: What topics and issues do we really care about? How is this domain connected to the organization's strategy? What is in it for us? What are open questions and the leading edge of our domain? Are we ready to take some leadership in promoting and developing our domain? What kind of influence do we want to have? Addressing these types of questions will help a community develop a shared understanding of its domain, find its legitimacy in the organization, and engage the passion of its members.

Community. The community element needs attention, organization, and nurturing: What roles are people going to play? How often will the community meet, and how will members connect on an ongoing basis? What kinds of activities will generate energy and trust? How can the community balance the needs of various segments of members? How will newcomers be introduced into the community? Addressing these types of questions will enable the community to find its specific ways to operate, to build relationships, and to grow.

Practice. Any community with sustained interactions in a domain will develop some kind of practice over time. Nevertheless, a

community can become proactive in taking charge of the development of its practice. What knowledge to share, develop, document? What kinds of learning activities to organize? How should the knowledge repository be organized to reflect the practice of members and be easily accessible? When should processes be standardized and when are differences appropriate? What development project should the community undertake? Where are sources of knowledge and benchmarks outside the community? These are the kinds of questions that will help a community intentionally become an effective knowledge resource to its members and to other constituencies that may benefit from its expertise.

The Stages of Development

Stage 1: Potential

As the community begins, the key *domain* issue it faces is defining the scope of the domain in a way that elicits the heartfelt interests of members and aligns with important issues for the organization as a whole.

The key *community* issue is finding people who already network on the topic and helping them to imagine how increased networking and knowledge sharing could be valuable.

The key *practice* issue is identifying common knowledge needs.

Stage 2: Coalescing

The key *domain* issue of the coalescing stage is to establish the value of sharing knowledge about that domain.

The key *community* issue is to develop relationships and sufficient trust to discuss genuinely sticky practice problems. Trust is

paramount in this coalescing process; without it, it is difficult for community members to discover what aspects of the domain are most important and identify the real value of the community.

The key *practice* issue is to discover specifically what knowledge should be shared and how.

Why should we let that happen? Why aren't we generating the history of mentoring as well as building upon it and generating new learning about it as a community online focused on that topic or several related topics?

Stage 3: Maturing

The key *domain* issue as a community grows is defining its role in the organization and its relationship to other domains.

The key *community* issue at this stage is managing the boundary of the community, which is no longer just a network of professional

friends. In defining new and wider boundaries, the community must ensure that it is not distracted from its core purpose.

The key *practice* issue at this point shifts from simply sharing ideas and insights to organizing the community's knowledge and taking stewardship seriously. As the community develops a stronger sense of itself, the core members frequently begin to see gaps in the community's knowledge, identify its cutting edge, and feel a need to be more systematic in their definition of the community's core practice.

Stage 4: Stewardship

The key *domain* issue in this stage of community development is to maintain the relevance of the domain and to find a voice in the organization.

The key *community* issue is to keep the tone and intellectual focus of the community lively and engaging.

The key *practice* issue for communities in the stewardship stage is to keep the community on the cutting edge.

Stage 5: Transformation

Many communities fade away, sometimes from lack of interest, other times because the problem has been solved, the goals met.

Some communities die by turning into social clubs.

Other communities split into distinct communities or merge with others.

Some communities become so important that they become functioning parts of the organization, created as departments or centers of excellence.

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We Fret About the Word

(continued from page 2)

I think you're condescending. You embrace the lowest common denominator and then hold it up as an academic ideal. How can you claim to be so critical of a "mean" world when you don't provide students an opportunity to explore their own questions and concerns about that world? Yes, our students are practical, but I believe they have many questions and concerns. And when given the opening to investigate them, they take it.

I never said that students couldn't ask those questions. I'm only saying that what an educational institution needs to focus on is academic quality: good materials, informed and energetic faculty, a decent advising system, and an orderly structure that supports student learning. You're too quick to brush these things aside in your embrace of notions like collaboration, uncertainty, and some particularly peculiar ideas like "perspective transformation." You're dabbling in weak metaphysics. That's not what the first principles of a college should be about.

That's easy to say. Are you completely unwilling to see that your vision of a college is, itself, built on a set of fairly entrenched principles? I think there's a major problem with your so-called pragmatism: it perpetuates the world of power that already oppresses us and our students. I thought you claimed you wanted to question that exercise of power?

Of course I accept that we're never operating in a vacuum. But I also know that, as many of our colleagues have persuasively argued over the years, students do not come to this or any college to be "transformed" into anything or to be initiated into a club with its own sacred vocabulary that you won't give up. It's all too precious for me.

Are you so sure that you know what academic quality is and how it is achieved? Is that so obvious to you? Why aren't you willing to look at the new schemes in which the old ways, which I thought you, yourself, questioned, are being repackaged with fancy bells and whistles? You're a sucker for numbers and claims of institutional success that seem to tell us more than they really do.

You're unwilling to separate the words from the substance. And the more you worry about the language, the more likely you'll be to miss the real discussion. You'll be left behind rummaging around in the words.

And I say if you forget the words and think they're only window dressing and not part of the real thing, you'll get lost. And then I'll bet you that in a few years time, we'll be pushed back to where this whole thing began 35 years ago. Then we'll need the language that you thought was so unnecessary and that you so willingly watched disappear.

Alan Mandell

Four Poems

Marilyn McCabe,
Office of Admissions

Fallen Prey

I am hunted
by hope.
It's sought me out,
smelled the trail
I thought I'd hidden
so well
with the scat
and musk
of dead dreams.
I saw it out
the corner of my eye
last night.
It ducked down
inside the tall grasses.

I've run so long
I'm tempted
to step out
in the dangerous
twilight
under the stars
hope likes to hunt by.

(This poem appeared in Bright Hill Press's
Second Word Thursdays Anthology, 1999.)

Angels at my Table

As she bent to lift the tray, I saw her wings,
blued on her lower back. *We are all angels.*
And the beatific little man at the next table,
gleaming with his new signed basketball
and talking of the convention next week,
where he'll meet all his gods. *How we sing.*
Even the unwashed man in black walking past,
who naps every day in the library,
feet propped on his overstuffed bag,
nodding to himself in sleep.
*How we all dance together
on the head of our pin.*



Psalm: The work is:

Create the world
and live inside it.
Wear the work
draped like washing
so all the world
is seen through
the work
and the world's winds
ripple and snap,
drying it
to a hard clean
and fresh.
Wrap the work
in yourself,
until you are the world
looking out.
Work's a coat
and a map you give the world
to follow and dream.
Otherwise
you are sleepless,
you are cold.

I Know

I don't know why
I can't not know
and in the not knowing
know, happily, nothing – or not
quite nothing, but
just a little,
enough to throw some light like
a nightlight in a strange room.
I don't know why
I struggle with the why,
the what, the – even worse –
what next; the who am I,
the awful who cares.
I don't know why
I can't sleep at night
and in the not sleeping not dream,
but be,
not large and like a world,
but small under the sheet under the sky,
small and
unknowing – not
unknowing entirely, but
at least not fearful
of the not sleeping
and awake to the night,
watching the sparks seem to meet the stars
in the unknown in between
(impossible,
because sparks extinguish
and the stars are racing away).
(I think this is something
I know,
but there I go again,
insisting on
knowing things.)

Sabbatical Report

Dick Butler, Central New York Center

On Sept 1, 2004 the elevator button looked the same as it had since 1990, when I first joined our Syracuse office. But I was changed. The doors opened and I stepped in. I pressed the button for the second floor. The elevator rose, carrying me back to the routines and duties I have pursued daily for most of my 18 years with the college. I wondered, “Where did the time go?”

My thoughts turned once more to the year’s sabbatical I had just finished. The elevator stopped with a familiar jerky bounce. The doors opened on a welcoming, yet different, vista. I walked into my world, ... but also a different world.

A few weeks later, an e-mail arrived from Alan Mandell, editor of *All About Mentoring*, asking if I would write an article on the sabbatical. I thought, “while I’ve

shared pieces of the sabbatical, I haven’t put it together ... really, for myself nor for others.” It was a pleasure to accept. But as I struggled to bring the article to fruition, I was not so sure accepting the invitation was such a great idea. Maybe the short form, submitted to the president was enough? No, I valued the opportunity to make sense of the year, in the form of reflective writing. I am happy to share the many rich sabbatical related experiences with others.

It occurred to me there might be additional purposes in writing this report, beyond simply regaling the reader with the activities of one sabbatical. I hope to resonate with at least five readers with different interests, who receive this journal. This article is written with the interests of these five in mind.

At least one of these five is a reader who is eligible for a sabbatical, but has not yet applied for one. S(he) may be interested in the sabbatical process from the viewpoint of a person applying, as compared to the viewpoint of the college and the committees reviewing the sabbatical proposal.

A second reader is one who has been awarded a sabbatical. This reader may find a point or two for comparison and contrast with her/his plans, experiences, and accomplishments. For example, the model of sabbatical process may generate ideas about how to better structure the process.

A third reader may find a recounting of sabbatical activities, and the impact of these activities (including plans, and problems), of interest.

A fourth reader may be a person outside the faculty, who is wondering about the value of sabbaticals. What comes from them, are they a boondoggle, should I support or oppose them? By studying the experiences of several mentors, such a reviewer may become better informed about the value of a sabbatical.

The fifth reader may find this account reveals a bit more about a colleague whom they know only partially.

I hope you find you are one of the five readers, and find value in reading further.

In the remainder of this article I will discuss products and processes, as they relate to sabbaticals. I will use this distinction between products and processes in reflecting on the sabbatical and its outcomes, using a multi-phase model: deciding, applying, arranging, doing, outcomes ... and aftermath. The essay will identify sabbatical activities and will reflect on what the sabbatical meant.

Products and Processes

There are both products and processes associated with a sabbatical. And it is useful to consider both. By **products**, I mean physical products, such as papers and reports; as well as understanding, knowledge, and strengthened interpersonal bonds. Some of the products include the proposal; the final report (submitted to the president); a book review for a book on mentoring, published in the journal *Learning and Education*; a presentation on distance learning for ABSEL’s (The Association for Business Simulation and Experiential Learning) 2004 national conference on simulation, gaming and experiential learning; acquisition, installation and operation of a home computer network; and the acquisition of a total of about 500 books and papers on early business education and on corporate governance.



Dick Butler

Less obvious products include strengthened personal relationships with former year-long exchange students and their families in Europe. I visited seven students and families from Sweden, Latvia, Germany, and France during the sabbatical. Not only did we strengthen our personal connections, but, since families were carrying out important work in their countries, we also learned some things of value.

One visit was with an exchange family from the former East Germany. That visit resulted in extending my understanding of the Iron Curtain and conditions for those living in a police state. The host mom had emigrated to the West, wheeling a baby carriage with our exchange son on top of several paintings, across the border. Unemployed for two years following her application for a visa to emigrate, she was allowed to take out of the German Democratic Republic (G.D.R.) only her children, clothes on her back, a small amount of currency, and the baby carriage in which she wheeled our exchange son. Carol described with agitation studying the Stasi's secret police file on her many years later, and discovering lies told by family members and neighbors in the G.D.R., a state where one in three were informants to the secret police. Hosted by this family, we made our third visit in 40 years to the Iron Curtain (Checkpoint Charlie) that had divided East and West Germany when I served as a young officer in the U.S. Army, and she was escaping the G.D.R. for West Berlin. While Berlin was now colorful and vibrant, the Checkpoint Charlie Museum contained artifacts of breakouts and work by artists, who captured the emotional mood of those times when the wall kept Germans within the G.D.R.

Another "product" included learning about the Soviet-era economic system in Latvia and how it undermined the well being of a once prosperous economy. And I learned of current efforts to rebuild Latvia's economy based on privatization, and on joining the European Economic Community. I met with an economics professor, part of the group charged with privatizing the Latvian economy, and currently serving as overseer (equivalent to our inspector general) of government contracts. Dr. Tiknus spoke with insight of the difficulty facing Latvia in rebuilding its economy, and of the social

problem created through Latvia's withdrawing citizenship from 40,000 Russians that Stalin had relocated to Latvia during his regime.

Other products of the sabbatical included updating my knowledge of research being undertaken in the field of corporate governance – the focus of my proposal. Attendance at two national conferences of the Academy of Management meant I was able to participate in six days of pre-conference workshops and conference activities, both in August of 2003 (just prior to the official start of my sabbatical), and in August 2004 (near the end of my sabbatical). I chose sessions useful in

understanding governance from theoretical bases. I learned about current research aimed at understanding how governance has gone "off track" in several notable instances, widely reported in the popular press. I hope to be able to contribute an organizing framework that may assist in making sense of the large volume of findings that are emerging. These were several of the products of my sabbatical.

Now to the process.

The sabbatical process can be characterized as deciding, applying, arranging, doing, and post-sabbatical wrap-up. As you will recognize, processes include a time dimension. There is a subprocess of applying for and being granted a sabbatical. There are subprocesses for acquiring the resources and knowledge to produce the careful thinking evident in product(s), such as presentations, articles, and books. Process leads to products, such as this physical report.

I like to compare a sabbatical to my favorite flower, the dandelion. Sabbaticals, like the

dandelion, may be both purposeful and aimless. The seeds of dandelions drift to earth, where they start the plant anew. The sabbatical may be likened to the wind, carrying intellectual seed to new places for renewal and blossoming when we land on fertile ground. We catch the wind with our approved sabbatical. Where we land may depend on the same luck that effects each dandelion seed. The plan for the sabbatical might be likened to the plan a dandelion

parent has, if it has one; to lift its stem on high and give its many seeds a chance to catch a fair wind that will allow a chance for a fresh start. I imagine those who fund sabbaticals, and many of those taking sabbaticals, have these hopes. The sabbatical plan may serve much the same function as the dandelion parent's canny raising of its arms, preparing us for launching forth.

Deciding to apply for a sabbatical occurred

following publication of the list of those eligible; discussions with Linda, my wife, and testing the idea out with selected colleagues and our dean. Deciding also meant considering whether a six-month sabbatical at full pay or a year's sabbatical at half pay was the better option. With Linda's encouragement, and the experience of a six-month sabbatical several years ago, I opted for the year's sabbatical. An important factor in this decision is that the time and efforts required to break away from other responsibilities, which is the same for either length sabbatical, hence occupies a smaller percentage of the longer one.

Before writing my proposal, I had thought about current problems in my field, management, and what might be done during a sabbatical. I also spent some time reviewing the college's policy on sabbaticals to see what the college needed from me; and sought out faculty members who had recently taken sabbaticals to learn the "unwritten" side of sabbaticals.

I like to compare a sabbatical to my favorite flower, the dandelion. Sabbaticals, like the dandelion, may be both purposeful and aimless. The seeds of dandelions drift to earth, where they start the plant anew.

Current research interests I wanted to pursue related to the major problems with corporate governance that had been making headlines in the news media almost daily, for the past two years. This research interest built upon a study I had completed, for my dissertation research, on external organizational environment and organizational governance.

My discussions with two colleagues who had recently returned from sabbaticals yielded a warning, “time slips away rapidly.” I also learned that while the sabbatical proposal is used to award the sabbatical, one is not held strictly accountable to fulfilling every item in the proposal. There is room for flexibility in modifying the proposal, as it unfolds. These insights were helpful: the first in terms of ensuring more effort went into time management; the second, in providing a greater sense of freedom to explore opportunities that developed. Three interwoven themes, six particular activities, and four outcomes were identified and discussed in a seven-page document, “One Year Sabbatical Proposal (for 2003-4).”

What led up to the proposal itself? At one level, I was tired, emotionally and intellectually. Mentoring requires a heavy time and emotional commitment, as we learn about our students and respond to their needs. I had engaged in a longstanding, ultimately successful campaign to obtain needed resources for center assessment, which had been draining. I had represented a colleague in an unsuccessful Article 33 appeal of a tenure decision. The sabbatical opportunity provided a chance to recharge by engaging in a different set of challenges.

The activities I proposed included: working on reviewing the literature on recent developments in management; preparing a reflection paper on recent leadership experiences in Rotary and our union, UUP; and learning to use a management simulation for use in teaching. I also proposed completing three other activities that were (or had been) “in process:” publishing from my unpublished research on boards of directors; examining the evolution of factory management, drawing on a collection I have assembled, and reporting findings; and developing a teaching case

study of a 50 year-old International Youth Exchange Program that recently terminated operations in its original corporate form, and its successor.

Expected outcomes that I identified include: increased currency in management ideas; two papers for presentations; incorporation of simulation gaming into teaching; and submission of a case study to a CASE workshop.

Altogether this proved an ambitious proposal. I will come back to discuss actual accomplishments later in the paper. Let me report at this point that not everything proposed was turned into accomplishments, and there were accomplishments that were not proposed.

I delivered the sabbatical proposal with a sigh of relief. While actual writing of the proposal took place during the four or five weeks before it was delivered to Interim Dean Perkins, work on the sabbatical had begun two or three months earlier.

Before the drafting and rewriting, there were serious discussions with Linda, my enormously supportive wife of 40 years. We discussed what the sabbatical meant for our family in terms of undertaking a few activities that required more flexibility in schedule than I typically have. So, I began the arranging process.

We began preliminary discussions with families of our former exchange students from Europe to test the idea of visiting them in the spring of 2004. We constructed an adequate home office to support my research and writing during this year, equipping it with requisite equipment including a new computer system, software, and a wireless network, with access to our high-speed Internet connection.

I entered into informal discussions with a colleague who was a prospective sabbatical replacement; began alerting students that I had applied for a sabbatical, and reassured students that they would have access to excellent mentoring services in my absence.

As May 1, the official notification date came and went, without notification of the sabbatical results, my anxiety level increased. I initiated inquiries, even requesting guidance on how to strengthen

the proposal should I have to submit a request for the following year. May 21 I received notice that the sabbatical request was approved. With a sigh of relief, I mentally closed out the application phase, and moved full bore into arranging the sabbatical.

Following discussion of various options with colleagues and the dean, we settled on a sabbatical replacement. I inventoried records of students I was responsible for, and made arrangements to transfer active mentees to other primary mentors. To maintain load, I had had to make commitments to students during much of May, under the assumption I would not be granted a sabbatical. Thus, I had several students whose contracts extended as late as early October, though the sabbatical started effective September 1. In fairness to these students, since my sabbatical replacement was from another discipline, it seemed necessary to complete contracted studies with these students.

With the assistance of a good friend and former mentor, all my students' files were reviewed, loose ends dealt with, and the files of active students then transferred to appropriate mentors. To reduce student anxiety, letters introducing the new mentor, and the reasons for a change, were sent to active students. Lists of student reassignments were furnished colleagues and staff to facilitate their work.

Inactive students' files were filed in one central location and arrangements made so they could be reassigned if the student associated with the file became active during my absence. These activities, along with continuing to mentor students who were completing studies with me, occupied much of my time through September.

Since we would be traveling, I decided to buy a laptop. While I was thinking about computer support, we ordered a newer Dell desktop computer, and specialized software to help with bibliographic entries (**Endnote**). I met with a colleague, who had experience in using bibliographic software.

With these arrangements completed (or at least well underway), I began the “doing” phase by attending the August 2003 Academy of Management meetings in Seattle, especially to help me learn about

current research on governance, one issue I was committed to study during my sabbatical, and to update my knowledge of developments in management in general.

In addition to current research, this conference is a primary way of learning about newly available learning resources for my students (i.e., texts, software, and web-based resources). I discovered a variety of professional development workshops were being held in the three days prior to the official start of the conference. Several of these dealt with theory and with research methods.

The activities differed in some respects from those in the sabbatical proposal. For example, two activities were proposed “on a time-available basis.” As it worked out, I didn’t work on the simulation game I had planned to experiment with during the sabbatical, nor the did I get much of substance done on the International Student Exchange Program case study, which I had presented an early draft of, at a “brown bag” presentation to faculty.

But, it turned out that very rich, unexpected opportunities developed. Our family has hosted 12 high school students from seven countries for year-long stays while they attended an American high school, improved their English, and learned about American culture. Linda suggested that in addition to participating in conferences, we take time during the sabbatical period to visit the families, a few of whom we had not met. I seized upon this idea because these families were engaged in a range of interesting responsibilities in their respective communities. As such, they offer a unique window on their country and culture. We also decided to return to southern Spain for two weeks during the winter, since I could write as well in Spain, surrounded by green grass and sun, as in Jamesville, NY, surrounded by banks of snow and often cloudy and overcast.

Many of the families of the exchange students we visited were engaged in quite meaningful roles in their countries. One of the best examples was Dr. Tiknus, the Latvian economist mentioned earlier. But parents in each of the other families were playing a significant and interesting role in their respective culture. For example, our

French exchange daughter’s husband, an artist, is a pioneer in what the *Wall Street Journal* featured as a new form of literature, the graphic novel. He shared with us examples of published works, original drawings, and discussed the difficulty and frustrations in his work. The mother in our Swedish son’s family, provides leadership training to mid and high level executives across Europe.

Another unplanned for opportunity resulted from spending some time on e-bay looking for governance materials, and stumbling across some inexpensive sets of correspondence books, lesson plans, exams, and correspondence between students and tutors. This whetted my appetite to learn more about institutions serving students in business in the early 1900s. These appear to have served students who were similar in many respects to the students we currently serve at Empire State College.

Over the past year, I have acquired around 500 volumes, and associated materials from these institutions, published through the 1909 to 1940 era. Not only have I acquired a good collection from several such institutions, but also I’ve acquired sets of instructional materials across time for one home-study institute in particular. For me, this is a rich and serendipitous discovery. Although I have studied and been interested in the development of management thought, I have not previously looked into the dissemination of these ideas in any serious way. For several reasons, the dissemination of management ideas seems important to understand.

So as I reflect on the year, I realize the value of physical and psychological renewal: time for family, opportunity to read a major national newspaper regularly, time to feed and observe the birds in our yard, time to travel and learn about management and other developments in other parts of the

world, time to think, and time to participate in workshops and conferences in my field.

Identifying the process of the sabbatical in terms of the written artifacts, like the proposal, is relatively straightforward. The informal side of the sabbatical is more challenging. One hope in preparing this report is that some faculty, who might have dismissed the idea of applying for a sabbatical, will be encouraged to do so. The sabbatical is good for the person, and good for our college and the university. I hope this report encourages colleagues to move planning for a sabbatical to a high priority.

This sabbatical provided a break from the very substantial amount of routine work of the college. It was possible to engage in a range of activities that resulted in personal growth in many dimensions. The sabbatical afforded me the opportunity to build and update knowledge that may guide whatever

scholarly work I am able to contribute over the remainder of my professional life.

One of the territories for research and writing, at least partially mapped during the sabbatical, is that of the problem of governance of organizations. A second is the

innovation in the spread of management ideas, represented by the home study and correspondence school movement in business education that occurred in the 1900 – 1940s. The importance of this movement is that it may have been instrumental in disseminating much of the requisite knowledge, and in developing much of the talent, that enabled and fueled the rapid rise of large organizations during this era.

When I began this article, I had five audiences in mind. I hope that if you have read this far, you have found some ideas and insights that serve you. A reader eligible for a sabbatical, who has not yet applied for one, may better understand the possibilities for, and process of, applying for a

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sabbatical. A reader who has been on one or more sabbaticals may have found a point or two for comparison and contrast experiences, and hopefully is reassured about their own success. A third reader may have found a recounting of sabbatical activities, and the impact of these activities (including plans and contradictions), of interest. A fourth reader may be in a better position to assess the value of sabbaticals – what comes from them, should I support or oppose them? And finally, some readers may find this account reveals a bit more about a colleague whom they’ve met. I hope you find you are one of the five who found this article useful.

The Boundaries of Asian Studies

Tom Grunfeld, Metropolitan Center

The following talk was given as part of a panel, "Thinking about Boundaries," at the All Areas of Study Meeting, November, 2004.

Traditionally, Western scholarship has been configured along very clearly defined lines or boundaries: disciplinary boundaries, national boundaries, cultural boundaries, gender boundaries, etc. In addition, especially for historians, periodization based on major events has also defined our work and our conceptions of the past. For example, Japanese history is divided according to the rule of each emperor, while Chinese history was broken down by dynasties, the first war with Europeans (1840), and the 1949 communist revolution.

The first obvious change to this pattern came with the Russian launching of the Sputnik satellite in 1956. This astonishing scientific accomplishment was received in Washington, D.C. with something akin to panic – perhaps unmatched until the horrific events of September 11, 2001. (The Cuban Missile Crisis had significant weight too.) One response to these events was the realization that American higher education was not meeting the needs of the new post-World War II globalization. Private foundations, the Central Intelligence Agency and major universities quickly reacted and encouraged the study of nonEuropean languages and the development of something called “area studies,” which the intelligence community believed would be useful to them in their conflict against communists.

In the study of nonEuropean cultures, area studies effectively broke down the rigid disciplinary boundaries and fostered the study of modern history as opposed to the far more popular study of traditional cultures. I don't mean to infer that disciplinary study disappeared, for it decidedly did not. However, the advent of

area studies opened up a new avenue of study for those uncomfortable with rigid disciplinary limitations. Easily available funds played a major role in generating interest in the field (for example, full scholarships for those willing to study Asian languages). But these innovations left all the other boundaries in place.

The funding, the political and social upheaval of the era (such as the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s that made us question the gender boundaries we had created), coupled with a long war in Asia, generated a burgeoning field in Asian studies. This also created many areas of contention and friction, often having to do with the boundaries we had artificially created: gender, disciplinary, political (especially political), to name but a few. The most contentious issues of the day were over the acceptance of government funding from an administration that was waging war against the very people we were studying, and the question of whether research, which could aid Washington's effort in waging that war, should be suspended until the conflict ended. The questioning of funding sources and the overt politicization of research were boundary-breaking actions in themselves.

