ALL ABOUT

MENTORING

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EMPIRE STATE
COLLEGE

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In Defense of the Rationale

This spring, a planning group made up of Eric Ball, Carolyn Broadaway, Craig Lamb and me facilitated a workshop at the Center for Distance Learning. We hit upon a rather simple premise around which we designed some activities: that each of us, in myriad ways, is beholden to a "worldview" that informs the way we work. That is, whether in our very first conversation with a student, in the decisions we make when judging a degree program, or in designing a new course or contract, we are expressing, either tacitly or quite directly, a set of specific values, an understanding of the role of mentors and students, and, even more generally, a whole cluster of ideas about the nature of education and society. We wanted to try to recognize the nature of those worldviews and to explicate their presuppositions. Certainly, we knew, value neutrality was not an option.

I was thinking about this notion of a worldview as I recently spoke with some students about their degree rationales and wondered, too, about the ongoing governance discussions about our academic policies in this area. Why was this sometimes-tortured exercise in rationale writing (for students and even for mentors) necessary at all? In everyday practice, the rationale is becoming more of a list than a truly (what it was originally called) "general essay" anyway. Is it really worth all the angst? What is the rationale behind the rationale? Within what worldview is its presence necessary?

Here is a description of one worldview within which we work: The best results of any endeavor come from our attention to individual self-interest. Isn't that, in the end, what individualization is all about? Isn't this the worldview within which our college

was founded? Thus, one might ask: Who knows the interest of the self better than that self does? A student chooses what and how he/she wants to study. "It's my prerogative, it's my choice," a student might say; "this is my education and you, Empire State College, are giving me a chance to earn what is my degree." "I can make decisions for myself; indeed, finally I have found an educational institution that will let me do just that. Yes, give me more choice, but let me do the choosing. You say, 'trust the learner.' Well, I'm the learner; trust me. I'll tell you what I want to do, and, if you want, you can write it up." If the final authority for every choice belongs to the student, there is no point in having to explain anything. There is no need for a degree program rationale.

Here's a description of a second worldview: The focus of any college worthy of its name is the passing on of a historical tradition of legitimate knowledge. Isn't that, in the end, what any academy is actually about? Isn't this the worldview that supports the creation and sustenance of authorities who, through the expression of their expertise, can teach others what they need to know? Thus, from this worldview, one might ask: Aren't the academic interests of students best served if those who do know guide those who don't yet know? "Why," a student could question, "would I spend my money on an education if those who themselves are the product of many years of study and who have gone through their own rigorous intellectual apprenticeship, don't profess at all? Learning from them is why I am here." Or, from the point of view of the faculty: "You say, 'Trust the professor.' Well, I'm the academic professional you hired because of my expertise. Trust me. Every student will not understand and will not be able to explain why he/she is studying this or that. Why ask them to try?" If the final authority for every choice belongs to the experts, we only need to see the curricula upon which the faculty has agreed. There is no need for a degree program rationale.

I think there is a third worldview. Indeed, the origins, policies, and core values of Empire State College are expressions of it. Yes, there is a borrowing from both of the worldviews described above, but it's distinctive. It's why we have "rationales."

At the heart of Empire State College are actually two sources of authority. Students have authority over their own academic decisions; faculty have authority over the academic quality of the institution. To forget any individual student, to fail to listen and imaginatively respond, is to recreate an institutional hierarchy in which all students are taken to be ignorant or, at best, novices. Simultaneously, to take for granted that a

student's choices are always informed, that he or she actually knows his/her best interest and that the faculty exist only to "facilitate" student choices is either naïve romanticism or just silly. Faculty do know something.

So, here's a description of this third worldview: In its policies and practices, Empire State College offers an intricate and ongoing working out of the tensions between student-centeredness and faculty expertise. Neither can stand alone; each needs the other. Such a worldview depends on dialogue and on collaboration – on the space and time needed for the constant back-and-forth that gives:
a) students practice in meaningful decision-making,
b) mentors practice in listening, researching and creating learning opportunities, and
c) the institution practice in developing, testing out, and supporting flexible structures that can sustain this wonderful practice of academic deliberation.

Thus, from the third worldview perspective, we say: "Mutual trust only builds up over time; it emerges as we talk to each other, and as we learn from what any one person can contribute to the conversation. Trust develops as we deliberate and as we debate. Our promise to each other is not only that we will listen and question, but that we will present our thinking and explain our judgments – that we will offer our reasons to each other. We stop talking at our peril."

A rationale is really only necessary if we acknowledge our commitment to the third worldview. It is necessary because it is the student's written expression of a process of researching, wondering, and interacting with people (with mentors, but with others, like those on an assessment committee, too). It is a description of choices and of a process of choosing. And, foremost, it is intended to communicate to others the reasons for those decisions, reasons that can, of course, be questioned and always further wrestled with.

The degree program rationale is necessary not because we need another writing sample; not because we insist that students give us answers to questions that we, the experts, already know. We – each one of us – need the rationale because it is one very concrete reflection of the basic democratic spirit of Empire State College: that all of us have an obligation to offer our ideas and our choices to others in a way that they can understand. Not one of us is free from this call to participation. This is one of the core values of our citizenship in this institution, which we invite our students to join and to practice with us. It is what we call learning.

Alan Mandell

Two Perspectives on Institutional Change

Joe Moore, Coordinating Center, Saratoga Springs
Sylvain Nagler, Northeast Center

At this year's All College meeting, President Joe Moore and mentor, Sylvain Nagler, presented the following reflections on change in the college. Moderated by mentor, Peggy Tally, from Verizon Corporate College, this exchange provided us with an important opportunity to hear and respond to two significant voices in our community.

Joe Moore:

The purpose of this session is to see beyond the stereotypes of newer employees comfortable with change and senior employees opposed to change – since we are more diverse and complex than those stereotypes – and think about the specific issue of institutional change at Empire State College.

In an interesting document, "A Prospectus for a New College," typed, and dated February 8, 1971, are the following words:

> "The new University College … a new commitment to higher education, is to be an institution which transcends constraints of space, place and time. It will represent an expression of faith in a more hopeful future, not yet shaped or perceived, in which higher education can open new paths of learning and fulfillment to every individual within the State of New York … It will seek to transcend conventional academic structure which imposes required courses, set periods of time, and residential constraints upon the individual student … The University College … will rely on a process, rather than a structure, of education to shape and give it substance as well as purpose."

These statements contain inherent tensions that continue to influence our thinking and planning at Empire State College. We still want a college that affords students access to learning opportunities beyond the traditional, campus-based constraints of space, place and time. We still want to "transcend conventional academic structure which imposes required courses, set periods of time, and residential constraints upon the individual student." And we still emphasize the process, rather than the structure, of education.

My hypothesis about institutional change at Empire State College is as follows: the contrast of process with structure, and the priority of process over structure, was an important, informing, and ultimately unfortunate historical distinction. When the college was being created, it had to show that it was different than traditional campus-based colleges. One way to do this was to associate structure with traditional colleges and characterize structure as barrier, impediment, negative. This historical distinction between process and structure is more than semantics. It hurt the college's development. Rather than develop appropriate, collegewide, alternative structures, that complemented and supported its alternative processes, structure itself became suspect with the college.

The college has been suspicious of structure for 35 years. There are rich anecdotes that purport to illustrate how structure inhibits access, freedom, learning, and service to students.

The problem, of course, is that any organization must have some formal and informal structure to function – whether it plans for it or not. So, Empire State College, in avoiding collegewide structure, developed local, multiple, often inconsistent, sometimes redundant, and occasionally competing structures. Choose any topic, and often you will find locally developed structures: admissions criteria, faculty personnel procedures, search processes, guidelines for degree planning, criteria for a student participating in graduation ceremony and more. This development of multiple, competing, and exclusive structures met the ultimate objective: prevention of collegewide structures. It also added to workload in at least two ways: endless meetings and documents, and appeals of locally derived rules and processes. You might call this the "de-structure" of Empire State College.

This de-structure was reinforced by a very positive institutional objective: the focus on the individual student. Other colleges talk about students being the center of their work; Empire State College meant it. As with snowflakes, no two students could be alike. Any process that treated students as part of a group was suspect – thus the institutional concerns over study groups, online courses, and actual courses at the Van Arsdale center, and so on – because groups meant structure. The emphasis on individual student and individual mentor combined with the opposition to organizational structures led to an underground system of structures.

Four developments threatened to crack the centrality of mentor/student relationship. First, the ideal mentor/student relationship, the meeting of two individuals, had to develop within a closed system, removed from the world of higher education accreditation, governance and regulation. Thus, there was resentment when the college had to develop systems that were consistent with federal and/state financial aid regulations or with the SUNY general education policies. These seemed inappropriate, outside interventions into the student/mentor relationship. Second, the comprehensive mentor relationship with each student could overwhelm the faculty mentor's ability (and time) to help all of her students continue moving toward degree attainment as enrollment increased. It could become a workload issue, with "below the radar," idiosyncratic accommodations to address the demands of the workload – for example, the "ghost load," quasi-private study groups, and learning contract templates. Third, the privacy of the mentor/student relationship could evolve in some cases into bad practice,

since there was minimal accountability, in no small part due to the failure of the institution to design an appropriate system of unbiased accountability and support for mentors. Finally, the ubiquitous adoption of technological applications, from e-mail to online databases, created communication, learning and educational alternatives for students that was reliant upon the centrality of the mentor for various functions, from basic information about the college to academic resources and learning options.

The college's history and its emphasis on individualism were consciously opposed to collegewide structures. Given this, it is reasonable that some also would perceive college-initiated systems or structures as intrusions, as reducing the scope of individualism for mentors and students.

The irony, of course, is that many faculty and staff and students want one college, one system, but few of us want to change what we (individually) actually do. We want structure for everyone else to support us, but a sense of professional autonomy for ourselves. We want a college that has structures so that it treats personnel and students fairly, so that it recruits and retains a diverse student body, so that it is academically sound, so that it is financially stable, and so that it is well regarded by the rest of higher education and the public. But we want this with a minimal of structure, with as few systems as possible.

In the effort to avoid structure, we fail to see how carefully constructed structure supports individuals – be they employees, students, or alums. In the effort to avoid structure, we fail to become community, since community is the sum of its informal and formal structures that support meaningful relationships (for students, employees, alumni, friends, and so on). In the effort to avoid structure, we can identify organizational core values as institutional reminders about what is important and special about the college and then associate change as an attack on core values when, in fact, those core values should drive change.

The focus on individualism, both student and mentor, and the avoidance of structure, also kept the college out of the public eye, below the radar, under-funded and under-appreciated. One of the concerns about

CDL was not just its use of technology, or its creation of curriculum, but its increasing reputation, its public-ness.

To illustrate more vividly: the avoidance of structure has led to 35 years of leasing spaces where faculty, staff and students work. These places could be low profile, hidden, beneath the radar, would not cost the state or SUNY anything and the college would not threaten the market region of any neighboring SUNY campus. Drive around parts of New York City, White Plains, Albany, Syracuse, Rochester or Buffalo, and many other areas and witness the impact of the absence of educational opportunity. It is illusory to think we can play a role in addressing these inequities without structure, facilities, programs and services.

> *The irony, of course, is that many faculty and staff and students want one college, one system, but few of us want to change what we (individually) actually do.*

How can we fulfill our public mission and represent our core values without institutional recognition, reputation, and funding?

Individual mentoring of individual students must continue to be the core of our enterprise. But we must develop systems to support that relationship and to assess how well we do with our students, in terms of student learning, retention, and graduation. We must confront the facts about our students (and their complex lives) and the facts about how organization can improve our work with students. This is not simply an issue of institutional planning and improvement, but one of equity.

The key to change at this college is the careful adoption of structures that support

mentoring, individualized degree plans, independent studies, study groups, short-term residencies, online courses and regular courses, assessment of prior college-level learning, and service to adult learners. We are attempting to be true to our history, and to create a college that is unlike any other college in American higher education. If we remain the Empire State College of 1975 or 1985, we will fail. If we aspire to be like most traditional colleges, we will fail. It is the careful integration of process and structure that increase the odds of our success. That integration is ours to create, and that is change.

There is no litmus test in this college for holding opinions that I or anyone else believes are correct. These issues are too complex, and we treat one another poorly and do a disservice to our community when we simplify and disregard someone else's opinion. You will see that Sylvain and I disagree on important points, but we know that our conversations have influenced one another's thinking, and we don't question one another's commitment to the mission of our college.

Last, a closing note about the hubris of leadership. We know that leaders, including college presidents, will craft their messages to support decisions they have already made. We also know that leaders often lose their own integrity when they craft messages just to increase their approval ratings. The best check on leadership hubris are colleagues and a community that engage in meaningful dialogue about important issues, such as institutional change, and treat it not just as political discourse, but as intellectual discourse. In the long run, worthy institutional change is not about one person or one specific change, but about the internal and external influences that shape an institution and that either increase or decrease the odds that it can fulfill its public mission.

Sylvain Nagler:

Joe Moore and Sylvain Nagler, college president and mentor, sitting side by side as panelists at an All-College meeting; two presentations, each seeing the college from different vantage points and through different lenses, sharing alternative views of where the college is today and where it is headed. We planned this panel because we generally agreed that this sort of public debate is thoroughly healthy for the vitality of the college, and too scarce as well.

It is no secret to many of you that I am dismayed by the impending changes in our academic programming. I also am troubled by what seems to me to be the rather anemic level of participation of colleagues in open discussions about these changes and the absence of a much more vigorous dialogue about what this institution will be like in the years to follow. So, let me please urge you to take this sort of mentor-president exchange as a model for what is possible, giving public voice to your concerns not only with the college president but equally with other decision makers and, most of all, with each other. Now for some nostalgia …

When I first arrived at Empire State College in July, 1972, the place was different in so many ways. We were a lot, lot smaller. Besides our size, we also worked with students in a radically different way. Compare for a moment how we defined choice then and now. If you were a newly entering student, there were no prepared academic options from which to choose, and if you were a mentor, there were no prepared academic options for you to propose. What to study and what to teach was nearly exclusively the outcome of a personal engagement between student and faculty person. Sometimes the process went smoothly and quickly, spanning a visit or two. Sometimes the process seemed endless and did not conclude well. The total absence of a finite catalog of academic choices required the two of us, student and mentor, to engage in a discovery process of sorts in order to fashion studies one at a time, a process that could be quite time consuming. The enabling condition to encourage this discovery process to be successful was and remains an hospitable and welcoming learning environment, an environment

which requires a place where, and a time when, students feel secure both to pursue study alternatives they bring with them and those which they design as part of the mentoring engagement.

Think for a moment how different the landscape is today for students than it was then. Now they are greeted by an elaborate menu of rather specific and concrete options, both in regards to learning modalities and subject matter, options that continue to multiply. This significant growth challenges us to question whether we are inching to become an academic expression of the larger consumerism culture which argues that more is better, i.e., more choices make for better choices. In capitalist America choice equals quality. The larger the supermarket, the more breakfast cereals on the shelves, the better for the shopper. The parallel argument for us would go something as follows: the more course choices we offer, the better positioned is the student to craft a unique, personalized program of study. My own sense is that such a model may not universally work especially well in either domain, not for the shoppers nor for the students. In other words, more is not necessarily better. It is certainly no substitute for personal engagement. Here's a story …

"Is that you Sylvain?," an innocent question even if it is just a bit past 5:00 a.m. in the Albany Airport terminal. "I was a student of yours at Empire State College years ago." I do my very best to search my memory trying to match the face and voice to a student roster that dates back more than 30 years. No luck. So, "When was that?" I inquire. "And, I am sorry, but I do not recognize you, so can you please tell me your name," I continue. "I don't have the same name as before," she replies. "You knew me as Bonnie S." It takes some moments, but I recall the name but not much more. Bonnie goes on to remind me of our story. We worked together for more than two years in the early 1980s. She recalls in some detail how in one of our early discussions I asked her why it was she wanted to be a CPA, a concentration she had previously identified. Her recollection makes me feel a bit uneasy as I wonder if I had been too intrusive back then, imposing my values on her with such a

provocative question. Bonnie gratefully eases my conscience before we board.

She is now an ordained minister on her way to Nicaragua this day to conduct a series of seminars for victims of domestic violence. This is her calling, she proudly shares, working with these victims at home and abroad. Upon my return to Albany, I secure her old contract evaluations and feel some sense of pride when I see some of the titles that comprised her degree. Who knows, perhaps we played a role in her journey?

I spend the remaining hours on my flight out west reflecting on what I can recall about our work together many years ago and how it connects to what I do now as a mentor. I think particularly about what happens to allow students to venture forth in directions that they might not have contemplated, not out of lack of interest, nor lack of preparedness, but because they do not perceive them as viable academic options. It is an option that seems unimaginable to many of them based on their previous roles as students in traditional institutions.

I believe this will happen less and less, as we increasingly rely on helping the student shop (recall the example of the cereal shelves at the supermarket) from an increasingly rich array of available structured courses and programs. Barry Schwartz in his *The Paradox of Choice* provides some useful insights into the process of behavioral choice. In his book he describes the challenge he confronted when he went to purchase for himself a pair of jeans, a transaction that he assumed would be routine and simple. He was prepared to identify a waist size and inseam length and off he would be with a new pair in his hands. No way, no more. Now besides waist and length, he needed to factor into his calculus style, color and fit. The result was a decision-making process for which he was unprepared. More choices for him was not better. Quite the contrary, it turned out to be confusing and anxiety producing. I worry that we may become more like the jeans retailer who regales in advertising more choices rather than the shopkeeper who takes pride in helping customers clarify their needs so that they can make an informed and relevant choice.

The contrasting choice models gets me back to thinking about Bonnie. I wonder what Empire State College would be like for her as a 2006 enrolling student. How would she react to an electronic processing system that presents her with many, many more choices than were ever made available to her in discussions with her mentor twenty years ago? Would the significant increase in available options contribute to making her feel more excited or more intimidated, more secure or more lost, more open to creating a novel study or more inclined to select from among a listing of available options. Speculation for sure, but perhaps there is something to be learned from a combination of Schwartz's analysis and our own college history. Presumably Schwartz the consumer would have benefited greatly had a salesperson approached him to help him sort out his needs and wants even before informing him of the vast array of styles, sizes, colors and the like from which he could choose. Similarly, Bonnie as a 2006 student, would surely benefit from a comparable service person who could help her sort out her needs and wants – the mentor.

Sadly, I believe the viability of that original mentor role is less secure, despite the college rhetoric to the contrary. It seems as if as the institution grows and diversifies its academic offerings, we are replacing the mentor role with an ever increasing set of rules that are designed to standardize our practices. In previous eras, each center and program relied on the functioning of an associate dean to monitor academic quality, relative both to mentor and student performance. Of course, we no longer have associate deans. They have been replaced by policies and procedures intended to govern our behavior. The rules have replaced the person.

True, the joining of a fixed calendar with online registration will afford students options never before practically available. The expertise of the entire Empire State College teaching faculty will now be theoretically available, a delectable smorgasbord of study options. So, opening up the entire college to students is a virtuous goal we all can surely endorse. But, we also ought to assess what it might take away. Consider the following. Rather than have beginning and ending dates determined by the life circumstances of mentor and student

> *I worry that we may become more like the jeans retailer who regales in advertising more choices rather than the shopkeeper who takes pride in helping customers clarify their needs so that they can make an informed and relevant choice.*

and the time it may take them to craft study alternatives, beginning in September those dates will be imposed on both of us. One result I fear is a decline in the number of original programs and studies that will be crafted because of the constraints that timelines will impose. Are students better served by supplying them with more and more course and program options? In many respects yes, but not if the cost is the diminishment of the engagement process between mentor and student.

I am hugely impressed with the effort and planning that has been invested in implementing the radical structural changes in our academic program that will be upon us in just a few months. Quite an undertaking. All at once, we will be going to a calendar system, restricting enrollments to specified dates, and to an online registration system that permits students to choose, on their own, from a veritable burgeoning catalog of study options, both in format and content. The administrative and technological innovations required to implement this new system, boggles the mind. Here is my wish. I wish that a comparable investment was evident in strengthening the mentoring model, that unique relationship between student and mentor that has allowed students to pursue rather conventional programs of study as well as to fashion ones that have no parallel in traditional academic settings.

Lest anyone misinterpret the concerns I have raised, let me say for the record I am

delighted with my role as a distance learning tutor and can testify to the unique benefits that obtain from that modality. My point here is hardly to indict any of the available Empire State College options, but to beg for an equal investment in further developing, honing and supporting the mentor model. At this point in the college's history, it does not share center stage with other administrative priorities. Senior members of the administration come to visit our center to herald the benefits that will flow from the new changes, what the calendar and online registration will mean for students and how they will benefit. Missing has been other visits to address mentoring and how we can strengthen and anchor it to the future of the institution. This is not a question of individual, unique tutorials versus structured distance learning courses or residencies. It is rather a question of how students will reach those decisions and how much flexibility they will have to make their determinations.

Why do we need a single calendar structure to accommodate the multiplicity of circumstances students bring to their enrollments and studies? Could we not find a way to have a fixed calendar but also allow for flexibility for those for whom those fixed dates do not make great sense? Why do we need exclusive online electronic registration? Could we find a way to have online registration for some and in-person registration for those for whom such an arrangement makes greater sense? Sure, I understand introducing such variations will require additional investment in system development, but if the outcome is returning mentoring to center stage in order to serve our students better, it would seem to be a worthy investment and has my vote.

A final thought, worth reiterating I believe. I hope that we can exploit whatever our respective loyalties to different programs to engage each other in dialogue about the college and its future. At times it seems as if battle lines have been drawn between academic approaches, between senior and less senior faculty and professionals – a tension which may have contributed to a silencing of divergent views. Not a good thing for an institution that wishes to prosper and for colleagues who wish to learn from each other.

"Visitor, enter our compound so that we may eat through you."*
Exploring International Research Partnerships

Cape Town, South Africa

*Isipedi greeting

Bidhan Chandra
  Center for Distance Learning

Cathy Leaker
  Long Island Center

Lear Matthews
  Metropolitan Center

Elana Michelson
  Center for Graduate Programs

Tina Wagle
  Center for Graduate Programs

The five of us at the Cape of Good Hope: (l-r) Lear Matthews, Bidhan Chandra, Elana Michelson, Tina Wagle and Cathy Leaker.

Tina:

In October 2005, a team of Empire State College faculty visited Cape Town, South Africa on their first of three proposed visits to embark on a collaborative research venture with colleagues at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). The Empire State College team consists of Elana Michelson, chair of the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies Program, Bidhan Chandra, mentor and area of study coordinator in business, management, and economics with the Center for Distance Learning, Lear Matthews, mentor at the Metropolitan Center, Cathy Leaker, a mentor at the Hauppauge Unit, and Tina Wagle, a mentor in the Master of Arts in Teaching Program at the Niagara Frontier Center. In this piece, we offer a brief description of our institutional partner, explain the research projects that emerged from our visit and offer a series of impressions of South Africa, the University of the Western Cape, and the relationship between our two countries.

The University of the Western Cape and Empire State College

The University of the Western Cape was established in 1959 by Parliament as the University College of the Western Cape, a constituent college of the University of South Africa, to serve people classified as "coloured." In 1970, UWC gained university status. Throughout the 70s, 80s and 90s, UWC "rejected the apartheid ideology on which it was established" and dedicated itself to curriculum renewal, research, outreach and access to an increasing number of African students. The University's headcount enrollment is now approximately 14,200. The University has an extensive range of undergraduate and graduate degree programs, with 20 percent of its students at the graduate level. In the new national plan for higher education, UWC maintains its status as an autonomous institution, but does so under a variety of challenging circumstances. These include significant financial constraints, a possible cap on enrollment, and the ongoing tension between access and academic quality. (University of the Western Cape's Prospectus 2005 - 2006, p. 4.)

Despite the obvious regional and national wealth differences between South Africa and the United States, there is much common ground between the University of the Western Cape and Empire State College. Both institutions include access as a key component of their mission statements. Neither institution has opted to be a highly selective institution. Each institution enrolls many students who do not fit the conventional profile of university entrants. Many of these students must develop a stronger set of academic skills to succeed in their degree program. In addition, many students at both institutions face financial burdens that threaten their initial and continuing enrollment. Finally, Empire State College is devoted to serving adult students (average age is 36), and UWC's mission statement includes a commitment

to "encourage and provide opportunities for lifelong learning through programs and courses." Both institutions recognize the importance of higher education for adults, and the impact this has on regional and national economies.

Given the rich history of the University of the Western Cape, it was important that we not allow our work with them to be misunderstood as a missionary endeavor. To drive this point home, Elana Michelson retold this famous story the first day we met together:

> As I have heard it, Bobby Kennedy went to South Africa when he was a senator from New York. He made a speech there in which he said that he had come to South Africa because he was very interested in understanding a country that had been settled by the English and Dutch and that had a tragic and unanswered history of violence and oppression against indigenous people and people of color. Then he said: I mean, of course, the United States.