In more recent years, the increase of scholars in the field, the concomitant growth of the study of Asia outside North America and, especially, political events (the introduction of capitalism to China, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the creation of ethnic nationalist states in Central Asia, etc.) have

led us to yet another round of boundary questioning.

Indeed, our scholarly group, the Association for Asian Studies, now hosts “border-crossing” panels at each of its annual meetings. The word “border” here refers to far more than geographic boundaries.

The two most perceptible changes of late have been assaults against the periodization of history and our accepted wisdom about geographic boundaries.

As a graduate student, I was taught that China had to be studied either as

“traditional China” (prior to 1840), “modern China” (1840-1949), or “contemporary China” (post-1949) – although the latter was really the preserve of political scientists and no self-respecting historian would touch it. Columbia University even had three separate scholarly seminars

What we now understand is that adherence to these dates as strict boundaries prevented us from seeing the continuities which were less affected by the dramatic transformations we assumed changed everything.

on China in which papers had to conform to that inflexible periodization. Ph.D. programs were just as rigid.

What we now understand is that adherence to these dates as strict boundaries prevented us from seeing the continuities which were less affected by the dramatic transformations we assumed changed everything. I am referring to religious beliefs and cultural practices, for example.

Ironically perhaps, in an age of heightened nationalism, scholars in Asian studies are beginning to study history outside the restrictions of national boundaries.

Tibet provides one model of this phenomenon based upon political motivation. Unknown to most, there are two of them, two Tibets: The Chinese government speaks of a Tibet which has political boundaries and is, for all intents and purposes, a province of China. However, the Dalai Lama speaks of a Tibet that encompasses all of ethnic Tibetan inhabitation – an area easily twice the size of China’s Tibet. Think of the president and media of Mexico referring to their country as including the heavily Mexican areas of the states of California, Texas and Arizona (with every map published including this area as part of the Mexican state) and every reference to events there as happening in “Mexico.” Most scholars use the Dalai Lama’s conception.

But this redefining of borders is nowhere more true than in Central Asia where the motivations are historically driven. Despite the establishment of the various “stans,” (nation states based on ethnic identity: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgystan and Kazakhstan), after the collapse of the Soviet Union, historians now study Central Asia as a whole entity, a bridge between Europe and Asia where an ethnographic map is far more telling than a political one.

On this question of national political borders, just one final example. The Bush administration says the United States is fighting a “war on terror.” This definition, widely accepted in the media and among the American public, places the United States, for the first time in its history, in a situation of fighting not a war against a nation state but an enemy that transcends nation states.

Periodically, questioning accepted wisdom is a healthy activity: we don’t do it often enough, it would seem. When it comes to boundaries of all sorts, we need to think of the world in very different ways than we have become accustomed to doing.

I Found My Mentor ... in Cuba!

Tina Wagle, Center for Graduate Programs

I recently celebrated my first year anniversary here at Empire State College, as a founding faculty member of the Master of Arts in Teaching program. As I reflect on that first year, I must admit it was not an easy one, especially in terms of my identity at the college. Where do I fit in? I am a faculty member of a statewide program where the colleagues with whom I work most closely are scattered at different centers, yet the people who see me everyday are mentors in various disciplines here in Buffalo, begging the question: who really knows me at this college? I spent most of that year interfacing with my computer and my telephone. And, although we sometimes complain about making the trek to Saratoga Springs, for me, it felt like I was going home. The monthly M.A.T. face-to-face meetings helped ground me in terms of forming my group identity, yet still not my individual identity. The most challenging aspect of this identity struggle involved the term *mentor*.

Prior to coming to Empire State College, I had heard the term mentor. I knew what it meant and in what capacity the term was used. Beginning in September of 2004, however, the term seemed to invoke an entire culture of which I was not aware. When I was a first year teacher in Rhode Island, I was assigned a mentor, a more veteran faculty member from whom I could seek guidance and ask questions, “buddies,” at Empire State College, I soon discovered. I quickly realized that faculty members, professors, were called mentors. To be honest, I didn’t feel quite comfortable with the term. I felt as though it was lacking some of the respect that the term *professor* often conveys. So, not only was I struggling with identity but also language at my new place of work.



Tina Wagle

This past June, I went to Havana, Cuba to the 11th International Literacy and Education Research Network Conference on Learning. The themes of this conference encompassed all of my professional passions, including teacher education, bilingual education and urban education. I was enthralled by many of the sessions there and found myself taking notes as to what I could bring back to enhance the M.A.T. program. I was sitting at the conference when it hit me suddenly. All of the people around me were *mentors*. Fellow presenters and educators spoke passionately about their projects or research, all the while keeping students’ learning and interest at the forefront of their work. I realized that titles and locations are not important in this capacity. What matters is the objective many of these educators, and everyone at Empire State College, share: to enhance education

for all people. Not until this conference did I feel the term *mentor* applied to me.

Now that I am a “veteran” in the M.A.T. program, I am experiencing a new identity formation, both individual and group. Again, I am alone in Buffalo in terms of M.A.T. colleagues and I am the only language person in the group, often jealous of my science counterparts who seem to speak in another language at times. Yet with this adjustment comes a renewed sense of purpose and intellect. I believe that change enhances creativity and motivation. I continue to discover everyday at Empire State College that change is everywhere. Let’s hope that change breeds positivity!

Keynote Address

Empire State College Conference on “Evaluating Learning: Opportunities, Tensions and Impacts” June 2004

Joyce E. Elliott and Anne Breznau, Office of Academic Affairs

This keynote address for the Empire State College conference on evaluating student learning includes two major themes. Part I is an invitation to develop fresh perspectives on connections between evaluating, teaching and learning. This part of the address was developed jointly by Anne Breznau and Joyce Elliott, and we view it as a co-authored piece.

Part II offers some thoughts on the value and importance of honest formative and summative evaluation, using as an extended metaphor Joyce’s experience as an adult learning to ride horses.

Part I. “Creative Re/Vision: Links Between Evaluating, Teaching and Learning.”

Anne Breznau and Joyce E. Elliott

In Mary Daly fashion, it may be useful to break the word “revision” into its constituent parts. To re/vise, to engage in re/vision, means to look again. We think that the on-going college conversation about evaluating learning gives us a remarkable opportunity to develop fresh perspectives not only specifically on our evaluation practices but also on the whole of our teaching and mentoring practices.

In *Education and Identity*, Art Chickering remarks that “curricular arrangements, teaching practices, and evaluational procedures are systematically linked.” He goes on to say, “jiggling a part sends vibrations throughout the whole” (1969, p. 196). In redefining our evaluation and grading policy and practice at Empire State College, we have definitely “jiggled a major part” of the college’s academic model. This two-day conversation can be seen as an opportunity to shape the “vibrations” that are coursing through the whole. This change asks us to re-vise, or to look again at our

educational practices with fresh eyes, and also challenges our creativity in new ways.

We, too, have had our conceptions jiggled in this change process, and struggled to find opportunities for learning in the shake-up. We have come to believe that our reexamination of **evaluational** practices brings with it valuable opportunities for creativity in our **educational** practices.

Laurent Daloz asks in *Effective Teaching and Mentoring*: “In what ways are we older and in what ways young?” (1986, p. 57). What does our 33-year history – what does the older part of us – know about educational practices that are still valid and must be respected and retained? What newness or freshness of perspective does a change in an important academic policy, such as student evaluation and grading, bring? In what ways are we rendered “young” by coming to terms with this change?

Our history tells us that adult learners bring different skill sets and experiences to college than other learners. They may be weaker in college writing skills and stronger in self-discipline. They may have less time to bring to the learning experience, and use that time better. They may have competing roles demanding their attention, and be better at juggling their priorities. Our knowledge of adult learners is profound. We know how to work with them. This knowledge is valid and we need to define it and respect it.

Our history tells us that adult learners are individuals with individual educational needs. Our experience with mentoring adults as they develop their own degree plans is vast and must be respected. We must be careful in this “old” knowledge that we don’t think of adults as if they remain the same over time. Not only are they individually different, but they also may change as a group as times change.

Our history tells us that adult learners often have prior college-level learning, waiting to be brought to light. We know how to unearth experiences ripe with learning, and how to bring each learner into awareness of that learning and its value. This ability of ours is valid and must be respected, retained, and passed on to new generations of mentors.

Our history tells us that adult learners sometimes lack educational self-esteem and are unsure of their ability to succeed in college. We each can point to cases where our support and mentoring brought learners to greater self-respect and to experiencing the joy of academic achievement. We know less about the cases where our support didn’t seem to help and a student left before reaching his/her goals. So, our ability to support learner self-development is both a strength and an aspiration. We need to know more about what works and what doesn’t.

Finally, our history and the literature on adult learners (especially that written in the ’70s and ’80s when adults were relatively rare in higher education) suggest that evaluating adults with grades may be detrimental to their learning. Some believe that a policy that provides for a grade along with a narrative evaluation will undermine the adult student’s learning experience. The college’s revised policy seems to fly in the face of our “old” knowledge, knowledge that we have viewed as valid. Something that our history does not tell us is whether the adult learner of today will be daunted or challenged by the existence of grades along with the narrative.

This is one place where fresh eyes, our ability to become “young” in our practice, must come to the fore. We would argue that this moment of change, this departure from our “old” knowledge and experience brings with it an opportunity for self-reflection and

renewal, for stepping out of deeply cherished habits of educational practice, for shaking out the dust, cleaning off the old lenses.

Each example of knowledge that we have gained through our history and experience – that adult learners have different skill sets, individualized needs and expectations, prior college-level learning, uncertainty about their academic abilities – each way in which we are “old” as an institution (to use the Daloz term) may be looked at differently as the grading policy becomes real to us. This is where Chickering’s idea that jiggling the evaluative part of the teaching and learning process affects all teaching practice comes into play.

How will grading as part of evaluating affect how our adult students enter their studies? How will it affect the ways they individualize their studies, the ways they use their time? How will it affect their educational self-esteem? Their learning outcomes?

These are questions we cannot really answer before the fact. Rather, we will find answers over time as we work with students within some new parameters. We wonder, though, if these are the most useful questions.

Changing the questions slightly might change the way we look at this moment as an opportunity for new evaluative practices that have the potential to renew teaching practices and enhance learning. For example:

- How can both narratives and grading affirm the skill sets that adults bring with them and challenge them to reach beyond their current grasp?
- How can both narratives and grading support the ways in which adults look at reflection and judgment so that they construct even stronger individualized degree plans?
- How can both narratives and grading strengthen realistic self-appraisal on the part of students, enhancing their self-esteem both for educational purposes and for life-long learning in a world that evaluates at every turn?

To reference Daloz again – he points out that caring for an adult learner means being

both “just and loving” (1986, p. 244). He notes that we mentors “are not simply nodding and smiling.” There is a lot more to our practice than that. Xin Liu Gale asserts the necessity, as does Daloz, of having a balance of loving support in the quiet of the teacher/student relationship ... and high standards in the context of the larger world (1997).

In the act of evaluation, as redefined in the new policy, we have perhaps strengthened the judgment component. We must make judgments about the work of the student, ideally in dialogue with the student. Issues of justice and fairness may now loom larger than before, along with worry that the loving and nurturing aspect of our work will be eclipsed. We may believe that our students will not be able to trust us in the way that they now do. Perhaps we also wonder if we can be trustworthy in a situation that makes evaluative judgments more visible or explicit within the learning experience.

Our colleagues across higher education have long wrestled with the challenges of

evaluative judgment in the form of grades. They have developed creative and interesting ways to bring evaluation and grading into the development of learning contracts, and into the core of learning itself. Many educators see student self-evaluation and grading as important elements of learning for the student, especially for adult learners. Malcolm Knowles, for one, sees graded self-evaluation as a system that “produces a high degree of motivation along with an output of energy that results in superior learning” (1975: 38).

We have, in the college’s recent policy change, made overt much that has been covert in our narrative evaluations. We believe that we will bring fresh eyes to the arena of educational practice because of this change, and that we will find renewal for ourselves as educators. We may also find heightened learning and self-awareness in our adult learners. We don’t yet know how the “jiggling” of evaluative practices will change us. We believe, however, that as this change unfolds, we will draw on the same qualities of invention and creativity that formed this institution from the beginning, as we re-envision educational practices for this new moment in our history.

Part II. “Evaluating for Progress and for Outcome: The Better and the Good.”

Joyce E. Elliott

Part II is not about grading *per se*. It is about the value of giving full, direct, honest feedback to students, whether or not grades are involved.

One objection to grading is that – compared to a narrative evaluation – a grade is a more explicit, even stark, maybe even negative summative expression of the cumulative judgment we have made about a student’s work. I want here to question whether the directness of a grade is inherently negative. I want to suggest that any evaluation – whether in the form of a grade, or a narrative, or both – that gives the student clear, honest and direct feedback about *both*

We have, in the college’s recent policy change, made overt much that has been covert in our narrative evaluations. We believe that we will bring fresh eyes to the arena of educational practice because of this change, and that we will find renewal for ourselves as educators.

how far she has come *and* where she stands now, is valuable to the student. We need to say to a student not only whether her work is *better*, and how, but also whether it is *good*, and why, and then we need to point to what comes next.

Our narrative evaluations – sometimes brief, sometimes delicately indirect, sometimes exquisitely gentle in providing developmental guidance – sometimes leave the student unclear about where she stands. The student may understand from ongoing interactions with the mentor, from comments on work submitted, and from the closing narrative evaluation that her work was better over time. She may even understand some of the ways it was better.

Does she know whether it was good?

Let me offer a rather lengthy metaphor using a personal example. As an adult learner, at the age of 41 (in my early middle age), I undertook to learn how to ride and take care of horses.

I assure you I felt as ignorant and anxious as any student who walks into our Riverhead Unit to begin or to return to college.

I worried that I would look foolish, that I would be incompetent, and – quite realistically – that I might get hurt.

The Riverhead student worries that he might look foolish, that he might be incompetent, and – quite realistically – that he might get hurt.

In my case, the possible hurt included embarrassment, failure, sore muscles, squashed toes, a bruised hip from a horse bite or a broken bone.

In the student's case, the possible hurt might include being challenged unexpectedly, discovering that the work does not come easily, re-enacting prior negative experiences with schooling, learning that his original goals are not a good fit with his real interests or abilities, and experiencing failure, maybe even with negative repercussions for career and family.

I hoped that I would learn what I needed to know in order to work competently and comfortably with horses. I wanted to learn enough so I could experience the joy of riding and simply being around these astonishing creatures who had always drawn me to them.

The Riverhead student hopes that he will learn what he needs to know for his career, to prepare for advanced

study, to become “an educated person,” to satisfy himself – so that he can have greater access to societal resources on behalf of himself and his family and experience the satisfaction of learning, stretching, and even taking his own measure.

In fact, I did look and feel foolish, I was incompetent, I failed, I cried or walked away in frustration and disappointment, and I did get physically hurt sometimes. (And still do, all of the above.) And, I learned, made progress, and achieved enough competence to experience the joy I hoped for and to be considered a “horsewoman.” As important, I have a pretty accurate sense of where I am located at present in this learning – I know what I can do safely and comfortably, what I can challenge myself to do with a reasonable level of risk, what is as yet beyond my reach, and how I might reach for it. I also know what I do and do not want to reach for.

In fact, the Riverhead student may feel foolish, experience failure, be incompetent and sometimes get hurt. And, hopefully, he will learn, take satisfaction in the learning, and meet both usual expectations and his own goals. Hopefully, he also will end up with a pretty accurate sense of where he is located – he will know what his competencies are, what he might still reach for and how, and whether he wants to.

My teachers gave me plenty of developmental advice, most of it with care for me as a person. Both so I would be safe and so I would experience success, they gave me assignments that progressed over time from the most basic to the more complex. Especially early on, they encouraged and affirmed small successes, small improvements.

I assure you, there were also times when they gave me summative feedback – sometimes because they believed I needed it to stay safe or move forward, and sometimes because I asked for it. For example, I remember Barbara stopping a lesson to say, “If you keep leaning forward like that, when this horse stops suddenly – and he will – you will go right over his neck and break a bone.” That gave me a pretty

good summative sense of where I was located (and where I was about to be located!).

I remember asking Chris to assess my overall skills and readiness to participate in a challenging trail ride. If she told me just about the progress I had made, and did not also give me her clear and honest assessment of whether I had come far enough to take on the challenge, I might have actually *gone* on that trail ride – and might not be standing here today.

Or, maybe, I would have passed up that trail ride thinking I was not capable of it, and missed an exhilarating and extraordinary experience.

I don't think it is necessary to give grades to achieve the kind of direct, clear, honest evaluation that I believe we should aspire to and that our Riverhead student needs and (at least mostly) wants. I do think that the collegewide dialogue about the nature of evaluation, which has taken place around a new evaluation and grading policy, has brought the issue of formative and summative feedback into much clearer focus.

With this clearer focus we have the opportunity to improve our practice and our student's learning. Direct, honest feedback helps students learn and helps them to know what they have yet to learn. It is better if we can make clear to students not only the *nature* of our formative and summative judgments, but also the *criteria* on which they are based. It is better still if we can help students to define for themselves criteria they believe should apply to their work and to form their own judgments by applying criteria that both we and they define.

Poet and educator Adrienne Rich writes this way about how it is for her to teach students who have needed to struggle for an education – students for whom education is not a birth right:

My early assumptions about teaching have changed. I think that what has held me ... is not the one or two students ... whose eyes met mine with a look of knowing they were born for this struggle with words and meanings; not the poet who has turned up more than once, though such encounters are

a privilege ... What has held me ... are the hidden veins of possibility running through students who don't know (and strongly doubt) that this is what they were born for, but who may find it out to their own amazement, students who, grim with self-depreciation and prophecies of their own failure or tight with a fear they cannot express, can be lured into sticking it out to some moment of breakthrough, when they discover that they have ideas that are valuable, even original, and can express those ideas on paper. What fascinates and gives hope in a time of slashed budgets ... is the possibility that many of these ... men and women may be gaining the kind of critical perspectives on their lives and the skill to bear witness that they have never before had in our country's history (1979, p. 67).

I can well imagine that Rich sees a need to provide both developmental and summative feedback to this student whom she so clearly loves and respects. Developmental advice and commentary to encourage the whole person, to mark and affirm the increments along the way to competence or even excellence, and to measure the distance from the student's beginning to the student's present location. Closing, summative assessment and commentary to inform the student of Rich's judgment about **where** she is located at present, how far she may need to travel to meet usual expectations as well as to achieve her own goals, and what paths she might take.

I can well imagine that Rich provides both kinds of responses with respect and care for the student as a person and in dialogue with the student, and that she trusts her own judgment. I can also imagine that we can, and do, do the same.

What if Rich did not share with this student her sense not just of her progress but also of her current location and possible new directions and pathways? Would the student be so likely to experience the amazement, the sense of breakthrough, the discovery of the value of her ideas that Rich speaks of? Would she develop in the same measure "the critical perspective" on her life and "the skill to bear witness" as well as the

potential for leadership in her community, workplace, or social network?

We are engaged as a community in reviewing our conceptions about evaluating. We are re-examining the connections between evaluating practice, all other elements of teaching and mentoring practice, and student learning. As we do this, I hope we will consider the possibility that clear, direct formative and summative responses to students enhances their learning and their sense of location and direction. I hope we also will trust that we can provide such responses with respect and care and that our students will value them. Finally, I hope we can engage our students in formulating sound bases on which to judge their own work and chart their own journeys.

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Found Things

Xenia Coulter, Ithaca Unit, Central New York Center

Xenia Coulter recently retired from her role as long-time mentor coordinator of the Central New York Center's Ithaca Unit. A gathering in her honor was held in Syracuse on 14 December 2004. (We thank Dick Butler for the photos taken on the occasion.) Among her papers, Xenia left the following list of "bequests."

TO: The Ithaca Unit

FROM: Xenia Coulter

DATE: September 15, 2004

RE: Bequests

As I review my additions to the Ithaca office, I wish to bequeath the following:

1. To Barbara, the TI calculator (I have another one at home anyhow)
2. To Laurie, the bookcase behind the door in Larry's office, Lee's first attempt at carpentry some 20 years ago. If you don't move it, it's pretty safe
3. To Barbara, my white clock (so you don't have to look at your watch while talking with a student, or, if it's behind you, the student doesn't have to look at her watch while you're talking).
4. To Paul and Jim (except that Barbara might still want them and there's no room for them in either Paul's or Jim's office), the two sort-of-cheap, 10 year old, largish brown (fake wood) K-mart bookcases purchased after Pete Perkins said "are you kidding" to my repeated requests for more bookcases beyond the seven I had obtained (or stolen) from the college.
5. To Barbara and Laurie, my "so that's the reason you get a larger salary than me" picture of a little boy and girl gazing inside their respective diapers (even though I was told it is a "classic" and I should take it home with me ...).
6. To whomever, the black thin set of shelves for cassettes that I got on sale just before Woolworths went out of business.
7. To Laurie, my New Yorker picture of how the west part of the U.S. appears to people living in Manhattan. If nothing else you can use the hook for one of your own (fabulous) pictures (for which the unit is most grateful!).
8. To Larry, in order to validate the Ithaca 20th anniversary power point presentation, the **big** painting (well, nobody else seems to want it ...). Remember its history – I bought it from Joyce Ferlano who needed money to finance her divorce – isn't that a good example of what it means to be a mentor?
9. To the future coordinator, mentors, tutors, and so forth, textbooks in sociology, writing, Spanish, music, social psychology, developmental psychology, psychobiology, gender studies, higher education, cognition, intelligence, mathematics, and statistics, plus books in health psychology, environmental psychology, organizational behavior, and political psychology, plus a variety of videos and audiocassettes (check out the music and poetry ones) – and of course all the CDL textbooks we've scarfed up over the years.
10. To the coordinator **only** – all the CDL study guides (they'll be worth something one of these days and s/he'll not want to lend them out to people who might lose them – or throw them away – and s/he should probably take the business ones away from Larry – he never looks at them anyhow).
11. To Paul, all the ancient course modules that go back to the beginning of the college and document one side of the
12. To the dumpster, the 1994 set of Books in Print which were given to us by the Utica Unit (which I presume has a later set). But please don't remove them from the bottom shelf of the brown bookcase (see bequest to Paul and Jim above)



Xenia Coulter

division in the college between the right side (who mentor) and the wrong side (who teach) – ha ha – I just don't know where they are right now – they used to be in one of the small bookcases (that were once my parents and I took them back). Hopefully, Laurie put them somewhere safe – check out the module on electronic music – pretty nifty (if completely unusable). There's also a module written by Richard Ford (or some other famous writer who lives in Albany). Clearly these are valuable – in a pinch you could sell them for AI money!

unless you find something else to hold the bookcase stable.

13. To Paul, “priceless” documents (e.g., minutes, reports, e-mails, policy statements) dating back 20 years plus no-longer-available college publications dating back almost to the beginning. (But please see warning above regarding their removal from the bottom shelf of the other Kmart bookcase).
14. To Barbara, and if she doesn’t want it, to CNY, my desk. I purchased this from a bank in Stony Brook nearly 30 years ago for \$15 and refinished it (for a lot more than \$15). I’m sure it’s worth something – maybe a lot! (Peg Morrison might know)
15. To Jim, the hand-made posters showing the changes for Empire State College students in the amount and source of their “general education” studies between 1975 and 1990 that I presented at a general education conference in Seattle Washington sometime in the ’90s. They’re stuck behind one of the bookcases in my no-longer-my office. Back then general education seemed intellectually interesting ...
16. To Laurie, the typewriter table that I “removed” from my office at Stony Brook when I came to Empire State College. If you should ever want to get rid of it, please call me first – it’s a **great** table!
17. I took with me the videos I made in which I explained to students how to turn on a computer and how to type up a degree program, but I’d be happy to give them to someone if interested. (I also have a video from 1984 of me selling Empire State College on local TV – that one’s for sale, however)



Fellow mentors and President Moore celebrate Xenia’s years with the college.

18. Diane and I are half owners of the refrigerator; Diane is whole owner of the microwave oven (thanks to the CSEA). You can have them, however. Some things don’t retain their value with age ...
19. Please take special care of the Empire State College small dark blue banner and the Ithaca Unit sign – they go way way back. Someday, when orange becomes passé and we return to black and white (or blue), you won’t have to hide them when the president comes visiting ... (or they may become acceptable as antiques, yes?)
20. Most important – the electric pencil sharpener – I think I’ve kind of left Jim out of things here, so I bequeath it to him. I love that thing – it’s just too bad that I don’t use pencils anymore. Please take good care of it (thank you).
21. Have I left anyhow out? Omigod – my orange sweater! It would be a source of great happiness to me if this sweater remains forever on the coat hook to remind folks of the days when we (well, let’s say, Diane) fought daily about the heat (too little, too much) or the air conditioning (ditto). That sweater, which has a large hole in it, was about to be thrown out nearly 30 years ago by the wife of a math professor at Stony Brook (famous for developing the math which turns strings inside out) and somehow or another I ended up with it. Gosh, it’s old enough to be worth something,



Xenia proudly displays one of her gifts, a framed photo of herself and one of her students.

don’t you think ... ? And anyhow, you never know when you might need a sweater, right?

Please feel free to exchange items among yourselves if you like.



Xenia Coulter and colleague Dick Gotti.

Danuta

Regina Grol, Niagara Frontier Center



Regina Grol

My parents came to France as refugees from Poland at the end of 1969. Initially, they rented a small flat on Boulevard Brune, but a few months later they moved to a 16th floor apartment on a nearby street, which offered a splendid view of the Eiffel Tower. I liked the view, the ambience of their quarters, not to mention the pampering and affection they showered on my children and me during our visits. Yet, there was a persistent irritant during each of my stays – sudden appearances of a nosy neighbor. Whenever I came to see my parents in Paris, I would also – inescapably – see Danuta, who resided in the same high-rise, and had a habit of showing up uninvited.

Although she was exactly my age, we seemed to have little in common. I rarely found conversations with her interesting. Yet I felt I had to make concessions. Although

Paris beckoned and time spent with my parents was precious, not to appear rude, I engaged in trivial chitchat with her. Danuta's intrusions regularly marred my otherwise wonderful visits.

For more than 30 years, Danuta was my mother's neighbor. I was perpetually puzzled by the nature of their relationship. I ascribed their frequent contacts to the loneliness of the two women, both emigres, both rather uncomfortable in the French culture, both tossed to Paris by an accident of fate. Danuta became a "Parisienne" by marriage, whisked from a village in Poland by a Frenchman of Polish extraction, who lured her with false promises of riches; and my parents left Warsaw in the aftermath of the Polish government's ugly anti-Semitic campaign in 1968.

I could not understand why my parents put up with Danuta's company. They had quite a few other friends, so why *her*, I marveled. What did they, Jewish intellectuals, liberal and honest to a fault, have in common with Danuta – bigoted, anti-Semitic, simpleminded, quarrelsome, dishonest? She stole from her employers and bragged about it. She used ethnic slurs in her comments about her Jewish bosses, and, some years later, revealed to my mother she had voted for le Pin, the fascist candidate for the presidency of France. My father had passed away by then.

I doubt he would have tolerated Danuta's presence under his roof after such an admission. In fact, I am convinced that's where he would have drawn the line. But my mother continued to condone her visits.

If one needed any additional evidence of Danuta's anti-Semitism, her own mother provided it. On her several visits to Paris, her mother divulged to mine Danuta's "pronouncements" that hit even closer home. For example, Danuta allegedly envied my mother her bigger apartment and referred to her as "*ta Zydowa*" (that kike) behind my mother's back.

My mother overlooked that, too. Perhaps, given Danuta's very tense and troubled relationship with her parents, she chose not to believe these denunciations. Yet years later Mother told me about them, so the disclosures must have been hurtful, for she retained them in her memory for very long.

Despite Danuta's very objectionable qualities, she grew to be more than merely a neighbor. She became my mother's substitute daughter and a repository of our family's stories. My mother, in turn, became Danuta's surrogate parent and, primarily, a shoulder to cry on. One might even say she became Danuta's "Wailing Wall." Mother was repeatedly called upon to listen patiently to Danuta's tales of woe about fights with her husband, her mother, her brother; her discovery that she was an illegitimate child; or her troubles with her two sons. For years, my mother would open her doors and her heart to Danuta, console her, cheer her up, give her presents, and regularly dispense advice on diverse subjects, from fashion to finance, and – repeatedly – on ways to maintain peace of mind and peace at home.

I have to acknowledge that Danuta reciprocated by rendering Mother some favors. She forwarded my mother's mail whenever Mother left town for extended periods of time, mostly to visit my sister in Italy. On several occasions, when Mother was already elderly and frail, Danuta accompanied her to the railway station to help her board a train and place her luggage on a shelf. Danuta also patiently listened to



Regina with her mother, 1947

Mother's stories; even when, as Mother aged, they became repetitious ... Yet, even then I did not give Danuta credit for her kindness. I believed – cynical as my bent of mind was – that she listened because Mother's apartment was a place of refuge, preferable to her own home, where turmoil was the rule.

After my father passed away in 1999, Mother refused to consider relocation, or, as she put it, “further transplantations.” (She found America too daunting, Italy too chaotic.). I felt particularly sorry for my mother then, sorry that she ended up living in Paris alone, with my sister and me miles away. I presumed that, as an elderly and lonely emigre, she was forced by necessity to accept Danuta's presence in her life. And yet I still viewed their relationship with great ambivalence. For, despite Danuta's crassness, their contacts continued. Over and over again, I was amazed by my mother's tolerance.

When in late May of 2004 my mother left for her annual visit to Italy, the last one as it turned out, it was again Danuta who was entrusted with the key to Mother's apartment and with forwarding her mail.

Shortly after my Mother's funeral in Italy, when I went to Paris to face the most unpleasant task of liquidating my parents' apartment, Danuta turned up repeatedly. She would drop by, out of the blue as usual, and would interfere with my sorting, packing, reviewing of papers and documents, that is, with all the chores I had to complete under tremendous pressure of time. While I was reluctant to accept her offers of help, she was relentless in reiterating them. At first, I suspected her of calculated niceness, as she stood to receive many things from my parents' apartment, but I had to change my mind ... She actually ended up being quite helpful in dealing with the building administration and in demystifying the workings of local bureaucracies.

Moreover, she told me stories I had never heard before about the beginnings of her friendship with

my mother. She recalled how they met in the street when they were both relative newcomers to France; how Mother approached her, hearing Danuta speak Polish to her little son; how their accidental street encounters became more frequent; how Mother, who had contemplated moving into a different neighborhood, ultimately opted for the building where Danuta lived, despite its proximity to a railway track.

I listened to these tales eagerly. They made me feel my mother's presence when she was already gone. Yet Danuta's account of my mother's last phone call from Italy, when – as Danuta reported – Mother had asked to be met at the train station and Danuta dissuaded her from coming back to Paris so soon, disturbed me. In my mind I questioned Danuta's motives again. Entrusted with the keys to my mother's apartment, did Danuta want to have it all to herself a bit longer? Did she try to postpone Mother's return for selfish and self-serving reasons?

In late August, the day I was leaving France, Danuta dropped by again. She looked wistfully at the empty apartment and was not the chatterbox she tended to be on previous occasions. She seemed unusually

pensive. Her voice was breaking as she spoke of her real sense of loss, and she could not hold back her tears. I was genuinely surprised by her emotional outburst, by her sobbing and her very apparent grief. Her tears moved me deeply. The fact that a woman of Danuta's ilk, so rough on the edges and so bigoted, could cry profusely over my Jewish mother's passing made me see the neighbor in a different light. It also made me realize what an exceptional human being my mother had been to elicit such grief. I grew to appreciate even more Mother's rare generosity of spirit.

I also understood how deeply Danuta cared for my mother. Clearly, this was a more complex relationship than I had been willing to concede. Upon my return to the United States, I wrote Danuta, expressing my gratitude for her many years of friendship with my mother. I understood at long last that while I loved my mother dearly, called her often, wrote regularly, and visited whenever I could, Danuta was physically there, when I could not be; that she and Mother had become close in ways not apparent to me for years; that despite appearances to the contrary, despite my contempt and ambivalence, Danuta's presence in my mother's life may well have been a gift. Perhaps a less than perfect gift, but a gift nevertheless. I consider her weeping a testimonial to my mother's magnanimity and count it, along with an Italian grave digger's gesture of putting a single rose on my mother's coffin, among the most touching farewells honoring my mother.

On Transformational Learning

Eva M. Ash, Long Island Center

The following essay is a version of a paper that Eva Ash gave at the 17th Annual Conference on The Teaching of Psychology, sponsored by SUNY Farmingdale, in March 2003, held in Ellenville, NY.

Personal Introduction

Over the last few years, I began to realize I was having one of those “a-ha” moments where something new was just trying to get into my brain: I kept getting confronted by the same new phrase. The phrase was “transformational learning.” It was new to me perhaps because my field is clinical psychology and not adult education theory or developmental psychology. Although trained as a clinician, I fell into academia several years ago and never left. I now suspect I may choose to stay.



Eva Ash

I arrived at Empire State College in 1998 with only a little previous teaching experience and without any real training in pedagogy (or andragogy as the case may be). Furthermore, I found there to be limited time and resources for developing myself as an adult educator. Nonetheless, my colleagues at the Long Island Center and I muddle through this process of mentoring adult learners. Several years ago we were struggling with the idea of assessing the skills of our new students. We talked about trying to get a Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) grant to develop our own skills for working with students who needed developmental skills work. We were particularly concerned with students who were writing and thinking at the pre-college level. We were looking for creative solutions since our overworked writing instructors couldn't do the job alone.

At one point, a colleague distributed a chapter from a book. The chapter was “Teaching with Developmental Intention.” The book was Jack Mezirow's (2000) *Learning As Transformation*. As a result of that conversation, I developed a course called “Critical Thinking and Writing in the Social Sciences.” But I wouldn't say that Mezirow's ideas particularly influenced the development of that course. You see, I need to be hit over the head with an idea a few times before I fully let it in.

About six months after that, just a few weeks before proposals for a teaching-of-psychology conference were due, I was confronted once again with the idea of transformative learning. A colleague had invited Kathleen King to talk during our faculty

development series on the topic of adults-as-transformative learners. King has published some of the empirical studies that test the theory of transformative learning, as well as an interesting research instrument that measures whether transformational learning has taken place (King 1997, 2003; see also *All About Mentoring*, Issue 25 for King's text of the faculty developmental presentation). I've used the teaching-of-psychology conference in the past to challenge myself to learn something new, so I promptly wrote a proposal. I still really didn't understand what transformational learning was, or how it fit into adult learning theory, but I hoped I would learn something that I could use to help my students.

At that point I understood that transformational learning had to do with helping students re-evaluate their beliefs, frame of reference, and process of learning in such a way that they made potentially life-changing decisions. It sounded interesting to me, but nowhere did I hear practical suggestions for actually working with my students. I had questions such as: Do I want to become a transformative educator? How exactly would I do that? Is this just the latest way of teaching critical thinking skills or promoting active learning?

This essay chronicles my journey to answer those questions. What I'll share with you is a review of the theory of transformational learning, strategies often used by educators which may or may not be transformational, specific suggestions for how to foster transformational learning, and two anecdotes of students I've worked with who I believe have experienced transformational learning.

Reviewing the Theory of Transformational Learning

Jack Mezirow, emeritus professor of adult education at Teachers College Columbia

University, is considered the “father” of transformational learning. The theory is, in some ways, a response to the work of Malcolm Knowles who in the mid-1970s and early 1980s made popular the idea of self-directed adult learning. (I’m sure Knowles’ work is well known to many Empire State College faculty members, especially our founding mentors.) Mezirow began articulating his theory soon after the publication of Knowles’ 1975 book, *Self-Directed Learning: A Guide for Learners and Teachers*, but Mezirow’s work didn’t become widely known until the publication of *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood* in 1990. The theory is grounded in the work of Paolo Freire and Jurgen Habermas. Namely, Mezirow situates transformational learning within Freire’s four levels of consciousness which progress from a learner’s preoccupation with survival needs, to an internalization of the oppressor’s values, to a questioning of values, and finally to the highest level where learners engage in action to bring about social change. He also uses Habermas’ three domains of learning: the technical (or skill) domain, the practical (or social and interpersonal) domain, and the emancipatory (or self) domain (Baumgartner, 2001; Cranton, 1994).

So then what exactly is transformational learning? The most straightforward definition I found, after delving into the books and articles written on the topic since 1990, comes from Patricia Cranton’s (1994) excellent theoretical and practical guide *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*. She writes: “Transformative learning is a process of examining, questioning, validating, and revising” our perceptions of our experiences (p. 23). A major assumption inherent in this definition is written about extensively in Mezirow’s books: Meaning is constructed by the individual by interpreting experiences in the world. Also at the heart of the theory is the idea that critical self-reflection must take place in order for transformational learning to occur. Critical self-reflection involves challenging our assumptions, asking questions about why we think the way we do and how we know what we know, and exploring alternative perspectives. According to Mezirow (1990, 2000), when one’s

assumptions are found to be invalid, that is when transformative learning can take place.

Mezirow outlined 10 phases of transformational learning based on empirical studies of returning adult students. The first phase is the experience of a disorienting dilemma such as divorce, job loss, or death of a family member. This is followed by “self-examination” and “critical assessment of internalized role assumptions.”

The middle phases are dominated by talking with others and coming to an understanding that others understand and experience similar crises, exploring new roles, building self-confidence in new roles, and finally “reintegrating into society”

(as cited in Cranton, 1994, p. 23). Specific “distorted” assumptions that may be challenged include epistemic assumptions such as “I read it in this textbook, therefore it must be true,” sociolinguistic assumptions, such as “women who get abused are weak ... they should just leave,” and psychological assumptions such as “I’m not smart enough to go to college.” What becomes clear at this point is Mezirow’s reach. He is not simply advocating for an adult learning theory that focuses on helping students become better thinkers and writers (although he is for that), and he is not espousing a theory intent on teaching new skills and theories. Instead, he is clearly in the camp of Freire when he articulates a theory of transformational learning intent on emancipation from restrictive roles. This is a theory of liberation.

So what this means to me, on a very practical level, is that transformational learning is no easy task. It isn’t easy for a learner, adult or otherwise, to engage in it, and it isn’t easy for an educator to foster it.

Immediately, this makes me think about my adult students at Empire State College. Adults return to college for lots of reasons: They need a degree in order to keep their job or move up the ladder at work; an event like 9/11, or impending retirement, or divorce or widowhood, or layoff from their job has forced them to re-evaluate their goals, and they realize they need more education or education in a new area in order to meet those new goals; or the kids

have finally gone to school, and the adult learner realizes now it is his or her turn to go to college.

But I’ve never had a student tell me she is returning to college in order to question the assumptions on which she’s based her life and is eager to change her entire belief system in order to be liberated from restrictive roles. Furthermore, my job description (and training and resources provided) seems less focused on

But I’ve never had a student tell me she is returning to college in order to question the assumptions on which she’s based her life and is eager to change her entire belief system in order to be liberated from restrictive roles.

this kind of emancipatory, personal growth-centered education and much more focused on a combination of the traditional subject-oriented education where teachers teach (content) and students learn theories and skills, and the only slightly more radical consumer-oriented model where teachers are mentors and resource people and students are gloriously self-directed. So now that I was intrigued enough by the theory of transformational learning to begin to question if I could and should learn how to foster it in my students, I thought I had better understand more about what it is and what it is not.

More questions swirled through my head: How is this related to critical thinking skills? What about Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule’s (1996) *Women’s Ways of Knowing*; is there a connection? Is transformational learning simply about promoting more active learning? Is self-directed learning a necessary pre-requisite for transformational learning? And finally, how often does transformational learning

take place, even when ideal learning conditions are met? In other words, what are my chances of actually seeing some transformations if I know what to do to foster them and I know where to look for the changes?

Transformational Learning: Is It Just the Newest Name for Critical Thinking?

My assumption is that all of us seek to help our students learn new material, critically evaluate what they read, improve their thinking and writing skills, and figure out how to integrate all of that into their post-college plans. But, of course, we all come from varied backgrounds, and we were trained in various eras when one or another “hot theory” was the pedagogical method *du jour*. Several of these methods are particularly interesting to me as I examine whether mentoring for transformational learning is a worthy goal. These include teaching critical thinking skills, using active learning approaches, promoting self-directed learning, and analyzing knowledge using feminist theory.

A focus on critical thinking skills involves teaching logical thinking, fostering reasoning skills, requiring an examination of the premises of an argument, encouraging the exploration of evidence presented, and demonstrating that it is fine to be skeptical of claims. These techniques, I believe, are particularly good for addressing the epistemic assumptions that Mezirow mentions our students have such as those I mentioned earlier: “I read it in the textbook, therefore it must be true,” and/or the sociolinguistic assumptions such as “Women who get abused are weak; they should just leave.”

Using active learning techniques with our students involve some or all of the following: getting away from the strict lecture format, including discussion and other activities like writing or performing a debate, using cooperative learning, including small group work where each group works on a problem and reports back to the larger group on what they found. These techniques get students doing things and get them thinking about what they’re doing. Active

learning also fosters a sense that neither mentor, nor textbook, nor student are necessarily experts, yet all three (and other) resources can work together to produce knowledge.

Self-directed learning, often hallowed at Empire State College, comes from a tradition where the student collaborates with the mentor/teacher to determine learning goals and learning activities, and the student actively participates in assessment of his or her learning. This assumes that students are motivated, have the skills to collaborate, and know what they need to learn. Self-directed learning challenges the assumption that knowledge flows in one direction from teacher to student, with the most active work being done by the teacher. It also seems to me that self-directed learning can significantly contribute to the transformation of students by helping students engage in what Mezirow calls “critical self reflection.”

Feminist theory can also make its contribution, as in Belenky et al.’s (1996) *Women’s Ways of Knowing*. Just as Mezirow argues that meaning is constructed by the individual through the process of interpreting his or her experiences in the world, Belenky and her colleagues argue that knowledge can be constructed in a particularly female way. Their book talks of a sort of connected knowing that looks for strengths and not weaknesses in another’s argument, uses empathy to understand a new/different idea, and uses collaboration to develop new ideas. They argue for mid-wife teachers who draw out a student’s best thinking by focusing on strengths, deemphasizing classroom hierarchies, and connecting students to each other. They also promote the exploration of women’s knowledge domains (i.e., motherhood) as disciplines not traditionally recognized by the academy.

It seems to me that none of these techniques or philosophies alone necessarily leads to transformational learning, but some combination of them, depending on the student’s needs and the mentor’s strengths, can contribute to transformational learning. We can (and should) teach them to be critical and careful readers and thinkers; we can encourage them to work independently

and pursue individualized goals. However, Mezirow would say that we must also model critical self-reflection so that students can make major changes in the way they see themselves and their goals. Perhaps I, perhaps all of us, are closer to fostering transformational learning on a somewhat regular basis than we realize.

How Can We Foster Transformational Learning?

When I first presented this paper, my audience was made up entirely of teachers of psychology. I argued that as teachers of psychology, we were in a unique position to help our students learn about themselves and their learning. Psychology students are sometimes all too eager to use their psychology course as a form of therapy. We can harness that willingness to self reflect and that openness to change in order to help them both learn specific concepts and reflect on their own experiences in such a way as to foster transformational learning. Depending on the student, I believe that the specific psychology studies that have the greatest potential for transformational learning include Adult Development, Women’s Issues in Psychology, Lifespan Human Development, Social Psychology, Theories of Counseling, and Psychology of Addictions. I would be interested to hear from colleagues in other disciplines how this may or may not be true for them and their students. I suspect many of us who teach in the one-to-one model, no matter the discipline, are uniquely situated for promoting transformative learning.

So by now I was convinced. I heard about transformational learning over and over from colleagues I respected, but didn’t really know what it was. I read the theory and became convinced that it was a worthy goal. A pedagogy of liberation? Sounds right to me. I even suspect that some of the techniques I already use, such as critical thinking skills and active learning, will promote transformation. I still struggled to understand how to do it. What exactly do the proponents of transformational learning suggest we use with our students?

Mezirow (1990) says that mentors/teachers who facilitate transformational learning must:

- Provide a relationship; the interaction is necessary to identify alternative perspectives.
- Offer emotional support and empowerment.
- Increase learner awareness (unlike in self-directed learning theory, the learner doesn't necessarily know what s/he needs to learn).
- Help learners question their assumptions; raise their consciousness.
- Model critical self-reflection.
- Help learners revise their assumptions.
- Provide models for functioning in the new perspective.

Although helpful, Mezirow's ideas seem to me to tell us *how* to be rather than what to do. I decided to keep looking for specific suggestions about what I could do with my students to promote transformational learning.

Cranton (1994) discusses several ways to promote transformational learning:

- Revise our goals from increased content knowledge to personal development.
- Give up our power as authority figures; enter into a co-learner role.
- Use our personal power instead (based in our expertise, charisma, and caring).
- Provide a high level of support and a high level of challenge.
- Stimulate equal participation in discussions.
- Increase learner decision making, (but be very sensitive to whether the learners have enough information to make good decisions).
- Model critical self-reflection; ask questions of what you know, how you know it, and why you know it in that way.
- For the secure learners, challenge their thinking.
- For less secure learners, provide provocative ideas for discussion.

These are also helpful for figuring how what kind of mentor to be, but these suggestions

only add a dash more specificity than Mezirow's suggestions did.

Kitchener and King (in Mezirow, 1990) provide suggestions closer to what I was looking for. Their suggestions for classroom assignments include:

- Identify two or more points of view on an issue.
- Ask questions (of the student, of the text) such as: What do you believe about an issue? What evidence supports your view? What evidence is contrary to your belief?
- Compare and contrast two competing views. Evaluate the evidence each argument uses.

Okay, now we're talking about what to do, but it sounds pretty much like teaching critical thinking skills to me. I was struck by the lack of self-improvement or emancipatory focus.

I reflected on this and on what I already ask students to do, and developed some specific assignments that I believe have the potential to foster transformational learning.

- Papers that ask the student to reflect on an experience they have had and apply theory they are reading to that experience. For example, students reflect on growing up in a household/neighborhood with strong racial prejudices and discuss how reading social psychological theories of prejudice has changed their view of the topic; or student reflects on her own experience as a victim of domestic violence while applying women's development theory and/or feminist theory to the situation.
- A paper, perhaps for a Theories of Personality contract, that asks students not to try to determine which theory is "right" but which asks them to answer the question "which is most useful under a particular circumstance?" For example, for a student who works with developmentally disabled adults, a paper that explores which theories are most useful for understanding the personality development of those clients.

- A paper or oral presentation that integrates theory from the text with a human example. For example, student discusses competing theories on language acquisition, discusses her/his own child's language development, applies one or more aspects of the theories to the child, and critiques the theory answering the question "what did it do a good job explaining and where was it lacking?"

- A paper that analyzes a character in a movie using theory from the text. For example, the student analyzes the behavior of the characters in *Leaving Las Vegas* from both a disease model and a psychodynamic model of addiction.

- Journal writing, which may include both a reading summary and a reader's response.

- An assignment that allows students to do creative work: art or poetry about a topic. For example, a student writes a poem from the perspective of an autistic child along with a brief explanation of the artistic choices made.

- Integration of experiential learning into a course. For example, an internship, a visit to observe a treatment facility or support group, an interview of a program administrator, or the compilation of a community resource list.

- Discussion with mentor about theories of adult learning using student's (and mentor's) own learning as an example.

- Oral or written assignment focused on compiling an autobiography or learning autobiography.

- Roleplay where each student (or each group) takes on the position of a famous theorist and engages in dialogue trying to justify own position.

I'd been doing many of these kinds of activities before I heard of transformational learning, but after reading Mezirow and his followers, I realize my assignments are missing a follow-up step which Mezirow says is crucial for the transformational learning to take place. After the learning

activities, a critical discourse based on the experience is necessary because this is the point where students may challenge previously held beliefs and roles. I know many of my Empire State colleagues already incorporate this step with their students, usually in a final reflection paper that requires the student to integrate personal learning with the content learning.

This realization that I may already be using techniques with my students that foster transformational learning inspired me to critically reflect on students I've worked with who may indeed have been transformed through their work at Empire State College.

Examples of Students Who Have Experienced Transformational Learning

How frequently does transformational learning take place? For many reasons, it is very difficult to say for sure, but theorists and practitioners alike say it probably does not occur very frequently (Mezirow and Associates, 2000). Like any group of students, a group of adult learners will include some who are most interested in gaining a credential and won't necessarily take the time to reflect on their own learning. Furthermore, even the most conscientious educator who facilitates transformational learning in somewhat willing students may not see the change in the learner. The transformation may never occur, or it may occur months or years after we know the learner, or it may be most noticeable at home. Rarely are we privileged to have a relatively longstanding and empowering relationship with a student, yet those students are the ones most likely to both experience transformative learning and share it with us. I have two examples to share of students who I believe experienced transformative learning.

Zarelda was a 45-year old divorced woman returning to college after a long absence when I first met her. She became my advisee and we worked together for over three years while she earned a bachelor's degree in human services. When I first met her she told me that she wanted to be either a drug and alcohol counselor or a social worker

who would work with women who had been abused. After some time, I learned that she believed she could do those jobs because of her experiences with her substance abusing ex-husband. She told me once that she had learned a lot and could help other women not make the mistakes she had made. She took several content courses with me in both group and independent study formats (Human Development, Psychology of Addictions, Theories of Counseling). She also completed academic planning with me where she added a third career path as a possibility for herself: probation officer.

It was during the Theories of Counseling study (her last before graduation) that I think I saw her transformational learning occur. We began the course with a personal reflection paper in which I asked her to write about her beliefs and assumptions about herself and others that would impact her as a counselor. She wrote mostly about her behaviorist beliefs and reiterated that her "having been there" would make her a good counselor. During this contract she read various theories, wrote a paper that asked her to apply theories to a case example (she chose her ex-husband), and discussed what she was learning. The final assignment asked her to revise that first personal reflection paper, integrating her new learning into the paper.

In this final paper, I was pleasantly surprised to find more than simply a reiteration of her earlier contention that behavior is learned and new behavior can be stimulated by the environment. In the revision she successfully integrated Skinner's concepts into her own behavioral perspective. More importantly, perhaps, she wrote about how challenging she realized it will be to counsel women who have been in situations similar to hers or people who are addicted to drugs. She also wrote that she had come to understand that advice giving was not what counseling was about. She also had now understood

that the very thing that made her an "expert" on domestic violence and substance abuse could hinder rather than help her counseling, depending on how she dealt with her own issues. The last time I saw her, she was considering graduate school in social work, but she was also considering remaining in her profession as a paralegal until she had completed more personal therapy and more introspection about whether taking a pay cut and entering a "helping profession" was what she really wanted.