Research Plans

We returned from our visit with a number of projects in mind. Although each project is most clearly associated with one or two people, we don't want to give the impression that any one of us "owns" the projects described below. We imagine that the collaboration and collegiality that we developed during our visit will continue as these projects come to fruition.

Elana:

I want to look at the portfolio process and the recognition of prior learning at UWC because I think it is an important site for looking at the relationship of knowledge and power in important and specific ways. The questions I have been asking re: RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) in South Africa have important resonance here: who judges whose knowledge? And on what basis? And in whose interest? And at whose expense? I want to know how we move beyond the naturalizing of epistemological privilege, e.g., the assumption that what "we" know is what students need to know and the ways in which socially legitimated

knowledge claims elide with social power of other kinds. I think that RPL can be a meeting ground among cultures of knowledge that allow us to look again at the many forms of knowledge we need to create a sustainable and just world.

Another piece that I want to do is an extension of a study I did for National Council for Adult Learning about eight years ago about the ways in which the individualizing of learning distorts many students' experience of their own identity and knowledge so that they cannot talk about what they know in the structures required by portfolio essays. Alan and Gabiba are working with a group of women shop stewards in "semi-skilled" jobs. They worked with them to produce a **collective** portfolio out of which individual portfolios could grow, and they are having great success. I want to take a close look at that to see the implications for us and for portfolio-mediated prior learning assessment more generally.

Bidhan:

As my contribution to the overall goals and objectives of the inter-institutional collaboration, I will be working in a sub-group with Shirley Walters, Tahir Wood, Jos Koetsier, Glenn Arendse and Lungi Sosibo. We will focus on "Motivation, Obstacles, and Support Systems for Adult Learners, and Policy Implications." The possible projects from this sub-group's work are factors that enable lifelong learning to succeed, monitoring part-time students with multiple life roles, learning histories, and e-teaching and e-learning. I also will be assisting the teams on both sides with effective virtual communication throughout the project period, including maintenance of the online course space for asynchronous sharing of ideas and resources.

Lear:

My counterpart is Vivienne Bozalek, chair of the department of social work. I met with two of her students (adult learners) who shared with me their involvement with the Recognition of Prior Learning (PRL) Program at UWC. They are both paraprofessionals in human services with substantive workplace experience.

My research plan is as follows: (a) Match two RPL adult learners entering the UWC's School of Social Work e-learning course with two Empire State College students equally experienced in Community and Human Services. As "critical friends" the students will have online discussions and analyze essays on selected topics; (b) create a comparable learning experience through study/course topics, assignments and shared workspace. In this regard, I have developed and will offer a study in the fall term titled: "Professional Ethics and Social Justice." A comparable course will be offered at UWC; (c) identify common and divergent experiences as paraprofessionals, community members, parents/partners, and students in human services; (d) and utilize the portfolios as additional data.

As we develop this research project, among the questions raised are: (a) how have students' experiences and social location (race, ethnicity, gender, immigrant status) influenced their work identity within the human services field? What are the issues relating to work ethics and understanding of social justice? (b) What are the factors that enhance and preclude workplace success? (c) What kind of professional identity emerges and how does it change over time? (d) What kinds of academic discourse emerge?

Cathy:

While the shape of my particular project (or projects) is still rather amorphous, I plan to use this collaborative opportunity to pay attention to at least two distinct sites through which students in both countries negotiate their relationship to higher education: academic development and lifelong learning.

I am developing a project with Venicia Smith and Melvyn November, two colleagues working in the Academic Development Department in the faculty of Economic and Management Sciences. We hope to learn, through a combination of survey and interview, how students in both institutional settings, (particularly those with a so-called skills deficit), perceive the value of academic development. More specifically, we want to understand the ways in which those students are able to transfer their emerging academic skills to the workplace.

Ideally, the outcome of this research will allow us to get beneath the rhetoric of transferable skills (and indeed of academic "development"), so that we might more effectively work to support students in their learning across settings and contexts.

My interest in the rhetoric of transferability also shapes my second project. Tahir Wood, director of the Academic Planning Unit at the University of the Western Cape, is developing an historical analysis of the genesis and deployment – what Foucault might call an "archeology" – of the term "Lifelong Learning." When he asked for potential co-researchers in this project, I jumped at the chance. Tahir brings a Marxist sensibility to the lifelong learning discourse, while I tend to adopt a postmodernist approach, but we share an assumption that the discourse is, in Tahir's phrase, "Janus-faced." In other words, lifelong learning offers opportunities for radical education not in spite of the fact that its progressive origins have since been co-opted by both neoliberal and neoconservative policy initiatives, but precisely because it's been so co-opted. Since returning from South Africa, I've read and been inspired by Tahir's work on the unexpected opportunities presented by seemingly reactionary changes in higher education, and I am excited about the opportunity to work more closely with him on this project.

Tina:

I am looking forward to continuing this collaborative research agenda with my respective partners, including Lungi Sosibo, my newfound African 'sisi.' I plan to focus on issues surrounding language that include bi and tri-lingual education in work and learning and also to focus on broader racial and social implications involving essential sociologically foundational dynamics in the two countries. I also hope to reconnect with some UWC colleagues from the Education department to compare teacher training and practices between our two institutions. One ramification of this research might include the work Elana and others are working on with regard to portfolio development. In the M.A.T. program here at Empire State College, we are working with electronic portfolios as a means of assessing our

students but also providing them with a space in which to reflect on their work and create a professional portfolio they may showcase in a job interview, for example, which links the two themes of work and learning. This notion of how we assess our students both programmatically, or collectively, and individually is interesting and potentially parallel to some students in South Africa.

Initial Impressions of Cape Town and South Africa

Other than Elana, none of us had previously been to South Africa. Inevitably, we all encountered some gaps between expectation and realities that we all experienced over the course of our week. Lear and Bidhan capture some of this below.

Bidhan:

I did make some pre-departure preparations before the actual travel began. I collected some information about the country and UWC, talked with a few Americans of South Africa origin and saw many pictures of South Africa on the Internet. I formed some initial opinions based on this preliminary research. I knew that I was to travel to a third-world developing country that is still struggling to minimize the high crime rate and to achieve economic development.

However, these initial perceptions were almost shattered during the travel from London and soon after arrival in Cape Town in a British Airways jumbo. My first disappointment was that there were no more than 10 black or colored passengers in the entire plane. I did not get any African flavor at all during the travel. Upon arrival, the Cape Town airport was another source of shock: it was a posh modern airport with almost first-world amenities. Whichever way I wanted to describe it, this place did not seem to belong to a poor African country. The ride from the airport to the hotel was even more shocking. The highway looked as if it were lifted and transplanted there from the West. It also was full of modern cars and buses. Buildings on both sides of the highway were sophisticated. And while passing by the Table Mountain, the driver pointed out to me the Christian Bernard Hospital complex in the foothills. My hotel

itself was very European; most of the staff I saw on the first day was white.

My disappointments with not getting a taste of the real South Africa I had hoped to see continued throughout my first day. Having arrived there on a Sunday morning, I freshened up quickly and joined my Empire State College colleagues on a sight-seeing tour. Our driver-cum-guide was a very interesting man, Yasir Abrahams. He was a Muslim, but had a last name that came from his Scottish grandfather. We visited some key touristy places, including the Cape Point and Cape of Good Hope. The same feeling again … am I really in Africa? On this first day in Cape Town, only two places did give me an impression of Africa … the Langa neighborhood http://www.capetown.at/heritage/city/langa.htm) which appeared to be poor and almost 100 percent black, and the District 6 area which was forcibly evacuated of colored people during the period of the apartheid. One week later, our visit to the Robben Islands was quite sentimental because this is where all key political prisoners, including Mr. Mandela, were kept.

Lear:

The first interesting observation was that I was one of the few persons of color on the flight from Amsterdam to Cape Town. I thought deeply about this in light of the fact that it was my first visit to the continent of Africa. Anxious and with anticipatory fascination about the trip, I was surprised at this ethnic imbalance, but would soon learn that Cape Town is a premier tourist destination for Europeans. The airport was quite impressive, with modern facilities and well developed environs. Ironically, the first two black South Africans I saw upon landing were a security guard and a cleaning person. These initial observations afforded me a glance into the class structure of the society, realizing, of course, that Cape Town is but one dimension of the country, and mindful that one must be cautious about premature judgments.

The natural beauty, like the hospitality, is a thing to behold. We stood in awe watching lush waves lash relentlessly against the shores of the Cape of Good Hope, the most southwestern point of the African

continent. Cape Town provides a classic lesson in contrasts: a thriving metropolis with a unique history of sustained human problems, surrounded by the characteristic beauty of African natural habitat.

Visit to the University

We were impressed with the University of the Western Cape campus, its students and its faculty. Bidhan offers a glimpse both of the university and of our work there.

Bidhan:

The five of us arrived at the university campus early Monday morning. Glen Arendse from the UWC was our guide for the morning. Explaining some very powerfully drawn murals in the hallway of the Senate building, he began to introduce us to the transition of the university from the pre-apartheid era to the present day. What was so disheartening to learn was the type and extent of discrimination a black or colored South African had to go through in education and professional life. This was a very moving introduction to the apartheid period.

At the Division of Lifelong Learning (DLL), the extreme friendliness and helping attitude of the faculty and staff were striking. In contrast to the U.S., there was no rush to sit down to business immediately and start our agenda. A lot of relationship – building activities took place first.

The university campus was very colorful. We saw myriad diverse people: mostly Indians, Malays, Muslims, blacks, but very few white students. All were typical college-age crowd. The campus seemed quite functional … not very different from a typical university campus in the West. We visited a couple of their libraries and computer labs. All were well equipped and a good number of students were utilizing these resources. There was a lot of interest regarding e-Learning throughout the campus. The IT department is headed by a former professor from the biology department. Under his leadership, the university has made a lot of headway in bringing some open-source course management system software and appropriately adapting it for the African audience. Later, Bidhan

delivered a seminar on e-Learning that was attended by about 25 persons. The Q and A session was lively. It seemed to him that although the university might be ready technology-wise for e-Learning, there is a significant knowledge-gap about sound distance learning pedagogies. The University does need to invest heavily in faculty development.

North and South

Despite the solidarity we felt with our colleagues in Cape Town, we could not escape our origins and we often found ourselves reflecting on what "the south" could teach us about ourselves.

Bidhan:

One expression kept popping up from the UWC side during our one week in South Africa. We were constantly reminded of the "north-south" issues, not only the economic divide but the digital divide as well. These issues were real because with them, we would not be able to observe things objectively enough to devise ways and means of addressing the "work and workplace learning" matter in the North American and South African contexts.

Our team was provided with an office space with a computer. This seemed to solve our Internet access and e-mail problem at first. But the joy was short-lived because of the extremely slow speed of the Internet. This was a wake-up call to the reality of globalization in developing countries. Internet connectivity and high-speed Internet access are two different things. If this was happening in an office inside the university campus, just imagine the plight of dial-in connection to the university server from outside of the university.

We saw AIDS awareness everywhere in the campus. It was mind blowing to learn that almost 40 percent of the university community is impacted in some form or the other by the AIDS epidemic: either students, faculty, staff, their friends or their relatives … it is impossible for us from the U.S. to imagine the impact of this magnitude on the normal functioning of the mindset of the learners and their teachers and mentors.

Personally, I was able to sense a feeling that the issues for South Africa workforce education are quite unique. It is not just a question of skill building or advancement as we mostly see in the Western world, because most black South Africans never had a skilled job in the apartheid regime. Most current job losses are happening in industries where South Africans are not able to compete with cheaper imports from China and India. Totally new skills must be learned for which there is no previous history for the impacted groups of workers.

Our brainstorming sessions seemed to be slow by U.S. standards, but most amazingly, we were able to achieve our stated goals for this visit by the end of the week. This taught us a lesson that things cannot always be achieved by rushing. I am convinced that the project discussions were very thought provoking. Everyone participated and contributed to an understanding of the major issues related to the theme of work and education, both in the African and the American contexts.

Cathy:

Strange as it may seem, I spent much of the time I was in South Africa thinking about an article I'd read while teaching in the freshman composition program at North Carolina State University. As a way of encouraging faculty to think substantively about the implications of online instruction, our associate director asked us to read Cynthia Selfe's "Technology and Literacy: A Story about the Perils of Not Paying Attention," published in 1999. In her article, Selfe offered a powerful, if gently articulated, critique of those humanists who "generally prefer our technologies and the material conditions associated so closely with them to remain in the background" because "we have convinced ourselves that we and the students with whom we work are made of much finer stuff than the machine in our midst." (413 - 414).

Selfe's argument resonated for me so intensely because, while I found many stories in Cape Town, the one story to which I kept returning was a story of the perils of not paying attention. Meeting with South African educators – whether teachers or students – threw into visceral relief all

the manifold machineries and materials to which I have paid increasingly insufficient attention in my daily mentoring (not least among these the economic machinery separating so-called developed from so-called developing nations). Let me briefly touch upon one piece of machinery that profoundly affected me as it did all my colleagues: language.

As a writing teacher and a teacher of English literature, I perhaps pay more attention to language than most of my students would like. Still when I teach English (as in literature), I rarely pay attention to English (as in the language). Similarly, when I talk about "language," I am seldom talking overtly about "the English language." Yet in a country with eleven official languages, and amongst students for whom English is both a third language **and** the not-so-choice language of instruction, I was forced to pay attention to English as simultaneously an embarrassing limitation and as an entirely calculable privilege. And I realized that by not paying attention to this dual recognition of English in my "stateside" mentoring – say, by tacitly endorsing my students when they characterize the "foreign language" general educatopm requirement as a burden – I risk the peril of colluding with the privilege and shoring up limitation.

It is too easy to return from a country like South Africa and conclude that theirs is the story of the perils of not paying attention. But, as I hope my brief example shows, I am telling an American story. I was reminded in South Africa that the material machinery to which our UWC colleagues must pay scrupulous attention – race, class, language, government education policy among others – are not those which no longer need our attention here in the developed United States; still less are they distractions from the real business of mentoring and learning that we are somehow fortunate enough to be able to ignore. Refusal to pay attention to the materials and machinery in our midst is no less perilous for me than it is for Nicia, my UWC partner. And the decision to pay active attention to – and to attentively act toward – race, class, language, government education policy, (among others) is not an act of American generosity or even of global

survival. It's the business of mentoring and learning.

Tina:

During our "team's" presentation at the All Area of Studies meeting in November entitled From Cape Town to Cairo, NY, a colleague from the audience insightfully inquired about the relationship between the North and the South in this collaborative research project. Our team responded by iterating our strong belief that we are not coming from the "almighty" states bringing our incomparable knowledge into a "developing nation." This was made abundantly clear to us while we were in South Africa, which turned out to be an incredible learning experience for me personally and professionally. Our colleagues at the University of the Western Cape made me think about issues, language, educational ideals, and general knowledge in a new and different manner. I was thoroughly engaged.

My intention upon going to Africa was not to make comparisons to the United States, but I could not help doing so while I was there. One of the most significant dimensions of this comparison is that I believe South Africans are at a significant threshold with regards to the quest for national social justice. Due to the relatively recent end of apartheid, Africans currently acknowledge and discuss racial and social injustice on a regular basis. Our UWC colleagues lead this very discussion in their classrooms and in their curricula, both of which are important models for other nations, including the United States. These models are important because they remind us that racial and social injustice continue to pervade our nation, and one means by which to combat this oppression is through education.

Finally, as I continue to reflect on this experience, I still see some us/them, north/south rhetoric, even in my own writing of this piece. Another goal of mine for this partnership is not to exploit differences between the two nations, but rather to form a new "we," a "we" dedicated to the ongoing, yet worthy, struggle for social justice.

Race and Ethnicity

On Thursday at the university, we attended a session on race, social justice, and higher education sponsored by the Center for Adult and Continuing Education and the School of Education. These issues, however, were constant foci for all of us throughout our entire week and shaped the projects that have emerged.

Lear:

Our visit to the township of Langa, an area designated for blacks under apartheid, was interesting, but perplexing. As we drove through the town, an unexplained nervousness engulfed my emotions. I was seeing what I thought to be a most poverty-stricken community, yet as a Caribbean I felt a certain affinity with the residents. I wanted to get out of the vehicle and talk to them. I also was curious about the expressions of my colleagues as we traversed the township, but for some reason I did not look at their faces. Although there were clear signs of material deprivation, the people of Langa displayed a sense of dignity on that Sunday morning. Many of them dressed in church attire, were returning from religious worship. Some appeared to be conducting business near makeshift market places, while others engaged in conversation or did chores around concrete and wooden shacks. Their facial expressions undaunted, friendly but barely camouflaged the hardships they seem to endure. Our driver asked two young residents permission to take their photograph, and as they obliged, I thought for a moment whether they would ever gain access to a higher education and move on to a better life. We learned that standard language of Langa is Xhosa, but the official languages of South Africa are Afrikaans and English. On that first day, I realized how complex a society South Africa is. Although apartheid ended two decades ago, the psychological damage could take another generation to subside, and the remnants of structural inequality still exists. Our dining at the 'Cape to Cuba' restaurant reminded us of the contribution of Cuba to the struggle against a brutal system.

Tina:

In the middle of our week there, I had the opportunity to give a seminar on bilingual education with ramifications of race and ethnicity, based on prior research with which I was engaged. During my presentation, I used the term 'ethnicity' several times, referring to various 'ethnic' populations here in the states. After I presented my information, a colleague from UWC asked me why I was using the term 'ethnicity' when I meant 'race.' This question stopped me abruptly and made me realize the extent to which our views on race and social justice differ in the north and the south. For example, there are eleven official languages in South Africa; in the states, there is not one. In South Africa, you are either white, colored or black. These lines are clearly drawn. Here in America, we like to boast about being a multicultural melting pot, yet we struggle to create racial categories to use on the U.S. census. The present racial status of the two countries provides quite an interesting study in contrast and progress, or lack thereof. I look forward to including this component in my joint research studies.

Cathy:

Reminders of race are omnipresent in South Africa, even in the very language. Yet, this very omnipresence had a bizarrely liberating quality that I much preferred to the resounding American silence regarding race. One example still sits powerfully with me. Elana and I arrived the night before the others and were sitting chatting informally with hotel employees. As I listened, I heard the first colloquial use of what Elana has called "the bizarre nomenclature of apartheid." But I heard it with a notable twist. Describing the political state of affirms in the country, our "informants" referred to various constituencies as "so-called black, so-called colored and so-called white. These were terms I was to hear over and over again during my visit. The strange legacy of the apartheid regime's attempt to categorize was a linguistic insistence on the tenuousness of categories. I couldn't help but wonder how the political discourse back home might be changed if we started referring to the "so-called achievement gap between so-called whites and so-called blacks."

Potential Research Outcomes

We are well aware of the limitations and challenges that this cross-national and inter-institutional project will offer during next two years. But the potential rewards also are too many. This is a unique opportunity to collaborate and work across geographic, institutional and disciplinary boundaries and to create information that will be helpful for the target audience. The added bonus is a very meaningful camaraderie and friendship with a diverse group of academics and administrators which should last for a long time.

Furthermore, this collaborative project would have useful academic and practice implications for students, faculty, and curricula development at both institutions. It would help us to learn how students in particular disciplines, and in two different social environments, perceive knowledge; help us develop new ways to tap into student resources to enhance their learning; discover other ways of looking for evidence; help students improve communication in the workplace, as well as job security; help students become more competent in working with their clients, through exploration of the ethics of caring, and social justice; help students understand the ways in which social issues and public policies impact their professional and personal lives; and increase students' capacity to comprehend and navigate the cultural contexts within which they work and live.

We also have come to realize that it is our duty as mentors to include these challenging discussions in our groups and learning experiences with students. It also is our duty to base our curricula on the multicultural society that we claim to be. This is just one of many inspirational insights that emerged from our first visit to South Africa. We believe that having gained this and other new perspectives has subsequently allowed us to be better mentors here at Empire State College.

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The International Self-directed Learning Symposium

Lorraine Lander, Genesee Valley Center

I was reading an article about adult education by Stephen Brookfield sometime last summer (Brookfield, 1995), when I came across a reference to an entire conference dedicated to self-directed learning. I was not aware of this conference and I was interested to read this information for several reasons. The first was that I do not know as much as I would like to know about conferences related to adult education and wanted to find out more about what existed. Another reason I was interested in knowing more about this conference was that I was looking for an audience for some research work I had done on motivation and achievement with our students. Surely a conference on self-directed learning would be interested in my research results. Another reason I was intrigued was I knew little about self-directed learning and it seemed so fundamental to what we do with students. Attending a whole conference on the topic would be a great learning activity for me and so I investigated further.

Since starting my position here at Empire State College two and a half years ago, I had wondered on several occasions where I would find an interested audience for research on face-to-face mentoring. After all, this mode of delivery is rather different than the methods used in most undergraduate institutions. I believe strongly in the importance and benefits of individualizing education and the importance of the primary emphasis on learning that takes place in a face-to-face study. Two years ago I pursued a research project that compared achievement motivation goals in students at Empire State College to such goals in adult students at a traditional SUNY college. I theorized that I would find support for my position that the methodology of a face-to-face guided independent study is more supportive of mastery motivation goals (where learning is the focus of the goal) and that I would find performance motivation goals (where grades are the focus

of the goal) more common in a traditional classroom.

One reason that learning goals might be more beneficial than performance goals (other than what might seem obvious) is that learning goals have been associated in previous research with study strategies that focus on deep learning and critical thinking, rather than surface learning and memorizing (Elliott, McGregor and Gable, 1999). Another aspect of achievement motivation goals, in addition to whether they are mastery or performance in nature, is whether they are approach or avoidant (Elliott and Church, 1997; Elliott and McGregor, 2001). So, when a student focuses on getting good grades or focuses on learning new material, these would constitute approach goals. However, if the focus is on avoiding poor performance (your goal is to simply pass or your goal is to avoid being ignorant), these types of goals are characterized as avoidant goals. Performance goals of both the approach and avoidant types have been associated with study strategies that focus on surface learning (memorizing), but in addition, performance goals that are avoidant (the goal is to avoid failure) have been associated with anxiety about ability to succeed, disorganization in study strategies, feelings of threat, and low levels of effort (Elliott, McGregor and Gable, 1999). These research findings give added support to the benefits of mastery achievement goals in college students.

In my own research, I found students at Empire State College who are enrolled in independent study are more likely to have mastery achievement goals and more likely to pursue deep study strategies in comparison to adult students in a traditional classroom. I hoped to report my findings at an adult education conference, although I was not sure which one, or where. It was about this time that I read about self-

directed learning and became excited about the concept and the conference.

It was not difficult to locate information about the conference. It is called the International Self-directed Learning Symposium (for more information, here is the web site for the conference – http://sdlglobal.com/symposium.htm). It also happened that while I was reading about the conference I also found out that they had a deadline for conference proposals coming up in just a few weeks. I put together a summary of my results and submitted it to them. Within a week I had an acceptance letter and began planning my trip to the 20th International Self-directed Learning Symposium in Cocoa Beach, FL. I became even more motivated to learn about self-directed learning (my own mastery approach goal).

Self-directed learning has been called one of the two pillars of adult education (andragogy is the other) by Sharan Merriam (Merriam, 2001). The concept refers to learning that takes place without direct supervision by another individual. This can include studying on one's own to learn a new hobby, reading about a topic of interest in books and magazines, or surfing the Internet to learn about something of interest.

The self-directed learning concept also covers what our students do in face-to-face guided independent studies. In addition, self-directed learning also covers the learning that takes place in other modes of delivery at our college such as cross-center mentored studies, distance learning studies, residency-based studies, and blended studies.

There are two aspects of the concept of self-directed learning, including self-direction as an instructional method and self-direction as a personality characteristic (Brockett and Hiemstra, 1991). When considering self-direction in instruction, important components include assessing

learning needs, acquiring resources for learning, supporting learning activities, and evaluation of learning. I see many important parallels between mentoring and self-direction in learning and the connections to mentoring reinforced my interest in learning more about this topic.

According to Brockett and Hiemstra, self-direction has received more focus recently as a personality characteristic. As an aspect of personality, self-direction indicates the willingness of an individual to take control or direction in his/her own learning activities. In relation to this perspective on self-direction, Stockdale and Brockett (2006) have recently developed an assessment of self-direction as a personality variable and subcomponents include initiative, control, self-efficacy, and motivation. (Susan Stockdale shared this assessment with participants at the conference who might be interested in studying self-direction, as she would be interested in having others use it in their research.)

Clearly after reading about self-directed learning, I could see the relevance to mentoring and to our college's mission. I found my attendance a great experience for many reasons and wanted to share more about the symposium with the college by writing about this experience.

The International Self-directed Learning Symposium is a small conference that had approximately 65 attendees this year. I found this an ideal size for interacting with other participants and presenters. The size of the conference resulted in small sessions with many opportunities to interact with other participants and important individuals in the field of self-directed learning and adult education. Ralph Brockett, Roger Hiemstra, Huey Long, Allen Tough and George Spear are all important theorists and authors in the field of self-directed learning and they were all in attendance this year. Frequent attendees from the field of adult education include Stephen Brookfield, Sharan Merriam, Rosemary Caffarella and Carol Kasworm (in attendance this year).