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Most striking to me in this case is the evidence that she revised her assumptions both about the profession (counseling isn't about giving advice) and about herself (having "been there" may make it harder and not easier to

counsel battered women). And her revised assumptions led to a significant change in her goals.

Tony was a 40-year old single male with no previous college experience when I first met him. He became my advisee, and we worked together for over four years until he graduated with a bachelor's degree in human services. My first impressions were not favorable. His oral communication skills were not strong, and he seemed hesitant to do much more than answer direct questions politely and perfunctorily. As time progressed, I learned that he had great fears about going to college. For years he had been told he was stupid; he had been classified as emotionally disturbed in school. He had spent years as an adult in the mental health system and the substance abuse treatment system. He also had brief military experience and clearly believed that I was another authority figure who could provide him with knowledge if he obeyed and followed directions.

The first changes I saw in him that might be indicative of transformational learning showed up in his writing. While his oral

communication skills remained problematic through much of his college career, his written communication skills flourished. While he was still not so willing to challenge me (or the text) during discussions, he was clearly able to think critically, evaluate arguments, and make arguments in his papers. He always did whatever I asked him to do, that is, until he graduated. After graduation he called me numerous times asking for advice about graduate school. I helped him explore some of his options, but I also made it clear that I thought he would be best served if he worked for a while in his new human services job, explored the potential for tuition reimbursement, and picked the brains of people in his organization to determine if a clinical degree or an administrative degree would be best for him. The best evidence I have for his transformation is that he soundly *rejected* my advice. Shortly after our last conversation about graduate school, I got a polite request from him to write graduate school letters of recommendation.

Final Thoughts

Shortly after I presented this paper at a conference for teachers of psychology, Jack Mezirow himself was invited by the Mentoring Institute to talk to Empire State College faculty (See *All About Mentoring*, Issue 26). Unfortunately, I wasn't able to attend, but it cemented for me the thought that I was right to finally let this new thought into my head. Frankly, I had set out to try to debunk the idea of transformational learning. I really thought it was just the latest buzzword in pedagogy and not all that different from promoting critical thinking skills. Although I was convinced that teaching critical thinking skills was crucial, I wasn't convinced that promoting potentially life altering changes, including complete reevaluations of previously held beliefs and roles, was a realistic part of my job description.

But I think fostering transformational learning is both a realistic and worthwhile goal. Perhaps here at Empire State College, where some of us have the luxury of developing close, individualized working relationships with adults who are already in a transition stage (Mezirow would say they

have experienced a disorienting dilemma), we are uniquely situated to assist in the transformation of students. Is it hard work? You bet; not everyone wants to critically re-evaluate long-held beliefs. Will the methods work with every student? No, but what does?

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Obscure Elegy: A Series of Personal Photographs

David Fullard, Metropolitan Center

This series of photographs titled “Obscure Elegy” is from a larger body of work called “Rapid Eye Movement (R.E.M.) Series.” Rapid eye movement is the recurring portion of a sleep state in which dreams occur. This work in progress, unlike my photo reportage and commercial work, is a personal “photographic observance” of a recurring dream as I remember it.

As the title of these photos implies, these fragmented dreams have an elusive, enigmatic and ineffable quality about them. As I experience these dreams, they are simultaneously arousing and

eluding my need to comprehend and explain their meanings. Another important characteristic of these dreams is their pensive, brooding, and lamenting quality.

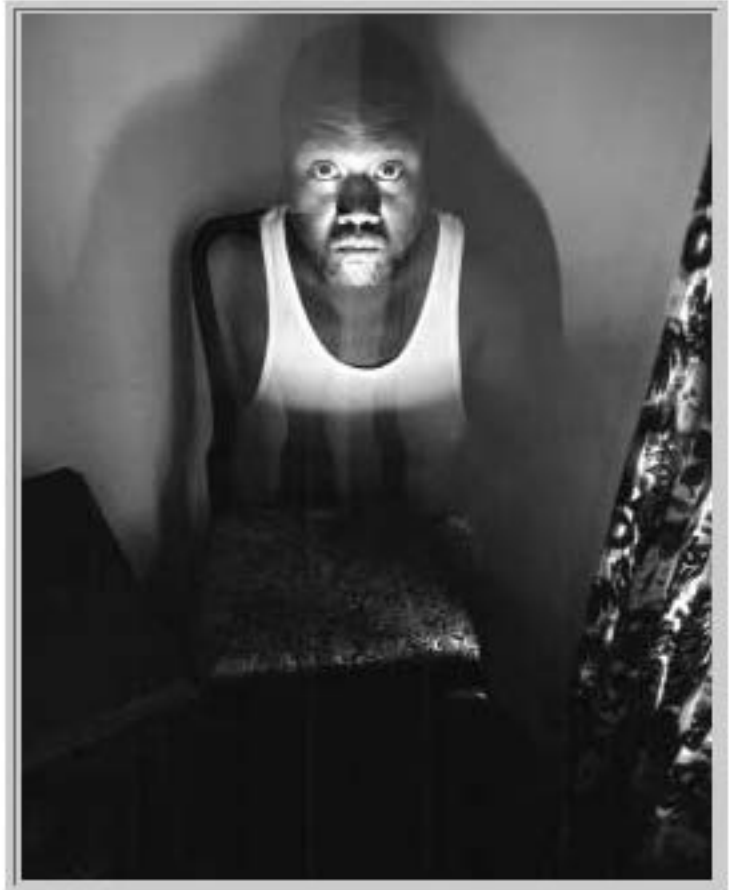
The actual content of the dream involves a perplexing mix of superimposed images that, at times, seems less obscure and at other times unclear, but always subtly mysterious.

These photographs represent the early exploratory stages of an ongoing project. To be continued.









Too Many Boundaries?

Eric Ball, Center for Distance Learning

Nadine Fernandez, Center for Distance Learning and Central New York Center

Cathy Leaker, Long Island Center

The following deliberations served to introduce a conversation with colleagues at the 2004 All Areas of Study Meeting.

Eric Ball

The institutionalization of boundaries, distinctions, and categories is an ambivalent process. It can facilitate creative, productive thinking and it can also get in its way. Lately, I have been thinking about certain humanities and social science categories (there's two already) that are institutionalized at Empire State College, and in the academy at large. I have been trying to imagine how, especially from the perspective of the undergraduate student, these might be invoked to facilitate and/or function to hinder a learner's entry into the fields, questions, interests, or concerns that he or she might have come here to study in the first place.

At this particular juncture in the college's history, we have a fair number of such institutionalized categories. These include the areas of study themselves (e.g., Cultural Studies; Historical Studies; Social Theory, Social Structure and Change) and the recent addition of SUNY general education categories (e.g., Humanities, Social Sciences, Western Civilization, Other World Civilizations). As such, these are some of the categories that I find myself having to discuss with my students, especially when it comes to Educational Planning in both its formal and informal moments. At a glance, these categories seem simple enough to work with: The general education categories serve to delineate certain broad domains of learning that must be included in a student's degree program; the areas of study outline even broader, overlapping approaches to knowledge within which – or, for Interdisciplinary Studies degrees, among which – students design a concentration. For instance, we might say that a course or a learning contract in philosophy can fulfill the Humanities requirement within a degree



(l-r) Eric Ball, Cathy Leaker and Nadine Fernandez

program, but that a degree program itself that focuses on philosophy is in Cultural Studies, and that it therefore addresses the guidelines of that area of study.

A closer look, however, suggests that these categories and boundaries might not be quite so easy to wrap our heads around. For example, the humanities and social sciences, which are so neatly divided into two distinct general education categories, are currently more intertwined and harder to distinguish than ever before. The evidence is everywhere, so I will simply share a couple of quotations. The other day, I picked up a recent introductory book on sociological theory co-edited by a faculty member at the University at Albany, which had the following blurb on the back cover: “The last decade has seen a dramatic shift in the nature of social theory. The disciplinary divisions that used to divide the social sciences from the humanities are breaking down as are the divisions between theory and ethical and political issues of social justice and the good society” (Seidman and Alexander 2002). Scholars preoccupied with

the epistemological and methodological ramifications of this breakdown might put it as follows: “For more than two decades, a quiet methodological revolution has been taking place in the social sciences. A blurring of disciplinary boundaries has occurred. The social sciences and humanities have drawn closer together in a mutual focus on an interpretive, qualitative approach to research and theory. Although these trends are not new, the extent to which the ‘qualitative revolution’ has overtaken the social sciences and related professional fields has been nothing short of amazing” (Denzin and Lincoln 1998:vii). Even the 1965 National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act includes in its definition of the humanities “those aspects of social sciences which have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods” along with the more traditional humanities areas of “language, both modern and classical; linguistics; literature; history; jurisprudence; philosophy; archaeology; comparative religion; ethics, the history, theory and criticism of the arts” (University of Central Florida).

As Michael Payne, argues, “The characteristic divide between humanities and social sciences is particularly obstructive to cultural studies, which seeks to understand meanings as they are made, exchanged, and developed within wider social relations” (127). This claim suggests a more concrete example of potential confusion. Cultural Studies as an area of study seems to me like it is almost synonymous with Humanities as the latter term is used throughout most of the academy, except that the latter would also include history, which for us falls under a different area of study, and, as I already mentioned, the humanistic social sciences. Moreover, for the rest of the world, Cultural Studies already means something in particular, as the name of an interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary field that is partially responsible for having revolutionized much of the humanities and social sciences in the last couple of decades. So, imagine a student who would like to obtain a degree in, say, Native American Studies that covers multiple perspectives. In terms of conventional disciplinary boundaries, she might like to combine historical, anthropological, sociological, political science, literary, folkloric, and artistic questions and methods in her concentration.

It seems to me that recent developments promoting interdisciplinary fields such as cultural studies would be liberating for such a student. She could simply pursue an individualized degree in cultural studies, because the mainstream academic field of cultural studies already implies traversing these and other disciplines in creative and unique ways. Yet, it seems like our own areas of study would be pulling her in the direction of Interdisciplinary Studies, and that she might be asked to negotiate and to address college guidelines in Social Theory, Social Structure and Change; Cultural Studies; and Historical Studies. And, this could come on top of her reading interdisciplinary scholarship which itself engages with and crosses conventional disciplinary boundaries. Although I recognize that it used to be common practice to distinguish sharply between the study of “society,” the study of “culture,” and the study of “history,” as a recent graduate trained in cultural studies, I also

realize that the recent trajectories of much scholarship and many academic departments radically question this taxonomy (see also Nadine Fernandez’s discussion below). Yet, our area of study categories seem to require mentors to ask students to think of their degrees in terms of such distinctions, and even “to decide” among such choices, and this can make me frustrated.

And so I find myself coming back to the same question over and over: If it is getting this confusing for the academy at large to think through these categories, how can mentors make enough sense of them to do good work with students? How can these

categories help an undergraduate imagine or think through what her academic path to a degree will be? But also, how much do these categories end up as little more than conceptual clutter that makes it unreasonably difficult for a student to articulate to himself, to his mentor, and to an assessment committee what his goals and plans are?

Part of me wants to say: “Thank goodness for all the confusion!” The overlaps, the ambiguities, and the contradictions are productive. To those who would offer a neat taxonomy of the human sciences, I say, “Good luck!” (That’s why after many years I’ve finally settled on organizing my books on my shelves in chronological order, not in terms of disciplines or fields.) Moreover, I recognize that such a neat, static, partitioning of knowledge on behalf of an institution would probably yield the false impression that humanities and social science scholars have expertly divided up the human world into coherent, manageable pieces, something which many of these scholars would be the first to claim is impossible, not to mention undesirable.

But another part of me wants to say: “Heaven help the student who is compelled to wade through so many of our categories in order to develop a suitable degree plan! It suffices to have all these wonderful contradictions and ambiguities and border crossings all around us and in the materials students study. It is unnecessary for the college to add to the confusion by institutionalizing our own complicated taxonomies as well.”

Do we or don’t we have *too many* boundaries?

Nadine Fernandez

Starting from Eric’s description of the general movement of the human sciences toward convergence and overlap, I want to discuss the particular case of sociology and anthropology. These two disciplines, which once

had more discrete boundaries, are now blending and blurring in ways that were unimaginable a few decades ago. If we had been asked to characterize anthropology and sociology 20 or 30 years ago we might have been able to sketch a neat dichotomy by making the following distinctions between these two fields of inquiry.

In terms of methodology, sociology would have been described as more quantitative, using large samples of people, and often employing surveys and statistical analysis in data collection and interpretation. Sociologists were concerned with how social conditions influence and shape the lives of individuals. Traditionally they focused their gaze on the United States or other industrialized societies. The problems they addressed included issues of social deviance, social control, social movements and change, and social stratification. Their theoretical roots grew out of Durkheim, Marx, and Weber and so too their focus on analyzing and understanding social institutions, bureaucracies, and social structures.

Anthropology, by contrast, developed a more qualitative methodology based on

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long-term participant observation usually involving smaller numbers of people. Key informants, individuals who developed especially close relationships with the anthropologist, often were the primary sources of data. This intensive and focused method emerged, in part, because the subject of the anthropological gaze was traditionally the small scale, non-industrialized, non-Western society. In the early part of the 20th century anthropologists worked with tribal peoples around the globe documenting these rapidly disappearing “primitive cultures.” Anthropologists considered their focus to be holistic. In these small-scale societies, their task was to learn about all social institutions, their structures and functions. They collected data on beliefs, values, social and family relations, governance, arts and music, rituals, food production and consumption patterns, etc. Anthropologists studied and described all aspects of culture, in its broadest sense – the way of life and modes of thinking and being of a people, the diversity of culture, and also comparison across cultures.

Now, of course, these distinctions obscure more than they illuminate anything about these two disciplines, their current engagement with theory and their directions. While in some ways the questions for sociologists and anthropologist have remained the same – understanding the human condition, and the relationship between the individual and society – how they go about answering these questions has changed. We now find sociologists doing more qualitative work, life histories, participant observation, and working in non-Western societies. Likewise, we find anthropologists studying the U.S. and other complex, industrialized societies around the world. They are exploring issues that decades ago we would have assigned to sociologists – such as urban social problems, drug abuse, and large scale institutions such as schools, hospitals and corporations. But perhaps more importantly, beyond this convergence of method and topic, we find sociologists and anthropologists reading the same theorists: Foucault, Bourdieu, Giddens, Habermas, Derrida (along with Marx, Weber, Boas, and Levi-Strauss). That is to say, the theoretical underpinnings informing

much recent work in sociology and anthropology are now very similar. Some of those clear boundaries are blurring, at least in terms of method, theory and the object of study for these two disciplines.

We also can jump another divide between these two social sciences and the humanities, particularly literature. The profound influence of literary criticism (especially poststructuralism and postmodernism) has been infused into both anthropology and sociology. In anthropology for example, we now see ethnographies as texts, subject to the same type of deconstruction you might employ in analyzing a novel including the examination of tropes, literary devices, and metaphors. Simultaneously we now see literature and novels as a sort of ethnography, and in anthropology courses it is not uncommon to find fiction used as a window into a culture. Also, conversely, much recent literary criticism and literary theory are concerned with literature as practice, as institution, and as culture. As such, this work is arguably also a contribution to a broader sociology and anthropology of literature.

With this trend toward convergences, blurring and overlapping boundaries, I ponder how we use our current Empire State College and SUNY categories in both advising our students and building degree plans, as well as in developing individualized studies and courses. I am in my initial months here at Empire State College, and I am still learning the processes and procedures of educational planning and designing individualized studies. However, already I find it fascinating and challenging to negotiate between the college’s categories and requirements, and my understandings of the disciplines and the moving boundaries in contemporary social science and social theory.

Cathy Leaker

Both Eric and Nadine have spoken eloquently to the value of boundary crossing, of challenging the illusion that either inquiry or knowledge can be neatly parceled into discrete and mutually exclusive categories. And I agree with their suggestion that students can benefit tremendously from a kind intellectual itinerancy. Still I worry

that interdisciplinarity can be confused with homogenization, particularly in terms of the kind of work – specifically the writing – we ask our students to do.

Eric rightly wonders whether students in degree planning might be paralyzed or misled by too many boundaries. I want to ask here whether students engaged in writing may be equally paralyzed or misled by too few boundaries. That is, I am concerned that in our attempts to clear away the kind of clutter that Eric rightly points out makes articulation difficult, we risk sweeping contextual and discursive multiplicity under the broad carpet of “writing” (or the slightly smaller throw rug of “college writing”). We then leave our students with the impression that writing is a decidedly uncluttered skill that not only transcends boundaries and disciplines but is independent of any context beyond the capricious whims of a given mentor on the one hand or the immutable “rules” of Standard Written English on the other. This trend towards the cloudy monolith is evident even in the language we use to identify studies and describe assignments; students enroll in College Writing in order to learn how to write a “paper” or a “research paper,” often without a sense of the distinctly different conceptual and rhetorical tasks that may be lurking within those fuzzy terms.* Even more problematic, when we imply that the work of distinct disciplines can be represented according to a single uniform code, we hide, according to Charles Bazerman, “the historical struggle of heterogeneous forces that lies behind the apparent regularity and the complexity of discourse that is played out against the school taught formulas of current convention” (63).

* I must confess to a peculiar semantic bias here. I find myself cringing whenever a student working with me in a component study talks about their writing projects as “reports.” Since I am trained in the humanities, specifically in literature, the term report has the derogatory connotations of “book report.” My concerns about the problems of thinking about writing in generic terms is hardly alleviated by the fact that in every case when a student has referred to their work as a report, he or she has indeed turned in a book report. I acknowledge, however, that my own tendency to refer to my students’ “essays” only perpetuates the problem.

Let me illustrate my concerns here by briefly explaining the reasons why English departments came to be the proprietors and guardians of the written word, of its most persistent “school taught formulas.” Those reasons communicate a particular ideology of writing, both what we assume it is and the kind of boundless work we insist it does (and doesn’t) perform. Following the argument of James Berlin and others, I suggest that writing was and is housed in English departments on the basis of two notably contradictory assumptions. On the one hand, writing is perceived as a technical tool, operating within a set of universal rules, and hence “good” writing is a matter of technical competence, of mastery of the rules. On the other hand, writing is perceived as an expressive art; in this paradigm, notes Berlin, “writing and reading practices are depicted as solitary acts providing the means to restore the individual to his or her true nature, or authentic self, putting the individual in touch with the inner voice that is each person’s unique center and guide” (105).

What’s absent in either of these constructions is the conception of writing as a social activity, as something other than the transmission of a unique message from one individual to another. That is to say, both the technical and the expressive rationales for locating writing in the English department subscribe to a generic paradigm of good writing; they deny the contexts for writing and occlude its negotiated meaning. Even more problematic for our students, it’s hard to avoid the conclusion that because it belongs to the discipline of English, writing is entirely incidental to the work that gets done in other disciplines. Yet if it’s true that, as Berlin suggests, a student “enters rather than generates a textual history” (108), and that this history is grounded in disciplinary ways of knowing, it seems to me that writing – conceived in terms of the specific rather than the generic – is not incidental but endemic to the knowledge produced in those disciplines. In this sense, we might say that writing is a bounded act.

But how, if at all, does the erasure of disciplinary boundaries within writing affect our students? What, if anything, do they lose if they are not exposed to the “textual histories” they enter when they write? In

other words, what’s wrong with a Community and Human Services (CHS) student or a Science, Mathematics and Technology (SMAT) student learning about writing in exactly the same generic terms a cultural studies student does? To answer this, let me offer a brief example from a discipline that seems as far removed from Cultural Studies as possible, a discipline for which writing – far from being transformative – appears to be nothing more than a transparent and transactional tool: biology.

I recently had an unsettling conversation with one of my students. T. is pursuing a Bachelor of Professional Studies degree in criminal justice, and he and I are working together on a study of the literature of true crime. (I want to note here that both the genre of true crime and the study have decidedly interdisciplinary elements.) As our discussion of his final project was winding down, T. began to tell me about his middle school-aged daughter who had written a research paper on AIDS for her science class and who had been punished for plagiarism by her science teacher. Eager to defend his daughter from a charge he felt was unfair, T. had first challenged the teacher’s interpretation of plagiarism, but then based his defense primarily on a disciplinary distinction. As he reported the conversation to me, “So then I said, ‘But you’re a science teacher; shouldn’t English teachers be the ones to worry about plagiarism? Your job is to teach science.’” While I didn’t give T. the validation he was seeking regarding the professional responsibilities of teachers, I did think about his comment for a long time because he clearly considered it a valid defense and was not offering it up as a last ditch desperate ploy.

... both the technical and the expressive rationales for locating writing in the English department subscribe to a generic paradigm of good writing; they deny the contexts for writing and occlude its negotiated meaning.

My sense is that T.’s perception emerges from precisely those two paradigms of writing – the technical and the expressive – according to which English seems to be the logical (and in his framework, the only) home of writing instruction. On the one hand, plagiarism is a technical issue (not an issue of values and integrity), and since English teachers are the technicians of language, they are also its sole policeforce; other disciplines are concerned with the content, with just the facts, and, therefore, have no business interfering in technical matters. This sense that any particular discipline’s primary commitment is solely to the facts (“your job is to teach science”) presents another, and for me more ominous, problem. Facts, in this construction, exist independently from the expression of those facts (particularly if expression is reduced to the outpourings of the authentic self). In a sense, then, language becomes both immutable and irrelevant, since it merely transmits facts. And, if language and/or expression is irrelevant, plagiarism (narrowly understood as passing off someone else’s words as your own) is literally impossible since any given fact (say, for example, the biochemical mechanism of HIV transmission) is part of the public domain and can hardly be construed as

intellectual property, much less “expression.” Such a construction of the relationship between facts and languages does more than simply confuse students as they try to negotiate the quagmire of academic integrity; it also, as Bonnie Spanier suggests, encourages a passive learning process and a passive student relationship to scientific information and its consequences (195).

Yet T.’s mistake here is not that he understood science to be distinct from English; indeed I would suggest that he is actually correct in assuming that the skills his daughter learns in English do not easily transfer to the science classroom. After all, both technique and expression look so

different in science than they do in English that they are literally unrecognizable. And if some students are misled by assuming that what is learned in English does not apply to other studies, others are equally misled by assuming that there is a perfect congruence between what and how they might write about Kafka and what and how they might write about anti-retroviral drugs. Indeed, as Brian Sutton notes, current research in composition studies suggests that “we should discourage students from assuming that what works in a [standard writing study] will always transfer, unaltered to assignments in other studies” (48). My contention here is that when students do encounter difficulties based upon assumptions of simple transference, they may well conclude (as T. did) that the reason for those difficulties is because writing belongs to one discipline and not another.

What I’m posing here seems to be a dilemma with only extreme answers. If it is true that writing skills do not easily transfer between one context and another (and that students struggle when they assume either that they absolutely do or that they absolutely don’t), then it would seem that in order to help T. (or his daughter) write effectively, either every mentor must take responsibility for exploring the nuances of technique and expression within his or her discipline and/or area of study or no mentor should assume that prerogative. Obviously the second option fails to acknowledge the real writing needs of students in an open admissions institution. The first option, however, would seem to elicit and indeed exacerbate precisely the kind of confusion Eric worries about when he suggests that the “conceptual clutter” of knowledge taxonomies (and to this I am adding the arcane rules of discourse conventions) “makes it unreasonably difficult for a student to articulate” his or her goals, beliefs, ideas, etc. Further, in calling students’ attention to the discourse conventions of each discipline, we risk enforcing rules that are both arbitrary and as Nadine notes, no longer even relevant to the actual work scholars are doing. Perhaps, then, keeping in mind the relatively sound andragogical principle of “first, do no harm,” the best solution is no solution at

all. Rather than risk multiplying confusion unnecessarily, we might keep doing what we have been doing (writing remains squarely within the boundaries of cultural studies) and address any confusion that results from that approach on an ad hoc basis.

But I would argue that there are steps we can take collectively to introduce our students to the distinct ways “writing” communicates and produces knowledge within, across, and without that nebulous entity “the academy.” More importantly, I think there are compelling reasons to take these steps because to shelter our students from our “clutter” may in fact do more harm than good. Charles Bazerman, for example, points out that “to ignore or even suppress knowledge of the contexts and forces ... that shape the knowledge of the discipline[s]” produces a dynamic of insiders and outsiders that sustains disciplinary and institutional control over what can be said (64). Bazerman contrasts this state of affairs to a situation in which students, attuned to context and to rhetoric, can enter contested terrain as “empowered speakers” able to understand how knowledge is constructed and thereby able to determine what knowledge they want to construct (67-68).

Bazerman’s work, and the argument I am presenting here, emerge from the theoretical position of Writing in the Disciplines (WID), a relatively recent movement in composition studies. The argument that disciplines are institutional, not epistemological (a point that our institutional organization emphasizes), as one of my colleagues rightly noted during the presentation at AAOS, makes the need for WID’s insights more pressing, not less. As Bazerman puts it, “if we are to create a humane society for the next century it is precisely the professional and disciplinary words we have to keep from getting away from us” (68).

While many of the specific practices of WID do indeed have more relevance to Research I institutions than they do to a college for working adults, I think its fundamental premise is crucial to the work we do. It’s true that many of our students are not particularly interested in becoming disciplinarians and therefore the kind of rigorous and intricate rhetorical analysis of disciplinary conventions that Bazerman and

others recommend may not be appropriate. Nonetheless, we can adapt to our purposes WID’s fundamental insight that “writing” is a cluttered negotiation of particular contents, contexts and conventions, and we can think more systematically about strategies we use to help our students become attuned to all three elements of their writing process. These strategies might affect the contracts we develop, the writing assignments we do or do not design, the readings we do or do not suggest (to what extent does a textbook, say, adequately represent our work as scholars and how could we talk to our students about this), and the conversations we do or do not have about writing. Ultimately, our purpose should not be to impose or occlude boundaries but to help our students understand and, to use Lee Herman’s word, in some sense “play” them. In doing this, we may give those same students the necessary tools to raise – with equal critical insight and equal credibility – the kinds of challenges to authoritative structures of knowledge that my colleagues Eric and Nadine have so powerfully articulated.

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Found Things

What follows is a letter from George Pruitt, president of Thomas Edison State College, and accompanying document from the Commission on Higher Education (Middle States Association). The material was stamped "Office of the President" on 11 September 1985 and was distributed to various offices around Empire State College. The Middle States document, "Assessing Prior Learning for Credit," offers some historical perspective on the practice of prior learning evaluation and on the role of Empire State College and Thomas Edison State College in the history of CAEL (then, The Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning; now The Council on Adult and Experiential Learning). Thanks to Marnie Evans, Metropolitan Center, for these "found things."

[Thomas A. Edison State College]
September 6, 1985

Dr. Morris Keeton
President
CAEL
105 Marble Faun Court
Columbia, MD 21044

Dear Morris:

Attached please find a copy of the policy statement adopted by Middle States concerning the assessment of prior learning for credit. As you are aware, Thomas A. Edison State College and Empire State College played key leadership roles in the preparation of this policy.

I am sure you share my pride and the fact that two CAEL institutions played such a pivotal leadership role in advancing the CAEL quality assurance agenda.

Sincerely,

George A. Pruitt
President
Thomas A. Edison State College
Trenton, NJ

cc: Dr. James Hall, President
Empire State College

Ms. Anne Bryant, Chairman of the Board
CAEL

COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Middle States Association of
Colleges and Schools
3624 Market Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104
Telephone: 215/662-5606

July 1, 1985

ASSESSING PRIOR LEARNING FOR CREDIT

A Position Paper of the Commission
on Higher Education

Middle States Association of
Colleges and Schools

Recognition of college-level learning, no matter how or where attained, adds another dimension to an institution's offerings by acknowledging the learning achievement of returning adults, by facilitating the progress of students already enrolled, and by conserving education resources. Many colleges and universities have developed programs to assess prior learning and award academic credit; these programs utilize a wide range of evaluative mechanisms, from standardized examination, recommendations from the American Council on Education, local challenge exams, to the expert assessment of individualized claims of college-level learning. Expert assessment of prior learning is relatively recent and presents new challenges and opportunities.

As guidelines for institutions which conduct programs of assessing and crediting prior learning, the Commission on Higher Education expects that a program for the assessment of prior learning should:

1. Make clear basic principles and values held by the institution regarding credit for prior learning.
2. Provide explicit guidelines as to what is considered college-level learning.
3. Make clear that credit can be awarded only for demonstrated college-level learning, not for experience per se.
4. Specify, as clearly and unambiguously as possible, the standards of acceptable performance in each academic area.
5. Specify what form the claim for credit should take, e.g., course equivalent, competency list.
6. Ensure that evaluation of learning is undertaken by appropriately qualified persons.
7. Indicate the appropriate form such as semester hours, course units, etc. the evaluator's credit recommendation should take.
8. Specify which degree requirements may be met by prior learning.
9. Specify how credit for prior learning will be recorded.
10. Define and articulate roles and responsibilities of all persons connected with the assessment process.
11. Develop procedures to monitor and assure fair and consistent treatment of students.
12. Develop clearly stated assessment policies and descriptive information for students, faculty, administrators and external sources.
13. Include provisions for periodic re-evaluation of policies and procedures for assessing learning and awarding credit.

Institutions may utilize the resources and experiences of other institutions already engaged in assessing prior learning, of organizations like the American Council on Education (ACE) and the Council for Advancement of Experiential Learning (CAEL), or the various standardized testing programs.

The awarding of credit for prior learning presents unique opportunities for students and for institutions. The commission urges institutions to apply the same standards of quality and excellence to assessment of prior learning programs as applied to other programs.

The Pumpkin Eater: A Short, Short Fiction

Robert Congemi, Northeast Center

The first time Laurie laid eyes on Pumpkin she fell in love with him. It was on a Saturday morning at the cat shelter, and as was her habit she had gone there to help clean and do whatever else was asked of her to make the lives of the abandoned cats a little better. Pumpkin, of course, was a darkish orange cat. He was quite large, pretty old, and on his last legs, with wounds from his years of street wars all over him. For instance, he had a chewed-up ear, a blind eye, and a badly-healed broken leg where he got shot with a BB gun. There was nothing else for Laurie to do but to take him home with her.

“You’re such a push over,” said Miss Vicky, a stout lady in her 60s who lived by herself and maintained the shelter. Laurie was already busy cradling Pumpkin in her arms and pressed his big, hairy face to her cheek.

“You should talk,” Laurie said back, big, heavy Pumpkin squirming nervously in her arms. They looked odd together, Pumpkin and this slight, young woman in jeans. “Is there a cat anywhere in this city who needs a home who doesn’t live here?”

“Unfortunately, yes, my dear,” Miss Vicky answered, clearly dry on this point.

Laurie’s home, where she lived alone, was a few miles outside the city proper, in an older, working class, suburban neighborhood. She already had cats there, but they were young and cute, sprightly – Pepper, Snowball and Ramona – and they didn’t need Laurie nearly as much as Pumpkin did.

At first, everything went as well as could be expected. Pepper, Snowball and Ramona didn’t particularly seem to mind the sudden injection of this old, wounded tomcat into their midst. They sniffed him curiously, Ramona did hiss once or twice – that was her nature – but when Pumpkin didn’t seem to mind and pretty much went about his own business, which was to just look

around, eat a little bit now and then, and to sleep, Laurie’s household settled back into its usual routine.

“Old Pumpkin’s just tired, girls,” she said to them, reassuringly, filling their food dishes and getting them fresh water. “He just wants to rest. He’s had a hard life.”

But, one day, after Laurie had him for only a few weeks, Pumpkin started to walk around the house to see what was going on less and less. Sometimes Laurie found him hiding in back of the closet in her bedroom or, what was worse, making his way downstairs to curl up in a ball in the cellar somewhere.

Denying reality, she tried getting Pumpkin to play in some way and tantalizingly dangled a string in front of him, or squeezed one of the toy mice she had, so that it made a funny sound. But when he started losing weight she became very frightened.

“Oh, no, no, no, Pumpkin, don’t lose weight,” Laurie told him. “I don’t want that to happen to you. I don’t want to go through that again.”

But day after day, it was undeniable that he was not the old, chunky, orange ball that only recently she had hugged at the shelter. He was much thinner, unnervingly thinner, with his furry skin starting to hang on him. More and more Pumpkin slept during the day, and when he did appear around the house, he moved so slowly that even the other cats perked up their ears and watched him curiously.

Finally, Laurie completely gave in and took Pumpkin to the vet. It was no trouble getting him into the animal carrier. She just picked him up, he hung in her arms without complaint or motion, and she carted him to her car.

In the vet’s waiting room, Laurie could hardly sit still. She tried reading magazines, scanning the other people and their pets,

and then thinking about things she had to do at work, where she was a secretary for a firm that sold advertising space. When she was escorted into the vet’s examining room, it was as if she were in a dream.

With concern on his face, the vet examined Pumpkin carefully, petting him, too, saying something in a low, soft voice about Pumpkin being a good, old boy who’d probably been through his share of troubles, and then he turned to Laurie.

He looked at her quite seriously. “Have you noticed any bleeding?”

Laurie’s body went cold. “No. No bleeding. Not at all. Why?”

The veterinarian furrowed his brow. “I’m going to take tests of course, but I suspect – I’m pretty sure – Pumpkin has kidney trouble, probably kidney failure.”

Later, when the tests were in and Pumpkin’s fate was clear, Laurie took Pumpkin home from the veterinarian’s for the last time and tried to think what to do. In the end, she fixed the best place she could for him, in a back room, which she never much used. She bought him a nice new bed, and placed toys all around it that he might conceivably like. She put bowls for food and fresh water in one corner of the room, and a litter box in another. Without exception, she changed the water every day, cleaned the litter box, and tried to play with him. He would lift his head up a little at her antics, and then squeeze his eyes shut and drop his head once again.

The day Pumpkin died Laurie came home from work and found him – sure enough – down in the cellar. On the drive home, she was certain that something bad had happened. Later, when she told this to people, they indulged her by saying that her instinct was real, but she doubted that they believed her about the instinct. Entering the house, she looked, tentatively, in one room after another, and then, sensing more than

ever the truth, she went downstairs to the basement. Once there, she peered into the dank darkness, and in a far corner, saw a tiny shape. Walking up to it, she saw of course that it was Pumpkin. He was stretched out – not curled up – his paws and legs splayed, his head and body arched back. Laurie stumbled a bit at the sight.

Bending down, she petted Pumpkin, stroking him as tenderly as she knew how, but his body was like rock to her touch, which made her even gasp a little. Despite this, she continued to stroke him, his body so hard. She was relieved to notice that he did not smell.

Not knowing quite what to do, she finally decided upon a large, plastic, garbage bag, which she then got, running upstairs to the kitchen. Back in the cellar, she kept up her courage, and managed to get Pumpkin slid inside the bag by holding the end of it open with her knee. Then she wrapped the bag up, with a plastic tie, and holding Pumpkin against herself in the bag, carried him upstairs, deciding, as firmly as she had ever decided anything, that she would bury him on her property, far back behind the house, just before some woods began. She would get a shovel and dig a hole deep, so that no animals could get at him, and in a way he would always be nearby.

But when Laurie went to go outside, she stopped in horror. She saw that the day had become very dark suddenly, and that it was starting to rain. Frightening rainstorms had been coming up very quickly all summer, and now the sky promised a deluge in moments. Already it was raining, getting harder, and she could hear thunder.

Again, not quite knowing what to do, Laurie, keeping Pumpkin beside her in the bag, waited. The rain was getting more and more fierce, simply intimidating. She would have to bury Pumpkin in the pouring rain, probably with thunder all about her.

“Well, I’m going to, I’m just going to,” she said aloud to herself.

So, walking in the rain with Pumpkin, she got a shovel and, somehow carrying both the shovel and the dead cat, reached the far back of the house where she had decided to bury him. Putting Pumpkin and the bag on the ground, she began to dig. The rain came

down harder and harder and harder. She would not let it bother her. She just kept digging and digging.

“I’m going to do this, I really am, so keep raining as terribly as you want.”

And she continued to dig, though the heavens indeed seemed to be emptying themselves with the rain. Laurie dug the hole very deep, finally placing Pumpkin into it, and, as delicately as she could, covering him up with the dirt, the rain drenching her so badly that she imagined it was actually furious with her.

“Keep coming, damn you,” she said to the rain. “Keep coming. But you’re not going to stop me.”

Mentoring Institute Reassignments 2003-2004

Margaret Clark-Plaskie, Genesee Valley Center
Lorraine E. Peeler, Niagara Frontier Center

During the period 2003-2004, mentors Margaret Clark-Plaskie from the Genesee Valley Center and Lorraine Peeler from the Niagara Frontier Center received quarter-time reassignments to the Mentoring Institute. What follows are the reports and reflections each offered at the conclusion of her reassignment.

Exploring Postformal Operational Thinking

Margaret Clark-Plaskie

I was very fortunate to be granted a quarter-time professional reassignment to the Mentoring Institute from September 1, 2003 through August 31, 2004. This reassignment consisted of a reduction in my regular mentoring responsibilities, which afforded me extra time to engage in scholarly activities. My unit coordinator (Mary Klinger) and center dean (Bob Milton) were very helpful and together we found a mentor (Elaine Lovegreen) to work with some of my students, thereby reducing my credit load.

Purpose:

As outlined in my initial proposal for this reassignment, the purpose was twofold: (1) To provide me with the opportunity to engage in research and pursue scholarly activities in the area of adult cognitive development, and (2) To provide a theoretical framework for understanding the practice and potential benefits/outcomes of mentoring at Empire State College. This framework might facilitate communication about mentoring with professional colleagues, both within the college and in the larger academic community, through discussions, formal presentations, and publications.

Background:

Within developmental psychology, adult development (particularly in terms of cognition) was traditionally viewed from a perspective of decline and deficit. Indeed, in one of the most influential theories of cognitive development, Jean Piaget described the fourth and final stage ("formal operations") as developing during adolescence. Does cognitive development end there? Is there no possibility of further qualitative growth during adulthood? In recent decades, there have been various theories of "postformal operational thinking," proposing that cognitive development may continue beyond Piaget's formal operations, depending upon adults' experiences. This more mature type of cognition may involve greater acceptance of contradictions, integration, pragmatic application, and relativistic, contextual, and/or dialectical thinking.

As part of this reassignment, I sought to delve deeper into specific theories and studies of postformal operational thinking and the types of experiences in adult education that might foster this development. My belief was that Empire State College might be viewed as a learning environment that is particularly conducive to adult cognitive development. My goal was to provide this theoretical framework and language for discussing our mentoring of adult learners and to communicate the significance of what we do to wider academic audiences. The outcomes would ideally include more informed mentoring practices, as well as enhanced appreciation of mentoring and its potential benefits to adult learners (i.e., possibly contributing to the collegewide inquiry into outcome assessment). My specific goals included conducting a literature review, developing a particular model of mentoring within the framework of postformal cognitive development, sharing this model with professional colleagues, empirically testing



Margaret Clark-Plaskie

my hypothesis that mentoring is conducive to postformal cognitive development, and disseminating the results from this research.

Activities and Accomplishments During the Reassignment:

Along with reviewing the literature, I spent time reflecting on Empire State College as a positive adult learning environment, from a theoretical perspective. That is, as I was reading about a particular postformal theory (Sinnott, 1998), I began to think about our institution, how it is different from traditional institutions, and how it may meet the needs of our changing population. In her book, Sinnott mentioned how traditional universities are not geared for adult ways of thinking and she called for major changes to create a radical new university for the 21st century. This piqued my interest and led me to read a book she co-authored with Lynn Johnson in 1996, titled, *Reinventing the university: A radical proposal for a problem-focused university*. My initial reaction was that this ideal university might already exist here at Empire State College. To explore this topic further, I consulted with Nancy Saari and created an online discussion database through the Mentoring Institute [<http://empire2.esc.edu/discussion/mentdis.nsf>]. I put a call out to colleagues from the Mentoring Institute, the human development area of study, and the Circle Affinity Group. Thirteen colleagues from around the college (mostly mentors, but also

a couple of administrators and professionals, with a wide range of experience with adult learners and/or the college, as well as areas of expertise) volunteered to participate with me in this three-week discussion. We began on February 24 and ended on March 17 with over 100 postings, including relatively greater participation during the college's no appointment week. Colleagues were very generous in sharing their time and knowledge, often enlightening the rest of us with references and detailed explanations from their respective fields (relevant to adult education and development), in addition to their own experiences with our students. I'd like to thank each individual for his/her thoughtful contributions: Eva Ash, Anne Breznau, Lorraine Gianvecchio, Mary Klinger, Alan Mandell, Frieda Mendelsohn, Frances Mercer, Francis Murage, Janet Ostrov, Julie Shaw, Bernard Smith, Evelyn Ting, and Marie Tondreau.

Much of our online discussion centered around my posting of ten problems with adult higher education, as identified by Sinnott and Johnson. Participants posted their opinions about higher education's changing roles, Empire State College and how well it is (or is not) meeting the needs of our adult population, and the possible connection between mentoring and the cognitive development of our adult students. A subgroup of participants also attended a follow-up/debriefing meeting in-person at All College in late March. We reviewed what the group learned, what worked well and not so well for them (useful information for future online discussions, as well as for myself and others who may be in the role of facilitator), and how this activity related to, and informed, my reassignment. I had extracted the participants' views about our college in relation to solving the ten problems with adult higher education and I presented the group with a summary table and asked for additional feedback. The contents of this table are now the basis of a manuscript that I am in the process of writing, to be submitted for publication in a professional journal of adult higher education, as well as in our own *All About Mentoring*.

In addition, themes from this discussion (along with other aspects of my

reassignment) were incorporated into a presentation at the All College Conference in March 2004. Lorraine Peeler and I led a session, titled, "Empire State College: A Truly Adult-focused and Diverse Institution?" We each discussed our own particular Mentoring Institute reassignments and how the topics are integrally connected to Empire State College's core values and President Moore's *Strategic Plan* (i.e., goal #1 – Adult Learner Focus and goal #6 – Multicultural Engagement). Colleagues were very responsive, suggesting ways that our scholarly works might be related to one another, as well as brainstorming and sharing current practices with students pertinent to both adult cognitive development and multiculturalism.

What other activities constituted my professional reassignment? Throughout the reassignment, Lorraine Peeler and I participated in monthly conference calls with Alan Mandell of the Mentoring Institute. I found these calls to be very useful in keeping me motivated; providing me with some structure, deadlines, and constructive feedback on my ideas and plans. We were also honored to serve on a committee to review applicants for the next year's recipients of the Mentoring Institute's professional reassignments. Then during the summer 2004, I worked with Alan to begin putting together bibliographies of adult learning and adult development resources for Mentorsite. I put a call out to colleagues for references and/or annotated summaries/critiques and we were quite pleased with the response. Eva Ash and Marie Tondreau, in particular, provided us with numerous annotated sources. The lists are "works in progress," but we're off to a good start and Judy Gerardi already mentioned how useful the lists were at a workshop she led in September for new mentors (sponsored by the Mentoring Institute).

Finally, conducting empirical research was another component of my reassignment. I have engaged in several activities related to this goal of testing whether or not mentoring at Empire State College is conducive to the development of postformal operational thinking. At the beginning of my reassignment, I submitted a proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and

received approval, contingent upon an amendment with the exact measures to be used. This turned out to be a long process, as there are various postformal theories and methods of measuring this development, most of which are too lengthy for mail surveys and rather complex to score. It's taken some time to contact researchers and wait for them to send copies of their measures and coding manuals. At last, I have located shorter, closed-ended measures of postformal thinking, as well as hypothesized correlates (such as "well-being"). With updated IRB approval, I will begin data collection soon. In this way, my research is an ongoing project, and while not yet completed, this reassignment was invaluable to making progress in my scholarship. I plan to share the results of my research both within the college and in the wider professional community, via presentations and publications. In addition, I will be able to collect follow-up data (longitudinal and other comparisons), and analyze, interpret, and disseminate the results during a six-month sabbatical next year. I am very grateful for the opportunities that have been granted me recently to devote time and energy to my scholarly interests. I think it is important to view them as part of the development of a program or body of work, which takes time, varied and combined funding and release time opportunities, and collaboration with colleagues.

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Defining and Redefining Multicultural Diversity Competency in our Mentoring Practice: Some Initial Thoughts

Lorraine E. Peeler

Overview of the Reassignment

The concept of student cultural diversity and/or multicultural education has centered on elementary, secondary and traditional undergraduate education. Factors in student cultural diversity include views of culture and education; educational approaches; demographics, language, communication, identity and cognition; effective teacher preparation and organizational enhancement (Garcia, 2002).

Very little research has focused, in a concentrated way, on adult learners and cultural diversity. In addition, many of the current textbooks attempt to integrate issues of diversity in their texts but does this approach ensure that students and mentors address the necessary issues that should be enhancing the quality of understanding for adult learners in the area of cultural diversity and/or multicultural education?

Because adult learners are diverse on a variety of dimensions and they have had a broader range of experiences that could enhance and/or detract from aspects of diversity, it is necessary that there be a more specific theory and practice that is especially designed for adult students and their mentors. In addition, because Empire State College is nontraditional in its approach to assisting adults in the learning process, a clear definition and practice is important to the mentoring process.

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) has issued an adult learners manifesto for higher education in the early 21st century (Duke, 2002). This statement includes concepts like full diversity of adult learners and their situations as well as support and access by diverse groups including cultural and economic. I believe this has heightened the need at Empire State College for a more intense look at how we address cultural diversity with our students and not make



Lorraine Peeler

assumptions that their age and experience means they have been thoroughly educated in aspects of culture and diversity issues.

The goals and activities that I projected as I went into this reassignment included:

- a) **Research** – a comprehensive review of the literature to identify critical factors that are relevant to cultural diversity for adult learners and mentors of adult learners.
- b) **Data Collection** – in the course of this research, I proposed to design a survey to collect some information from my colleagues, across the college, to assess how they encourage and/or have been encouraged by students to address cultural diversity. I was also interested in acquiring some input from students about their experiences.
- c) **Theory and Practice** – to develop a theoretical framework that could serve as the underpinnings to encourage mentors to assess and integrate learning activities in their contracts that will encourage issues of cultural diversity across the spectrum of learning and not just as an individual cultural diversity contract.

In retrospect, I recognize that my goals and outcomes were sizable for a .25 reassignment, but I believe that each goal is a work in progress and will certainly spur a more focused approach to our pursuit of a

multicultural education process and serve our culturally diverse student population.

Introduction

Empire State College has been in a dialogue about cultural diversity and multiculturalism since I was hired in 1991. I was hired as a multicultural counselor – one of the first in the college, from a grant-funded initiative by the Ford Foundation. My role was to assist students from multicultural backgrounds and interface with mentors in their work with them. This position was student service oriented, as well as focused on the belief that most culturally diverse students are in need of academic remediation. Many mentors thought that my primary role was in the area of remediation because there seemed to be a consistent need for minority students to have assistance with academic skills.

Consequently, the college has grown in its focus by the development of the Multicultural Affinity Group. Although well intended, our role and focus is not always clear. Multicultural residencies were developed during this period also. Genesee Valley Center (GVC) and Niagara Frontier Center have conducted these residencies successfully. The GVC multicultural residency has continued for over 10 years and has spawned an extraordinary arm in the Disabilities Conference. I have been privileged to be a presenter on a number of occasions at the GVC multicultural residency.

What was not clear then, and is still not clear now, is: (1) What do we mean by multiculturalism, cultural diversity, multicultural education and related issues? (2) How should we operationally define it so that it can be implemented and assessed consistently across Empire State College? (3) What is the role of mentors, students and professional staff in this process?

Although the focus of this reassignment began with a focus on mentors and students, I believe the first focus in any research should be to define the terms of your research and operationally define what you intend to assess or measure. Constructs are broad terms that we begin to apply to situations that may only have faint resemblances to the depth of the term and

its true meaning. Specifically, cultural diversity and multiculturalism are constructs and in our institution, they are often interchanged in their meanings and contexts. The lack of clear definitions makes it hard for us to assess our strengths, weaknesses, growth or decline, or whether we have it or don't have it.

On the other hand, an operational definition allows us to redefine and clarify a construct so that in our context we know what behaviors we will identify as cultural diversity or multiculturalism so we can assess and measure them on a consistent basis. We will all know and agree on the behaviors and activities when we see them because they will be clearly defined and measurable.

Bennett (2001), a prominent authority on multicultural education, asserts that since its beginning, the concept of multicultural education has often been perceived as lacking definition and purpose. In addition, she asserts that graduate students, who have taken one or two courses in multicultural education, or who attempt to develop literature reviews for dissertations, encounter lack of definition and conceptual clarity, as major barriers in their research initiatives. I believe this is especially true because of the lack of clarity and often overlap in use of the terms multiculturalism, cultural diversity and multicultural education.

If this is true overall in the field, it is understandable that Empire State College, as a non-traditional institution, may have a need for further clarity and definition. What this means for me and the outcomes of this reassignment is how to assist mentors in unraveling the

complexities of multiculturalism as it relates to our work with students. My first focus, through the review of the literature, has been to develop an operational definition that is relevant for this college.

Clarifying the Constructs: Multiculturalism, Cultural Diversity and Multicultural Education

There has been ongoing discussion in our institution about multiculturalism, cultural diversity, multicultural education and related components for some time. Diversity and multiculturalism are often used interchangeably and the two terms are related but not the same (Krishnamurthi, 2003). Although the terms overlap, they are not synonymous. They are mutually exclusive terms with distinctions and nuances that are important to their application and assessment. A clear definition of culture is necessary because culture is at the core of these terms and “multi” and “diversity” are only descriptors.

- Culture

Culture is the basis for the discussion of multiculturalism and diversity. We live in a pluralistic society. All individuals are cultural beings. They are influenced by belief systems, value orientations and worldviews that influence customs, norms, practices and institutions. Although there is an American culture, which is often called the dominant culture, there are numerous sub or micro-cultures and that are outgrowths of ethnic, racial, social or religious heritages. The American Psychological Association (2003) asserts that culture is fluid and dynamic, as well as universal and specific in nature. Culture influences every aspect of human endeavor, is subjective,

has fuzzy boundaries, changes constantly and often precipitates our stereotypic thinking (Stuart, 2004).

Although we believe we are clear about the definition of culture, cultural theorists have split their emphases in defining culture between a code of conduct embedded in social life and the symbolic products of these activities (Stuart, 2004). Culture is not just the standard definition of ideas, customs, skills and art of a specific group of people passed along to succeeding generations. Culture today is more than a specific group of people that embrace the same or similar ideas, customs, skills and art. Current assessment of culture is twofold – codes of conduct and the symbolic products, which include behaviors and their outcomes. Fiske (2002) summarizes current thinking about culture and believes that culture is the source of ties that bind members of societies through an elusive socially constructed constellation, which includes practices, competencies, ideas, schemas, symbols, values, norms, institutions, goals, constitutive rules, artifacts, and modifications of the physical environment.