I attended many interesting presentations at the conference that covered a large range of topics. The concept of self-directed learning has broad applicability to the idea of lifelong learning, and different presentations reflected this wide appeal and potential for application. For example, the concept has received broad interest in a variety of fields where lifelong learning is important, such as medical school education and nursing

One presentation even examined the relationship between self-direction in learning and the gross domestic product of countries around the world based on the idea that individuals with entrepreneurial spirit to develop businesses would need high levels of self-direction in their learning to be successful ...

education, as well as continuing education in these fields. It has been applied by human resource departments in the business world to corporate training. One presentation even examined the relationship between self-direction in learning and the gross domestic product of countries around the world based on the idea that individuals with entrepreneurial spirit to develop businesses would need high levels of self-direction in their learning to be successful and this success would benefit the country's economic development (Guglielmino and Guglielmino, 2006).

I found most everyone at the conference had heard of Empire State College based on our connections to nontraditional education of adult college students. They were very pleased to have someone from the college attend the conference. I was especially aware of this interest when, during the final evening's banquet dinner, participants were being introduced, and it was announced that I was from Empire State College. I was the only participant who had the name of her institution included in her introduction and I took this added notation on the part of the conference organizers as evidence of the

interest they have in our institution and my participation in the conference.

One of the questions I raised with several of the organizers and founding members was whether anyone from Empire State College had ever attended any of the past 19 conferences. Responses varied on this. Lucy Guglielmino, one of the founders and conference organizers, replied that no one from our college had every attended. She did report that quite a few years ago she was invited by our college to give a workshop about self-directed learning, but there had been no contact since then. I got negative responses from Roger Hiemstra and Ralph Brockett about their recollections of any Empire State College faculty attending. Huey Long told me he thought he remembered a cute blond woman and a far less attractive older gentleman from the college had attended one of the early conferences, but I was never quite sure based on the twinkle in his eye when he said this whether I should take him seriously.

I feel that attending the International Symposium on Self-directed Learning was a very useful experience for me, especially as I am a new faculty member who is trying to figure out my niche in the scholarly world. Attending was useful to me as a learning activity, as I learned a great deal about the concept of self-directed learning. While there, I also had an opportunity to present my findings on achievement motivation goals in adult college students and got great feedback and comments from the other participants.

This year the organizers of the conference created a society to continue the work of the conference. By attending this year, I became a charter member of the International Society for Self-directed Learning. The organizers of this event also started a refereed journal, the *International Journal of Self-directed Learning* two years ago. This journal focuses on the concept of self-directed learning and the wide range of research that has been conducted on it. (Issues are available online at this web

address, http://sdlglobal.com/journal.htm, and you might consult back issues for more information on the topic and the variety of studies that have been done in relation to self-directed learning.) Issues of the journal contain presentations from the conference, in addition to information regarding outside submissions. Prior to two years ago, annual volumes of the presentations of each conference were published and are available to those interested at http://www.sdlglobal.com/products.htm).

I felt very welcome and met many interesting individuals at this conference, in addition to learning quite a bit about an important concept related to what I do and the research I am interested in pursuing. I am looking forward to going back next year and I would invite others to join me if they find the topic interesting or if they are searching for an audience interested in the self-directed learning of our students.

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A recent issue of *Adult Education Quarterly,* 56 (3), 171-187 opens with an essay by Tom Nesbit of Simon Fraser University, "What's the Matter with Social Class?" Nesbit asks a key question: "So why do scholars [of adult education] so significantly acknowledge class less than its counterparts [gender and race] and why is it so underrepresented in adult educational theory?" *All About Mentoring* is looking for someone to critically reflect on Nesbit's argument and to think about its relevance for our work at Empire State College.

Two Writings

Bernard Smith, Center for Distance Learning

Bread of Affliction

"For the third time, dinner is ready." Kate's voice obliterated the rumble and squeak of tanks as they trundled across the TV screen. She called down from the door of the basement, a room we had converted into a play area for Eartha. We kept the TV and VCR in the basement. That way Eartha watched her programs and her videos with Jenny.

Jenny was more like an au pair than a sitter. She came from London, on exchange for a year. She was taking one of my classes, politics. We let her stay here, in the spare room until Kate got rid of her. These days Kate stays home to look after Eartha herself. Eartha still misses Jenny. I can tell.

I stretched over and hit the switch. I never got round to buying a remote. The news from the Middle East cut off and for a moment there was silence.

From the top of the stairs Eartha called, "Douglas." Already I recognized in the throaty voice of my daughter the sing-song that was her mother's.

"Doug-las. Oh Doug-las." Eartha was playing the coquette.

I struggled up from the recliner and shut off the light in the basement then climbed the stairs to the kitchen. When I got to the top Eartha was waiting for me and flung her arms around my legs. I tried to peel her hands from my trousers. I tried to step around her.

"Where does she come off with this 'Douglas' business?" I said.

"This is hot," Kate said, her hands full. She held a tray of stoneware soup bowls and Eartha's plastic plate. I stood in Kate's way, between her and the table.

"Can't you sit down? This is hot."

She clattered both bowls down, one on each of the table mats, then sat down heavily and looking away from me stuck her spoon into the bowl of soup.

"I offered to help," I said.

I lifted Eartha onto her baby chair and cut her two meatless sausages into fifths. There also was a handful of french-fries on her plate. They were cut in the shapes of letters and numbers. I tried to arrange them, to make some kind of sense out of the chaos. I managed "BLUE," SAM, and "344" but I couldn't find any place for the letters "F" and "G," and I put them off to one side then I filched an end-piece as Eartha pouted.

"Is it hot?" Eartha asked as she stabbed a slice of the sausage with her baby fork. She blew across the tines of the fork and her breath disturbed the air so that the filament of steam which still coiled up danced and swirled and dipped. Eartha giggled.

"Warm," I said. "It's still warm."

From the breadbox I grabbed a package of "Branola" and emptied the last few slices onto a plate.

"What's that?" said Kate.

"You said you weren't going to bake any bread."

Kate said nothing. She played with the cheese which covered the surface of her soup, twirling it round the bowl of her spoon as if it was spaghetti.

"Soup's fine," I said. "You really do make the best french onion soup."

Kate lifted her head and stared at me for a moment then she dropped her eyes and gazed at the steam swirling up from her bowl.

I could hear the steady tick tick of the clock on the wall above my head.

"Soup's fine, is it?" said Kate. "That's good. I am pleased. I am very pleased. I am so very pleased that my soup is superior to Jenny's."

I closed my eyes.

"Water. I want water," said Eartha rattling her fork against her plastic plate.

"How do you ask?" I said.

"Please. Water. May I, please may I have some coldy woldy water."

But Kate had already run the faucet. She slammed down a mug on Eartha's tabletop. A few drops of water lapped over the top and spilled onto the ketchup-smeared plate. Eartha giggled. I looked at Kate.

"You finished?" I said to Kate and I started to gather up my bowl and spoon.

"I'm still eating," said Kate. "Can't you see I'm not finished yet?"

"I'm finished," said Eartha. "Let me down. Let me down." Eartha was crying without tears. Her little legs kicked against the wooden chair. The high chair jumped up and down and moved a few inches across the kitchen floor, across Kate's clean kitchen floor.

"Stop that," I said, "Stop it." I dropped my spoon into the empty bowl and set them back down on the kitchen table. Then I separated Eartha's table from her chair so that she could clamber down. As Eartha stepped down from her chair she grabbed hold of my arm to steady herself. Her hand was sticky from the ketchup.

"Go and play in your room," I said. "Until bedtime."

"Wash your hands and face," Kate said. "Now."

Kate grabbed at my soup bowl and piled hers on top. I thought both bowls would tumble to the floor the way she held them. She scraped back her chair then she took them over to the sink, ran the faucet and dumped them in. Water splashed onto the floor.

"I'll wash them," I said.

"They need to soak," said Kate. "Let them soak." Then she said, "You didn't eat your bread."

She pressed the pedal of the garbage pail with her foot.

I shrugged. "It seemed a good idea at the time."

"Many things do," she said. The muscles in her face were taut as if she was trying to hold herself back from crying or perhaps screaming. She used the lid of the box to scrape the two or three slices of bread off the plate. They fell neatly inside. She lifted her foot off the pedal and the lid fell back down and snapped shut.

"You didn't need to throw them away," I said.

"I did," she said.

"I would've taken them for lunch tomorrow."

"I'll wash the dishes later," said Kate. "Leave them. Okay?"

"Are you going out then?" I said.

"Maybe," she said. "Maybe."

⌘

Michael is Crying

"Michael is crying," says my wife. She is sitting up in bed with the covers wrapped around her. It is only August, but already I can feel the chill of the night air as it swirls over my body. My wife has all the blankets bunched around her. One breast lies exposed where her nightdress is open. I try to touch her, to bring her close beside me. She pushes my hand away.

"Michael is crying," she says, this time with more insistence. "Listen," she says and she places her hand lightly on my arm. Her skin is soft. "Can't you hear him?"

All I hear is the sound of my breathing and, from somewhere far in the distance, a squeal of brakes. My wife throws back the covers. I smell the warmth of her body billowing over me.

"Where are you going," I say. "Stay here." When she settles back we will make love.

My wife turns to look at me. "What are you talking about," she says. "He's crying. He needs me." As she speaks, the moon plays with the hollows of her cheeks, making her face look as though it had been sculpted from a slab of granite.

I stretch down and fumble for my watch on the floor. I maneuver to catch the light from the moon. I can barely read the hands on the face.

"It's after three," I tell her. "He'll be asleep again in a minute or two."

"No," she says. "He's crying hard."

"He's trying to manipulate you," I tell her. "Let him cry himself to sleep."

Then I hear him. He howls. Then he stops. Outside, somewhere in the night a siren wails rising and falling, rising and falling. The window in our room is open at the bottom and I can feel a breeze enter. The lace curtains shimmy and flick, rustling in the draught.

"Listen," says my wife. She unfolds her legs from mine. "He is coming upstairs."

Michael is padding up the stairs. I can hear him sob in the juddering way he does. I can hear him brush against the walls as he climbs. Michael is seven. He is small for his age. Everything frightens him. He cries easily.

The door to our room is pushed open a little. It makes no sound. A moment goes by and the door is pushed again. Now it is half open.

"Go back to your room Michael," I say. Michael does not say a word. He pushes the door again. This time it bumps against our bed. Michael stands in the doorway. His body racked with sobs. He is shaking but he doesn't make a sound. He turns to look at me. He is caught in the light of the moon as it streams through the window. Now he lets himself go and tears run down his face.

"I wanna … " he says through heaving sobs, "I wanna sleep in here with you."

"No," I say. "You know that's against the rules. You have a perfectly good bed downstairs in your own room."

"But I want to," he says, his voice shrill. "There are monsters in my room. A raccoon just looked in my window."

Michael grips the bedclothes at the bottom of our bed and tries to clamber up. "Stop this," I say. "Stop this immediately. You're not a baby anymore."

My wife digs her nails into my thigh. "Let him," she says. "He is so frightened."

Michael is on the bed. I try to push him off. Not hard. Not so that he will fall and hurt himself. I try to push him back down onto the floor. I try to pull the bedclothes away from under him so that he will tumble backwards, so that he will get the message. The boy screams blue murder. His hands flail. He strikes this way and that. I grab at his foot and pull him down. I won't have him behave in this way, not at half past three in the morning; not at any time. I hit him across his face with the side of my hand. Not hard.

"Lester," my wife shouts and grabs my arm. The boy screams then stops crying. He moans quietly rubbing his cheek with the tips of his fingers. He stares at me as if he is a hunter sizing up his prey. I am breathing heavily.

"Let him," says my wife. "What's the harm this once? He's so upset."

"He's too old to be sleeping in our bed," I say.

"He's only seven," says my wife. "That's not too old."

Michael wipes his eyes with the back of his hand. He stares hard at me. I can feel his eyes bore into me. "I am little," he says. His voice is pleading.

I cannot give in. I shake my head. I say nothing.

The boy makes his hand into a small fist, raises it then punches the tangle of bedclothes. He does not cry. He turns his head slowly towards his mother.

"Please," he says. "Please." He stretches out his long thin arms towards her. "Please."

"Come here," she says softly. And the boy half crawls half leaps across the bed into her open arms.

His pajama top feels rough as he burrows past me to clutch at my wife, his hands grabbing. Her breast is still bare. The boy buries his face in her nightdress. As she strokes his hair it gives off a smell of apples. She brushes her hair from his face. She kisses his cheeks. He clasps his arms around her waist. My leg stings where she dug in her nails.

"Come on," she says. "Let your old man sleep. We'll go down to your room and chase away those monsters."

"Will you sleep with me?" the boy says. "Will you stay with me 'til I fall asleep?"

My wife swings her legs over the side of the bed and stands up, her back towards me. She lifts the bodice of her nightdress to cover her breast. I watch them go hand in hand through the door, their nightclothes tracing the soft outlines of their flesh.

⌘

Refashioning the Scholarly Self for Higher Education: Reflections in Progress

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Lately, I find myself spending much of my "scholarship time" thinking about the meta-question of what kind of scholarly activities I might want to be doing in the first place. Such reflection could itself be considered a scholarly activity, not merely because knowing what and why you do what you do as a scholar is a necessary part of doing scholarship, but also because addressing this meta-question thoughtfully entails locating, reading, and engaging with scholarly materials as a way to survey possibilities. In the essay that follows, I retrace, summarize, and record some of my steps and reflections along these lines. I suppose that much of what I have to say is of mostly personal value, but at the same time, I know that many faculty who make the transition from research university to higher education focused primarily on teaching and learning are forced by circumstances to rethink their sense of scholarly self. If nothing else, then, I hope that my reflections can serve as a reminder to those of us facing such a predicament that we are not alone.

You mean pencil and paper aren't enough?

My academic background happens to be in the critical humanities – cultural studies (broadly defined) in general, Modern Greek studies in particular. Up to now I have been speaking and writing mostly about such things as literary texts (e.g., Greek novels), folk literature (e.g., Cretan oral poetry), various artifacts of cultural production (e.g., cookbooks on Greek food), and "theory" (Ball 2000; 2002; 2003; 2005). Compared with faculty who move to this college from a lab-science background, say, one might think that most humanities faculty like me have it easy when it comes to doing scholarship in a teaching-centered institution. All we need is to read a few books and then write about them, right?

Well, I suppose there might be a handful of humanities scholars out there who can actually get away with working this way. And, I can imagine that a fair amount of humanities scholarship looks to the outsider as though it were produced in this way (much like an excellent theatrical performance sometimes comes off looking like the effortless product of a few good actors getting up on a stage together). But the fact of the matter is that for better or worse, many forms of academic writing in the humanities today require that scholars have regular, convenient access to historically unprecedented quantities of scholarly books and journals, plenty of blocks of time for the mentally draining, time-consuming processes of close reading and articulate writing, and time and money for the constant networking that greatly improves one's chances of getting something published (especially given the publishing crisis unfolding the past several years). Access to recent journal articles and certain kinds of funding have improved since I arrived at Empire State College, but when it comes to books, journal articles more than a few years old, and blocks of time and mental space, the "usual" resources are simply not there for many of us.[1]

In light of this, I have known since I came for my interview that if I were to stay in this institution, in the long run I would have to refashion my scholarly self. After all, there would be no time for extensive ethnographic fieldwork in Greece. I would no longer be going online every couple of days to request piles of books on cultural theory, literary criticism, and environmental justice from the library and through interlibrary loan, having them sent to my office or stopping by the library to pick them up on the way to my office. I would be spending more time on the phone with undergraduate students than I would out trading favors and exchanging the latest professional secrets at national conferences and on the listservs

of the appropriate academic associations. Gradually, I would need to withdraw from that corner of the research academy where I had been trained and which I had begun learning how to find my way around. And in doing so, I would simultaneously need to metamorphose into some other kind of scholar. But into what?

Moving toward "education"

In very general terms, there seemed to be at least one obvious reasonable answer: it would probably need to have something to do with education. I had at least two good reasons for thinking this way. First, teaching and learning and their associated administrative responsibilities are what I would now be spending most of my time on anyway. Second, when I was still in graduate school at The Ohio State University (OSU), I had already begun interacting with students and faculty in various education departments (especially art education). It turns out that at Ohio State, cultural studies (broadly defined) has been alive and well not only in many of the departments in the College of Humanities, as one might expect, but also in education. (For an overview of cultural studies in education at OSU, see Lather 2005.) Several of the graduate seminars I took brought together students from many departments, including comparative studies, English, Near Eastern and Judaic studies, African and African-American studies, French and Italian, East Asian studies, women's studies, education, and art education. Before graduating, I had even co-authored with (art educator) Alice Lai my first paper on cultural studies education in the journal *Studies in Art Education* (Lai and Ball 2002).

Besides, cultural studies (in the narrower sense of the Birmingham school) has never been dissociable from education anyway – and once upon a time, neither from adult education (Wright and Maton 2004) – so at some level, the idea of

migrating away from the critical humanities and toward critical education is more a consequence of the historical contingencies of academic professionalization than of deep epistemological differences. Indeed, a glance at some of the articles in recent issues of such leading journals as *Educational Theory, Educational Researcher, Studies in Art Education* or *Educational Studies* – not to mention journals like the Review of Education/Pedagogy/Cultural Studies devoted explicitly to cultural studies in education – suggests how much scholars of education have been dealing with many of the same ideas, theories, and concerns as scholars in cultural studies and the critical humanities/social sciences in general. Wright (2002) argues that North America in "the 1990s saw the emergence of what is becoming the institutionalized and discursive manifestation of cultural studies in education" (223). Indeed:

> What's happening in North America, for example, is that people who are doing critical work on education, who are in education with a capital 'E' are saying that the way forward is not multicultural education, nor is it critical pedagogy, nor even antiracist education. The way forward it appears, for some critical educators, myself included, is cultural studies. (Wright 2002:243)

Adult Education, too, may ultimately reconverge in the U.S. with cultural studies: As critical pedagogy (e.g., Brookfield 2005) and postmodernist pedagogies (e.g., Collins 1995; Briton 1996) continue to make headway there, the field becomes increasingly fertile for a "cultural turn." (The recent paper in *Adult Education Quarterly* by Sandlin 2005 is evidence of this.)

So, bracketing factors related to professionalization, it seemed at least possible that someone like me might be able to find a conceptual niche amongst the activities and concerns of at least some scholars in education-related fields. But what about that issue of professional niche? My first thought was that as a scholar I should find a new academic home and start digging in, and it felt much like starting graduate school all over again as I began surveying the terrain. Where might I fit in? Adult education? (Still seems too far away from the critical/cultural studies approaches that I have been trained in …) online education? (Even farther away …) art education? (But I also do literature, and much art education focuses on K-12 education, which is not for me …) educational theory? (I'm not a professional philosopher …) educational research? (I don't have the resources at my disposal for this …) humanities education? (For all intents and purposes, there is no such field … there is composition studies, for example, but that's not the same thing …) Well then, what about critical pedagogy/cultural studies education?

> *… I realized that in my own short career as a scholar I have actually been most at home being disciplinarily homeless – which is to say, constantly straying, a "critical nomad," from one field to another, irrespective of my institutional home base at a particular moment.*

(Conceptually, perhaps … But this still raises another problem: There doesn't seem to be a place here for scholarship by those of us in teaching-centered institutions who are primarily practitioners, not theory-researchers …) Perhaps I am just missing something?

In deliberating these questions, somewhere along the way it occurred to me that maybe I shouldn't even be looking for a new disciplinary home. I was suddenly overcome by the transdisciplinary spirit of cultural studies (a spirit which seems to be waning as cultural studies becomes increasingly institutionalized, professionalized, and bureaucratized). I remembered that at Ohio State I probably took as many classes from scholars in French literary theory, American literature, and cultural ethnography as I did from those in my home field. I recalled the fact that at Ohio State the field of Modern Greek Studies saw itself not as a discipline but as a contingent, tactical, interventionist academic positionality (Lambropoulos 1990). Then I looked up this wonderful passage I had once read in Jonathan Culler's (1997) book on literary theory:

> Theory […] is a body of thinking and writing whose limits are exceedingly hard to define. The philosopher Richard Rorty speaks of a new, mixed genre that began in the 19th century: "Beginning in the days of Goethe and Macaulay and Carlyle and Emerson, a new kind of writing has developed which is neither the evaluation of the relative merits of literary productions, nor intellectual history, not moral philosophy, nor social prophecy, but all of these mingled together in a new genre." The most convenient designation of this miscellaneous genre is simply the nickname theory, which has come to designate works that succeed in challenging and reorienting thinking in fields other than those to which they apparently belong. This is the simplest explanation of what makes something count as theory. Works regarded as theory have effects beyond their original field. (Culler 1997:3).

To summarize, I realized that in my own short career as a scholar I have actually been most at home being disciplinarily homeless – which is to say, constantly straying, a "critical nomad," from one field to another, irrespective of my institutional home base at a particular moment. (And when I occasionally think back far enough to recall that my journey actually began in a Department of Mathematics and Computer Science, things are really put into perspective for me.)[2]

Relinquishing the assumption that I must find a new academic home, I decided to think again in strictly conceptual terms. I decided to ignore, momentarily anyway, questions about the borders and boundaries of the professional terrain. Rather than trying to fit myself into existing disciplinary and professional configurations (however inevitably unavoidable this might be), I settled on asking myself: Given my academic

background, and given that I'm working within the opportunities and constraints of Empire State College, what might I have to say as a scholar about education? (And how might I come to know these things? Why might they be important? How might I manage to articulate them effectively to particular audiences?) Even if I can answer these questions, I will still eventually need to ask myself – in terms of academic boundaries and disciplinary borders – who would really care to listen to what I have to say as a scholar (assuming there is anyone at all)? But at least I decentered this question. I need not assume that the lay of the professional land is the most important factor that should guide my scholarly planning. I hope I am not naïve: Such a decentering entails new risks, but what intellectual project of significance does not?

Making my own map of critical educational research directions

Given my academic background, and given that I'm working within the opportunities and constraints of Empire State College, what might I be able to contribute to scholarship on education? Recognizing the immense generality of such a question, I found that I needed a provisional map of some kind for starting to think it through. I thought I needed a map that would give me (the illusion of) a bird's-eye view of what cultural studies and the critical humanities/social sciences are all about. (I understand that much scholarship in the critical humanities explains why such a bird's eye view is impossible or undesirable, and how attempts at such a view erase difference, but my idea here was not to create a theory of the critical humanities, but simply an "initial map" which would help to guide my migratory process. The map would be a means, not an end.[3]) So I spent a day reviewing some touchstone texts in the "new" humanities and critical social sciences, including David Harvey's (1996) relational-dialectical theory of "the social process" in Part I of his treatise on *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (78). This work on critical historical geographical materialism has often been useful to me in my scholarship on place and art/literature.[4] More generally, though, and even as Harvey's own overriding concern is an ecologed Marxist critique

of capitalism, I also find that the general epistemological and methodological discussions of relational dialectics provide a cogent, non-essentializing, non-positivist, anti-reductionist framework for situating a plethora of poststructuralist and postmodernist and cultural studies projects, from Foucault to Derrida, Raymond Williams to bell hooks, Lacan to Deleuze. At the end of the day, I write down in my journal the following statements as a provisional map of the humanities tradition which I sense I have been a part of up until now:

> From literary criticism to cultural ethnography, the critical humanities/ social sciences are ultimately one giant project of developing non-commonsensical, non-Cartesian, non-positivist models and strategies for raising awareness (among scholars, students, the public) of the relational-dialectical social process at work in everything humans say or do – awareness *that* these processes are always at work and of *how* they work. Such awareness is important because these models and strategies can contribute to emancipatory social change, and because overall they have greater explanatory power than do positivist models which (because of their success in certain quarters of the natural sciences) are still prevalent in some social sciences and (because they seem to mesh well with our dominant culture's "common sense") are still dominant in public life.

For example, one way much recent scholarship in this tradition tries to raise such an awareness is through accounts of the "constructedness" of just about everything we moderns tend to take for granted (which is not, by the way, the same as saying that "nature" doesn't play a constitutive role in the "social" construction process, as Harvey [1996] explains so well). Attention is drawn to the extremely complex historical processes generative of the concepts, words, and artifacts of common sense and of positivist research. Everything gets scrutinized, including "you" and "I" (e.g., critique of the subject), entire disciplines and their categories (e.g., genealogy of literature),

disciplinary concepts (e.g., tradition, the aesthetic, objectivity, fact), and other "fundamental" concepts more generally (e.g., sex, race, beauty). This scholarship is sometimes viewed as part of the critique of objectivity; of liberal faith in rationality, control, and progress; of the Enlightenment; of foundationalist epistemology; or of the autonomous/sovereign/transparent/stable/ liberal/humanist subject. A simpler way to think about it might be that it is an attempt to get us away from approaching things by asking, "What is it?" to asking, "How did 'it' come to be constituted as such?" and "What are the assumptions and implications of treating 'it' as such?" This change in perspective from Cartesian rationality to relational-dialectical rationality radically alters how we describe, analyze, and respond to the phenomena around us. It necessarily changes how we define or articulate social issues or other problems, how we might strive to reduce suffering, or to promote social (and ecological) well-being. It changes how we label "causes" and "effects" (Harvey 1996:54), ostensibly empowering us to deal with them more effectively than we could have through the lenses of common sense or positivism.