This is why issues of multiculturalism go beyond race, ethnicity and gender. They go beyond the deficiencies, academic or otherwise, in groups that are culturally different than the dominant group. Dimensions of culture include history, social group interaction patterns (intra versus inter) language and communication, healing beliefs and practices, art and expressive forms, recreation, social status, value orientations, family life processes, religion, diet and clothes. Other areas that are seen as multicultural include sexual orientation, size, disabilities, geographic location and marital status. These areas also represent codes of conduct embedded in a social life that have symbolic products that are sometimes subtle but persons feel their effects.

For example, a young, African-American professional divorced mother of three was discussing the responses she gets from people when she is transacting business. The assumption is made that she is a single parent who has never been married. In this case, there are multiple levels of stereotypic thinking because she is a single parent and

... cultural diversity and multiculturalism are constructs and in our institution, they are often interchanged in their meanings and contexts. The lack of clear definitions makes it hard for us to assess our strengths, weaknesses, growth or decline, or whether we have it or don't have it.

African American. I'm sure a Euro-American divorced mother of three also feels the pressure of the stereotypic assumptions of a single parent, which is a culture.

I believe an issue that makes our awareness of cultural groups problematic is a two-edged sword. We can become over sensitive or over stereotypical. In either case, the more labels we apply and the more we group people based on cultural similarities, the more we run the risk of oversimplifying and making assumptions that all members of a group have the same characteristics. We fail to address the differences within groups. In my cultural diversity study groups, I recognize that most of the material about the specific groups is stereotypic, so I begin my discussion of culture with this question: "Is there an American culture?" This question forces students to apply the definition of culture to American life. Although the majority of students respond in the negative initially, as I press the discussion in the light of the definition of culture, we find that despite our racio-ethnic differences, there is an American culture that makes us more similar than different on many dimensions. Often because we are focused on the labels, we fail to see the overarching and pervasiveness of the American culture.

Stuart (2004) stresses the need to be aware of both cultural sensitivity and cultural stereotypes because with all of these labels (African American, Native American, disabled, Asian American) there is a "myth of uniformity" and the naïve belief that all members of a group will have the same characteristics. When we are culturally sensitive we are well meaning. When we operate in cultural stereotypes we seek to organize in an attempt to understand, but we oversimplify and minimize individuality.

- **Multiculturalism**

Multicultural at its foundation means many cultures. Technically, it refers to the interactions between the European American culture and individuals from microcultures, often called minority and usually ethnically and/or racially different. Banks and Banks-McGee (1988, pg. 11) state that a "nation as culturally diverse as the United States consists of a common overarching culture, as well as a series of

microcultures." The overarching culture is the national macroculture or the American culture. Banks (1994) calls it the "U.S. Universal Culture," which was developed through a process he calls "multiple acculturation." This is the influence of the various cultural groups like African, Indian, Hispanic, Jewish, Asian, Southern and Eastern European on the Anglo-Saxon culture. So multicultural describes the American culture as a product of multiple acculturation, distinct cultural groups influencing and shaping a major culture.

The concept of multiculturalism is not as limiting as multicultural which basically acknowledges the interactions of macro and microcultures. Multiculturalism encompasses the broad scope of dimensions of race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, gender, age, disability, class status, education, religious/spiritual orientation, and other cultural dimensions. This scope is inclusive of the codes of conduct and symbolic products. The American Psychological Association (2003) asserts that all these are critical aspects of an individual's ethnic/racial and personal identity. It is what they bring with them to the workplace, to football games, and into the student/mentor relationship.

On the other hand, Morey and Kitano (1997) believe multiculturalism seeks to promote the valuing of diversity and equal opportunity for all people through understanding of the contributions and perspectives of people of differing race, ethnicity, culture, language, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and physical abilities and disabilities. Their position is closer to the concept of cultural diversity and is less culturally focused. Consequently, this leads

to our discussion of the definition of cultural diversity.

- **Cultural Diversity**

Currently, cultural diversity has become an all-encompassing term due to the business community that began to ensure that managers and employees received training to heighten their awareness of diversity issues in the workplace. The term cultural diversity is a combination of culture and diversity. We

have already discussed culture, so the key term to be defined is diversity.

Krishnamurthi (2003) states that diversity is a representation of people that typify all cultural and innate differences. It is an essential component of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism encompasses more than diversity. The term diversity is used primarily in employment settings according

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to the APA 2003's definition. Cultural diversity literature usually asserts a business case in its perspectives and includes a clear discussion of affirmative action, valuing diversity and managing diversity. The underlying assumption for the business cases is that diversity relates to the demographic characteristics of the workforce.

Thomas (1996) believes that diversity has become verbal shorthand for a workforce that is multiracial, multicultural, and multiethnic. Consequently, this workforce is filled with people's own individual perceptions and biases. The role of diversity awareness is to assist people in going beyond biases and perceptions to become productive in their organization.

Diversity is not just about differences, but it is about the outcome of the mixture of similarities and differences in the workplace. R. Roosevelt Thomas (1996), a prominent

diversity consultant to major corporations, believes diversity refers to any mixture of items characterized by differences and similarities. He believes true diversity is awareness of the collective mixtures of similarities and differences, not just one dimension. Although diversity is seen as positive, when it increases, complexity increases. Diversity brings with it assets and liabilities that have to be worked in and worked through, especially in organizational settings.

For Empire State College, a more diverse student body brought about a need to address academic skill levels and our assumptions about how self-directed and ready for a nontraditional setting an adult student may be. If the average student were 35 years old and had more than 10 years of work experience, sometimes on professional levels, then a stay-at-home mother of three or a Hispanic male who just finished his G.E.D. would pose a problem, although the asset is that the student body is more diverse.

Diversity for some includes an understanding of affirmative action, valuing differences and managing diversity (Gadenswartz and Rowe, 1993; Cox, 1994). Diversity is seen as purposeful with specific outcomes. Affirmative action is quantitative, legally driven, remedial and based on the assimilation model of diversity. At its core is the philosophy of righting the wrongs perpetrated on specific groups by opening doors.

Valuing differences is qualitative, ethically driven, idealistic and based on a diversity model. Its philosophical view is predicated on how diversity affects organizational outcomes that holds that the presence of diversity as a distinct organizational resource. It is “warm and fuzzy” in its approach and seeks to open attitudes and raise awareness.

Managing diversity is behavioral, strategically driven, pragmatic and based on the synergy model. This philosophical approach focuses on management and requires them to take proactive steps to create and sustain an organizational climate that minimizes factors that hinder performance and maximizes factors that promote it. The goal is to open the

organization’s system so that diversity awareness and its application flow through the organization.

Griggs and Louw (1995) assert that diversity should be defined in the broadest possible way. Not only does diversity include differences in age, race, gender, physical ability, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic class, education, region of origin, language, and so forth but also differences in life experience, position in the family, personality, job function, rank within a hierarchy, and other such characteristics that go into forming an individual’s perspective. Diversity is not just what group you affiliate with but individual characteristics as the person relates to the group. Group identity and personal identity have an interactive effect that influences how an individual relates on multiple levels.

Cox and Beale (1997) define diversity as a mix of people of different socially relevant group identities working and/or living together in a defined social system. A cultural group is an affiliation of people who collectively share certain norms, values or traditions that are different from those of other groups. Cultural diversity means the representation in one social system of people with distinctively different group affiliations (Cox, 1994). Diversity is often confused with organizational responses to characteristics such as valuing diversity and managing diversity and leaves out the group and personal identity aspects.

The counseling perspective of diversity tends to address group and personal identities. The American Psychological Association asserts that cultural diversity focuses on recognizing cultural differences and is culture-centered in its perspectives. It encourages the use of a cultural lens as a central focus of a professional demeanor in the workplace. This is evident in the dimensions of cultural diversity, which go beyond race, gender and ethnicity, and includes size, disabilities, geographic location, sexual orientation, etc. (American Psychological Association, 2003). The counseling/human service perspective includes in its definition of diversity, a person’s social identities, including age, sexual orientation, physical disability, socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity,

workplace role/position, religious and spiritual orientation, and work/family concerns. All perspectives of diversity have now moved from the issues of valuing and managing diversity, to diversity competency issues. The focus has moved from just raising awareness to direct application for employees and managers.

- **Diversity and Demographics**

Even though the definition of diversity is clear, it is important to note that the organizational rationale for valuing and managing diversity is primarily driven by demographics. Colleges have been impacted by the changing demographics in their student bodies. Carnevale and Fry (2000) predict that students of color will enter college in the U.S.A. during the next 15 years at a greater rate than in the past. In some states such as California and Hawaii, the minority student body will exceed whites. Empire State College was developed based on a need for a flexible learning environment for what was at that time a nontraditional population. Although adult students attended traditional colleges, the campuses were still designed for the traditional-age student. Today, most major urban campuses actively recruit adult students and have made some accommodations for their specialized needs.

Currently, non-white Hispanics (about 11 percent) and African Americans (about 12 percent) are almost equal in their representation in the U.S. population. Meacham (1996) relates demographics to higher education and asserts that people of color and immigrants will constitute 8.5 percent of entrants to the workforce. By the year 2020, one out of every three Americans will be a person of color. At that time, students of color will make up almost 50 percent of the student populations (pg. 112).

Krishnamurti (2003) believes that the change in student body demographics is only one factor in the rationale for promoting diversity on college campuses. The other factors are the global work environment, the diverse workforce, and the need for an inclusive education and campus environment. He asserts that higher education institutions must promote diversity and multiculturalism because both

perspectives are essential to the students, the teachers and the institution.

- **Multicultural Education**

Multiculturalism and diversity all hinge on the fact that there are cultural differences in organizations and educational institutions. They seek to ameliorate the impact of cultural differences on varying dimensions to ensure cooperative environments for work and learning. In institutions of higher education, the focus of multiculturalism and diversity may assist in a positive working relationship between student and teacher, but it does not necessarily impact the quality of the educational experience. With the rise of awareness about multiculturalism came the development of, and infusion of, multicultural education. It arose out of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the development of Black studies and women's studies departments on college campuses in the 1970s. The term "multicultural education" described the wide variety of programs and practices related to educational equity, women, ethnic groups, language minorities, low income groups and people with disabilities (Banks, 1988).

"Multicultural education is at least three things: an idea or concept, an educational reform movement, and a process" (Banks and Cherry, 1988, pg. 3). Initially, the focus of multicultural education had to do with bilingual and/or economically disadvantaged students and meeting their learning styles that were assumed to be different than the traditional Euro-American student. The more the field of multicultural education grew and evolved, it was seen in a broader context. This broader conceptualization of multicultural education made it clear that multicultural education was a need for all students, not just the bilingual, racially different and economically disadvantaged students. Banks and Cherry (1988) assert that all students, despite their cultural differences, should have an equal opportunity to learn in school and multicultural education is the vehicle.

The core of multicultural education has to do with instruction and teaching. Bennett (2001) defines multicultural education as multidisciplinary in nature and built on four broad principles. The principles are: the theory of cultural pluralism; ideals of social

justice and the end of racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice and discrimination; affirmations of culture in the teaching and learning process; and visions of educational equity and excellence leading to high levels of academic learning for all. The first four principles are inclusive of the concepts of multiculturalism and cultural diversity. The last principle focuses on its application in the educational field. These principles provide the basic tenets of multicultural education and multicultural research.

The application of these principles in multicultural education, includes curriculum reform, equity in pedagogy, multicultural competence and societal equity (Bennett, 2001). Curriculum reform and equity in pedagogy focus on direct teaching and instructional issues. Curriculum reform assesses the content areas in terms of multicultural representation, as well as bias in text and books/instructional materials. Equity in pedagogy focuses on school climates, student achievement and the cultural style of the teacher and the learner.

Multicultural competence and societal equity border on issues of multiculturalism and diversity. Multicultural competence focuses on ethnic identity development and group cultures and the reduction of prejudice, stereotypes and discriminatory behavior. Societal equity takes into account the demographics and population trends and the impact of these trends in society.

Banks (1999) conceptualizes multicultural education similar to Bennett (2001). Specifically, he sees it as a field that includes five dimensions: 1) content integration, 2) knowledge construction process, 3) prejudice reduction, 4) equal pedagogy, 5) empowerment of school culture and social structure. Content integration, knowledge construction and equal pedagogy are similar to Bennett's curriculum reform equity in pedagogy. Both models include a prejudice reduction component. Banks included the fifth dimensions of empowerment of school culture and social structure, which focuses on physical environmental factors and how they promote diversity and multicultural interactions.

- **Cultural Diversity and Education**

Despite the definition of multicultural education, characteristically it has been applied more to elementary and secondary schools than higher education. Most multicultural education researchers focus their writing, research and application toward students and teachers in these settings. Some aspects of the multicultural education perspective may apply in higher education, but not all tenets.

Meacham (1996) bypasses the more complex aspect of multicultural education in his application of multiculturalism and diversity in higher education. He implies that there is a need to understand the distinctions and nuances of multiculturalism and diversity, in order to apply it to the needs of higher education. He does not use the term multicultural education, but defines and sets the boundaries on a contextual level in higher education for multiculturalism and diversity. Succinctly, Meacham asserts that "multiculturalism refers to the fact that our society is composed of numerous cultures, that this is a strength of our society, and that each of these cultures deserve to be fully valued and diversity refers to all of those dimensions of difference that provide the foundation for the construction of meaning in our lives" (pg. 113).

Meacham believes that because multiculturalism and diversity are prominent themes in our society on various levels, our students will bring these issues into the classroom even if, we, the faculty do not. He asserts that not to engage students in a critical examination of issues of multiculturalism and diversity would be irresponsible of college and university faculty. The engagement of students in viewing the world from a more diverse view is an ethical issue, not just a nice thing to do. I concur with his position. Our use of the terms multiculturalism and cultural diversity must go beyond disjointed discussions of the needs of specific groups and issues, to the question of how to mentor our students in a way that maximizes critical thinking and productive learning for the student.

Operationally Defining our Terms: How Does Empire State College Need to Measure These Areas and Why?

Now that we have a clearer understanding of the definitions of multiculturalism, diversity and multicultural education, what specific aspects of behavior would constitute multicultural competency and diversity awareness in our mentoring practices at Empire State College? One thing we must understand is that multiculturalism, cultural diversity and its applications are too significant and complex to be one-dimensional. Their import must go beyond quick discussions at breakfast meetings at the area of study and All College meetings. As an institution we must not equate affirmative action initiatives with our need for multiculturalism in our disciplines and valuing and managing diversity across the college. We need to be more interdisciplinary and organizational in our approach to these issues.

The human services perspective focuses on knowledge, awareness and skills. This can work for us at Empire State College as we increase our knowledge about multiculturalism, our awareness about the need for application in our mentoring practice, and our goal of developing skills that are specific to our work at the college. Our multicultural competency will be reflected in the mentor/student relationship. And diversity will be reflected throughout the institution.

Stuart (2004) defines multicultural competence as the ability to understand and constructively relate to the uniqueness of each student in light of the diverse cultures that influence each person's perspectives. If this is the case, what does that mean to us as mentors at Empire State College and how would we begin to implement it in a way that it could be assessed and measured?

In order to get to an operational definition for our use, there will need to be a college-wide assessment of where we are and where we need to go. We should begin with what are our rationale and needs for addressing multiculturalism and diversity in our educational practice? Stuart proposes a plan of action for multicultural research, but

some of the questions can be modified to assist Empire State College in a more poignant focus for our institution. Some questions we can begin with on a collegewide basis are:

1. What are our rationale and needs for addressing multiculturalism and diversity in education, training, research, practice, and organizational change?

Encourage mentors to feel free to integrate their own backgrounds, experiences, identities, prior beliefs, values and unique vantage points; identify this as a means to encourage students to own their own in an academic context.

2. How do faculty, staff, and students familiarize themselves with multicultural and diversity issues?
3. Is the college climate supportive of under-represented students and marginalized groups?
4. Do all centers and units have programs and committees that value and support multicultural and culturally diverse initiatives?

Secondly, we should assess the mentoring tools that can enhance the college as a culturally competent and sensitive educational institution. This would include the general education requirement of Other World Civilizations, especially the aspect of learning about the distinctive features of the history, institutions, economy, society, culture, etc. of one non-European and non-U.S. civilization. More learning contracts should be designed to help students fulfill this requirement, and in so doing expose them to critical thinking about cultures different from they best know.

In addition, our learning contracts lend themselves to a fertile ground for integration of diversity and multiculturalism, from the choice of books and textbooks to the actual learning activities. What would be the component parts for us as mentors and in the development of our learning contracts? For example, the redefinition of these constructs into measurable terms for our ongoing assessment would include the integration of multicultural/diversity competencies into our learning contracts. The learning contract would be the documentation of learning activities where we can integrate, as well as assess, behaviors that would promote the competencies.

Recommendations

This is just the starting point to begin to operationalize and implement a plan of action that truly addresses multiculturalism, cultural diversity and competency in an ethical and meaningful way across disciplines in the college. Some recommendations to spur further discussions include:

- A statement of goals for student learning in the learning contract that integrates study content and readings which reflect an aspect of multiculturalism and diversity despite the academic discipline.
- A component in the learning activities that challenges students to draw from their own cultural orientation and apply it to the learning. (Already this happens in the choice of topic for an essay or final paper. The goal is to encourage this aspect to ensure that students are comfortable coming from their own cultural orientations when appropriate.)
- Encourage mentors to feel free to integrate their own backgrounds, experiences, identities, prior beliefs, values and unique vantage points; identify this as a means to encourage students to own their own in an academic context.
- Encourage mentors to encourage students to open their eyes and ears for culturally diverse aspects of their

learning contract studies in current events.

- Encourage mentors to revise their studies and course materials to be more reflective of cultural diversity and multicultural issues.

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Reflections

Ernest L. Boyer (1928-1995) *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, A Special Report from The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

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Boyer's extended essay has been around for 15 years, but it continues to influence our thinking about what constitutes scholarship. Alan Mandell has asked me to take a second look at it and try to summarize Boyer's crucial arguments.

Boyer begins by noting that the definition of scholarship predominant in the late 20th century hadn't, in fact, been in place for very long. During the American colonial period, college teachers were thought of as primarily responsible for the instruction of young men in the classics, and for the formation of "character." In the 19th century, with the creation of land grant universities and the establishment of technical institutes like RPI, the emphasis began to shift toward "service" as a primary function of the university, while the smaller liberal arts colleges continued to focus on classical education. It was only in the late 19th century, Boyer argues, that American universities began to adopt a view of scholarship that placed heavy emphasis on the creation of new knowledge through research and the production of scholarly writing.

He points out that in the period since World War II, with the very rapid growth of post-secondary education, a tension has been growing. On the one hand, colleges and universities expressed and implemented a commitment to mass higher education. On the other hand, more and more institutions committed themselves to a system for evaluating faculty that emphasized scholarly research and publication to the virtual



Ernest L. Boyer

exclusion of teaching and service. It is this narrow definition of scholarship that Boyer sets out to critique in *Scholarship Reconsidered*.

In the preface, Boyer states his purpose clearly:

[T]he most important obligation now confronting the nation's colleges and universities is to break out of the tired old teaching versus research debate and define, in more creative ways, what it means to be a scholar We propose in this report four general views of scholarship [:] discovery, integration, application, and teaching.

Finally, we need a climate in which colleges and universities are less imitative, taking pride in their

uniqueness. It's time to end the suffocating practice in which colleges and universities measure themselves far too frequently by external status rather than by values determined by their own distinctive mission. [xii]

Boyer devotes his second chapter "Enlarging the Perspective" to an articulation of each of these four views of scholarship. He begins by assuring the reader that his intent is not to "water down" our expectations for promotion and tenure.

Surely, scholarship means engaging in original research. But the work of the scholar also means stepping back from one's investigation, looking for connections, building bridges between theory and practice, and communicating one's knowledge effectively to students. [16]

The "*scholarship of discovery*" captures the traditional definition of scholarship, the search for new understanding through investigative research and scholarly publications. Boyer emphasizes that he is arguing that this commitment is central to the academic enterprise and should, if anything, be strengthened. "[T]he probing mind of the researcher is an incalculably vital asset to the academy and the world." [18]

The "*scholarship of integration*" involves "making connections across the disciplines, placing the specialties in larger context, illuminating data in a revealing way, often educating non-specialists, too." [18] "[W]hat we mean is serious, disciplined work that seeks to interpret, draw together,

and bring new insight to bear on original research.” [19]

The “*scholarship of application*” responds to the question “How can knowledge be responsibly applied to consequential problems?” [21] Here, Boyer is quick to make a distinction.

[A]ll too frequently, service means not doing *scholarship* but doing good. To be considered scholarship, service activities must be tied directly to one’s special field of knowledge and relate to, and flow directly out of, this professional activity. Such service is serious, demanding work, requiring the rigor – and the accountability – traditionally associated with research activities. [22]

Finally, Boyer explores the “*scholarship of teaching*.” Again, he is quick to distinguish between what some view as “a routine function, tacked on, something almost anyone can do,” and the kind of teaching that can only be achieved by professors who are “both widely read and intellectually engaged.” [23] “While well-prepared lectures surely have a place, teaching, at its best, means not only transmitting knowledge, but transforming and *extending* it as well.” [24]

In sum, he argues, “What we urgently need today is a more inclusive view of what it means to be a scholar – a recognition that knowledge is acquired through research, through synthesis, through practice, and through teaching.” [24]

In subsequent chapters, Boyer goes on to explore how each of these forms of scholarship might be assessed, acknowledging that, at least at a simplistic level, one of the appeals of the traditional definition of scholarship is ease of measurement. Articles published in peer-reviewed journals and books published by academic presses are easy to tote up, and we need worry about their actual contribution to the sum total of knowledge only if we are of a mind to. Other forms of scholarship will require more imaginative approaches to assessment.

For example, he explores the concept of the “teaching portfolio,” an idea championed by Peter Seldin and others. His description

of such a portfolio is relevant: “A faculty member,” he writes, “could choose the form of scholarship around which a portfolio might be developed. The material used could include many of the varied forms we’ve described – ranging from publications, to field work documentation, to course descriptions, peer reviews, student evaluations, and even, perhaps, recordings and videocassettes.” [40-41]

Boyer also encourages us to recognize that scholarly interests change during a career, and that institutions committed to encouraging the vitality and renewal of faculty need to both recognize and reward these changes. He also encourages institutions to remain flexible and creative, and to celebrate and reward faculty work that furthers the college’s unique mission rather than mimicking the ideal-type of the research university. “We are persuaded that if scholarship is to be enriched, every college and university must clarify its own goals and seek to relate its own unique purposes more directly to the reward system for professors.” [53] Boyer worries about what happens when institutions fail to integrate their missions with the assessment of faculty work.

Far too many colleges and universities are being driven not by self-defined objectives but by the external imperatives of prestige. Even institutions that enroll primarily undergraduates – and have few if any resources for research – seek to imitate ranking research centers. In the process, their mission becomes blurred, standards of research are compromised, and the quality of teaching and learning is disturbingly diminished. [55]

Boyer goes on to critique the undergraduate and graduate education future professors received at the time, and takes special pain to note the failure of the academy to recruit and train minority faculty. “The intolerably small pool of qualified minority applicants represents a shocking weakness, if not an indictment, of American education at all levels.” [66] He notes the risks inherent in a pattern of graduate education that tends to replicate the focus on so-called “pure research” to the exclusion of service and

teaching that characterized the professorate of the 1980s.

Despite its having been published 15 years ago, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* remains relevant today. Boyer clearly articulated a set of challenges to which most colleges and universities have yet to seriously respond. “Publish or perish” remains an apt characterization of the prospect faced by those seeking tenure in most traditional institutions. Empire State College has adopted a definition of scholarship intended to respond to Boyer’s call for change. Whether that commitment to scholarship broadly defined will actually be realized remains to be seen.

The Pledge of Allegiance: Does “Under God” Belong?

Justin Giordano, Metropolitan Center

The public and legal debate over whether these two simple words “under God” belong in the Pledge of Allegiance reached its crescendo this past summer when in their June 14, 2004 decision, the United States Supreme Court handed down its decision in this case. Namely the High Court ruled that the plaintiff had “no standing.”

While the Supreme Court also pointed out that there is no violation of the Constitution in the language contained in the Pledge of Allegiance, the fact remains that the matter has not been conclusively resolved. In other words, the fact that the Supreme Court chose to make its ruling based on the “standing” issue and not on the underlying and more substantive issue of whether the specific words themselves can unequivocally remain in the Pledge of Allegiance opens up the door for future challenges. To that end, no sooner had the Supreme Court decision been handed down holding that the principal (who had sued on behalf of his daughter) lacked standing, the principal in question vowed that the matter was far from closed. He announced that he and his like-minded activists allies were in the process of preparing additional lawsuits challenging the constitutionality of the just disputed “under God” words in the pledge. Whether this issue will be heard by the High Court again is uncertain. Even if it does, it is unlikely to happen in the very near future. However, it is also quite likely that a number of lower courts will provide this contentious issue a forum and consequently the matter will still obtain a degree of play in the media.

The case made its way up the ladder to the U.S. Supreme Court via the Ninth Circuit (located in California) when the latter ruled in the plaintiff’s favor holding that the words “under God” were in violation of the U.S. Constitution. It should be noted that the Ninth Circuit enjoys a reputation as the most controversial appellate court in the

nation, having had its decisions overturned by the Federal Supreme Court more frequently and at a higher percentage rate than any other Federal Circuit court. The plaintiff (a California resident separated from his wife who had sole custody of their daughter) initiated this civil action on behalf of his young daughter. His complaint cited that his daughter had been required to recite the Pledge of Allegiance in spite of the fact that she objected to the “under God” language. The school authorities contended, however, that the circumstances were quite different, and that the young girl could be excused from class during the recitation of the pledge and that in any event she was absolutely under no requirement to recite the Pledge of Allegiance as a whole or in part.

Be that as it may, the contention made by the proponents of removing the reference to a deity in the pledge’s language is that the issue is not whether one individual is subjected to the recitation. Rather it is the overriding principle of separation of church and state that is being violated, as mandated by the U.S. Constitution.

Indeed, the Constitution has been consistently interpreted as stipulating that the government cannot endorse a national religion. However, the U.S. Constitution’s First Amendment simultaneously prohibits that same government from inhibiting in any way individuals from exercising their right to religious belief and expression. The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution’s specific and pertinent language reads as follows: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

Camps on both sides of this dispute will claim to be on the side of righteousness here as championing the spirit and letter of the Constitution. An argument that has been put forth by those opposing the mention of God in the Pledge of Allegiance readily point

out that the language in the pledge does not derive directly from the Constitution. Furthermore, they say, the words in contention, “under God,” were only added by Congress in the early 1950s, and, therefore, were hardly part of a long-standing American legal tradition.

The history behind the development brings us back to 1951 when the Knights of Columbus inserted the now famous two words in their meetings’ recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. Their stated purpose in so doing was to underscore the difference between a free nation with a government entrusted with limited powers versus a totalitarian form of government where the citizenry owes its allegiance exclusively to the state. In 1952, the Knights of Columbus recommended that the United States Congress follow its lead and formally adopt the same version of the Pledge of Allegiance.

The rationale and reasoning that accompanied the adoption of the additional two words are best encapsulated in a House of Representatives report, which stated the following: “Our American government is founded on the concept of the individuality and the dignity of the human being. Underlying this concept is the belief that the human person is important because he was created by God and endowed by Him with certain inalienable rights which no civil authority may usurp.” President Dwight D. Eisenhower also contributed to the discourse by strengthening the rationale for refining and expanding the pledge when in 1954 he thanked the Knights of Columbus for their crucial input. He expressed it in this matter: “These words will remind Americans that despite our great physical strength we must remain humble. They will help us to keep constantly in our minds and hearts the spiritual and moral principles which alone give dignity to man, and upon which our way of life is founded.”

Thomas Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, himself staunchly subscribed to the belief that the very notion of freedom is grounded and derived from the existence of a higher authority which supersedes the nation-state. Some would ascribe this Jeffersonian approach as espousing the doctrine of “natural law,” a doctrine that adheres to universal principles of right and wrong, which in turn transcend man and governments. Nevertheless, the historical record does not provide conclusive evidence that Thomas Jefferson was strictly guided by the norms of natural law. In the final analysis, whether Thomas Jefferson was inspired by natural law or not becomes secondary. What is indisputable is that the concept of a higher entity has long permeated the three branches of American government as well as American society in general. Indeed, in many respects, the tradition that has led to the words “under God” being added to the Pledge of Allegiance dates back to the very founding of the American nation. It has even been argued that this issue supercedes the old political boundaries of conservative versus liberal and right versus left. Case in point, in the *Zorach vs. Clauston* case decided in 1952, Justice William O. Douglas, reputed to be a devout liberal, commented that “[American] institutions presuppose the existence of a source of rights that is separate from and prior to the state.”

The opposing view embraces the concept of the Supreme Court as being the ultimate and sole interpreter of the Constitution. In effect they are promoting the principle that whatever the justices deem as being the Constitution’s position constitutes the supreme law of the land, period and end of argument. This, some will contend, is equivalent to a king, emperor, parliament, dictator or supreme ruler dictating the law by mandate. In essence and simply put, this philosophical approach utilizes the law to place an individual or an entity (for example, a parliament) in a position of total power. Monarchies in Europe essentially ruled under the precept of quasi-infallibility because they governed by “divine right” (that is, chosen by a deity to rule).

The issue of whether the words “under God” thus belong in the Pledge of

Allegiance comes down to a very fundamental question that goes beyond the confines of the language framed in the pledge. Does this nation derive its laws from “man,” which can be modified at the whim of frail or power-hungry men, or is the law and the government it represents above the reach of man and indeed emanates from a higher, more consistent source? Many in the United States colloquially refer to that source as God or a divine entity. But as long as it is not one individual who is the sole repository for the powers bestowed by that divine entity (for example, a monarch), but rather those said powers are equally distributed among all men and women, then the ideal of a “government of the people, for the people and by the people” will continue to endure.

In reality a case can be made that pledging allegiance to the United States “under God” reinforces individual and human rights in that those rights belong to all individuals, even had said rights not been specifically enshrined in the Constitution. Thomas Jefferson himself ably underscored this fundamental principle in the Declaration of Independence when he wrote: “We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.” After all, the argument goes, the Constitution for all of its greatness can always be modified via the amendment route, but the inherent dignity and sovereignty of the individual cannot.

It can thus not unreasonably be argued that the Pledge of Allegiance to a nation that derives its very essence and its laws from a higher entity (especially when that is a generic entity not a god belonging to a specific faith or religion) is more protective of the rights of all of its citizens and their right to freely choose whether they wish to believe or not in a Deity. This seems a far cry from the proposition that the government is imposing a set of religious beliefs on its population simply because that nation’s pledge of allegiance incorporates the words “under God.”

Academic Planning: With a Little Help from My Friends at Empire State College

Janet Lee Bachant, Metropolitan Center

Colleagues have commented that academic planning is one of the most challenging but also rewarding experiences in mentoring. I must admit that at the beginning of my half-time appointment I found it primarily overwhelming! Helping to orient students in a system I didn't know myself was daunting but also provided me with a mirror of the experience many students have upon entering the unique Empire State College environment: wanting to get started or restarted on college work, but having the queasy feeling of not knowing where to go or what to do next.

I have developed over the last few years, with the help of my friends at the college, a method of mentoring students in academic planning that works well for me, even if it is still a work-in-progress. Central to how I teach academic planning is an effort to make the process more interactive and less isolating. As a believer in balance and structure, I have developed an organization for the study that incorporates individualized time with the mentor and group time with fellow students at different levels of completion. Each component addresses different needs of the student new to a unique college experience.

Students begin the process of academic planning by meeting with me for an initial private session. This gives us an opportunity to get to know each other, and for students to talk about and reflect upon their unique dreams, goals and reasons for coming to Empire State College. It also provides students with an anchor in what can be a confusing and sometimes turbulent process.

During this first meeting with the student, which generally lasts for an hour, I make sure that I take a few minutes, using my computer, to start students on the process of obtaining their login to the Empire State College web site. (The login process needs to be finished from their own homes as it takes

a little time to be operationalized.) This jump starts them on using the college web site, enabling them to access the library, area of study information and guidelines, the bookstore, writing and math resources, and other helpful areas on the site.

As we get more and more students who are computer literate (if not computer dependent!), academic planning can be used to demonstrate computer literacy and satisfy the SUNY general education requirement for computer competency. To accomplish this, we need to make sure that students can use email, save their work into files that have subfolders, and know how to retrieve and modify their files. Students generally are able to do this in the course of their academic planning study.

My academic planning learning contract (which I give to students at the initial meeting) is now more developed than the one I first used. In it, the first thing I ask students to do is to explore our web site, with particular attention to the area of study guidelines, including the interdisciplinary studies section. This gives students an opportunity to think about their concentration and to begin to hone in on what focus will best meet their educational and professional goals. Not every student is able to complete academic planning in the first enrollment period. Some do need time to orient themselves and further examine their direction. These students may need to wait to do academic planning till a later date, when they are ready. But I find that most students get a lot from actively engaging the academic planning process in their first enrollment, even if they need to take an incomplete and continue the work into their next period of enrollment.

Following this exploration, students are asked to begin using one of the degree program planner tools available to them. For quite some time, the only choice for Metropolitan Center students was the one

developed by my colleague, Fernand Brunschwig, an Excel based program that is listed on the learning contract (<http://members.firstgate.j.brunsch>). I have found this program very useful, in that it helps students with organization, the calculation of credits, and their ability to conceptualize both prior learning and future contracts. One feature of this program that I find particularly useful is that the filling out of this spreadsheet automatically fills out the SUNY general education requirement chart, which saves students considerable time. Our students also have access to the DP Planner on the college web site, which is located in the MyESC screen.

In the time between our first individual meeting and their first group academic experience, I ask students to enter their transcript data into the Excel program in the exact order and with the exact titles as they appear on the transcript, doing the best they can to separate out what they anticipate to be their concentration from general learning. I let them know that this initial ordering is primarily to give them practice with seeing what they need to do, and that it is not unusual to reorganize concentrations as they become clearer about their goals. I let them know that there will be many revisions to their program as we go along, and that structuring a program for themselves does not mean that anything is set in stone.

Another assignment for their first group meeting of the academic planning seminar (I schedule the seminar for once monthly, two-hour meetings, held in the evening to maximize attendance) is to develop an academic "wish list" of everything they have always wanted to learn in college. I emphasize that we may not be able to gratify their every wish, but that looking inside themselves is the best place to start to develop a program that works. I ask students to bring eight copies of their current work (partially completed degree program, wish list entered into the contract

credit section of the plan, degree program rationale), to share with their fellow students at the monthly academic planning seminar. I ask them to bring to the seminar only that work that they are willing to share with their studymates.

This is where the fun begins! Initially I thought of the academic planning seminar group as a way for me to avoid the mind-numbing repetition of the necessary details of developing a degree program. But my colleague Eva Ash, from the Long Island Center, generously shared with me her way of doing academic planning as a small group experience. Trying it out convinced me that the small group process incredibly enriches the academic planning experience. Most importantly, it is an opportunity for students new to the college to connect with each other. Students are hungry for a setting in which to get to know each other, so the meetings tend to be a lot of fun, providing them with opportunities to see the range of interests and occupations of their peers, to network with each other, and even to help each other (proofreading, computer use and airline advice to name a few recent examples).

Even the frustrations involved with finding their way around the system become points for bonding with others. This is an underappreciated aspect of using a group format for teaching academic planning. Being a member of a group at the beginning of this new college experience affords students an opportunity to vent their frustrations, have the experience of helping and being helped by others at the college, and finding that there are many in the college community who are interested in helping them to develop a good learning experience.

Academic planning seminars are helpful in another respect as well: they allow people at the beginning of their Empire State College tenure to connect with and learn from others at varying levels of completion. During the seminar, each student shares what he or she has been working on with other students by distributing copies of their work and then soliciting comments from each other as well as from the mentor. Students learn that they can learn from each other. Taking on the role of teaching a peer

at an earlier level of development gives them opportunities to consolidate their own learning and to connect with others. This group experience also gives students a good start to the college process. Students get to know each other and questions about studies, classes, how things get done, etc., can be easily answered in this setting. In the process, instead of feeling isolated, students feel more connected, and learn that help can be had from many quarters.

Finally, there is an additional and unanticipated benefit to structuring academic planning as a hybrid course, a combined individual and group-based format. I am not sure why it happens, but students get the job done! And they often get it done within the time limits, with fewer problems, and less anxiety. It may be the modeling in the group setting, or the structure and the expectation that they will be able to accomplish this in the time allotted, or the ability to learn from each other's issues, or a combination of these and other motivations that makes it happen. Whatever is going on, I have noticed a profound increase in the number of portfolios I am able to shepherd along to assessment using this system. Developing my own structure has enabled me to better meet my own needs and those of my students in mentoring them through what may be the most complex and important study they take at Empire State College.

Mentoring the Religious Studies Student

Charles DeMotte, Central New York Center

Charles DeMotte was a mentor at the Central New York Center between 1992 and 2004. What follows are some of his reflections on these years of work as a mentor in the broad area of religious studies.

Stephen Hawking tells the story about a famous British scientist who once gave a public lecture on astronomy. He described how the earth revolved around the sun, and how the sun orbits around a vast collection of stars in our galaxy. At the end of the lecture a little old lady stood up and said: “What you have just told us is rubbish.” “The world is really flat and is supported on the back of a giant tortoise.” Smiling smugly, the scientist asked, “What is the tortoise standing on?” “You are a very clever young man answered the lady but it is turtles all the way down.”¹

While we would no doubt find the woman’s explanation to be absurd, it does remind us that people hold different world-views, which may seem true or ridiculous depending upon the eye of the observer. Working with students in the field of religious studies, I have sometimes been privy to other universes of meaning that may seem as strange as the story of the tortoises. Yet the differences often revolve around semantics, definitions, and theological models. Insofar as the study of religion employs the use of symbols and allegories to determine meaning, seemingly far-fetched stories may contain important insights on whatever level.

Religious conviction is also motivated by faith. One of the most touching moments at Empire State College graduations usually comes when students briefly share with the college community their struggles and triumphs – thanking parents, bosses, spouses, and significant others for standing by them and, in many instances, thanking God, for “his” love, help, and support. A personal relationship with God (or some

higher power) is a perspective many of our students have, which is often at odds with the intellectual universe expounded by those in the academy. Because we live in a society that has largely minimized spiritual eschatology, the religiously oriented person usually learns to compartmentalize his or her private beliefs and adopt a more generally accepted construction of social reality. The study of religion by its very nature, however, highlights faith or belief in the intangible world.

In exploring the process of mentoring in religious studies, we are confronted with a number of questions: What place does the study of religion have in the academy? What are some of the challenges one faces in working with students in religious studies? Finally, how might one approach religion as experiential learning?

The Place of Religion in the Academy

It is interesting, and perhaps ironic, that the first American colleges were created to train clergymen. Even as late as a century ago, many state and private colleges held compulsory chapel services and required church attendance as well. The marginalized importance of religion within the academy largely came about through the rise of the social sciences in the 19th century and with it, the subsequent acceptance of the defining principles of positivism, reductionism, relativism, and determinism. According to Auguste Comte, one of the pioneers of sociology, religion was an atavistic holdover from an earlier stage of human development, which was far less viable in explaining the human condition than was the study of behaviors and social forces.²

The sacrifice of religious studies on the altar of modernism has had less to do with the impact of science (long considered to be an ally of religion) than with the pervasiveness of technology, leading to the objectification

and materialization of knowledge. Whereas a half-century ago the humanities still dominated college course listings, today college curriculums are largely patterned according to the professional and career interests of students. It is no secret that most students, particularly adult learners, seek out studies that will enhance their careers, such as business administration, management, health and human services, information technology, and the like. One only has to quickly review the course offerings of market-driven online colleges to see which way the wind is blowing. The point is not whether this is a good or bad development; rather, it is to provide a framework for my earlier stated question: what place does the study of religion have in the academy?

There are, of course, many possible answers to this question. On one hand, the study of religion is closely tied to the contextual framework of history, literature, and cultural dynamics, so there are many possibilities available for a student to develop a degree program in this field. Another approach focuses on the different expectations one brings to the study of religion, both from the perspective of a mentor and a student. To an insider, such as a student who is committed to a particular religious tradition, the answer might be to find justifications for his/her own faith, or to compare and contrast that religious tradition with other belief systems. To an outsider, such as one who might be mentoring or tutoring a study in religion, such a contract could serve to expand a student’s knowledge of the historical and cultural context of religion, to present a perspective of diversity, or to offer a lesson in critical thinking. These objectives (and there are many others) may or may not coincide with one another. Broadly speaking, the study of religion, like most academic offerings, requires a theoretical environment so as to place institutional religion, in its multiple

dimensions, within the framework of human experience.

A deeper, and perhaps more contentious approach to the study of religion in the academy relates to those intrinsic questions of meaning and purpose, subjective experiences, the nature of self, and the origins of life. Realms of meaning are defined by the way we see the world. A hardheaded scientist, for instance, may characterize as valid only those forms of knowledge derived through the senses, from which concrete and accurate measurements can be made. At the other extreme, a religiously oriented person might adopt St. Paul's definition of faith as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." What is meant by "evidence" in this context is unclear; however, undoubtedly, the method of substantiating truth would involve a methodology that deals with speculative questions.

What makes the study of religion important, if not unique as a field of inquiry, is that it stretches our understanding and conceptions of reality. The familiar debate over Darwin's theory of evolution illustrates these different perceptions. His theories have become widely accepted within the biological and social sciences for well over a century. As a meticulous scientist, Darwin gathered samples and made careful observations of structures and forms within the biological world. Evolutionary theory based on natural selection and the so-called "survival of the fittest" rested not only on sound evidence but displayed a logical consistency as to how species adapt and evolve into other forms of life.

In recent years, a new theory has emerged predicated on the assumption that each species in nature unfolds according to a pre-existing "intelligent design" that provides a blueprint for evolutionary change. One of the leading proponents of this theory has been British biologist Rupert Sheldrake. Sheldrake argues that patterns of organization involve the appearance of what he calls "morphic fields," which are intelligence systems that are cumulative and over time and become habitual. Morphic fields exist within other fields so that changes in the pattern on one level will lead to corresponding changes at another level.³

Unlike the Darwinian model that seeks to explain how one form evolves into another form, the intelligent design model posits that evolution proceeds through patterns of resonance that coalesce into and perpetuate forms. When the pattern is altered, new forms are created. Although a creator "God" is not necessarily part of this paradigm, it is easy to see how such a correspondence can be made.

The point here is that neither model is inherently correct or incorrect, but rests on a given set of assumptions. I have had students tell me that they do not agree with Darwin and put forward instead a theory of creation. The question then becomes one of evidence. Quotes from the *Bible* may provide the basis for an interesting discussion, but they do not constitute solid evidence. On the other hand, some students come to the study of religion as convinced materialists and have no truck with metaphysical issues. For example, the Buddha, one of the great world teachers, used to challenge his disciples by taking contradictory positions. If one denied the existence of material forms, he would point to the many examples of concrete objects as having a reality in the physical world. On the other hand, he was equally prepared to prove to a materialist that the forms, which he or she thought were inviolable, were in effect illusions. For him, truth was to be found along the razor-edged path between pairs of opposites, so that dialectical discourse had its use.

Central to the learning experience is the epistemological question of how we know what we know? As a mentor in this instance, I would be less inclined to insist upon scientific orthodoxy and more eager to help the student, if possible, logically substantiate his or her original premise. If it is true that the heart and soul of mentoring emerges through the interaction of discourse, then both the student and mentor need to explore and negotiate the assumptions of their own mental universes. We have to remind ourselves that it is not only the students who are called on to reflect upon such assumptions.

Challenges to Working with Students in Religious Studies

The challenges to working with students in religious studies are many and varied and to some extent are situational, even though common issues often arise. Since I come from a background in theosophy and Ageless Wisdom studies, my predilection is to define the scope of religion as inclusively as possible. Others may be more circumscribed in what they consider the extent of their interest and, of course, the legitimacy of their discipline. Either way is acceptable. I will, therefore, site a few examples, which may or may not correspond to the experiences of others.

In my experience at Empire State College it has often been the case that a learning contract emerged out of the needs of students at a particular point in time. Sometimes the best way to engage students in a discussion of some of the deeper issues posed by religion is to approach such questions indirectly. For example, studies related to death and dying offer one such avenue of inquiry. A number of years ago, I introduced a study group titled "Life, Death, and the Afterlife" in response to what I thought was a topic of considerable interest among our students. Since many people have had one or more experiences of going through the death process with a loved one, the challenge was to provide a study that would supply a context of learning that would help them make sense of their personal experiences. At the same time, such a study would allow them to share and give vent to their own thoughts and feelings in connection with these events. Dr. Kubler-Ross's classic book, *On Death and Dying*, provided a model for understanding the stages of death that one in the final stages of life usually experiences. This model offered students a carefully developed model for assessing their own experiences in undergoing this process.

The second part of the study group concentrated on the vast amount of literature related to so-called "near death experiences." Considerable research has been done in this area starting with the work of Raymond Moody, who collected case histories of those who had undergone a near death experience, to others who have

approached the subject from biological, psychological, cultural, and religious (mystical) perspectives. This part of the work not only engaged the student in an interdisciplinary analysis but also invited a critical discussion of some very basic questions, such as: what is death? What is the self? What, if anything, survives death? Finally, what are the implications of some kind of existence after physical death has occurred?

This last question opened the door to the third theme of the study group, which was purely speculative. The employment of speculative questions within a study is, I think, valuable because it stimulates the imagination. One way I found to frame these questions was to explore Eastern and Western theories of the afterlife. What might seem to be straightforward theological pronouncements often mask a whole range of interesting perspectives. Heaven and hell may be understood literally, but they can also be comprehended psychologically as opposing states of consciousness, historically as possible ways of seeing a cultural worldview at any given point in time, or as given situations within the human experience. For instance, many Holocaust survivors have aptly described their experience in Nazi concentration camps as living through hell on earth. Whether one believes in the afterlife or not, the fact that such beliefs on a wide scale have important social implications merits further analysis and provokes students to confront new problems and ask new questions.

Such questions also relate to the investigation of other religions and cultures in general. The post-9/11 interest in Islam, the Middle East, and their assumed connection to terrorism is a case in point. It has been my observation that everyone brings to a study of religion certain cultural biases that tend to color how one sees the world. Students in my History of the Middle East study, for example, often assumed that Islam justified the suppression of women. Yet as Geraldine Brooks, in her book, *Nine Parts of Desire* has demonstrated, the ill-treatment or subjugation of women in regions of the Islamic world owes more to the cultural baggage of certain tribes and peoples that have, over time, been grafted onto religious practices and doctrines. In a

similar vein, students sometimes misunderstand *jihad* as a justification for holy war and terrorism, forgetting that the word essentially means “to exert oneself in the way of God.” *Jihad* thus refers to a deepening of faith. A study of the early teachings of the prophet Mohammed indicated that considerable tolerance was displayed towards believers of other faiths. No doubt, a major challenge regarding the study of any religion is to go beyond generalized perceptions to an understanding that religion exists within a cultural setting, and is a complex entity that underscores a multiplicity of ideas, behaviors, practices, and interpretations of each.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge in mentoring students in religious studies is the inability or unwillingness of some students, whether out of fear or absolute conviction, to go beyond the parameters of a given faith to consider other viewpoints.

I was once asked to tutor a student who not only insisted upon studying only the Catholic religion, but also refused to read anything on the subject by non-Catholic authors. Initially, I was tempted to decline the offer to engage in such a sectarian approach; however, in pursuing the matter further, it appeared possible to develop a study focusing on debates within the Catholic tradition itself.

The subject the student chose to study was the Inquisition. Predictably, the literature revealed that some Catholic authors saw this phenomenon as an unfortunate aberration within the history of the Church, whereas others took the position that it was better to kill the body to save the soul. My mentoring task was to juxtapose one Catholic writer

with another so that what the student perceived as a monolithic tradition was actually a body of diverse opinions within a particular framework. The interesting point about this study is that it started from the student’s perspective and widened into a broader frame of discourse than neither the student nor myself had anticipated at the start. Thus, here was a clear way in which it was possible to interject an element of critical thinking into a contract on religious studies so as to challenge the student’s thinking in new and constructive ways.

Religion as Prior Experiential Learning

Experiential learning offers another possibility of engaging students in discussion of many aspects of “spirituality” that would fall outside a conventional religious studies curriculum. More and more it seems that people are experimenting with non-traditional religious practices whether out of curiosity, a desire to find peace of mind, a willingness to explore certain cultural traditions and rituals, or an interest to go more deeply into what might loosely be called “spiritual experience.”

Perhaps the most difficult challenge in mentoring students in religious studies is the inability or unwillingness of some students, whether out of fear or absolute conviction, to go beyond the parameters of a given faith to consider other viewpoints.

Prayer and meditation are two such practices that are central to many religions. Because they are subjective in nature, some may question whether they can qualify as legitimate academic learning at all. An essential rule of thumb is that any evaluation of a student’s religious practices should have little to do with acknowledging repetitive engagement, and more to do with the learning derived from such devotional practices. Over the years, I have been asked on several occasions to evaluate a student’s knowledge of meditation. There are of course many schools and types of meditation, which is a framework of learning in itself. In what appears to be a simple practice, the participant is often

involved in strenuous efforts to still the mind and to be receptive to subtle patterns of thought and symbolic impression. In reality, this cognitive practice of mindfulness constitutes a study of spheres of consciousness as experienced by the meditator. Here, experience can be converted into learning by challenging the student to relate subjective experiences to objective knowledge, as might be gained from a study of transpersonal psychology, for instance. By the same token, since meditation is used in medical science, avenues are now open to explore these practices in a number of other situations.

The same might be said about prayer, defined by one of my students as “communion with a higher power.” In evaluating a student’s prayer life, I have tried to look for concrete examples of the ways prayer has produced certain ends, the distinction between prayer-induced results and so called coincidences, and the role of prayer within different religious traditions. One might also explore with students their understanding of scriptural references to prayer and their meaning, the place of prayer within an historical context, and perhaps controlled experiments in which prayer was tested against other variables. Through my experience in working with students, I came to see that some understanding of prayer could be legitimized in a way that could be appropriately evaluated as college level and true academic learning.