Using this provisional map of the critical humanities, I then asked myself how, in general terms, my own work as a scholar in Modern Greek studies has sought to participate in this project. I came up with three interrelated answers: First, I have interpreted particular literary texts as simultaneously the effects ("symptoms") of socioculturally specific processes, and as the (actual and potential) causes – participants, agents, transformers – of those processes. (For instance, I have interpreted three novels by Pandelis Prevelakis in the context of place awareness and of local and national cultural identity negotiation in modern Greece.) Second, I have critiqued examples of and the discourse itself of literary criticism in terms of particular sociohistorical processes. (For example, I have considered implications of nation building on the creative expression of inhabitants of certain locales within the nation-state.) Third, I have suggested new literary critical approaches for specific contexts based on my understanding of the particularities of the sociohistorical process in those contexts. (For instance, in the interest of addressing contemporary

socio-ecological problems, I have argued for a radically place-based approach to choosing and analyzing "literary" texts for contemporary academic literary criticism.) Summarized, these three approaches are as follows:

1. Interpret particular literary texts as simultaneously the causes and effects (in the sense of Harvey 1996) of the relational-dialectical social process.

2. Critique in terms of the relational-dialectical social process examples of, or the discourse of, literary criticism itself. (Such critique could be theoretical and/or accomplished through readings of specific literary texts.)

3. Suggest literary critical approaches or literary theories for specific contexts based on my understanding of the relational-dialectical sociohistorical particularities of those contexts.

My next step was to see if I could transpose what I have been doing in literary studies to parallel tasks in critical educational studies, taking the "educational event" to be the analog of the literary text and taking educational research/theory as the analog of literary criticism/theory. I came up with three broad parallel tasks for educational studies as analogs of my (provisional) understanding of the critical humanities/social sciences. These three tasks are as follows:

1. First task: Interpret particular educational events as simultaneously the causes and effects of the relational-dialectical social process.

2. Second task: Critique in terms of the relational-dialectical social process examples of educational research/theory or the discourse of education itself. (Such critique could be theoretical and/or accomplished through interpretations of specific educational events.)

3. Third task: Suggest concrete pedagogical approaches or educational theories for specific contexts based on my understanding of the relational-dialectical sociohistorical particularities of those contexts.

In fact, these three tasks largely resonate with Peters and Burbules's (2004) overview of poststructuralist educational research. For example, critique of the discourse of education itself would include the call for educational researchers to "develop a critical self-understanding of the historical conditions of the formation and genealogy of their own discipline" (34), such as through the following (Foucauldian) questions:

- What are the various modes in Western culture (and in other cultures) through which children and adults have been constituted as knowing, learning, and educated subjects?

- What are the various ways children and adults have been constituted as subjects of educational research, of pedagogy, and of theories of human development?

- What are the interrelations between various forms of knowledge and power in education and educational research?

- How is power exercised in educational institutions?

- To what extent has educational research constructed its own history as one of steady progress toward greater objectivity and laws concerning human development and learning? (Peters and Burbules 2004:42)

Also, it would include critique of the paradigms that "define the major legitimate (i.e., fundable, publishable, marketable) approaches of educational research" and how these relate to specific political and economic configurations (51). (I will need to return to this point below in relation to teaching-centered colleges and universities.) The second task also would include reflexive critique of the role and status of the educational researcher, researched, and research methods:

> [P]oststructuralist researchers are developing a better philosophical sense of what is at stake when one comes to do research, gaining a healthy skepticism for what counts as "knowledge," "education," "research," and "science," and questioning the apparent naturalness of these categories. One of the effects of this response has been to challenge researchers to reexamine themselves, their own practices, and the institution called "science." (Peters and Burbules 2004:100)

The first task would include doing empirical research of educational events, but now using poststructuralized approaches to interpretation that take into account the critique of the subject and the critique of representation and textuality. That is, the researcher's interpretations of educational events would not rely on positivist or other unproblematized, commonsense notions such as the individual student, the student's motivation or intent, or the transparency of what is said in a classroom or in an interview (Peters and Burbules 2004:56).

This question of interpretation suggests that in considering my analogies between literary and educational studies, the question of method, in a general way, needs to be addressed further. For example, interpreting written literary texts such as novels or poems is not interactive in quite the same way that interpreting an educational event is, since the educational event is not literally a text and since the researcher may be an integral part of the event's unfolding. In some ways, it could be more like interpreting literary texts that emerge in oral performance where one is present as an active participant-observer (Ball draft). This suggests a range of possible critical interpretive methodologies ranging from those more on the humanities end of the humanities/social science spectrum which focus mostly on textuality and close reading to those more on the social science end which focus more on critical ethnographic interpretation and analysis. (As the humanities and social sciences continue to meld, this seems more like a distinction in emphasis rather than in kind. See Ball, Fernandez, and Leaker [2005].) Scholars in education have been covering the gamut – with everything from critical ethnographic research (Carspecken 1996) to close readings of one's own classroom (see Perl 1994 and especially Ellsworth 1989 for examples of this). (Of course, both the second and third tasks I have listed could be accomplished without even looking empirically at particular educational events, but through theoretical scholarship that

seeks to clarify, juxtapose, problematize, and/or propose – see Michelson [1999] for an example of this.)

In many ways, all three of these tasks ultimately lend themselves to generating improvements in the everyday practices of educators, something which is especially important for a faculty member like me at an institution focused more on teaching and learning than on research. However, the idea of "improvement" here must be problematized so that it is not understood merely in the sense of improved content/skill acquisition, nor in the sense of positivist educational research as something measurable, nor even in terms of some less attractive forms of qualitative practitioner research (such as "action research") aimed narrowly at helping the educator improve his or her own specific teaching techniques vis-à-vis specifically observable outcomes. This also is why in the third task I have used the word "approaches" instead of "techniques" or "tools" or "best practices:"

> Although there is almost unanimous agreement about the idea that educational research should have a practical orientation, there are many different views about *the way* in which educational research should play a practical role. Some argue, for example, that educational research should provide educators with educational techniques. On this account, the task of educators becomes one of implementing general educational "truths" that are produced elsewhere. Others maintain that educational research provides different interpretations of educational reality. Practitioners can use these interpretations to understand and make sense of the educational situations they are in. (Biesta and Burbules 2003:1-2)

As Biesta and Burbules (2003) argue, pragmatist educational theory indicates the importance of the latter approach to educational research as providing useful interpretations of specific educational realities which can subsequently be used by educators to make sense of their own inescapably unique situations with students. The extreme complexity of human interactions and the relational-dialectical social process support Dewey's idea that education "is an art and not a science

– or, to be more precise: that it is an art that can be *informed* by science, that is, by the outcomes of educational inquiry" (Biesta and Burbules 2003:79). I also would argue that this is why the three tasks I have outlined above are on balance more useful for improving educational practices than all the positivist quantitative and qualitative data analyses in the world. (And I'm not surprised that some businesses and other large organizations are slowly discovering that they can benefit more from ethnographic analyses than from surveys and other kinds of studies – see, e.g., Taylor 1987.)

One way professors in the humanities have been seeking to improve their pedagogical approaches in light of critical humanities/social science scholarship is simply by changing which content they teach. (For example, in light of his understanding of the political assumptions and consequences of the Western canon, a typical literature professor would now include in his syllabus texts by people of color.) Another way they have sought improvements is by trying to ensure that teaching and learning themselves become an explicit moment for raising students' awareness of the relational-dialectical social process. (For instance, the literature professor not only changes which texts he teaches, but also encourages students to inquire into the historical process of canon formation. Or, he has them interpret a poem not simply in terms of "beauty" or "truth" but in relation to contextual social and historical processes.) My own experience suggests that some combination of these two approaches comprise the mainstream of pedagogical adjustments made by research faculty in the critical humanities/social sciences, in some ways a direct reflection in the classroom of their scholarship. But there is another crucial angle from which the question of "improvement" can be addressed which has to do with *how* teaching and learning occur, whatever the content might be. Such questions of pedagogical approach are likely to be addressed by scholars who deal with education per se – whether they be in one of the professionalized educational disciplines (e.g., for adult education Herman and Mandell 2004), or in an explicitly humanities area like composition studies (e.g., Smit 2004). Interestingly, though, and

mirroring the critical humanities' penetration into educational fields, pedagogical questions are very slowly starting to receive more attention in the critical humanities.[5]

Gradually, the question of audience needs to start coming back into view. It would seem that there are potentially three broad audiences for critical educational scholarship along any of the lines I have been discussing:

1. Researchers and/or intellectuals who are not in education per se, but who could nevertheless benefit from critical interpretations or critiques of educational theories or (my own or others') educational practices.

2. Scholars in education who could benefit from accounts of theory or (my own or others') practices insofar as these contribute to the development of educational discourses and educational research.

3. Educational practitioners who could benefit from accounts of theory or (my own or others') practices insofar as these contribute "directly" to the development or improvement of their own pedagogical practices (improvement in the sense of pragmatism discussed above).

(1) is a viable option because education is an important "moment" in the broader relational-dialectical social process. Thus, for example, a classic text like Willis's (1977) *Learning to Labor* is of interest to noneducation scholars dealing with working class culture because it explores how the moment of schooling, including resistance to education, contributes to the reproduction of the working class. The separation of (2) and (3) reflects a division of labor in contemporary academia between scholarship aimed primarily at those who are mostly engaged in research (e.g., journals such as *Educational Researcher* or *Studies in Art Education or Adult Education Quarterly),* and scholarship aimed primarily at those who are mostly engaged in teaching and learning (e.g., journals like *College English, College Teaching* or *The Journal on Excellence in College Teaching).* As a conventional (nonpractitioner) educational researcher, (B) is what I have already begun to do in a limited way (Lai and Ball 2002; Lai and Ball 2005), recognizing that its

potential contributions to improving day-to-day practice are necessarily long-term and indirect. But a really interesting question for me now is whether any of these audiences would welcome educational scholarship which is *critical* from faculty who are primarily *practitioners*.

Toward a critical educational scholarship by practitioners?

At a level of extreme generality and abstraction, my map-by-analogy has helped me to begin to approach the questions I have raised for myself about possible scholarly directions, now that I am no longer positioned to engage in the kinds of critical humanities scholarship conducted in research universities; now that I am primarily an educational practitioner. On the one hand, given my background in the critical humanities/social sciences, I recognize that whatever I might have to say as a scholar about education will most likely have to do with one or more of the three critical/cultural studies tasks I have discussed. Broadly speaking, while I may be relatively lacking in expertise in the relevant scholarship dealing with education per se, this is still the general area in which I already have some theoretical knowledge and scholarly experience, and the things I might have to say in relation to these tasks would be potentially important for the same reasons that any other scholarship in the critical humanities, social sciences, or education is important.

But I have yet to confront one of the most challenging practical issues of all. My sense is that the three broad tasks I have outlined also are dealt with (in incredibly diverse ways) by scholars in research-centered universities. As a general rule, the scholars who address them are given the time, library resources, and other forms of institutional support for doing so in ways that would be considered appropriate by academic peers, enabling them to conduct studies, publish papers, establish book contracts, and so forth. Such an environment is competitive enough for scholars in research institutions. What is the would-be scholar in a teaching-centered college or university supposed to do? Can there be, for example, a "scholarship of teaching and learning" for practitioners who operate in the critical/

cultural studies vein of the three tasks I have identified?

One way of trying to get at this question is to ask: Why would we even expect a faculty member in a teaching-centered institution to make valuable contributions to any of these three tasks that a research faculty wouldn't have already done more thoroughly and with more extensive familiarity with the related scholarship?

I can think of at least two interrelated answers to this question:

First, because the positionality alone of the teaching-centered professor (i.e., the fact that she works in the context of a teaching-centered institution) might have some constitutive effect on her scholarship: she

… the educational researcher is like the critic who reads a handful of literary texts but knows very well all the scholarship and theory related to those texts, whereas the teaching faculty is like the critic who knows the literature very well … but may know only a small fraction of the relevant scholarship on them.

might look at things in ways which would not have been possible, or at least much less likely, if she were working primarily in the context of a research university.

Second, because there is something about "being there" (Bradburd 1998) with students for so many hours a day, so many days a year, so many years which has its own potential to yield important insights, much like the cultural anthropologist who does extensive fieldwork has the potential to construct particular insights about another culture that the comparative literary critic, say, does not. (And this is not to say that teaching-centered faculty have larger sample sets for which more reliable positivist data can be obtained!) From this perspective, educational researchers look more like tourists of pedagogical events, while teaching faculty could be potentially more like its anthropologists. As participant-observers, their participation borders on dwelling. Or, to use the metaphor of

literary studies instead of anthropology, the educational researcher is like the critic who reads a handful of literary texts but knows very well all the scholarship and theory related to those texts, whereas the teaching faculty is like the critic who knows the literature very well – has read many more texts in the tradition, and has probably read many of them several times – but may know only a small fraction of the relevant scholarship on them. I do not mean to privilege the teaching-centered faculty over the research-centered faculty, just to point out that each has a relatively unique potential to develop particular insights. Teaching faculty tend to lack in their command of evolving scholarship whereas researching faculty tend to lack in pedagogical participation.

Thus, a scholarly agenda developed specifically for teaching-centered faculty that builds on their particular potential strengths vis-à-vis research-centered faculty would probably emerge from accounts, analyses, and critiques of the teaching faculty's own pedagogical practices and experiences with students. Whether aimed at critical scholars (in or out of education-related fields) or directly at other practitioners, such scholarship could try to make up for its shortcomings in terms of "library savvy" by being grounded in extensive "field work." This field work would not actually be conventional critical ethnographic research per se, since this kind of study requires resources that mostly only research faculty have access to. Indeed, it might take the form of critical close readings of one's educational practices and experiences in historical context (along the lines of Ellsworth 1989, say), but where these interpretations are guided by and reflect a certain sense of nuance or sophistication

resulting from long-time, long-term pedagogical engagement.

While scholarship along these lines ought not to burden itself with trying to perform the library savvy of research faculty, it should nevertheless demonstrate its theoretical currency and competence. In other words, while it might not be able to "talk the talk" of all the important theory of the day, neither should it premise itself on blatant misreadings of such theory, on oversimplified journalistic interpretations of it,[6] or on "straw man" attacks which mistake such gross misreadings and oversimplifications for the theory itself.[7] While a teaching faculty's unique positionality vis-à-vis the researching faculty may lead him to critical insights which are broadly significant, he should not risk inflating that significance. He also needs to be wary that given the immense quantity and diversity of relevant scholarship out there (so much that many research-centered scholars have trouble keeping up with it!), he may never be in a position to begin apprehending what the extent or scale of that significance looks like from the point of view of research scholars. Rhetorically, then, it seems wiser for teaching-centered faculty aiming to contribute to critical educational scholarship to adopt a more modest ethos than many of their colleagues in research universities can get away with. *In fact, it may be that critical educational teaching scholars will need to adapt or invent new modes of scholarly writing that are appropriate to their tasks and intended audiences.*

Of course, there is another practical issue of professionalization: As long as faculty at research universities exercise the most control over critical research on education (through the peer-review process and other mechanisms), it may be unnervingly difficult for education-centered faculty attempting to do this kind of scholarship to publish their work. That is, certain peer-review criteria privilege research universities. So, for example, I suspect that it is easier for research faculty to publish rigorous analyses based on very limited pedagogical experiences (sometimes based on a single class!) than for teaching faculty to publish rigorous analyses based on extensive pedagogical engagement but a comparatively narrower command of the current research. It also would seem that as the pressure to publish in research universities continues to increase, research faculty will spend increasingly more time acquiring references for their bibliographies and less time dwelling with students. It is difficult for me to imagine why this should automatically mean that their work contributes more to the discourse of education than that of teaching faculty who overlook important scholarship related to their concerns but nevertheless construct thoughtful accounts of extensive pedagogical experience.[8] (Perhaps research-centered universities and teaching-centered institutions will someday develop strategies for scholarly collaboration that bring out the best that each has to offer.)

Conclusion

This is where my discursively nomadic reflections about possible scholarly trajectories for "dwellers in education" have taken me so far. I am increasingly aware of the ways that the humanities have penetrated education and that education has penetrated the humanities. (As such, I am still not clear on whether I am migrating away from the critical humanities/social sciences and toward education, or simply to a different part of the critical humanities/social sciences that was concerned with or part of education all along.) On the one hand, I recognize that being in Empire State College means not having access to some of the resources I would need for continuing to do the kinds of scholarship I was originally trained to do. On the other hand, I know that being at Empire State College means that I have access to extensive interactions with so-called nontraditional students, with students online, and with colleagues in a wide array of disciplines and fields, none of which I would have been likely to have in a research institution. Keeping in mind these opportunities and constraints, I am in a better position to continue contemplating the specific questions I might like to address as a scholar.

Having begun to survey the professional terrain as well, I am gradually beginning to see which audiences seem more and less likely to be receptive to someone writing from my particular position, and what the current vehicles are for communicating to them. This can be frustrating, as my survey of the terrain thus far suggests that the academy does not offer many spaces for those humanities educator-practitioners who want to write about their practice from a critical/poststructuralist perspective, unless of course they do so according to the standards and expectations set by research institutions. Nevertheless, this also makes the poststructuralist in me think that maybe I am onto something: What if the relative lack of such a space is, as I have tentatively hinted here, a reflection of the hegemony of the research university in too narrowly determining what counts as scholarship – a hegemony which devalues quality teaching and learning in higher education at the same time that the market keeps upping the ante when it comes to the educational credentials that people need for employment or promotion? Then would not the gradual creation of spaces for critical/cultural studies educational practitioner scholarship be a significant institutional intervention that could help shape the evolution of higher education in general?

Notes

1. Of course I would be naïve to expect, given the 12-month, tuition-driven nature of our work, that we would ever have scholarly resources comparable with most other institutions. At the same time, though, I look forward to continuing improvements to those areas which seem indispensable to any college or university, such as good access to scholarly books and academic journals.

2. I do not mean to romanticize this nomadism. It is often a fine line that separates the work of the insightful transdisciplinary scholar and that of the dilettante, not to mention the whole issue of "The Amateur Professional and the Professional Amateur" that has been plaguing the humanities (Garber, 2001: 19). My only point is that a nomadic approach to critical scholarship is a legitimate option. Whether it's a better or worse option (and for whom), whether it's easy or more difficult (and for whom), are still open questions as far as I am concerned. But I do recognize that it

is largely in the vein that I have been operating myself.

3. For an outstanding example of scholarship which strives to preserve difference in mapping developments in educational scholarship and institutions, see Lather (2005).

4. I also am now struck by certain similarities between Harvey's historical-geographical materialism and Biesta and Burbules's (2003) account of Dewey's transactionalism. A critical comparison of these by someone who is better versed than I am in these theories might lead to further understanding of the philosophical overlap and connections between American pragmatism and European poststructuralism.

5. For example, the journal *Pedagogy* describes itself as follows:

In spite of the large role that teaching plays in the lives of most English studies scholars, no other mainstream journal has devoted itself exclusively to pedagogical issues spanning the entire discipline. *Pedagogy* has stepped into this breach, covering all areas of English studies from literature and literary criticism to composition to cultural studies. It reverses the long history of the marginalization of teaching and of the scholarship produced around it.

6. See Garber's (2001) entertaining discussion of how journalism simplifies complex academic theories because of "how many 'bounces' you can allow an idea to have" in such venues (35).

7. For example, the last decade has seen many a writer (research scholars included) justify the existence or ostensible importance of his or her own work in terms of how it disproves Foucauldians who reduce everything to mere power, or postmodern scholars who relativistically argue that anything goes.

8. Conventional research about online education is a good example of this. Many scholars who have published in this area have such a limited experience of it in practice that it is almost as if they were engaged in the equivalent of armchair anthropology. Having had this experience many times myself, I was happily amused when I read the Open University's Nigel Blake's (2002) initial response to Hubert Dreyfus's account of online education in *On the Internet*: "I do not find my own online practice described in this book, even in vague terms; so at the very least I write here to set the record straight regarding the range of actual practice" (397).

Acknowledgments

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A Retrospective

Diana Worby, Hudson Valley Center

Diana Worby, long-time mentor in literature and writing at the Hudson Valley Center, offered theses reflections at a party celebrating her retirement held this spring at the home of colleague, Leontine Temsky.

I've been thinking about how I got from there to here: how did I get to be 81 years old, retiring from Empire State College, after 31 years of doing work that I have loved. Who were those folks who were present on the way, moving me forward, and who deserve appreciation?

I need to start with my mother and father, Jewish immigrants with thick Yiddish accents I was ashamed of when I was a girl; readers of *The Partisan Review, The Dial Magazine,* T. S. Eliot; friend of William Carlos Williams. When they died they had on their bookshelf George Bernard Shaw's *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism,* as well as first editions of poetry of e. e. cummings, T. S. Elliot, Siegfried Sassoon, Tolstoy. They were fiercely anti-religious: Yiddishists, opposed to practitioners of any religion.

Our religion was: Art, Music, Literature – the mantra of our household, and one I hated, resisted, turned away from. It seemed overwhelming to me, especially since my older sister entered that world of art, music and literature. Of course I had to rebel against it, even though I was the best customer at the bookmobile that parked across the street from our rented apartment every week when I was a girl. I read voraciously. So after high school, high honor student, et al – though those parents hardly noticed – I went, on their advice, to Sadie Brown's Collegiate Secretarial Institute. Got a job at the Free French Delegation, met Lou, got married at 22 or so, had those requisite three kids by the time I was 30, and got involved in community activities. So thanks, Esther and Zachy Zacharia for getting me to that point. And look what I turned to finally? Art, Music and Literature!

At age 47, I took my first college course, Psychology (what else?) at a Rockland Community College (RCC) satellite. It was much less threatening to me than going to a campus. (Like Empire State College students, it was hard for me to think about myself as "college material.") So I studied my brains out and got an A. Next semester I took two courses, still at satellites; same process, two more A's. The handwriting seemed to be on the wall. I enrolled in an American Literature course, still thinking I was a psych major, and Professor Libby Bay was my teacher. (Okay, so here's the book of notes I took in her class; and it was a six-week summer course!) She was brilliant, she was full of literary lore and knowledge, she was the hardest marker I ever had. Years later, while I was still finishing my master's degree, and she was chair of the English Department at RCC, she recommended me for an adjunct position teaching College Skills and English 101 at RCC. Libby, deepest thanks, my first, my ever-present teacher, my friend, my inspiration. That was my beginning.

Then there's Sam Draper. Here's the story: I was, indeed, as I have said, a psych major. One day I was sitting in a psych class and the teacher was droning on: " … if you bite your nails you are fixated in the oral stage, and if you (yadda, yadda, yadda) you are fixated in the anal stage." I thought I would perish. What should I do? Stick it out? Drop? (Drop the course? Would that made me a "drop out"?) But I went to "Drop-Add," still pacing back and forth with indecision, and this man practically accosted me: "I'm starting an honors literature program … you look like a mature person who would love it … I need 10 students to start it … I'll give you a good mark" (he might have even promised me an A!) and,

Diana Worby and her husband Lou

he was so persuasive, so "in my face," as they say today, that I yielded. The professor was Sam Draper and thanks go to him. I took several literature courses with Sam. At one point I wrote a paper and made an oral presentation on *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* as an Aristotelian tragedy. How's that for a "lower level" community college class? After I finished, Sam got on a chair and started shouting "Brava! Brava" – what was I to think? So, at some point, literature trumped psychology – of course it was there, hiding all the time. Then one day I met Sam Draper in a RCC hallway and said, timidly, "Dr. Draper, I've decided to change my major from psychology to literature," and he said, *"What a Triumph for Literature!!"* Now there's a teacher. Those words rang in my head. That literature would triumph if I entered into it. Wow.

Eventually, Sam's persuasiveness sent me to Manhattanville College for my bachelor's degree in English – a superb program and superb education. Thanks, Libby, thanks Sam, thanks RCC, thanks for hiring me as an adjunct at RCC, where I was when Hy Hoffman and Jay Gilbert called me to ask if I could be a tutor for an Empire State College student. Empire State College was located in the basement of RCC during those years, and that was the beginning.

Evidently I caught on to the "Empire State College mode," and soon I was working with lots and lots of students (you know how that goes with a hard-working tutor).

Then one day I was at some social gathering and a prim and lovely woman with excellent posture was introduced to me: Mary Ann Biller, the dean of Empire State College's Hudson Valley Center (then known as the Lower Hudson Learning Center). She mentioned that one of the faculty members had a three-month reassignment and was looking for a replacement for those months. Enter: Miriam Tatzel, who interviewed me for about eight minutes, said I would be fine, and left me with a drawer full of students. I staggered under the amount of knowledge I had to absorb, the detail, the preparation of degree programs. The teaching/tutoring part was fantastic but oh, the paperwork! I read every document around; I went to every "open information session" and orientation, learning, learning and working 10 to 12 hour days.

The three months were over. Mary Ann Biller called me into her small office, located off a cold hallway \in the rear of the basement of the library at RCC and asked me if I would like a half-time job. Hey, sure! A couple of weeks later, she asked if I would like a three-quarter time job. Hey sure! So I taught two or three courses at RCC and was a three-quarter time mentor for a year. The rest, as they say, is history.

To Miriam Tatzel, thanks, for seeing something in me I knew nothing about, and for having faith in me. And to Maryann Biller, with whom I still exchange holiday cards, thanks in absentia, for also seeing something in me I knew nothing about, and for having faith in me.

My colleagues: you have been a community of warm friends for me. We have supported each other, you supported me, you have been there with me sharing some of the best years of my life. Thanks.

My students: I am wordless. Some 25 years ago I had an article published called "Across the Corner of My Desk" … and that dyad, that eye-to-eye relationship with a student, that sharing of a text or a poem or a paper on the desk between us – that dense and suspended discussion, that triumph in a face that lets me know that real learning and understanding has taken place, that someone has moved, through a story or a poem, to another level of herself, another level of living– my students/my self. Thanks to the hundreds of students I have mentored. You were everything.

And to Lou, my constant, my sidekick, my proud husband, who, 35 years ago told me to quit the part-time job I had, while I was a part-time student; that we would manage financially without it, that I should go to school full time. His pride in my schooling, in my work, in me, is palpable. Thanks, Lou.

So if not for Esther and Zachy Zacharia, Rockland Community College, Libby Bay, Sam Draper, Miriam Tatzel, MaryAnn Biller and Lou, I might not be where I am, who I am. I was not alone. I was, and am, the sum total of intersecting people and events.

Core Values of Empire State College (2005)

The core values of Empire State College reflect the commitments of a dynamic, participatory and experimenting institution accessible and dedicated to the needs of a richly diverse adult student body. These values are woven into the decisions we make about what we choose to do, how we carry out our work in all parts of the institution, and how we judge the outcome of our individual and collective efforts. More than a claim about what we have already attained, the core values support our continuing inquiry about what learning means and how it occurs.

We value learning-mentoring goals that:

respond to the academic, professional and personal needs of each student;

identify and build upon students' existing knowledge and skills;

sustain lifelong curiosity and critical inquiry;

provide students with skills, insights, and competencies that support successful college study.

We value learning-mentoring processes that:

emphasize dialogue and collaborative approaches to study;

support critical exploration of knowledge and experience;

provide opportunities for active, reflective, and creative academic engagement.

We value learning-mentoring modes that:

respond to a wide array of student styles, levels, interests, and circumstances;

foster self-direction, independence, and reflective inquiry;

reflect innovation and research.

We value a learning-mentoring community that:

defines each member as a learner, encouraging and appreciating his/her distinctive contributions;

recognizes that learning occurs in multiple communities, environments and relationships as well as in formal academic settings;

attracts, respects, and is enriched by a wide range of people, ideas, perspectives and experiences.

We value a learning-mentoring organization and culture that:

invites collaboration in the multiple contexts of our work;

fosters innovation and experimentation;

develops structures and policies that encourage active participation of all constituents in decision-making processes;

advocates for the interests of adult learners in a variety of academic and civic forums.

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The Arab Americans

Mel Rosenthal, Metropolitan Center

*T*he pictures included here are a part of an ongoing documentary exploration describing the experiences of Americans whose lineage can be traced to the Arabic speaking countries. Since 1992, I have been making photographs revealing the significant diversity of Arab American communities mostly in New York state, which has the third largest concentration of Arabs in the United States. Often misunderstood and misrepresented in American popular culture and politics, especially today, Americans who share the legacy of the Arabic language actually represent 22 countries in the Middle East and North Africa and at least three religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

The exhibition from which these pictures are taken included 50 images and originally opened at the Museum of the City of New York in March 2002; moved to the Allentown Art Museum in Pennsylvania as "Americans by Choice;" and then in 2003, opened at the American Immigration Law Center in Washington, D.C.; and toured in Syria and Jordan sponsored by the U.S. State Department. The body of work continues to travel and grow as I meet and photograph new individuals and communities.

Young Syrian-American girl who goes to the local public school in Brooklyn Heights. A teacher there told me that the school has many students who come from Arabic-speaking countries. Muslims, Christians, Jews and children who profess no particular religion all coexist there.

Woman and her daughter beside an icon of a saint; Church of the Virgin Mary, Palm Sunday, 2001.

Women's basketball at the Al Noor School, a private school for Muslims in Sunset Park, Brooklyn.

At a Palestinian wedding at Widdi's Catering Hall

Moroccan Sephardic Jews at their synagogue on the East Side of Manhattan

Astroland Amusement Park, Coney Island, New York, March 27, 1999. The occasion is Eid al Fitr, the three-day festival of fast-breaking at the end of Ramadan.

At Eid al Fitr, 2000, in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn

Teenager roller-blading on street in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn
with Vietnamese women behind her

Dancing at Widdi's Catering Hall.

Muhaideen Batah, Palestinian carpenter/photographer graduating
from the Metropolitan Center of Empire State College, 1999.

What Do We Know About Student Learning? A Case Study

Xenia Coulter, Center for International Programs

On February 17, 2006, the Mentoring Institute sponsored a workshop on the topic, "mentoring at distances." Among the cases presented at this meeting was the following by Xenia Coulter.

Mentoring at a distance

Everyone wants students to learn. Learning, after all, is the business of an educational institution. But how do we go about making sure that learning really takes place? Does it make a difference whether we consider ourselves to be mentors, as reflected in the title of this workshop, or teachers? And what about distance? Does that help or hinder us in considering questions of student learning? If the classroom is the benchmark condition of learning and the web course the prototype of distance learning, then should we, by analogy at Empire State College, consider the nondistant student to be the one we meet regularly in our offices to discuss their work and the distant student the one we never meet, but only speak with on the phone, by e-mail, or in a web course? Do these different venues differ in facilitating student learning? Do they affect how much teachers are aware of and responsive to problems of student understanding?

The "case" I will present today is that of a particular course of study – experimental psychology. It is a subject area that presents major learning challenges and it is one that I have taught, tutored, or mentored in a variety of settings. I want to describe how my own journey through teaching, mentoring, and, now, mentoring this course at a distance, has forced me to recognize that students do not always learn what we teach, and teachers do not always know this. The "lesson" of this case is about the role of "distance" in bringing these truths to light.

Experimental Psychology

I've taught something akin to this course for more than 30 years: in the classroom, as an individualized study, as an individualized study at a distance (e.g., over the phone), and as a web course. It is a challenging course in any setting. Unlike many other psychology courses, experimental psychology does not easily relate to the typical student's interest in the field. Most of our adult students, for example, study psychology to enhance their skills as counselors or therapists. They do this by appropriating information about human behavior from intuition, experience, or authoritative sources to help make sense of what they encounter in human service settings. These students are generally not very interested in psychology as an academic discipline or scientific enterprise.

The major purpose of the experimental course is to expose students to psychology as a science. An important goal – not always well received by students – is to critically examine the experimental methods that have produced the "truths" about human behavior they look to psychology to reveal. Of course, I also want to excite students about the process of doing research – the testing of hypotheses and the analysis of data – and there's always a small number who do become captivated. But for students who want only to "understand human behavior," my hope is that they'll at least learn to appreciate how complicated that quest may be and how uncertain, meaningless, or even wrong, many of the "obvious" truths about people often turn out to be. To attain this level of understanding, students must learn the devil of the details in research, which means as students they must learn to read closely, to recognize what they don't understand, to uncover inconsistencies in their own thinking, and to give up the practice of "getting the general idea" and skipping the

rest. Moreover, they must acquire a sense of logic and order, precision in speaking, solid knowledge of research structure, and lots of information about areas in psychology they hardly know at all that seem utterly irrelevant to the helping professions.

From Stony Brook to Empire State College

At Stony Brook, psychology was second only to biology in popularity, and every psychology major was required to take the experimental psychology course. Thus, each term at least 400 psychology students, mostly seniors, signed up for it. They were divided into 20 different lab sections, each taught by a graduate student (with one section reserved for me). They also attended together one large lecture a week where as the instructor, I tried to provide a "big picture" and to clarify difficult concepts. Note that they came to this course already having taken statistics, research methods and several courses with attached labs. With the experimental course, however, the lab itself largely defined the subject matter. Students spent their time conducting experiments (mostly with rats) and writing appropriately formatted research reports. In other words, they learned about experimentation in psychology by actually doing it.

At Empire State College, the situation was obviously very different. First of all, most of my adult students were already committed to the human services. They were not in some early stage of life needing to be prepared for every possible contingency. Secondly, Empire State College offered a concentration area unavailable at Stony Brook – Community and Human Services (CHS) – which was a much better option for these students. Once they realized that applied psychology was a critical component of the CHS concentration, most students were readily dissuaded from concentrating

in psychology itself. Thus, I did not have to deal with large numbers of students struggling with a course of little interest to them as was the case at Stony Brook.

However a few students were interested in studying psychology as a discipline, which raised the third Empire State College difference: a lack of laboratory opportunities. Unless they had studied psychology elsewhere, students could not participate in educational experiences considered critical in psychology – not just research experiences, but serious exposure to the "hard science" courses that only a handful of faculty at Empire State College were prepared to teach.[1] Somewhat in desperation, I designed for these students a study in experimental psychology that would at least expose them to some of the subject content and research experience that they had missed. I found a good textbook[2] that focused upon experimental logic and that also introduced many important areas not then available (e.g., psychophysics, perception, attention, cognition, learning, memory, etc). I assigned a number of illustrative articles and research reports, and I was able to locate inexpensive laboratory software[3] that could be installed in the students' personal computers that allowed them to collect and analyze data from classic psychological experiments.

To help them learn the material, I developed a dozen or so questions for each chapter in the text that called for definitions, analyses of assigned articles, presentations of their data, and explanations or descriptions of various research issues. They wrote out their answers, and we then met to talk about them. With the students I taught at a distance (over the phone), I did almost the same thing. When I came to develop the web course, I elaborated upon this approach, using the same textbook, readings, and experiments. As a substitute for the individual meetings involved in mentoring, I created a number of "mini-lectures" on tricky issues, revised my questions, and distributed them to either the discussion area of the course or to the written assignments. The former offered students a chance to clarify their understanding of the concepts and terms in the course; the latter allowed me to assess their mastery of the material.

Distance revisited

When I began instructing the web course, in other words, when I became a "distance mentor," I was immediately struck by the poor quality of the discussion responses and the written assignments. Answers were often way off the point, and in the threaded discussions, the students were much more likely to reinforce each other's

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misunderstandings than to raise questions about what someone might have said. As I said to my friends at the time, with a web course you're not allowed to escape the fact that your students have not understood the material. It's right there in your face all the time.

How come, I wondered, I hadn't felt so hopelessly confronted with ignorance when I worked with my students in other settings? Reflecting back upon my Stony Brook experience, I acknowledged that my students didn't always "get" the material. It was with the Stony Brook students, for example, that I discovered they (seniors!) had no idea what a variable was, despite having had course after course that always began with a brief overview of research methods and an obligatory discussion on dependent versus independent variable. I knew this because when asked to define the word on an exam, well over half the students got it dead wrong

or said something like "an independent variable is a variable that is independent." But unless I read their exams (and I had some 20 graduate student assistants to do that for me), I was otherwise pretty much spared confrontations with their ignorance. I assessed my skill as a teacher by the quality of my lectures and explanations, not by the thinking of my students.

But what about my Empire State College experience and the students with whom I had worked one by one, face-to face? Of course, I had a very select group of students. But, as I began to think about face-to-face conversations in general – and phone conversations too – I began to recognize how nonconducive that setting is for confronting students whom you like and respect with their lack of understanding. There are social rules of conversation that govern the way in which we talk with people that encourage us to avoid exposing the student's ignorance. Written answers to questions are certainly a helpful corrective, but how far do we go with our feedback to these answers? What I typically did was to provide what I considered to be clear, sometimes even inspired, oral dissertations in response to those limited number of answers that showed very little understanding of the concept involved. I then asked the student to rethink and rewrite answers to those questions. Rarely did I ask for a second rewrite. Instead, I simply hoped that comprehension would improve as the study progressed; otherwise, a student who systematically wrote poor answers ended up with a relatively negative final evaluation or mediocre final grade.

These reflections reveal an interesting irony. The very setting that epitomizes distance learning – the web course – seems to be the best setting for exposing the teacher to a student's thought – in other words, the setting that best removes the distance between the student's thinking and the teacher. The classroom, on the other hand, the epitome of nondistance learning, is a setting that allows or even encourages a teacher to completely distance herself from the thinking of her students through the lecture podium, the prepared lecture, class scheduling, and even graduate assistants. In other words, in the classroom – also in face-to-face (or ear-to-ear) mentoring, where

rules of conversation confound the situation – it's also a lot easier to distance yourself from student ignorance than it is in a web course. So maybe we're not thinking about the right kind of distance when we talk about "mentoring at a distance," at least if we are concerned about what students are learning.

Clarifying the problem

About 20 years ago, two researchers did an experiment with physics students. After they completed an introductory course that emphasized the Newtonian contribution to our understanding of motion, the students were put into test situations to see what extent their originally primitive notions of motion had been altered by the course. The findings were quite striking. They indicated that although the students were able to state the correct answers on exams, their original ideas about motion hadn't really changed. Even when confronted with situations that primitive reasoning could not handle, they persistently defended their intuitive conceptions – even when they were provided with hints that reminded them of what they had just learned. Apparently, studying their textbooks, listening to lectures, and even discussing the material helped students learn to plug in the right formulas, use the right words on exams, and recognize the correct phrases. But in terms of learning, despite these activities, their minds remained resistant to the new ways of thinking that was a major focus in the course.

Reading about this research in a book by Ken Bain,[4] I was struck by how much that situation resembled what I face in my course. What is ordinarily almost invisible to teachers in classroom settings that was forced upon me in the web course was, indeed, the resistance of students to learn new concepts. The variable issue that I noted at Stony Brook, for example, continued to haunt the web course as well. The textbook presents, defines, and illustrates variables repeatedly in the first three chapters. Knowing that students find this concept difficult, I focus upon this important term in my own written comments, where I explicitly warn the students about conceptual pitfalls (most particularly that students confused variables – which vary – and the different values a variable can

take). And I give my own examples. And we discuss it as well. Despite this extensive preparation, students still fail to grasp the concept. Here's a typical question on a written assignment which "tests" what they have learned:

Half a group of adults saw a film on stress reduction. The other half saw a film on bird watching. One week later both groups were asked to rate how effectively they handled stress during that week. What is the independent and dependent variables in this research?

At least 80 percent of the students indicate that there are two independent variables here: A film on stress reduction is the first; a film on bird watching is the other. A few students also may list "Group of adults" as an independent variable too. Most students have less difficulty identifying the dependent variable, but about 25 percent may mix up the two types of variable. Bear in mind that aside from the extensive instruction they receive in this course, these students have been exposed to the term "variable" in every single psychology course they have taken. It seems right to characterize these failures, just as with the physics students, not just as ignorance, but as some kind of systematic "resistance" to understanding.

Other examples abound. About 70 percent of the students never grasp the meaning of an "interaction" between variables; about a quarter of them never fully understand the concept of a "confounded" variable. The class[5] engages in an extensive discussion of the idea that a theory cannot be proven but only disproved, that a theory serves to explain data, so theory and data must be kept separate, and that a "correlation" is not "causation." (This latter concept is typically printed in bold in every statistics book; and it is similarly printed in bold in the experimental psychology textbook). In a recent discussion thread, one student said repeatedly that the correlation between smoking and lung cancer "proved" that smoking caused lung cancer. She did this despite having studied the textbook, having read my own "mini-lectures," having responded to my repeated replies to her where I explained why a significant correlation does not signify cause, and having engaged in an exercise where all

students shared examples of common correlations that are causally meaningless.[6]

Dealing with this problem

For several iterations of the web course, I was convinced that students were simply not reading the text, not reading my little lectures, and not reading the discussions. How could they have read these sources and then stated exactly the opposite of what they read in their (graded!) written assignments? So, I modified the web course to further encourage reading by clarifying the course structure, making the comments easier to read, and adding exhortations about making sure to read my comments (mini-lectures) and all the discussion responses.

Yet, too many students still told me that my course was the hardest they ever took (and I had drop-outs to support their claim) and that they read and studied the material again and again. Over time, I began to wonder whether the problem was not that they failed to read so much as they simply failed to comprehend what they were reading.[7] I already knew that more than half the students utterly failed to understand the basic arguments of one of the assigned articles[8] so I figured that perhaps most students simply couldn't understand sophisticated text. I couldn't change the textbook or the articles, but I eliminated some parts of the mini-lectures that were probably unnecessary or off the point (even if, to my mind, entertaining), and I began to focus upon the more difficult concepts by breaking down my questions into many but smaller progressive steps.

These changes certainly improved the course. While students still began with the usual misunderstandings, the proportion of students who improved in their understanding seemed to increase. Still, a substantial number continued to struggle. My reaction by now was despair and a little bit of anger: Had I done all that I could with the web course? How else could I improve my "lectures" and questions? Was I giving enough feedback,[9] and was the feedback clear enough?[10] Would it help if I could add more visual aids, particularly animated graphics? But what kind of animated graphic would more effectively depict an interaction, or a noncausal correlation, than the static ones already available? And

then, finally, why do these students come to my course with such poor preparation? Why does all their ignorance and confusion and resistance to learning fall on just my shoulders?

The research on physics students cut short these ruminations and really made me sit up and take notice. My own conclusion was that students often do not understand what they read, but the research also suggested that the cause was not due to a lack of studying, the density of text, the

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structure of the course, to poor preparation in other classes, or even to inadequate feedback. Instead, the implication was that the students come to the course holding tacit (or intuitive) ideas that run contrary to the concepts being presented. They cannot take in information that challenges ideas they take for granted and don't even know they hold! In other words, their minds are literally blocked. Their resistance to learning was not willful, but systemic. While it is probably helpful to use clear language, to include many examples, to limit the number of important new concepts, and to encourage considerable practice with these new ideas, the problem is that "learning" in this instance is not just a matter of adding new information into students' minds, but of actually changing their minds.

This insight has helped me understand why my course is necessarily so difficult. Like the idea of "motion" in physics, many psychological concepts have common sense understandings. These everyday perceptions are often wrong and certainly too vague

and imprecise to be scientifically useful. When they take these concepts for granted, students do not even realize that they don't have a clear idea of what they mean. Not only is it difficult to make a student stop and take notice, but it is almost impossible for a teacher to know what conception they have that stands in the way of their learning. Each student comes to the course with different experiences and backgrounds that shape these tacit understandings in ways that teachers, often with very different backgrounds, cannot even imagine.[11]

To excavate the ideas that students already hold and then to help them look at them critically and ultimately reconceptualize what they thought they already knew is, by definition, an effortful and time-consuming process. When you consider the structure of our system of education in which the assumption is that if the truth is stated clearly enough, it will be learned, perhaps it's not surprising that in the end our students don't learn as much as we think they have. It was recently announced in the press that more than half of our college graduates are incapable of solving simple problems or understanding a scholarly book. Is it possible that the distance our system of education creates between the mentor or teacher and the thinking processes of his or her student might play a role in creating these abysmal statistics? As we try to streamline education, that is, make it into a business of information transfer, aren't we making this problem worse?

In that context, it does occur to me that the web course might possibly, under the right conditions, offset this problem. If my hypothesis is correct – that web course makes the problem much more obvious than in other educational settings – more instructors like me are going to become increasingly aware of the problem. The more we recognize the resistance of our students' minds to change, the more likely it will inspire individual instructors to chip away at that resistance and to look for various remedies. But whatever the remedy, ultimately we need to recognize that student learning will never be an "efficient" enterprise – at least not as long as it involves a transaction between teacher and student. Perhaps, someday learning will consist of machine-brain interactions as described

in science fiction; but that day is not here. So, for now, the best lesson I may have acquired from this case – my history with experimental psychology – is that these struggles should not be seen as failures by either the teacher or student. Learning, understanding, mind-changing – they take much more time and effort, and they are much "messier" processes, than our current system of education acknowledges. The web course reveals the problem, but it's up to the faculty to bring it to light and work together to find ways of addressing it.

Notes

1. The Center for Distance Learning has since added a number of "hard science" courses to its catalogue, so today students can more easily meet the concentration expectations in psychology than even five years ago.

2. Kantowitz, B. H., H. L. Roediger III and D. G. Elmes. *Experimental Psychology.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Thomson, 2005. (I am currently using the eighth edition.)

3. Originally, the software was MelLabs, which was self-contained on a floppy disk. Two years ago, the experiments moved online. The full reference is: St. James, J., W. Schneider, A. Eschman, *PsychMate.* Pittsburgh: Psychology Software Tools, Inc., 2003 - 2005. (I am currently using version two.)

4. Bain, Ken. *What the Best College Teachers Do.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, (2004): 22 - 23.

5. By "class," I include myself. Somewhat contrary to accepted practice in web course pedagogy, I engage fully in these discussions in order to alert students to problems in their conceptions or reasoning.

6. For example, with children, the bigger their feet, the better they read.

7. I even revised the "icebreaker" activities to include these questions: "How do you know you haven't understood what you read," and "if you don't understand something, what do you do about it?" Interestingly students had a lot of difficulty with the first question. This discussion turned out to be a

fascinating one for me and for them, but it took too much time and energy away from the focus of the course, so I ultimately eliminated it. As it happens, it didn't make a difference. Not surprisingly, they were not able to apply that discussion later on in the course because, as I've come to understand, they didn't know how to recognize that they didn't understand, much less what.

8. Seligman, M.E.P. The Effectiveness of Psychotherapy. *The American Psychologist,* 50.12 (1995): 965 - 974.

9. The amount of feedback I give is prodigious. Not only in the discussions (where I am very careful about when and what I say), but in each of the nine written assignments. It is not uncommon for me to write more words in my feedback than the student produced in the assignment!

10. Over time, I have created some "hypertext" feedback. These are prewritten responses to common misunderstandings that students can access via a link in their assignment evaluations. I developed these to make sure that what I said was as clear and helpful as possible – and not dependent upon the time and place I was actually writing the evaluation.

11. Mike Rose (*Lives on the Boundary,* NY: Penguin, 1990) makes this point forcefully. He shows how the individual experience of each student can produce a mindset that disallows them from understanding the main point of a book or lecture. He also argues that only through an individual conversation with that student is it possible to uncover the misconceptions that block his or her comprehension. A similar argument was presented recently as an Op-Ed article by Karin Klein ("Johnny's lesson," in the *Hartford Courant,* February 19, 2006). The author describes her experience tutoring a young man in algebra and how she was able to discover the source of this student's inability to "get" algebra only through personal conversations (that sounded a lot like mentoring). She argues that such opportunities cannot occur in our existing school systems, which do not allow enough flexibility for teachers to discover what is standing in the way of any given student's learning.

> Holding a conception of knowledge as constructed does not make life easier but, in fact, complicates it because it means that everything is potentially questionable and, as a result, there are more areas of uncomfortable cognitive dissonance to be managed. In a sense, this may reinforce Perry's notion of commitment as an unsophisticated response to an initial recognition of the complexity implied by the view of knowledge as constructed. The learner copes by saying: "In this chaos of constructed knowledge, I have to make up my mind and hold on tight to my view."
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> – Jennifer A. Moon. *A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning: Theory and Practice* (2004) New York/London: Routledge (p. 43)

The Novel Pregnancy: A Sabbatical Report

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Newly pregnant with my son 14 years ago, I remember the sensation of bees working inside me. I could feel the vibration of their flight, hear the sound of their hum as they did their work, the buzz of a new life being made: the concentration of it all, the intense, internal energy of cells being replicated, DNA being concocted, fingers, toes, arms, legs and a heart and brain being built. On the outside I appeared quite unchanged for sometime, but this rich, surprising, secret inner life was a tantalizing, mysterious one that I could not articulate. It was not like anything I had experienced before. It wasn't until my son emerged, flailing and wailing, that anyone could know just exactly who was growing in the interior world of my body, despite my evolving physical and imaginative relationship with him for the better part of a year. We were always together. We knew things about each other.

Before my sabbatical began, I made the decision to observe my creative process as well as to just do the work of continuing my research and writing of my partially written novel, *Deep River*. It's hard to describe the anticipation I felt of having time, time sanctioned for me to indulge my imagination, my critical thinking skills, my passion, my anxieties, my curiosity, my hopes. I wanted to watch myself and make note of how I work: What stimulates my writing? What stops it? How do I get from point A to point B in my story? What do I learn about structuring a long work? What does writing this novel teach me about myself? About life? About history and culture and relationships? About how to teach writing?