Awarding credit for a student’s learning in religious studies often depends on how knowledge is framed. One of my students requested credit for learning gained from an 11-year study in “A Course on Miracles.” The basic course was contained in a multi-volume series of books supplemented by other study materials. Her learning was derived not only from various readings and classroom study, but also from daily spiritual exercises that were recorded in a journal. Further discussions with the student revealed that the content of this course had less to do with “miracles” themselves than with more recognizable areas of learning such as transpersonal psychology, Christian theology, and journaling. It was around those topics that an evaluation was framed.

By far, in my experience, most students requesting credit for their experiential learning in religion seek evaluations in the area of biblical studies. This learning is often derived through church-sponsored bible classes, self-study, or from matriculation at a religious or bible college. Rudiments of bible knowledge are often gained through membership in a church group or through religious education classes, which usually take the form of what should be considered religious indoctrination classes. Hence the awarding of credit for a casual study, or for a simple narrative knowledge of scripture would be highly problematic.

More legitimate requests come from those students who have studied the *Bible* over a period of many years and have reflected upon different meanings and interpretations. One such student related the book of Genesis to other creation myths; another studied Hebrew so as to gain a good knowledge of the original meaning of key terms; whereas a third student looked at scripture from the standpoint of numerology and obviously learned a great deal. The richness of biblical study comes from its interdisciplinary nature and possibilities for interpretation contained in its many symbols, allegories, and mysteries, which offers numerous avenues for evaluating a student’s learning.

Searching for the Boundaries in Student-based Learning

One of the complexities surrounding religious studies derives from the lack of clarity of its boundaries. While some might argue that the field of religion is merely an extension of a traditional humanities and social sciences curriculum, much of what might be considered as pertaining to religious experience defies any such neat categorization. This is all the more so given the vagueness of what has been termed “spirituality,” which is often highly personal as well as subjective. In all of this work, it must be remembered that, like in many other fields, the canon of knowledge is not static. Courses once thought to be completely unworthy of academic consideration are now mainstream college studies. Examples of courses taught in accredited colleges and universities around

the country encompass a diverse array of studies, inclusive of topics like meditation, spiritual healing, and shamanism, anthroposophy, and Native American religious practices, which reflect a new wave of interest in things spiritual.

To the larger question regarding the proper role of religion, in its multitudinous forms, within academia, I have little else to say. However, as I prepare to leave Empire State College after mentoring students for nearly 12 years, my one parting conviction is that learning is student-based. It is therefore necessary to keep focused on the needs and interests of the student, structured by the standards of intellectual inquiry, that should drive the questions we ask, the range of studies we do with our students, and the criteria we use to judge our work and theirs.

Footnotes

- ¹ Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (Bantam Books, 1988), 1.
- ² Huston Smith, *Why Religion Matters* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 79-86.
- ³ Rupert Sheldrake, *The Rebirth of Nature* (Park Street Press, 1991), 193-195.

Progress to Presentation: Reflections on 'Getting it Together' for the All Areas of Study Meeting, 2004

Linzi Kemp, Center for Distance Learning

The e-mail announcing the All Areas of Study (AAOS) Meeting arrived in my mailbox, "I wonder what is an AAOS?" thought this author to herself. As a new mentor, a great deal of time is expended on "What?" Questions often remain internal, from sheer embarrassment as to the extent of naivety about practically everything. Occasionally though, an inquiry struggles out, based on a logic that nobody can know that at this juncture of their nontraditional college career. On those occasions, colleagues are rooted out to respond from their vast experience; they are recognizable as employees who are able to formulate the big question, "Why?" Everyone has vast experience, by dint of being privileged to have been at Empire State College just one more day. Those who have been here through a few decades will, I hope, forgive and ignore this assumption. You are the people who maybe know the

answers without needing to be cognizant of the questions!

The AAOS e-mail was one of those times when "What?" became externalized and colleagues were interrogated as to "What is an AAOS?" and "What goes on there?" As ever, they responded patiently and thoroughly. I was directed to college news on ESCNet (July 1, 2004) for more detail and consequently noted the "call for submissions:"

We invite people to propose papers, panels, workshops, and other activities that will help us explore the myriad ways in which we are "working at the boundaries."

It would be so much easier to turn up, listen and learn rather than "do" anything. But the theme, "Working at the Boundaries – Adult Learners and Teamwork," sounded intriguing particularly as it was a theme I'd

previously explored. Perhaps though it would be considered "cheeky" to offer something at this early stage in my Empire State College career. I was reassured by friends that it would be neither "cheeky" nor presumptuous (a rough translation from a British idiom) to submit a proposal. Basically, excuses were overridden!

As one of my interests lies in teamwork, I considered ways to introduce that interest. Looking at any topic from the point of view of who is the end user is helpful when determining the goal. The end users of all our output are the students we serve,

major sources of our students' interest in coming to Empire State College have been desires for new jobs, for more challenging work, for credentials, for mobility within their companies, and for transition from one kind of work to another (Empire State College, 2004).

Rather than a focus on teamwork amongst colleagues; as already experienced there is a plethora of great teamwork operating at the college, I decided to concentrate on students and teamwork. A working title, "Working at the Boundaries – Adult Learners and Teamwork" kept within the boundaries of the conference theme and coordinated with the niche market of our adult learners.

The next stage was to select the presentation arrangement. Boundaries to submission were fairly flexible as to format, exemplified in the invitation for "other activities." My imagination really did not stretch to what would encompass "another activity." A proposal for a paper was rebuffed because the criteria could not be met (University of Huddersfield, 2004):

1. Knowing you know more than the potential audience.
2. No margin for error.
3. Precise planning.



Linzi Kemp

A panel format requires a range of expertise to facilitate discussion (NIH, 2004) and that predisposed a network of experts from the field; maybe for the future. A process of elimination had thus set the direction for a workshop. Rather fitting for the topic of teamwork – a workshop is defined on the World Wide Web (www) as a conference format appropriate for small groups involved in problem solving. The workshop proposal was thus submitted by a deadline of September 20.

Then came the professional development event called the New Mentor Workshop, September 21 - 22, 2004. As would be true of AAOS, the mentor workshop was an opportunity to network and learn. Two sessions in particular had an impact on the formulation of the teamwork presentation for AAOS:

Workshop 1: Adult Learning/Adult Learners – Toward a life of reflective practice and

Workshop 2: Thinking about a new study/the learning contract.

The former workshop emphasized the concentration on adult learning and incited the title of this write-up. The latter workshop awoke me to the realization that the one to one mentoring situation, forming the philosophy of our college (Empire State College 2004), required integration into the teamwork presentation. Panic set in: Had I inadvertently created the wrong product and mistaken the potential audience? This was a nightmare for all marketers (marketing being my discipline). I decided to really work at the boundaries and incorporate a rather broad definition of team,

a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993).

Small could mean two people (student and mentor) with complementary skills (from their past experiences). Student and mentor committed to the common purpose of learning with an ultimate goal of student graduation. The collaboration between student and mentor in designing a study

being recognition of the teamwork that happens in the process (Herman and Mandell, 2004). Research for presentation content was thus widened and a return was made back to the original proposal for an update and resubmission.

It “takes a village to raise a child” (Clinton 1996; African proverb) and, keeping within a village metaphor, it can take a collegial community to raise a presentation. Conversations with Center for Distance Learning (CDL) faculty were instigated on how teamwork was achieved in online courses. One morning, there were two drop-ins who chatted with me about virtual teamwork whilst another contributed casually and precariously leaning in the doorway. The office really isn’t big enough to be a village square but we were working towards that. Knocking on the neighbor’s door (regional units) also brought forth rich data about teamwork in study groups and the one-to-one mentoring scenario. From this collegial input, a presentation began to be formed.

My perspective of a workshop is that it means work for both the presenter and participants. I therefore scheduled various activities to ensure participants were learning as they were performing. The ideal of interactive workshops is “to transform students from passive listeners to active learners” (Bonwell, 2004), an ideal that melded with the stages of teamwork “forming, storming, norming and performing” (Tuckman, 1965). It was planned for workshop participants to be divided into smaller groups to answer a warm-up quiz mirroring State University of New York (SUNY) general education requirements. The aim was for members to “form” as a team. The principle exercise was the Wilderness Survival (1976) taken from a CDL online course, Management Principles.

In this exercise, groups are given a scenario of being stranded in upstate New York one winter’s eve. They attempt to decide individually their responses to various questions relating to survival and then, by consensus, agree on their team answers. The learning outcome to have participated in “synergy” i.e. the team performs better than the summed input of its members:

“Teamworking is achieving the more successful completion of a task by working together, than the separate individuals would have done by working alone” (Leith, 1995, p 802).

Such interactive tasks were to be interspersed with feedback from the audience on the experience of team working as it was happening to them. Activities were designed to lead to discussion as to the effectiveness of teamwork in one-to-one mentoring, study groups and online courses.

In conclusion, this article for *All About Mentoring* is titled: Progress to Presentation; Reflections on ‘getting it together’ for the All Areas of Study Meeting, 2004. Therefore, the reflection stops here before the actual presentation. It did take place on Friday, November 20, 2004, 8:30 a.m. - 10:15 a.m., but as to what happened? Well that is another story!

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Sabbatical Report

Reed Coughlan, Central New York Center

My sabbatical spanned a six-month period with six weeks tacked on the end because I continued my quarter-time assignment to the Center for International Programs (IP) throughout my leave. I enjoy the IP work; I like to travel and I was engaged in several projects that I wanted to bring to fruition. Two of these projects involved archival work at the Public Record Office (PRO) at Kew Gardens, London, and are now complete. The first resulted in a book, *Enosis and the British: British Official Documents 1878-1950* published by the Greece and Cyprus Research Center, and is a compilation of official British documents that reflect both official and unofficial views on Enosis, the Greek Cypriot movement to bring about the unification of Cyprus with Greece. I identified, assembled and edited these documents from the Public Record

Office over the course of visits to London (on the way to or from Cyprus, Athens and Thessaloniki) during the last ten years. The second project resulted in a journal article that I co-authored with Bill Mallinson who teaches at our partner institution in Athens, New York College. He is a former British diplomat who had also done extensive research at the PRO, though his work had focused on Foreign Office documents while mine dealt with documents from the Colonial Office. We combined what we knew about these two branches of the British government for an article we titled, "Enosis, Socio-cultural Imperialism and Strategy: Difficult Bedfellows." It will appear in the journal *Middle Eastern Studies* next year. The sabbatical leave allowed me to bring these two projects, long in the making, to a close.

Another reason to continue my work with the Center for International Programs is that I was in the middle of developing a proposal for a new required course for the Empire State College Athens – New York College Program. It incorporated elements of information literacy and bibliographic instruction in the syllabus. Although the academic dean at our partner institution rejected it, my commitment to this project had been based on what I know about the dearth of library resources in both Athens and Thessaloniki and the requirements of Middle States for information literacy. My reassignment to the Center for International Programs came to an end in October when my sabbatical also came to a close.

During the first few months of the sabbatical, I developed and submitted a successful application for a reassignment

to the Mentoring Institute to develop materials and work with faculty on bibliographic instruction and the use of Empire State College's databases on the virtual library.

Although these projects were important to me, they were not part of what I had set out to do in my sabbatical application. My sabbatical proposal had actually envisioned writing a book based on interviews with one hundred Bosnian families. I had completed these interviews in 1999 - 2000 when I had an Imperatore Fellowship. I had been working on an analysis of this data and looked forward to an opportunity to devote my undivided attention to writing a book about Bosnian resettlement in America. Before I could do that, my co-author and I were invited to contribute a chapter to an anthology, *Homeland Wanted: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Refugee Resettlement in the West*. For this chapter we analyzed data for a subset of the 100 families. This subset of 20 families had indicated that they had experienced severe trauma as a result of their experiences in war. We had gone back to conduct second interviews with them and to see if referral to community resources was warranted.

We finished a draft of the chapter and I went back to work on the book manuscript. I wrote for about a month and was making good progress when we heard from the editors of *Homeland Wanted*. They asked for a fairly major revision. That was discouraging at first, but on reflection, I'm really glad they did. The revision was a much better effort. Anyway, the book project went in fits and starts both because of unanticipated interruptions and because of various trips for the Center for International Programs. No complaints there though. Athens and Thessaloniki are favorite cities in the spring and summer months. We finally finished work on the manuscript in December and sent it off to the publisher. Springer will publish *Bosnian*



Reed Coughlan

Refugees in America New Communities, New Cultures in its Clinical Sociology Series. They anticipate that it will be on the shelves by August, in time for it to be promoted at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association.

So, the sabbatical helped me to bring closure to a number of substantial projects that had been in the works literally for years. It also helped me to launch a number of new projects that I hope will continue to percolate until I have another period of uninterrupted time to research, read and write. I put together a study group designed to introduce students to research methods in the social sciences, provide them with instruction in the protection of human research subjects and then expose them to interview techniques in preparation for actual interviews that were to be carried out with some of the Bosnian families I had first met five years ago. That data has now been collected and awaits analysis. I will say, students really loved this study group and it served as a great opportunity for them to learn about world events (the war in Bosnia), the experience of flight and exile and the challenges of resettlement. They report that it helped them to get some perspective on their privileged lives and it helped to broaden their perspectives on the world around them.

The latest project that I began work on toward the end of the sabbatical leave involves interviews with a new group of refugee arrivals in Utica. Africans fleeing the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Sudan and Somalia have been resettled in Utica by the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees. I have now received permission from the IRB to proceed and I have received funding from the UUP professional development committee for a small pilot project. Evidence from two focus groups with service providers conducted at the Refugee Center suggests that this will be a very different story than the one we told about Bosnian resettlement. As we said in the book on Bosnian resettlement,

The relatively successful resettlement of Bosnians reported in this research occurred, we believe, because of the fortuitous combination of the characteristics of these Bosnian refugees

and the features of the receiving community. The Bosnians comprised a relatively young, energetic, hard-working population who valued home ownership. The community itself offered a set of well organized, centralized resettlement services, a labor market that could absorb Bosnians who did not speak English, and a housing market that could supply affordable homes. Staff at the Refugee Center, local realtors and the New York State Department of Labor report more recent changes in local conditions in both the labor market and the housing market (D. Mistic, personal communication, August 10, 2004). The number of entry-level employment opportunities has declined, and the housing market for low-income apartments has virtually disappeared, especially for larger families.

The newest populations being resettled in Utica, Africans from the Sudan, Liberia, and Somalia, among others, therefore, face a very different set of circumstances. In addition, the African refugees, unlike Bosnians, do not resemble those in the host society either physically or culturally. It remains to be seen what the outcome of their resettlement experience will be, but the changed labor and housing markets will make it difficult to provide the new refugee group with the same opportunities enjoyed by the Bosnians a decade ago (Coughlan and Owens-Manley 2005, p. 234).

When I began my work with Bosnian families six years ago, I determined that I first needed to learn about the war that had driven them from their homes. With African refugees, I am confronted with learning about the causes and circumstances of the civil strife in four different countries, so I have my work cut out for me. I also have now set up and am running a study group for students interested in learning about African societies and the resettlement experience of refugees from Sierra Leone, Liberia, Somalia and Sudan.

On balance the sabbatical was productive, invigorating and unpredictable. It's always helpful to make a clear plan and to be ambitious at the outset, but also to be

adaptable in the course of seeing that plan through to completion.

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In Memoriam ~ Bob Rodgers



Bob Rodgers at work.

After completing his Ph.D. degree from the University of Chicago in 1964, Bob Rodgers served for several years as a research associate and lecturer at Cornell University, working on a team examining child rearing from a cross-cultural perspective. He joined the learning resources faculty of Empire State College in 1973, and, for a year, he worked in Saratoga Springs with others who were designing learning materials for the college, which was “brand new” at the time.

Bob joined the small faculty here in Buffalo in 1974, and remained with us until 2002. He retired for the first time in 1996, but fortunately for this center, he returned to the faculty as a part time colleague and remained for an additional six years.

But outlining the shape of Bob’s career with Empire State College does nothing to suggest the richness of it! Bob was, at times, cantankerous, maybe even contentious, radically devoted to nontraditional education and furious at anything that he perceived as a threat to good educational practice. Everything mattered to Bob: It mattered that introductory-level psychology was taught without a lab experience attached to it (Bob was adamantly opposed),

and it mattered that there be a distinct statement of purpose on each learning contract (Bob was vociferously in favor), and it mattered that learning contracts bore titles that hinted at the sophistication of the study being undertaken (you’ll know immediately where he stood on that one!) He wouldn’t have titled a learning contract Child Psychology. Rather, his study would have a title like this: Understanding the Relationships Between Early Stimulation and Preadolescent Development. (You can imagine the hostility with which he learned that the computer system adopted by the college in the late ’90s wouldn’t permit titles of that length!)

But it’s important to point out that the distinctions that he insisted upon were significant to him because of the effect on student learning. Bob MacCameron and I were reminiscing a few weeks ago, and Bob commented that, for Bob Rodgers, the contentions were never about him, but always about students. I had many disagreements with Bob R. in the years that we worked together, but none of them had to do with any attempt at self aggrandizement – there were not disputes about office space or access to support staff or equitable distribution of any of the

“That man ... has more radical bones in his little finger than all the rest of us combined.”

“perks” of academia: The issues always had to do with how this institution best serves students.

In thinking about this day and these remarks, I read through Bob’s file in the dean’s office. First of all, it’s huge – two big fat file folders crammed full! The first, from the “early days” here in Buffalo was filled with tendentious memos to and from Bob wherein every aspect of educational practice was debated hotly: in fact, the folder nearly smoked as he railed against the weight of “paperwork” and against the number and variety of tasks required of an Empire State College mentor.

Another aspect of his professional life illustrated by the material in his folder, though, was his endless curiosity, his habit of lifelong learning. He was a computer “pioneer” at this center, lobbying for a computer long before the college turned in that direction. Reports of his activities during sabbaticals included such diverse activities as learning figure drawing and woodcutting techniques, editing plays, writing verse, learning Russian. He participated in every aspect of center life, from working on fund raising phonothons to sponsoring symposia, and he believed firmly in the obligation and the privilege of faculty governance.

For more than 10 years, my office was immediately adjacent to Bob's. From his office there were often sounds of vigorous discussion, punctuated with sounds of raucous laughter. Since he kept a cupboard of toys for the young children who often accompanied their parents to his sessions, there were also "happy children" sounds. I remember noting at one point how incredibly Bob covered the remarkable range of talents of our students: He was fiercely proud and often in awe of the accomplishments of the most gifted, and at the same time incredibly patient and passionately supportive of the needs of the most challenged. In those years when we were "neighbors," he often stuck his head in at the end of his day to talk about the remarkable range of students he'd seen that day.

And there was Bob's unbelievable honesty, particularly about himself. For example, as we moved into the computer era, there were many "Mac vs. PC" disputes in this center and in this college. Bob was a "Mac" man and I always assumed that his preference was deeply rooted in his opinion of the pedagogical and editorial superiority of the Mac. Imagine my surprise when I read a request from him for support for the development of educational software. He wrote, "In 1984, I had purchased a Macintosh because of long-standing dislike of large corporations such as IBM." And my favorite – in a memo that he titled "job dissatisfaction," undated, but written to Peter Ristuben, so sometime in the late '70s or early '80s, he recounted the advice he'd recently given a bright student who was contemplating accepting employment in an institution that Bob perceived as bureaucratic. He wrote to that student, "Those who work by insight and confrontation, autonomously, will find themselves hampered at every turn by rules and regulations, will eventually turn themselves off, and do no one any good." He concluded with the observation that this comment applied to him in his work with Empire State College, as aptly as to his student.

And yet he stayed, and he came back for more after retirement. I believe that it was on the occasion of our celebration of his retirement – or at some public moment late

in his career – that he remarked, movingly, that we should never ever forget that the faculty of Empire State College have the best jobs in the State University of New York system! Throughout his career, he railed against the encroachments of bureaucratic change and the evolutions in the college that stemmed from the inevitable adoption of technology, and yet he cherished this

"He could see the future not only straight ahead, as could the rest of us, of course, but also around corners."

institution, his colleagues, and most of all, his students. In profound ways, he and the college were an ideal "fit," and there was abundant mutual benefit in his long relationship with Empire State College.

Anne R. Bertholf

[Anne Bertholf was dean at the Niagara Frontier Center]



I spoke with Bob MacCameron about our friend and colleague Bob Rodgers this past week. Bob R. might well have been seen by those who didn't know him well as an academic conservative. As long-ago colleague Joanne Altieri said to Bob MacCameron, however, way back in 1977: "That man (meaning Bob R.) has more radical bones in his little finger than all the rest of us combined."

I guess it depends on where one stands on academic issues when thinking about Bob R. Bob M. and I both felt that Bob R. sometimes behaved in ways some might well have viewed as self-indulgently contrary. As we all came to realize over the years, however, it was principle rather than simple contrariness – there was **nothing** simple about Bob R. – that moved him to say and do what he did.

When Bob R. refused to give grades, for example, at the time when requests for after-the-fact grades first became an issue, it was not to be contrary, but to protect what he saw as the integrity of the narrative evaluations that had stood alone before that. When he championed what some thought of as long and/or awkward titles for learning-

contract studies, he did so not out of self-regarding stubbornness, I believe, but out of his conviction that not to do so was to subvert what Empire State College was all about.

As I've said about him over the years, Bob R had a quirky mind. And I meant that as a compliment. In faculty meeting discussions,

for example, Bob often brought up concerns that none of the rest of us had thought of. He could see the future not only straight ahead, as could the rest of us, of course, but also around corners. And, whether I liked hearing what he said or not, I came to feel that we as a group needed to listen very carefully to what he said and then to take it into account.

Bob also was a walking review of research in an astonishing array of boundary-busting topics and even disciplines. More than a few times, in a discussion we'd be having of some issue or another, he'd say something to this effect – which I'm making up, I should add, because I can't do what he did – "Oh, yes, there was an article on that very thing by Abbott and Costello in the *Journal of Literary Psychology* ... Volume 3 ... Issue 23 ... 1967."

In Bob R.'s absence, we are impoverished.

Keith Elkins

[long-time mentor at the Niagara Frontier Center]



Bob Rodgers at home.



Mrs. Dorothy Rodgers
Empire State College
Market Arcade Building
617 Main Street
Buffalo, NY 14203

Dear Dorothy,

I was very sad to hear of Bob's sudden passing this summer, and I am very sorry that I am unable to attend his memorial service.

I have very fond memories of Bob. He was one of the original group that sat in a very dusty classroom in Rockwell Hall in 1974 and started the Niagara Frontier Center (Buffalo Center way back then as I recall). Bob was the only member of the group that had any notion of what we were supposed to do. Thank God for Bob!

I once heard someone say that if we all thought alike, we would be redundant. Bob would never be accused of being redundant. He was an extremely bright guy, and he brought keen insights to every discussion. He was creative and very analytical, and that made him a great contributor to our group.

It wasn't until his retirement party that I fully realized the extent of his experiment-oriented mind. One of your sons told some stories of how Bob was always thinking of (and perhaps implementing) experiments with (on) the family. I have a strong memory of one of his off-the-cuff ideas for an experiment that had to do (and there is no way to express this delicately) with coins in a urinal and how much money would need to accumulate before someone would dare to retrieve it. It was the late 1970s, and times were tough. So even a trip to the men's room resulted in an idea for an experiment. (I later told Bob that 26¢ was the take and that I was pretty sure Keith Elkins was the one who cashed in.)

Bob was a very special guy, and he will be missed by all. I am proud to have known him.

Sincerely, Jack Burke
[Jack Burke was a former associate dean at the Niagara Frontier Center]

At Princeton Battlefield

(Fall, 1947)

Bob Rodgers

In the grove on the rolling hill slope
The wind whispers gentle elegies to the dead
Through soft green and black pine clouds.
Up from the passive earth and the still blood below
Rise the new lives – a new army forming
Of plants and green bushes and men.
All caught up to be tried in the cold wind.

The fields are green with vivid fruitfulness
Then tan with barren pride, then white,
Then fresh chocolate, then green – on and on.
While the dead lie below smiling.

It is fall when a new spirit, restless and eager,
Comes through the dancing pine branches,
A cold wind spirit, anxious
to work on the world a change.

“Let us be off to winter, 0 pines!
“Forget your summer indolence –
now you must fight.”

And around the grove the fallow fields
Are mottled by sweeping cloud shapes
The halo of trees about them turns
Bright with golden pain.

The infinite mist-blue horizon sends
Spears of chilling wind across the rolling land;
The leaves chatter together at a last gala party
Before they sweep off to their earth steep.

Pines toss parallel branches slowly
But only to whisper more tender elegies to the dead.

The dead? They are the earth
And the earth is the seasons,
And the dead smile below,
For there is no change for them.
All change is but one
unchanging chain of changes.
Unrepentant and forever repetitious.
The dead laugh at the bitter air
And turn to each other, friend to foe,
To say, “This is our earth, our own
“And we who were its children
are now its parents.
“We love those pines above –
we are those pines above.”

(Note: according to Bob's son Mark, Bob began his undergraduate studies at Princeton, but only spent six months there before being drafted. After World War II, he spent two more years at Princeton before transferring to the University of Chicago. There he earned the M.A. and Ph.D. “Apparently,” Mark noted, “he never earned his B.A.” If he were to have stayed at Princeton, he would have been a member of the class of '47. This poem was published in one of the 2003 Princeton Alumni Weekly magazines.)

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Send submissions to Alan Mandell (Empire State College, 325 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10013-1005). It is most convenient if your submissions are sent via e-mail or on disk. We very much look forward to your contributions. The next issue of *All About Mentoring* will be published in fall, 2005. Please send your contributions to Alan Mandell by July 1, 2005.