What I discovered watching myself write is that the conception, gestation and birthing of a long work is unnervingly like the process I experienced producing a child. This may not be a surprising metaphor, yet it for me it was a visceral, surprisingly accurate comparison. Once again I had a

Elaine Handley

rich, secret inner life. The buzzing was back. And like that first pregnancy, I found my sense of self vacillating between confident, strong and productive and fragile, lost and unwell as a writer. Some days it was a rush to write – I felt like I had metaphysical wings, and I could travel anywhere in time, geography, or sensibility. I was powerful. Then there were days I wondered what ever gave me the idea that I could sustain a long work, that I had anything to write that would be of interest for anyone else to read. I was mercurial – finding it hard to sit in my chair some days and other days not even wishing to stop to eat.

My novel takes place in 1852, in Greenfield Center, a small town on the outskirts of Saratoga Springs. Two years after the Fugitive Slave Law was passed, forbidding anyone from aiding or abetting people running from slavery, and the same year that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* further exploded the abolition debate, 1852 is a time of great social ferment as the slavery question further polarizes communities and the country.

Participants on the Underground Railroad (UGR) Movement are participating in civil disobedience, and civil disobedience is at the heart of *Deep River*. The two protagonists, Isaac, an African American man who has run from slavery, seeking freedom, comes to the cottage where Maizie Booth lives alone and continues her father's work as an agent on the UGR. A transcendentalist and feminist who defies many of the social mores, she is a committed abolitionist whose idealism has limited her in certain ways. She and Isaac become friends and teachers to each other and team up to execute the escape of the woman Isaac loves and was forced to leave behind in slavery.

And so my work progressed. While I continued to research and read biographies, novels, and nonfiction about the antebellum era, and study maps, review web sites and talk to people, underneath it all, organically, the novel was developing both on paper and in my head. Sometimes days would pass without my writing while I was reading and thinking, but no matter, the story was always with me, the characters very real, very alive, and often insistent. They were my constant companions, and I often woke at night and spent hours thinking about them and working out in my head how the plot would develop, how I could better portray their characters, and thinking about what I was trying to get at with this story. Over and over I asked myself: what am I to learn here? What am I trying to express?

A painful period at the beginning of my sabbatical when I felt completely blocked about how to get back inside the novel – and temporarily abandoned it to get into a writing rhythm by revising poetry – birthed a heady period in May and June when I experienced what psychologist Csikszentmihalyi describes as "flow." Whenever I sat down to write, my finger began typing without me seeming to even think. This fascinated and surprised me, because especially during this time the

characters asserted themselves in interesting ways. I would sit to write a scene I had planned out, but in the transmission of that scene from my brain to the screen something happened. The plot changed, a very minor character suddenly had something important to do or say and became more integral to the plot. I remember William Faulkner claiming he stopped writing when the voice stopped. My experience was somewhat similar. I seemed, during that period, to be taking dictation.

But there were fallow periods too, when I put aside my writing, or rather my writing put me aside, and I was restless and distracted as I struggled to go deeper in my understanding of the issues I am writing about. I discovered that this project was in part about undoing my education. Historically there was much I needed to unlearn. I came to understand how prejudicial my education has been, and how pervasive racism is in terms of what and how we learn. I don't know if this surprised me as much as disturbed me. It has left me to wonder how much prejudice I carry around that is still unknown to me.

One such example is the idea the Underground Railroad was a social movement devised and run by whites who opposed slavery and wanted to help the poor, victimized African Americans. In truth, the UGR was a collaboration between the races; free African Americans worked tirelessly to devise means of escape and support for people enslaved. Thanks to people like William Stills, a free African American in Philadelphia who helped hundreds of freedom seekers, records exist of these underground activities. In the Albany area there were several African Americans who actively organized and participated in the UGR movement. So this idea of collaboration has become central to my story. It is no longer a story about a man escaping from slavery and a white woman helping him. It is about a man escaping from slavery who sets in motion moral questions, and the moral education of many white people.

From my reading and research I came to understand that people's allegiance to the abolition cause came in degrees and that abolitionists were often quite racist in their beliefs about the intelligence and abilities of African Americans, let alone what roles and rights they should have in society. How free is free? is another question underlying my story.

> *How would I convey my freedom-seeking protagonist's speech pattern without having him speak in heavy dialect? What does dialect convey besides place? What are the racist and classist associations and what do they mean?*

As an undergraduate English major I focused on American literature, and in graduate school my area of expertise was 19th century American literature. Why is it that in all my college courses I never encountered the writing of Frederick Douglass, a seminal 19th century figure, a brilliant mind and one of the most eloquent writers from that era? This shocks me. His writing and social commentary, his understanding of the power and destruction of racism, especially institutionalized racism, his comprehension of human nature shines across 19th century American social commentary like a laser beam. His autobiographies are powerful renderings of an intellect that has largely gone unnoticed. Why isn't he held up there with Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Melville and Hawthorne? How is that we are still mostly ignoring his insights?

I also came to a greater appreciation of the cultural changes that African Americans brought to the south in terms of language, work rhythms, food, and music. Despite being literally at the mercy of white southerners, African Americans were able to exert considerable cultural influence that

continues today. In this context I particularly struggled with the issue of speech and language. How would I convey my freedom-seeking protagonist's speech pattern without having him speak in heavy dialect? What does dialect convey besides place? What are the racist and classist associations and what do they mean? Should I leave the scene in the novel where this man asks Maizie, the white woman, to teach him to speak like her? Should I let the language of commerce win out, as it still does today? If a person who spoke in dialect learned to read conventional English, would his speech change regardless?

Questions and more questions emerged as I continued to write. Seminal questions: How much do experience and education divide us? How much did southern and northern culture divide the people working in the UGR movement? How much do gender and gender roles divide us? What is the fear at the root of racism, sexism, classism? What possibilities exist in friendship? Was it possible for an African American man and a white woman to sustain a friendship in antebellum America? How severely can convention limit us? As I continue my work on this project, I realize that in part I want this story to be about what is possible.

Much of my work during my six-month sabbatical had to do with peeling back layers. The most enjoyable part of this came in my continuing research of local history. I have put several actual people in the story and it was sheer pleasure to figure out how to weave them in. There is Angeline Tubbs, a reputed camp follower and jilted lover of one of Burgoyne's men who by the time of my story is a wizened crone who walks through Saratoga in extravagantly bizarre dress, complete with a red cape, constantly followed by cats wherever she goes. The locals somewhat fear her because she is said to have prophetic powers. She was just too interesting a person not to use as a character, so in my story I have made her a messenger between people working on the UGR. Seventeen-year-old Dolly Smith, the servant of the famous Walworth family of Saratoga, who was granted her freedom

and then hid runaways in the family wine cellar becomes a co-conspirator with Maizie. Maizie encounters Anne Northup who worked at the famous United States Hotel as a cook, and by 1852 had been mourning her husband Solomon's disappearance almost 12 years before – despite being born a free black he was tricked and literally sold down the river. There are historic places too – like the Stone Church in Middle Grove where the anti-slavery meetings are held, and several historic places in Saratoga Springs, where many scenes in the novel take place. In such a story the devil is in the details, and I have had to learn about food, clothing, tools, accoutrements, speech and habits of the time in order to make the story accurate and realistic, which I am committed to.

I looked back into my own family history as well for material and found two stories that leant themselves to this tale I am telling. One involved my great-grandfather and his accidental poisoning; an African American woman, a former slave, who worked for him, saved him. My mother happened to mention the other story to me at a serendipitous moment and it is now in the story: My protagonists are circuitously heading south having devised a plan to travel by the Erie Canal, Isaac unseen in a coffin (though quite alive) and Maizie posing as the grieving widow. While on the Erie Canal they encounter a family on a houseboat in terrible grief. While the family performed their chores, one of the children, a two-year old boy, has fallen unnoticed into the canal and has drowned. This was the circumstance of my great, great grandparents and their family of 13 children who harvested and sold timber on the canal.

You just can't be sure how your child will turn out. You love him, you guide him, you teach him – but he is no tabla rasa. Genetically, intellectually, emotionally he comes with his own stuff and it is an amazing process to watch him unfold into the person that he is.

My experience so far with this novel is surprisingly similar – and I didn't expect it to be so. Bottom line, it is a mysterious process that I obviously have some control over, but the fusion of imagination and history and language is powerful, maddening, confusing, exciting and to some degree indescribable and unknowable – just

like parenting. I find myself searching in crowds for my characters faces. At all sorts of strange moments a gesture, a voice, a circumstance whisks me out of the present and into my novel – my other present. Like parenting, this novel is teaching me a great deal about how I work, about commitment, about trusting myself and pushing myself. It's making me look hard at my core beliefs, at my writing ability, at how I live my life. My sabbatical and my continuing work on this project is often painful – and euphoric.

I was disappointed not to be able to complete a draft of my novel during my sabbatical. My intention was not to write a long book, not to have an extended pregnancy. But the process has to be honored, and it seems there is more growing to do before I am done. I am eager to finish this story and find out what happens (I do not know how the story will end). I am excited about getting it to the point that I could ask other people to read it and give me feedback.

The writer Leslie Marmon Silko wrote in her book *Ceremony*:

> I will tell you something about stories,
> [he said]
> They aren't just entertainment.
> Don't be fooled.
> They are all we have, you see,
> all we have to fight off
> illness and death.
>
> You don't have anything
> if you don't have the stories.
> . . . .
> He rubbed his belly.
> I keep them here
> [he said]
> Here, put your hand on it.
> See, it is moving.
> There is life here
> for the people.

I don't know what will happen when this book is finally, completely birthed. But I do know that the story is now integral to who I am, what I am about, as I carry it inside me. The time that I was granted to work on it was very rich, very important, and I am aware of how privileged and lucky I am to have had it.

Transitioning to an Online Environment: Two Voices from the Center for Distance Learning

Julie Shaw and Kim Hewitt, Center for Distance Learning

These are thoughts offered by two area coordinators at the Center for Distance Learning who developed these inchoate ideas through months of conversation about the challenges of online learning. These thoughts are a mere slice of an ongoing dialogue grappling with questions whose answers will emerge from a dance between technology, self, and the continuing spiral of innovation in teaching and technology. Julie Shaw, area coordinator for human development, social science research and formerly psychology, has been teaching online for three and a half years. Kim Hewitt, area coordinator for American history and American studies, has been teaching online for six months.

Julie Shaw

Online teaching … . What an unexpected turn! It is an especially surprising career for a person like myself for whom physical presence matters – who frequently augments a thought with a gesture, and watches the eyes of the listener to determine comprehension. I have associated online interactions with business exchanges where the subtleties of communication are frequently a hindrance. I have associated teaching/learning with face-to-face interactions where the subtleties are the essence of the exchange. Given my belief in the effectiveness of face-to-face communication, how could I effectively teach online, and, inversely, how could a student effectively learn?

Many Questions

When I applied for the position of area coordinator at the Center for Distance Learning, I had lots of questions. I could "see" myself teaching at a distance; that is, sitting at a computer communicating with

Julie Shaw

students, because I just come from seventeen years with IBM, where online exchanges via Lotus Notes were routine. I could "see" myself teaching, having had experience teaching in multiple settings – including business environments, colleges, high school, and elementary schools – and with varieties of students at all levels – from adults to children, and from the gifted to the severely emotionally and learning challenged. I had difficulty, however, understanding how to put teaching and online exchanges together. How could I, through the mechanical medium of computers, reach to the heart of a student? It felt like the wrong mix of metal and magic. Paradoxically, too many voices flood an online discussion at once, and, at the same time, everything is too sequential. In a classroom, my eye could sweep a group of students and follow many types of expression. On a page, only one line can be read at a time.

How could I make the teaching/learning dialogue "feel real?" Without the nuances communicated by "presence," would communication become false? I thought

Kim Hewitt

about various deceptions at a distance, from the mundane to the meaningful, such as the outstanding paper that is not written by the student. Deception, I surmised, is built into anything distant. Communication is harder to maintain. Plagiarism is harder to detect. Excuses are harder to validate.

Much deeper than issues of deception, however, were issues of teaching effectiveness. Wonderful ideas often emerge from rapid-fire dialogue. For many of us, the mind works much faster than typing fingers. Additionally, mismatches between the spoken words of students and their gestures have informed me of their readiness to learn a new concept, as Susan Goldin-Meadow (2006) has shown. I would not be able to see these paradoxical messages online.

Face-to-face contact visibly encourages trust and confidence. Could this trust be emulated at a distance? What about the qualities of relationship communicated by

posture, tone of voice, eye contact, mirrored gestures, movement around the room? In a classroom, I could physically approach a distracted student and get a rustle of interest. What was a comparable strategy online? You know the clichés – the spark of attention, the magnetism of shared ideas, an electric moment. Action at a distance took on a new meaning when I applied it to online learning.

Additionally, how could I provide adequate feedback to a 'constructed' student, through communication that is delayed and partial? Feedback has at least two elements, the completion of an intellectual task and the completion of an emotional exchange. I was concerned that in an online environment, it would become easy for me to react to the rational at the expense of the radiant, and that, for the student, it would be difficult to synchronize knowledge of new material and knowledge of a new self, both critical to deep learning.

So, in my new role as online instructor, for both personal and pedagogical reasons, I had to, once again, deconstruct and reconstruct teaching. What is it that happens in teaching/learning? How much of it happens as a result of lesson plans, commentaries, mini-lectures, discussion questions and essay assignments, and how much happens as a result of the personalities at both ends of the teaching/learning spectrum? How much depends on the instructor (me) and how much on the course template? How much depends on the quality of the message and how much on the quality of the medium? Can any of these paired elements be separated? Such deconstruction of education – apart from its influence on my relationship with my students – challenged me to create a new relationship with my teaching self.

A Few Answers

Naturally, so many questions led to much personal reflection and shared dialogue. From an analytical perspective, I could certainly provide details about online learning and teaching that lead to adjustment within it, some of which are due to the nature of the students themselves. We have an advantage in that we work with adult students, who are able to successfully relate the structure of their prior learning

– from whatever source – to the subject matter at hand. Many of our students are female, who often learn through stories (Belenky, et al, 1986), and there are few subjects that cannot be linked to stories to help memory retention and to reach deeper levels of interest and attraction (Nath, 2004). We can make use of multiple modalities and, thereby, reach students through their imagined senses (Raman, 2003). Assignments tap into connections between personal experiences and learned material, the shortest path to deep learning (Gasperri et al, 2005). We use the telephone to touch base, to determine the veracity of assignments, to motivate, to provide remedial instruction, and to help them relate course material to their own experiences.

> *Action at a distance does happen within the learning/teaching space created between the teacher and the learner. Both teacher and learner can be moved or touched, and charged by excitement; they can envision new horizons, and find new centers for identity.*

In my discussions about online learning with Kim Hewitt and other colleagues, I found that many of my questions were being answered, however, not by analysis, although that certainly is necessary, but, more importantly, by knowledge that I was embodying the online environment. As the environment felt more like an extension of myself, a comfort developed that was at first unexpected. I identified with Sherry Turkle (2005) who described the online environment as a transitional space. The term has meaning as an overlapping space between two individuals, neither subject nor object but some of both. When this transitional space becomes transparent, it

serves as a medium for symbolic exchange, much as words are a medium for meaning. Although she used the term to describe a space where new identities were explored and formed, particularly for adolescents, more broadly it describes the ideal environment for the exchange of meaning that occurs in learning.

It is comfort within the online transitional space that matters most. It is a gestalt shift, and no description of the changes of the particular parts will convey the meaning of the whole. When the computer and keyboard become transparent interventions (Tallent-Runnels, M.K. et al, 2006), the online environment functions as an extension of the self. For our students, many of whom have co-dependent relationships with their blackberries and cell phones, this comfort may happen more quickly than for us.

Students sense when a person is comfortable and confident standing in front of a classroom, and they sense when a teacher is comfortable in an online environment. The confidence comes not only from knowledge of subject matter, but also knowledge of and comfort in the medium. Perhaps it is like an experience we all passed through many years ago when we first learned that the written word mediates meaning. At first it was awkward, with each word having rough edges, but eventually the words flowed and we learned to read. The written words became a transitional space for meaning. The computer becomes a transitional space for learning.

So, a successful online teaching/learning environment becomes like other teaching/learning environments once there is comfort within the space. It is a space for serious play, for emotional safety, for self-recognition as well as recognition of "the other." It is a place for both rapid and gradual transitions. In the transitional space, a learner – whether identified as the student or teacher in the relationship – feels the presence of opportunity. When the instructor sees the online environment as an extension of herself or himself, that sense can be passed to the student.

Action at a distance does happen within the learning/teaching space created between the teacher and the learner. Both teacher

and learner can be moved or touched, and charged by excitement; they can envision new horizons, and find new centers for identity. A teacher comfortable within the medium can motivate students within it.

Success, at both teaching and learning online, are learnable behaviors. Adjustment to the new medium can be measured by an increased flow in language, the acceptance of various mediums for communication, and the depth of learning conveyed. It feels awkward in many ways for quite a long time. I am sure that I am still adjusting. Like riding a bike, learning to swim, or any other experiential successes, however, I now have skills related to both teaching and learning that I will retain and make use of as I deconstruct future teaching/learning environments.

Kim Hewitt

I came to the Center for Distance Learning with six years of teaching experience. I have taught in several regions of the United States and in a variety of settings, and have experienced a diversity of students: first generation college students, adult students, Vietnam vets, handicapped students, orthodox Jewish and Muslim students, international students, inner-city students, graduate students. I had honed my skills of listening, reading facial gestures and body language, assessing tone of voice as well as content, and responding to (and guiding) group dynamics in the classroom. I carefully considered what kind of atmosphere I wanted to create in the classroom and had striven to achieve a specific presence there. I strove to be an "authority" who was not authoritative, and tried to be accessible while still maintaining a friendly distance from my students.

As a young and physically diminutive female teacher, I was constantly aware of my physical presence in the classroom and the interactions between myself and students that informed me of the constantly fluctuating minute influences on the learning environment. The subtle nuances of eye contact, language, clothing, perfume, stature, sitting versus standing, tone and volume of voice, the occasional emphatic pause during a lecture, or the punctuation of a hand slapping the desk, the seating arrangement during office hours, the proximity and

… I've become a novice teacher all over. I've entered unfamiliar territory – a land of disembodied interaction. I'm often not sure where I am online. I literally don't know where to place myself.

occasional touch between instructor and student – all of these things contributed or diminished the development of interest, trust, openness, humor, critical distance, and even the erotics of the learning environment. I felt teachers who ignored these dimensions were missing opportunities to recognize classroom dynamics and establish rapport with their students. I wanted to be energetic as I walked around the room, paused, acted out scenes for my students, sat among my students, and interjected myself into the discussions when it seemed beneficial, revealing my emotional and intellectual self or withdrawing, as I felt appropriate. In sum, I developed my presence and my self in the classroom as a physical presence.

How in the world would I make the transition to online learning and mentoring?

I thought it wouldn't be too difficult. After all, even though I perceive the world in concrete, kinetic ways, I love written language. I have a well-established writer's voice and am fairly computer literate. Writing and e-mailing is second nature to me – often easier than speaking – easier than communicating in person when I have a million other kinds of stimulus to decipher flooding my brain. Wouldn't online interaction allow me the time to process my thoughts and react in a slower, more exacting manner?

I am drawn to the pedagogy of online learning. Clearly it offers new opportunities to make learning student-centered and interactive and self-reflective. In practice though, it has been very challenging to make the transition to an online learning

environment. I struggle to understand how to connect with students via e-mail and through online discussions. I've struggled to become real to them and for my students to be real to me. I've realized that a face classroom has no one-to-one correspondence to a virtual learning environment. There are similarities, but also huge differences. I've realized I have to be creative in how I use the tools available and that I have to find new tools to create rapport with students. I have to find ways to create a virtual learning environment that can mirror the classroom: safe but exciting, fun but challenging, and above all, engaging.

In that process I've become a novice teacher all over. I've entered unfamiliar territory – a land of disembodied interaction. I'm often not sure where I am online. I literally don't know where to place myself. I am not in front of a classroom, nor am I walking around joining in group discussions. I'm often not sure who I am online. My presence in the face classroom has been kinetic, auditory, visual, tactile, olfactory. Without these tools, without this self, who am I?

I thought I had an online identity. In the postmodern world of portable and malleable identities, I thought I could easily accommodate one more identity as an online instructor. Like anyone who practically grew up with e-mail, I have several e-mail accounts, and multiple e-mail nom de plumes and personas and modus operandi. I'm no stranger to chat rooms, online discussion forums, virtual flirting, online sarcasm, emoticons, and changing my answering machine with each changing mood. I have a cell phone, I know how to text message. But an identity as an online instructor requires deeper transformation than recording a message and using spell check. It calls for some kind of re-inscribing the self in a world of words that translates one's real self – not one's imaginary self, not a persona – into a format that is both accessible and meaningful for students. In turn, a virtual learning environment means recognizing virtual students as real people. Those words on a computer screen originate in a flesh and blood person. I can't see her squinting at the screen, I can't see his puzzled look, but he's there. It is dangerous to create a student in my imagination – I need a response, I need a voice and a reality

to ground my perceptions of my virtual student. My task is to strive for a learning environment in which that student can communicate his or her self through the medium available as one step in establishing trust and rapport on the way to learning. My task is to make myself real to my students in order to help create that trust and rapport. How can I do that and not lose the other paramount tasks at hand – like learning American history?

One approach is through the creative use of technology. Is more, more? Or is less more? In theory, I believe in a student-centered virtual world in which a student becomes deeply engaged in an online environment that includes experiential problem-solving – we could call it educational complex gaming. In the current world of CDL technology, the reality is that I can make a few phone calls to check in on my students and put a voice to a name. I can create a web site with my picture on it so my students can see my face and a short video so they can get a glimpse of me in action. I can use emoticons and language that evokes emotion and physical presence ("I see," "I hear," "I was sick when I read … "). I can insert voices into my courses in the form of autobiography and historical narrative. I can use audiotape and videotape, photos, images, and as many real world examples as possible.

In the meantime, I try to stave off the anxiety of an identity crisis and experiment with my online identity as it develops. I imagine many of my students are struggling with the same task. In the idealized world Donna Haraway envisioned in her cyborg manifesto, man and computer will merge so seamlessly that virtual identity will be second nature. Until then, I feel I am stuck in the ancient pre-computer struggle of Sappho, caught between physicality and the ideal: "Day in, day out, I hunger and I struggle." I grapple with online communication skills and developing ways to read and understand my students.

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Government by Lawyers

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The Percentages

The complaint is often heard in the public square and in private gatherings. It goes something like this: "there are just too many lawyers in politics … " And by extension, the conversation typically goes, the elected political class seems to be the quasi-exclusive domain of those practicing the legal arts.

The first issue that comes to the fore is whether the above popularly held and fairly widespread impression is based on reality. Does it even bear a semblance of truth? Is it simply a tired old tale that gives an opportunity to the many who do not necessarily hold politicians and lawyers in the highest of esteem? Is it only a convenient credo?

The facts, for what they're worth, are not dispositive per se. In fact, it depends on the interpretation that is adopted. For example, the percentage of lawyers in the United States Congress fluctuates at around 45 percent in recent and current times. This number may appear rather high; however, this number actually represents a lower percentage than some 36 years ago. More specifically in 1969, 58 percent the members of the United States Congress were lawyers. Clearly this percentage change demonstrates that the legal profession's presence has declined by approximately 13 percentage points; or, put differently, the net change is equivalent to shrinkage of more than 22 percent. While the number crunching can be a little uninspiring, the conclusion the process yields is evident: the number of lawyers in Congress has significantly decreased over the course of some three and a half decades.

Of course, numbers can at times be misleading and more often than not don't always relate the full story. In many instances it thus helps to compare and contrast one statistic with another in order to better evaluate the situation. For example, if we examine the current number of women representatives in the United States Congress, we find that there are a total of 83 female congresspersons – 69 (out of 435 members) in the United States House of Representatives and 14 (out 100 members) in the United States Senate. This constitutes approximately 15 percent of the Congressional body. Naturally, there is a fair amount of overlap as some female members of Congress also are attorneys at law. However, the contrast is amply evident: 45 percent lawyers versus 15 percent women. Of course it could be argued that this is not a valid comparison; nevertheless it can be utilized to illustrate a point, namely, that although the percentage of lawyers in Congress has slipped below the 50 percent level, when compared to any other group, be it another profession, gender, etc., the figure remains striking and unquestionably imposing.

The Issue

The issue is as old as the republic itself and can best be framed in the form of a question: Do lawyers make better legislators than non-lawyers? If one assumes that having grounding in the law makes formulating and evaluating new legislation more efficient, then indeed lawyers do have a decided advantage over non-lawyers. However, the counter-argument that can and is regularly made is that being extremely conversant with the minutia of the law does not per se supercede common sense or a strong set of guiding principles. And of course there is no question that "good" law should always be founded on sound and just principles. Possessing the aforementioned strong beliefs is far from being exclusively reserved to the non-lawyer class, despite the myriad popular jokes poking fun at the integrity of legal practitioners.

The question then can be rephrased as follows: Does the added element of a legal background make the process of developing new legislation more efficient? A related question would be: even if efficiency were enhanced, is the value of this increased efficiency worth the cost, if you will, namely, to have a single profession be so over-represented in Congress? Or, do the benefits exceed the costs?

There are of course no easy answers to the aforementioned, and in many respects one's response is strictly premised on any individual's ingrained biases or serve as purely rhetorical questions. Suffice to state, however, that efficiency is not in all cases the most desired attribute. In fact efficiently enacting a piece of legislation that is so-called "not sound law," either because it was rushed through without enough serious thought or because not enough time was allotted for intelligent debate, is most definitely not the best outcome. On the other hand, detailed knowledge of the law can, in some instances, make the process of enacting new law focused on extreme legal minutia, sometimes to the detriment of the solution to a problem that the legislation was originally intended to address.

The History and Trends

Historically, legislative bodies in the United States have been dominated by lawyers. This is nothing new and dates all the way back to our founding fathers and the framers of the United States Constitution. The executive branch has not differed from this path either. There have been 43 presidencies and 42 Presidents (Glover Cleveland was elected to two non-consecutive terms) since the inception of the United States as a sovereign nation. Out of this number, 25 out of the 42 (59.5 percent) American Presidents were lawyers.

The same trend has held true for state legislatures and executives (i.e., governors) as well. But here, too, the trend seems to be on the downward slope with regard to lawyers as elected officials. For example, the

most populous state in the union, California, went from 48 percent of its legislature coming from the legal ranks in 1969 to around the 20 - 22 percent range currently. In New York state, lawyer-legislators fell from its high of 61 percent to the current range of 33 - 35 percent over the same period of time.

This data indicates considerable and noticeable changes, which may be due to a variety of reasons. Perhaps a backlash against lawyer-politicians has taken root. An indication of this may be found in a recently released Harris poll. This poll, which has been conducted annually since 1977, ranks 22 prestigious occupations and has been tracking their popularity, in percentage terms, over the last 28 years. This year only 18 percent of the poll's respondents viewed the legal profession as prestigious, while in 1977 the legal profession was ranked as prestigious by 36 percent of the respondents. This constitutes a full 50 percent drop in popularity.

Another plausible reason is that the salaries that elected officials, particularly legislators, command may no longer be as attractive to ambitious attorneys, who can be swayed away from the call of public service by the substantially more enticing compensation packages that prestigious law firms are offering, particularly to young lawyers from the top law schools. It also could be a combination of both. Some may even want to believe that the citizen-legislator is back just as envisioned by the founders of the nation, even if history tends to demonstrate

that that vision was primarily just that, a vision, and not so much a true reflection of reality.

Educators and Governance

Are there comparisons that can be drawn between the legal profession in Congress and the educator's role and evolution in higher education governance? In fact there aren't that many flagrant similarities. However in terms of comparing advances women have made in academe [and by extension governance], it is clear that women now constitute at least half of the faculty body in most colleges and universities in the United States and this is equally reflected in the university governance structure. At Empire State College the male-female faculty proportion stood at 43.5 percent to 56.5 percent respectively as of the 2004 - 2005 academic year data. This compares rather well to the approximately 85 percent male, 15 percent female membership ratio of the United States Congress. Indeed the congressional numbers do not fare well even against the current law school population male-female ratio, which has recently, and for the first time, seen the number of female students surpass that of male students.

In many respects, and most importantly, faculty's involvement in governance has visibly increased over the decades as the input from educators has been more significantly sought in policy making. While setting and implementing policy remains the responsibility of the academic institution's administration, many institutions of higher

learning, including Empire State College, have adopted a so-called shared governance approach. In this respect, a comparison of sorts also could be made with congress if viewed from the perspective that an elected official's input lies – at least in theory – in his/her proximity to the people. It is thus this proximity that gives that input its distinct value. Similarly, and keeping in mind that within the parameters of higher education governance, faculty senates serve as consultative and not legislative bodies, the educator-legislator's (to use a colloquial if inexact term) contribution derives its unique value in it being grounded in the educator's interaction with students.

The final extrapolation that can be made from the diminishing lawyer-legislators case presented herein comes in the form of a beckoning question. Namely, must an educator be deeply steeped in all aspects and minutia of higher education, similar to a legal education being essential for a congressional legislator, in order to be an effective participant and contributor to college/university governance? It would seem that the answer is clearly no, assuming that the educator-legislator (more precisely a quasi-legislator at best) like his/her counterpart in congress, is well informed about the issues and accompanying facts and data. It is the willingness to participate and provide a positive contribution to the betterment of the institution and the nation that constitutes the critical requirement, not formal training in a particular or specific profession.

The Meeting Memo Summary: A Protocol for Learning Continuity and Student Participation in Record Keeping

Thomas Akstens,
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At the end of the documentary film Hoop Dreams, a high school basketball coach visits for a final time with his graduating star player. After the player has left, the coach turns toward the camera and says, "One goes out the door and another one comes in. That's what it's all about." In the context of the film, the coach's statement is heavily ironic – an indictment of his revolving door approach to his young players.

I've thought about this moment in connection to my own experience as a mentor at Empire State College. I would go to considerable lengths to make sure that my students never had the impression that mine was a revolving door – and I'm sure that the same is true for any of my mentor colleagues. After all, our effectiveness as mentors is based on our students' trust that when they meet with us, they will receive our best efforts and our full attention to their individual needs.

Still, we share the responsibility for the success of any student meeting with the student himself or herself. Moreover, both of us face considerable challenges in preparation for any meeting, whether it is a tutorial for an independent study, a telephone conference to discuss educational planning, a study group or a meeting to plan an enrollment. As I will discuss, I have found that chief among these challenges are continuity and record keeping. Over the past few years, I've developed a protocol that helps me – and my students –to meet these challenges to productive engagement. I have come to call it the "meeting memo summary."

It can be difficult to maintain continuity in a tutorial that meets bi-weekly, or sometimes even less frequently. Generally, a student leaves my office with what appears (to me

at least) to be a clear, mutually-agreed-upon direction for his or her work: chapters to read, a topic proposal to develop, an annotated bibliography to prepare, or perhaps a rationale essay to outline and draft. Energized by the student's apparent motivation and clear sense of direction, I've made a few notes, confident that our next meeting will provide productive follow-through.

There have been times, however, when the student has arrived for that subsequent meeting and it has become immediately evident that my confidence in our "game plan" was misplaced. The conversation might take this sort of turn: "Sorry, I didn't realize I that was supposed to write up notes on those chapters," or "Didn't we agree last time that this bibliography would be updated and annotated for today's meeting?" In some instances, I've felt as if I was participating in an experiment on the Rashomon effect. Even when the student and I compared written notes, I felt as if we had participated in two different conferences that had occurred in not-quite-parallel universes.

As a result of these experiences, I became convinced that I needed to develop a protocol that would provide continuity between meetings, as well as a method of documentation. It became immediately apparent to me that this would involve some sort of an exchange of written communication between meetings, with opportunities for response and dialogue. If nothing else, I hoped that the protocol that I developed would provide both of us with opportunities to refocus our attention on what had been discussed, what conclusions had been reached, and what actions and follow-up had been agreed upon.

After a fair amount of experimentation, I arrived in 2003 at the basic framework for the meeting memo summary. Here is the text of the assignment for the meeting

memo summary, as I currently distribute it to students:

The meeting memo summary provides you with opportunities to consolidate your learning and participate in your own record keeping. You should expect to provide me with a memo that summarizes the intention and substance of each mentor or tutorial meeting, study group meeting or extended telephone conference. Your memo also should articulate the follow-up work we have agreed upon as the result of the discussion, and our plans for a subsequent meeting. You will find that these memos are easier to write if you take good notes during our meetings. These memos should provide you with greater continuity in your learning experience. They also will be instrumental when I come to write my evaluation of your performance in a tutorial or study group. You should expect that I will make annotations of my own on your memo; you are welcome to revise or supplement the original memo if you wish to incorporate, comment or expand upon my suggestions. Memos should be submitted within a week of our meeting. The length of the memo will be determined by the demands of the content. Here is a suggested format:

1. Your name and full contact information.

2. Date of the meeting.

3. Purpose of the meeting.

4. Summary of the content of the discussion.

5. Important questions, problems or resolutions that emerged from the discussion – or that have occurred to you as a result of the discussion.

6. Further reading, writing or study that will provide follow-up.

7. Date, time, place and purpose of the next meeting.

I had anticipated that this protocol would meet with some degree of resistance from students; the result has been quite otherwise. Contrary to my expectations, students have generally welcomed the opportunity to review the content of our discussion and to consider the outcome. Several students have told me that they value the process of preparing the meeting memo summary because it gives them a chance to integrate their learning. Others say that it's worthwhile because they know that I will incorporate their summaries in my evaluation of the tutorial or study group, and that therefore they have a hand in the record keeping that is part of my own process in evaluating student work.

I have received a few cursory memo summaries that obviously exploited my statement that "the length of the memo will be determined by the demands of the content." On the other hand, the great majority of memos have been very substantive. They have clearly been the product of considerable thought about the content of the meeting and about the work that needs to be done to make the subsequent meeting and assignment successful.

Finally, it has occurred to me that the meeting memo summary may have its origins in my own professional history. In 1990, I returned to teaching after more than a decade in business. Based on my own experience, I often tell students that the workplace is a culture of memos and meetings. I've become convinced over the past two years that the meeting memo summary protocol has additional value because it prepares students to function in that culture.

Computers have made everything much easier in life, chiefly because you can buy anything you want using them and get it delivered almost immediately. But the Internet is also good because it erases the old puzzlement about the differences among wisdom, knowledge, and information. Everything that can be accessed online is equal to everything else. No piece of data is intrinsically more important or more profound than any other. Therefore, there really is no more wisdom; there is no more knowledge; there is only information. Nothing has to be taken as a challenge or an affront to what one currently knows and values. And that fact can be very freeing.

– Mark Edmundson, "A Word to the New Humanities Professor"
The Hedgehog Review (2000), Volume 2, Number 3 (p. 32)

Down Destiny's Way

Robert Congemi, Northeast Center

The SS4000 simply had to be justified – Sweeney knew that. After a lifetime of trying to stand for something other than a material life, he now stood before a shining, new SS4000, which he owned.

Sweeney still wasn't sure how it had happened. One moment he had gone into the car dealership to buy an ordinary sedan, and the next a salesperson was chauffeuring him over to the SS4000, which was featured in all its glory in the center of the showroom, the salesman saying:

"It's all right, Mr. Pierson. Give yourself a break. You deserve it. You've spent a lifetime helping other people."

But before he could find the time to justify it, in some spare moment with an argument that he really couldn't imagine, he just had so many things to do, the usual so many things to do! For one thing, there was all the work for the Authority – fine-tuning a proposal that needed to be done immediately, preparing for an annual meeting in two weeks, consulting with colleagues on issues that had to be resolved. For another, there was the family – his younger daughter with the outrageous husband, his older daughter who was neurasthenic, and his son who refused to work at a job. And then – thank god – there were the re-writes for the theater company. He would not give that up. He was finally getting somewhere, after all these years. And they had to be done by the weekend.

"All my life," he told his shrink, Dr. Abramson, who, Sweeney thought, sat so smugly behind his desk, making a triangle with his hands, "I have been trying to live two lives – the practical, the reasonable, the *necessary,* but also the creative, the meaningful, the *truly human.* That's not such a bad thing to do, is it? To want to want to do something that really makes sense. Why must all these things happen to me? It's always been this way, since I've been a kid. But I've deferred on the one thing enough. I mean it."

And he had thought he was so near to reconciling both.

Indeed, it was worse than ever.

That's why the incident with the SS4000 happened. That day was simply madness. He had gone to the off-street garage where he had contracted to keep the SS4000, a block away from his house in one direction, two blocks from the state buildings where he worked, in the other direction, and SS4000 wasn't there! The first day he had owned the car, Sweeney had parked it among a few others, hurried a couple of steps away to get back to his office, and then turned around. The garage was an old factory building, really, the paint on its walls faded and peeling, its windows dirty, but the SS4000 rested like a glorious bomb, sleek and white and intimidating. Now it just wasn't there!

He looked all the way down the garage to his left, he looked all the way down it to his right, and looked back again at the space where his car should have been. The emptiness almost made Sweeney dizzy. Running, he went to find Jim, the stocky, round-faced black man who managed the garage, usually occupying a small room at one end of it, playing solitaire.

"Jim, Jim," Sweeney called out, coming up to the room, which had no door. "Where's my car? I came to get my car, I have to be uptown for a big meeting right now, but I can't find my car. Where's my car?"

Later, when it was all over, Sweeney decided that Jim, a very, very black man seemed to whiten a little. There was definitely something like that in his reaction to what Sweeney was telling him. And shaken – no, terrified, even though there was often something vaguely unsettling about the man.

"What d'you mean, 'where's your car,' Mr. Pierson?" Jim asked him, rising from a chair at a desk, spilling his cards. "What d'you mean?" If possible, Jim was more alarmed than he was.

And then it came to Sweeney – it hadn't in his panic – that he'd heard that indeed a car had actually been stolen from the garage the previous week.

Jim ran out of the office past him, and Sweeney followed after, hurrying.

"A car was stolen out of here last week, wasn't it, Jim?" Sweeney said to him.

Jim didn't turn around, but kept moving to where the SS4000 should have been. "No, there wasn't. No, there wasn't. You got that wrong, Mr. Pierson, whoever told you that."

The SS4000 still simply wasn't there, and no matter how many times Sweeney and Jim looked in the empty space where it should have been, or all around the rest of the garage, it *wasn't* going to be there.

"Where's your god-dammed car?" Jim said aloud. "It got to be here."

Suddenly, Sweeney realized he had no more than minutes to get uptown to his meeting at headquarters. If he left the garage immediately, rushed a few blocks to a bus stop on the avenue, maybe he wouldn't be disastrously late.

"Listen, Jim, I *have* to be uptown right now. I simply have to. You look around some more, and do what you must. Call the cops or something. Check with anyone else who works here. I'll call you as soon as I can."

Sweeney saw Jim's confusion. "How could it not be here? The doors was locked last night. I opened it myself this mornin'. Everthin' looked good." His face was screwed up.

"You have insurance, don't you, for this sort of thing?" he asked Jim as he left.

Jogging about as fast as he could and not look totally insane, Sweeney made it to a bus stop on the avenue, his briefcase

swinging wildly in his hand. As luck would have it, he just caught the bus as it was leaving the stop. Once he was on the bus, the other passengers looked at him strangely – he supposed that in his suit and tie he didn't strike them as the kind of man who rode a bus much. As for himself, he was a riot of emotions and thoughts. There was the meeting at headquarters, which mainly involved the annual report that he and his colleagues had to make. And there of course was the car. How could that have happened to him? How could the car have been stolen? It couldn't have been stolen. But where was it? And, finally, there were the people on the bus, who – he wouldn't apologize for feeling as he did, though he knew it seemed unbelievable – fascinated the writer in him!

"Ah, look at them," he thought. "Those who take the bus – how poor, how much they struggle, how I could hug them all. Perhaps at some point I will write a play about them."

Which was the way it was at headquarters. Once again, there were all the principal players. Poor Dr. Destrepo was there, looking lugubrious and overmatched as always, up in front of the conference room, getting ready to begin making the presentation, fussing with the computer, trying to make it project properly upon a screen. Michealson was there, and Orkney, sitting in chairs to the side, with their folders of notes in front of them. At the other end of the conference room was Gorgon, their boss, presumptive vice-president, always so large and intimidating, looking as if he were waiting to devour someone, as always. Beside him were two female aides, very pretty young women, without doubt utterly devoted to him.

"Someday I could use *them* all in a play, too," Sweeney thought, nodding hellos and starting to take his seat at the conference table.

But at a second glance, Sweeney could see that Dr. Destrepo was really having trouble. Bending over his computer, the old scholar was clicking away with his computer mouse trying to get to what Sweeney supposed were his charts and graphics which would be the part of the presentation that would detail their performance for the past year.

The more Dr. Destrepo clicked, the more upset he became. He simply could not get the infernal machine to do what he wanted it to.

"Maybe there's something wrong with the building system," he offered up to everyone, smiling vainly.

Poor Carlos.

Gorgon was not going to be distracted or mollified. His response was his usual unpleasantness. The man really was criminal.

"Carlos, not again," he called out, his female aides amused. "You really have to learn to use that machine. Don't you practice? Or are you trying to hide the numbers? I understand that they're not going to be very good."

Looking away from his clicking, Dr. Destrepo, lifting his bushy eyebrows, said, "But, no, the numbers are not that bad."

Sweeney saw that it was time to try to come to the rescue. He would be the marines, if he could. It was not something that he had not done before. At least, he would try.

"On the contrary, Mr. Gorgon," he ventured to call out, bringing everyone's attention to himself. "Carlos is right. The numbers are *not* going to be that bad. … "

"Really?" Gorgon interrupted him. "I hear attendance at our programs is down. They're losing momentum. Few new people are joining up. Etcetera, etcetera, etcetera."

Gorgon waved his hand in a gesture of dramatic dismissal.

Sweeney would return fire.

"Mr. Gorgon, considering the cutbacks, people's time being taken up by worse problems, I have to say again we really are doing fairly well. Dr. Destrepo and the rest of us have been working for some time to gather all the data to prove this. We've been working day and night, to get the fullest picture, and we feel we'll be making a very positive report. Given the economy, the world these days, it isn't really that bad at all."

"I await your report, Sweeney," Gorgon said. "It's good to hear that at least you're working day and night."

And, then, suddenly, at Gorgon's remark, referring to Sweeney's saying how hard they were working, Sweeney remembered where the car was, where he had left the car. As so often in his life, it seemed a thought had come by chance, a gift of some commiserating deity to save him.

"Outside, on the street by the office downtown," he said to himself. "I had forgotten I was so busy. I left it there overnight. Poor Jim. I'd better call him."

Sweeney was not able to get Jim right away. Though he had run interference for Dr. Destrepo and was able to defer to him for the rest of the meeting, of course Sweeney still had to be present. There was the possibility of excusing himself to wander around headquarters to find an available phone, but he did not do that, either – even he was not unintimidated by Gorgon's presence. And then when the meeting **was** finally over and he found a phone, Jim did not answer his call! He did not know why and that worried him. Why was Jim not by the phone, even though Sweeney called several times? Was he out looking for Sweeney's car? Was he with the police? Was he all right?

Not knowing quite what to do, Sweeney left headquarters as soon as he could, caught the bus back to the garage, and hurried underneath its old, rusted, automatic door hoping to find Jim, to find him O.K., and to tell him that he knew where the car was.

Sweeney found Jim, now inexplicably behind his desk, by the phone, actually. His playing cards were still scattered on the desk.

"Jim, Jim, I tried to phone you," Sweeney said to him. "I tried to phone you several times. What happened? I wanted to tell you that everything was all right. That I know where the car is. That nobody stole it from here. That I left it outside my building at work."

At these words, Jim looked at Sweeney in a way that Sweeney didn't fully grasp, though he thought about it from time to time afterwards. It was something like a potpourri of confusion, astonishment, relief, and anger.

"You found the car, Mr. Pierson?" Jim managed to say, looking up at him. "You found the car? It wasn't stolen from here? You left it overnight at work? On the street?"

"That's right," Sweeney answered back, brightly, or at least trying to be bright.

"I can't believe it, Mr. Pierson. I just can't believe it."

"Well, believe it, Jim," Sweeney said.

Jim now stared at Sweeney with much more clarity of feeling. He was really annoyed. Sweeney remembered *that* look for a long time.

"Mr. Pierson, I hope you don't mind my sayin' it, but you one crazy sonovabitch, let me tell you. You one crazy sonovabitch. You come real close to givin' me a heart attack, Mr. Pierson, a great big one. You really did."

Sweeney understood. He was crestfallen and genuinely sorry. "I know, Jim, I know. I can guess. I'm so sorry. I'm so very sorry. You see my life … "

In the end, Sweeney managed to explain his life to Jim and, gradually, Jim came around to loosening up, and even smiling. Before Sweeney left, he also told Jim that a bottle of champagne would be his the next day.

"The biggest bottle of champagne that I can find, Jim, when I see you first thing tomorrow morning, as some kind of small way of making all this up to you."

"Tha's okay, Mr. Pierson," Jim said. "But, I tell you again, you one crazy sonovabitch. … and you got one crazy-ass life … sir."

"I know, Jim, I know," Sweeney agreed once more.

It was true. There was nothing else to say.

Prior Learning Assessment as Transformative Learning

Annalee Lamoreaux and Kathleen Taylor,
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Joan is an executive assistant:

> We always think our way is the best and the only way. … I think that we just assume that that's the way you do things [but] when you start to look at other ways, I think that opens your world perspective, if that's the right word, your worldview. You get more open-minded … it does open you up to maybe being more accepting of other viewpoints. (p. 83)

Rose is a marketing representative:

> I have been stuck in the experience of traditional learning: a right or wrong answer, a right or wrong way of doing things. … [Now] I will accept my answers as the answers at this time, rather than directing my thinking to the mindset that the answers have to be the right ones. (p. 91)

Mary is a dance teacher:

> I feel *differently* because I examined [my experience], and turned it all around, and looked at it, and took it from all sides and thought, "wow!" I mean, it was a much more profound realization than if someone had just told me. And I think what happens when you write [experiential learning] essays … and you keep digging, and digging and digging, and you come up with this greater truth – it's a greater truth, and you *own* it. (p. 97)

These adult reentry students in an undergraduate degree completion program are describing changes in themselves as a result of preparing a prior learning portfolio (all learners' quotes are from Lamoreaux, 2005). We who work in prior learning assessment (PLA) often share stories about our learners' changes ranging from increased self-confidence because they know more than they realized, to new perspectives including a new sense of ownership for their learning and their lives, and even to seeing themselves and the world in new ways.

Little in the literature, however, confirms these anecdotes. Few articles and even fewer studies examine PLA from the learner's perspective; most PLA literature over the last 30 years has focused on institutional policies and practices. A handful, however, have suggested that there can be developmental or transformational changes related to PLA. (Brown, 2002; Burris, 1997; Challis, 1996; Droegkamp and Taylor, 95; Green, 1983; Hodgson, 1990; McGinley, 1995; Taylor, 1991; Taylor and Marienau, 1993)

In Saint Mary's College adult degree-completion program, students write four experiential learning essays on topics comparable to those taught to traditional-aged learners. During the eight-week course, they share their essay drafts, averaging about 2,500 words each, with their peers and their instructor for feedback; their final drafts are assembled, along with other documentation, into a portfolio that can be submitted for evaluation.

Intrigued by our adult learners' stories, we wanted to understand their experience of change related to PLA and how they thought their change came about. One of us interviewed 12 learners in depth, selecting those who responded most positively to an initial question about change (Lamoreaux, 2005).

A Continuum of Change

Though students' change experiences differed, their descriptions suggested three steps in a continuum. The first and least complex change focused on increased self-knowledge and greater understanding of how their past experiences had affected and formed them.

> I [saw] patterns of behavior emerge that I had not considered before [putting] the experiences down on paper. … I was able to see clearer how my own actions added to much of the drama I experienced in life. [Rochelle, manufacturing plant administrator] (p. 84)

A second group of students experienced those changes and also discovered in themselves a new awareness of other perspectives and/or identified as assumptions that which they had previously taken for granted, leading to deeper self-questioning.

> I think [reading other students' experiential learning essays] opened me up … in terms of being willing to explore different options and different opinions and different perspectives. It made me question many of my own beliefs and ideas. … I tried not to shed some of my old views and opinions as much as maybe embrace others more. [Matt, sales representative] (p. 88)

The third, and most complex, change appeared to embrace both of those and also included becoming aware of oneself as consciously creating, modifying, and "owning" one's perspectives. Mary's statement at the beginning of this article is one example. Here is another:

> A year ago [there was a lot of TV and news about] same sex marriages … and [I was] in the middle of my essay [on marriage and family] … it occurred to me that what I have learned [throughout my life] about families, family life and marriage, really did not condemn what these people were doing … [It's] just that our definition of marriage and what, who a family is, is just changing. …

And I think in that moment, I really did understand that … It just has to do with how we *define* our social institutions and how those definitions have evolved, and … It didn't mean I had to necessarily fundamentally agree with homosexuality. It just meant that I had to understand that this is a social evolution. [I realize now that I] … can divide out the personal feelings, and understand just the reality of the society I live in. [Sarah, parochial school librarian] (pp. 89-90)

Course Components that Contributed to Change

Learners variously identified four aspects of the PLA course as contributing to the changes they experienced: Kolb's model, writing their experience, peer feedback, and mentor support and challenge.

Kolb's model. Students used Kolb's four-stage model (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, active experimentation) to help them identify what they learned from experience (Kolb, 1984). Many learners commented on the challenge of consciously reflecting on experience, and the insights that emerged when they considered other possible perspectives.

> Writing that paper [on parenting] … challenged many of my preconceived notions of what I thought of my parents, and then I had to kind of critique myself as a result of it, too. [Matt] (p. 106)

> When I was writing [the death and dying essay] … I realized that I [had] never stopped and thought about other people's pain [Rose] (p. 109)

Writing their experience. The process of writing their experiences down seemed to foster for many a shift in perspective, looking at their lives from the "outside in," instead of "inside out," as Matt described it (p. 108), and seeing patterns of which they had been unaware:

> If you're telling a narrative to someone … [you can't] go back and look over it again and start to see, *why* did that same thing keep happening? … When you look at it on paper … you can see

patterns. … [R]eading these papers over and over … gives you that perspective *as if you were somebody else looking at your own life.* [Rochelle] (p. 108)

Peer feedback. Though learners could choose not to participate in peer feedback sessions about very personal essays, almost all shared essay drafts in order to give and receive feedback. Most often, students were paired with others who had written on similar topics.

> The rewards are when … you're getting their input from *their* perspective, and that's not *your* perspective … and you think, "Oh my God, I would never have thought of that *that* way … " Or "That's not the feeling I had around that, but I can see why you thought of it and why you see that feeling around it." [Rose] (p. 115)

Mentor support and challenge. Learners described the importance of receiving feedback on drafts that not only supported their efforts, but also asked questions that encouraged deeper thinking and examination of perspectives other than their own.

> [She] was so skilled in giving you encouragement, at the same time making you go deeper and pushing further and harder. … I was beating myself up and I got a very encouraging response … which kept me going, because without that, I would have quit. … It was hard for me to make a generalization that I didn't agree with necessarily … [my instructor's] critiques forced me to go back and look at what other people might think or what other ideas there are besides mine … She kept bringing me back to the process … encouraging [but] at the same time pointing up where you're not getting it. [Bob, actor] (p. 112)

PLA and Transformative Learning

The changes described by learners in groups two and three, which included surfacing and questioning assumptions, also appeared consistent with transformative learning. According to Mezirow (2000), transformative learning is the

process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (pp. 7 - 8)

Joan's comment (which began this article) echoed Mezirow so closely that one might think that transformative learning theory was part of the PLA course curriculum (it was not).

Two course components that emerged from the interviews as being most central to learners' change experiences – critical reflection and mentor support – also are consistent with transformative learning theory. Critical reflection involves bringing tacit assumptions to awareness where they can be questioned. For most of these learners, reflecting on their experiences led to challenging previously taken-for-granted assumptions. "Trying on" other points of view and reframing experience also can lead to new understanding of experience (Mezirow, 2000, p. 20). Learners in the PLA process "tried on" other perspectives when they responded to peer and faculty feedback.

Furthermore, according to Mezirow (2000), support is particularly necessary when facing a *disorienting dilemma,* which is how these learners felt when writing essays that led them to question "how I am" or "how things are." Given that the most challenging essays were on topics such as death and dying, divorce, marriage and family, and parenting (rather than business-related topics like supervision or customer service relations), it is hardly surprising that a supportive mentor who acknowledged learners' feelings while at the same time requiring more substantive analysis and generalizations was crucial to their experiences of change.

Long-term Implications for Learners

Learners often described the impact of their changed perspectives in their own lives and on the people around them, connecting their ability to take others' perspectives

to becoming more patient, tolerant, and effective with family, friends, fellow workers, and fellow students.

> I found myself approaching [other learners] in class differently … so my judgment and my biases no longer stood between me and *learning* something from them. [Linda, late 40s, investor relations executive] (p. 96)

> [At work,] I understand [others'] point of view better … I hear them better, and … it seems to be easier to find some sort of middle ground [whereas] before, I would probably be more stuck on my position. I think I'm able to find a consensus better, to look at the other side and negotiate, and to realize that there's lot of different perspectives and the truth is, you know, in the eye of the beholder. [Bob] (p. 87)

Openness to other perspectives also appears to have changed some learners' approaches to learning and awareness of their own learning processes. Sarah described how, when reading literature, she now thinks beyond her personal reaction. Linda, whose former learning approach relied on authorities, now questions authorities' positions, compares it to her experience, and forms her own opinion. Rose and Mary spoke of a new sense of *owning* their learning – an essential component of self-directed learning.

Among the overarching goals of higher education are understanding that knowledge is constructed, as well as developing awareness of one's own assumptions and the capacity to question them (Taylor and Marienau, 1997). Being able to question tacit assumptions equips us to challenge the ideology that lives within us and to realize we are "social products shaped by the cultural group and social class to which we belong" (Brookfield, 2000, p. 129). As one learner so eloquently described her experience of ongoing change:

> It's not like, "well, I wrote all these essays, I got all the [credits]" and then it stopped … there are probably things that happen every day that I could attribute to writing those essays. … I definitely feel more mature, feel like I've grown; it's sort of a process of growing up, learning these things

about yourself that you've been doing. I think sometimes when we go on our merry ways through our lives, through my life – I'm always doing stuff, and doing stuff, and doing stuff – [Now] I just stop and look at everything, and open up all these different cans of life. [It] changes the way I look at it. *I think anytime you look at something in great detail, you can't look at it the same way.* So that just keeps changing. I can't put all those things back in the can. So I feel more in the world, I feel more connected to other people, I feel able to do a better job of what I'm doing … [but] once the process starts, I don't think it stops. At least for me it hasn't stopped. It just keeps unfolding. [Mary] (pp. 100 - 101).

> *What would it take for transformation to become a developmental intention … with regard to the prior learning assessment process? Is it worth pursuing? What would be lost if we do not emphasize this potential outcome of the PLA process?*

Implications for PLA Programs

In the few studies and articles that described transformative changes related to the process of constructing a prior learning portfolio, such changes appeared to be side-benefits. We were unable to find programs that include fostering transformative changes as an intentional focus of the PLA process, although these may exist without being widely known or reflected in the literature. Though Michelson, Mandell and Contributors (2004) described a "personal exploration" approach to portfolio development that includes using transformation as a frame for exploring past changes in students' lives (pp. 42 - 43), this

approach did not extend to *intentionally fostering current* change.

What would it take for transformation to become a *developmental intention* (Taylor, Marienau and Fiddler, 2000) with regard to the prior learning assessment process? Is it worth pursuing? What would be lost if we do not emphasize this potential outcome of the PLA process?

The findings of this study suggest that particular course components are important, as is interaction with other students. And even many experienced faculty mentors need to learn how to provide effective facilitative feedback that both supports and challenges learners. However, we are disheartened to note that such a labor-intensive, individualized, narrative-based approach seems to be swimming upstream against a current that's flowing toward simpler, less-expensive, instrumental, documentation-based, and "one size fits all" approaches to PLA. We hope, with this article, to begin a conversation that includes questioning our diverse assumptions about PLA.

Postscript

In sharing these discoveries about learners' descriptions of self-discovery and change, we do not wish to imply that self-knowledge or evidence of critical reflection is sufficient for award of credit for experiential learning. Other criteria also are critical to the award of credit, including the ability to generalize beyond their personal learning. However, the capacity to take multiple perspectives and critically reflect on experience contributed to learners being able to generalize and synthesize learning from their experiences and to construct knowledge.

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Immersion in Ancient Egyptian Texts: Sabbatical 2005

Susan Hollis, Genesee Valley Center

My six-month sabbatical leave from mid-February through late July 2005 provided me with an exciting and enriching experience of adventure and new learning. In my initial sabbatical proposal, I expected to do extensive exploration of ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts, the earliest known body of continuous texts in the world, asking about their origins, deep purpose, and performance, which is where I began my reading. After my proposal was accepted, however, I received an invitation to write a substantive chapter (50 pages) on the literature of ancient Egypt for a college textbook to be called *Literatures of the Ancient Near East,* scheduled for publication late in 2006. This textbook, which has no parallel, intends to explicate texts that appear in various anthologies available to researchers and students who investigate the literature and related materials of the civilizations of the ancient Eastern Mediterranean and northeast Africa. Shortly thereafter I also was invited to

write three short articles on three widely varied instructional, sometimes called wisdom, texts from ancient Egypt for the *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* a standard reference book for clergy, laity, and professionals in the field of biblical studies.

Thus my sabbatical proved to involve several things I had not anticipated. All involved research, however, so part of it included renewing my acquaintance with the extensive resources of the Harvard University Libraries, spending a pair of two and a half day periods there, having taken advantage of my alumna status to gain full library privileges. I similarly made use of the Rochester (NY) Regional Library Council access agreement through the SUNY Resource Center in the Rochester Public Library to gain borrowing privileges at the Rush Rhees Library of the University of Rochester as well as reactivating my borrowing privileges at the Ambrose Swazey Library of the Colgate Rochester Crozier Divinity School. With all these resources, I spent a good portion of my time reading and absorbing what I gained and the rest writing. The textbook manuscript of 92 pages was submitted on time in early September 2005, following the helpful critiques of two colleagues at different institutions who graciously agreed to review my work before I sent it to the editor.

First things first, however.

I began where I intended: working with the Pyramid Texts, those texts written on the insides of the sarcophagus chambers, the antechambers, and the connecting corridors of the pyramids of six kings and four queens dating to the late third millennium BCE. The purpose of these funerary or mortuary texts as a group

Susan Hollis (R) receiving this year's Excellence Award for Scholarship from Susan H. Turben.

was to facilitate the king's journey to and successful arrival in the next world as well as providing protective spells for him. My particular focus lay and lies in the earliest pyramid with texts, the pyramid of Wenis or Unas, dating to about 2350 BCE. While I had read some of these texts years ago as a graduate student, I had read little about them as a general group and nothing about their arrangement and how that might impact their purpose. Thus early on, in addition to simply reading the entire set of texts connected with this particular pyramid, I read and reread a very important article by Dr. James Allen, a colleague at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, entitled "Reading a Pyramid."[1] In this article, Dr. Allen elucidated the order of the texts, showing how they relate one to another. His work, complemented by that of others, helped me move forward in my thinking about the origins of these texts and why they began to be inscribed at that time, given they had most likely been part of the funerary rituals for a considerable period prior to the time of Unas, first in oral form and then most probably on papyrus, though no papyrus copy has been found to date (nor has any papyrus of that time period currently known, as all writing has come to us via writing boards, seals, and tomb and temple walls). Seeing them placed in an orderly fashion gives them an integrated meaning that I had not appreciated previously,[2] particularly when I was reading them in my graduate course in Old Egyptian hieroglyphs.

As I gained an understanding of the significance of text placement in the tomb, I have been able to extend that kind of appreciation to the texts and iconography of other tombs, particularly those of private individuals from that and later periods. This was particularly helpful in a subsequent activity: looking at the strands of autobiographical and instructional texts that date from the time of the third millennium BCE, the centuries just before

and after Unas, as they come together in texts in a vizier's tomb that dates to the last quarter of the 15th century BCE, a thousand years later, for a paper delivered at the spring 2006 annual meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt. After input and discussion with my Egyptological colleagues, I expect to present a longer and enhanced version as part of a special panel on Ancient Egyptian and Ancient Israelite Instructional and Wisdom Literatures at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in November 2007.

The work on the textbook chapter proved to be an extraordinarily broadening experience as well as far more demanding that I had expected. Yes, I had read virtually all the primary materials numerous times over in the past 30 and more years. As I encountered and read the most recent discussions of the literature in the field, however, materials including whole books and numerous articles that have been published in the past 15 years, thus gaining knowledge of the latest thinking, I found new ideas not only for my chapter but ones that I can and will use in my teaching at both the undergraduate and graduate levels at Empire State College. What fascinates me the most in some ways was learning the modern terminology for concepts I have been applying to my research and thinking about for years, some even in my dissertation: notably fictionality, the idea that whatever we relate is not the act itself and therefore has an element of the interpretive in it; intertextuality, the concept that narrative and related texts inherently draw on, and relate to, previous texts; and reception, the understanding that the intended (and unintended) audiences affect the end interpretation of the materials. By working very closely with these terms in the broad scope of the literature chapter, I have gained a much greater appreciation of the embedded history and culture of the texts themselves while developing to a much higher degree my own critical thinking faculties. Thus, I have become even more conscious of the target audience, biases in writing and receiving, and the challenges of reporting and telling of events and thoughts, all of which are interpreted after the fact and presented through one's own lenses to a specific audience.

> *What fascinates me the most in some ways was learning the modern terminology for concepts I have been applying to my research and thinking about for years, some even in my dissertation …*

In addition, I have become much more aware of something I have not seen in the literature: the subtle impact of how traditionally received history overrides the corrections and adjustments present in more recent discussions. For example, I have seen how nineteenth century ideas get perpetuated in the general literature even though these ideas have been discarded, in many cases long since, in the more specialized materials. It also has been fascinating to gain a handle on how a writer's contemporary ideology affects his/her understanding and interpretations, something that goes way beyond Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* of 1987,[3] which has impacted Africanist and African-American studies and understanding very strongly as well as engendering considerable controversy in a number of fields. I have begun to see these concepts very much at work as I work in my faculty role, particularly as I work with the Seminar in Liberal Studies and my new Models in Critical Thinking track in Oral Tradition for the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies (M.A.L.S.) program as well as in with my fall undergraduate group study in Critical Thinking.

During my time off, I also traveled some, driving south and experiencing southern history in ways I had not before. (I am a died-in-the-wool Yankee with very deep New England roots.) Some of the history was gained fairly formally through participation in an Elderhostel in north Florida, acquainting me with some significant 19th century history beginning about 1850, and some came more informally with visits to plantations and other historic areas. These experiences became particularly pertinent in the undergraduate group study I led in African American history during the fall 2005. Having the time to make this kind of trip was most valuable.

In another unexpected project, Dr. Tim Madigan, who teaches philosophy for us in Genesee Valley as well as at St. John Fisher College, asked me to collaborate with him on a course titled Utopias/Dystopias in Popular Culture for the Rochester's Writers and Books organization. Given that I have had a long-time interest in utopian/dystopian science fiction and fantasy as social commentary, particularly that written by women, the project intrigued me and led me to become acquainted with materials I had not read previously. We hope eventually to present this course as a study at Empire State College, perhaps in a residency-based format, perhaps online. Certainly I benefited from reading books like Thomas More's *Utopia*, Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*, Ursula LeGuin's *The Dispossessed* (actually recommended by Nan DiBello), and B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two* for the first time. The other books on our list, Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*, George Orwell's *1984*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Leguin's *Left Hand of Darkness*, I simply reread, noting particularly the concept of intertextuality which appears very strongly throughout them.

The one disappointing aspect to my sabbatical was not being able to fully disengage from my work in the graduate program. Of course that program had no say in my leave, but because I am to teach a new Models track that begins this fall and must do what other tracks do, I had to be in conversation and do some development work on that course which honestly compromised my own projects more than I would have liked. I have no answer to this issue: the timing of the new Models with my responsibility in it and my sabbatical simply were at odds.

I could have used and would love to have had much more time to pursue these and some of my other research projects, notably my work on the ancient Egyptian goddess Hathor, and to have had more time for my Pyramid Texts – but those and other will

have to wait. Ultimately, I appreciate very greatly the time I had for concentrated professional development through research, reflection, and writing, and I am delighted that not only do I have new and enhanced materials to bring to my students but also I will have some publications as a result including a textbook I will surely use with my students, something I simply could not have done without the concentrated time to devote to it. Therefore I give my thanks to all who made this sabbatical possible.

Notes

1. James P. Allen, Reading a Pyramid, in C. Berger, G. Clerc and N. Grimal, eds., *Hommages à Jean Leclant,* BdÉ 106/1 Cairo (1994): 5 - 28.

2. Subsequent to my sabbatical, James P. Allen published a completely new translation of these texts, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts,* SBL Writings from the Ancient World 23 (Atlanta, GA, 2005), in which he presented all the texts for the six pyramids with which he worked in the order in which they appear in the respective pyramids.

3. Martin Bernal, *Black Athena. The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization. Volume I: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785 - 1985.* London: Free Association Books, 1987.

Might it not be that there is a place in the university – a minor one, it might seem to some, but still a place – for uncertainty as opposed to certainty, for risk and chance rather than total reliability? In fact, in the context of teaching in particular, the admission – even to some extent the celebration – of uncertainty might well be one of the distinguishing features of the university and its pedagogical relations.

– Richard Smith, "Dancing on the Feet of Chance: The Uncertain University"
(*Educational Theory,* Volume 55, number 2, 2005, p. 139)

Thanks to Eric Ball for this find.

Four Poems

Mindy Kronenberg, Long Island Center

Divine Circumvention

Though I'm loath to admit it,
there are corners of this house
I haven't visited in years –

Nooks woven with intricate webs,
ghostly nets twisted on unpainted trim.
I've avoided those spaces under the bed

that are slathered in dust,
prairies with insect husks
and crumpled, tumbled poems.

My modest box of rooms
grows to unfathomable canyons
of profound neglect,

where memory mingles
love and despair, and the voices
I've buried for so long in my head

hold whispered conversations
between the living and the dead
and I leave them, undisturbed, there.

Incantation

The poets close their eyes:
each a conductor,
each a magician.

One conjures rain
on a field blighted by sun,
another rouses wind
through the hungry fingers of trees.

One builds monuments – stone
castles, glass towers,
another releases a dark
net of birds.

Each channels strange music,
sees the future, flees the past,
and just as stars spin bright
tales through centuries of night

they burn, ignited by reverie,
and take flight in words.

Leviathan

My neighbor's sail is spread
on the late November grass,
a seamless white expanse
strewn with curled leaves
fallen like ideographs.

On one side his dog stands
sure-footed, with massive paws
on its folds; on the other
he kneels ceremoniously –
smoothing a cherished sea scroll.

The sky hovers above us like slate.
His fireplace churns logs
into flame, and the chimney unravels
a plume of smoke.
Birds cast a dark net that billows
on the roof.

My neighbor stretches out,
face against the ground beneath the cold sun
as if to hear the humming of the earth.
His dog runs toward an invisible sound.
Clouds cover the sail in shadow.

The boat that pulls to the gravity
of the golden moon sleeps
among dark fingers of trees,
cradled in its wooden bed.

Each night its shadow pulls
to my window like an immense beast.
I imagine it thrashing in dreams
of warm, salted waves,
unleashed to the water's jade embrace.

In my own slumber I toss and turn,
taunted by the promise of words
that float but never quite land,
my ear against the pillow
for the thrumming of the deep.

She Gets Messages

Not whispers, not music,
no questionable commands
to take down Presidents or hoist
herself up on a ledge
and retrace her steps through the air.

She gets messages
from the delicate powder
that resides in flowers,
a rasp of wings
in the birdbath's glimmering water.

A subliminal incantation
glows from the edges of clouds,
gathers in heavy fists of rain
and glazes the stunned faces of her shoes.

From the interior of dreams
a tangle of sweet voices
vaporize and spiral,
move like fragrant smoke
through the narrow alleys of her days.

Her fingers glow
with the heat of captured silences
that melts and ices
and seeks safe exile
in singing islands of paper.

Mentoring Institute Reassignment 2004 - 2005

Frieda Mendelsohn, Niagara Frontier Center

I received one of two reassignments to the Mentoring Institute in 2004 - 2005. This article reports what I did, what I learned, and my reflections and conclusions. I greatly appreciate the opportunity that the Empire State College Foundation made possible, by its support of the Mentoring Institute, for time to focus my attention on my academic interest in web site usability, apply my new understanding to service to the college, and to reflect on what I learned in the process.

Purpose

The purpose of this reassignment was to allow me to devote significant time to the Mentoring Institute's ongoing Mentorsite project; in particular, I intended to focus on making Mentorsite more useful for orienting new mentors as well as more usable for all mentors.

Background

Mentorsite grew out of the Mentoring Institute's desire to both revise the Mentoring Handbook and "put it on the web." The original handbook subcommittee of The Mentoring Institute Advisory Board – Mayra Bloom, Alan Mandell, Frieda Mendelsohn, Susan Oaks, and Robyn Silverman – began work in 2000. As we reviewed the handbook, it became clear that the original materials did not reflect all centers and programs in the college nor did they reflect the work of all of our colleagues. Chris Rounds received a Mentoring Institute reassignment for 2002 - 2003 during which time he wrote new material and continued organizing and developing the site.

As the site continued to grow, however, it became increasingly clear that, while we have written, revised, collected and linked to a great deal of information, it is not always clear just where each piece of information belongs, nor is it always clear how the reader should get from one piece of

Frieda Mendelsohn

information to another. Further, it is unlikely that one path through the material will be appropriate for all readers, particularly our newest colleagues.

Mentorsite has a variety of material, some of which is useful in learning about mentoring and some of which is useful for doing the work of mentoring. For example, one section concerns educational attributes of mentoring and its impacts on students and mentors, while another section specifically walks the new mentor through the process of writing the first learning contract. One goal was to create a welcoming, inviting introduction to this large set of material, which applies what we know about mentoring to our initial online contact with new mentors. Such an introduction could give the new mentor an overview of both kinds of material and show how the site is organized without getting too deeply into the details.

In order to design a path through the material for new mentors, I needed to learn more about their information needs as adult learners new to this institution. Some initial questions were: What do they

know when they arrive and how varied is that knowledge? What are they asked to do when they arrive and how varied is that experience? What are the different local orientation activities into which this resource should fit and how varied are they?

Activities and Accomplishments during the Reassignment

I worked closely with four groups of people during this reassignment: the Mentoring Institute (Alan Mandell, Brian Gabriel, Sandra Coulter); the Mentorsite committee (Cathy Davison, Alan Mandell, Frieda Mendelsohn, Chris Rounds, Susan Oaks, Francis Murage and Brian Gabriel); and the New Mentor Workshop committee (Meredith Brown, Judy Gerardi, Cathy Leaker, Alan Mandell, Frieda Mendelsohn and Chris Rounds), and the Mentoring Institute Reassignment group (Reed Coughlan, Alan Mandell and Frieda Mendelsohn).

Since the first New Mentor Workshop of the 2004 - 2005 academic year was in mid-September, my immediate task was to redesign Mentorsite for that workshop. My goal was to rework the homepage so that mentors would be better able to choose the appropriate section in which to look for information. I reviewed the literature on usability, particularly with regard to intranets, and reworked the organization of the site to simplify the interface.

I presented Mentorsite at the New Mentor Workshop and referred new colleagues to it throughout the workshop. More important, by attending the workshop, I learned more about the concerns of the new mentors, the strengths they brought to the college, how they saw the college and their work, and how they wanted to be able to access information.

It became clear during this meeting that, while online resources serve many useful purposes, they do not take the

place of print. Print allows one to sit in a comfortable chair at home with one's feet up, print is easier to use for complex information, and print is easier to use for getting an overall picture of the organization of the information. It may be that this is because we still do not have the information arranged correctly or it may be that this is the last generation of learners who will prefer print; in any case, it was clear to us that print materials should be distributed at some point in the orienting process. Further, new colleagues made it very clear that they wanted a glossary of terms – the sooner the better.

My next step was to work through Mentorsite to determine how much of what we wanted to distribute was already written and available online. Could we simply print out some pages or did we need to do more?

It also was clear from the New Mentor Workshop that the composition of the 2004 - 2005 group of new mentors highlighted differences among faculty at units and centers, new programs under development, and mature term-based programs. These differences included the programs in which faculty were hired, the orientation process they received locally, and their proximity to their dean, faculty chair, and colleagues.

In February, the Mentorsite committee met in Saratoga Springs. Each of us had reviewed the site before the meeting. We determined that the site needed to be reviewed for tone; it was still Center-centric in places. Through our testing and feedback from colleagues, we found that SEARCH would be the key to making this site usable. We acknowledged that an effective search engine should return both pages with information most relevant to the query and it should return results in a form that demonstrates to the user that the relevant information has been found. While the first objective was being met, we found that searchers frequently did not recognize that they had found the information for which they were looking because the title of the page was not clear. This was referred to the Mentoring Institute for more research and implementation.

We also spent some time brainstorming words and acronyms for the glossary (on which Alan Mandell and Brian Gabriel

would work). We found a need for material related to teaching and learning at a distance and we identified the need for a process to keep up with changes in the college's web resources. Finally, we discussed how to encourage more contributions to Mentorsite and we discussed ways of marketing the site to the college community.

In March, I created a new section in Mentorsite: Quicklinks for Mentors: Empire State College at your fingertips. The purpose of this page was to provide one place for mentors to find resources on the college site (as well as a small selection of external sites), which was organized specifically from the mentor perspective. This page replaced MentorSPACE, a site that I built while at CLT but which the college no longer

> *Distance is an essential feature of everything we do at Empire State College, from orienting and developing new mentors, to working with each other on committees, to working with our students, to relationships with our administrators and colleagues.*

maintained. After the Mentorsite committee tested Quicklinks and I incorporated their feedback, Alan Mandell invited a group of mentors from across the college to test it. Those who accepted the invitation agreed to use this site as their interface with the college sites for a week and answer a set of questions. The feedback from this group was rich and deep; our colleagues informed us of resources we had missed and they identified gaps that we should fill. Perhaps more important, they told us where they expected to find these resources. This gave

us a better idea of how the material should be organized.

In June, we announced Quicklinks to the Academic Conference on Educational Planning and again, at the July Governance Retreat.

Finally, I again reworked the homepage based on everything I learned over the year to prepare for the 2005 group of new mentors. More important, working with Alan Mandell, I identified those elements that I thought should be in "The Binder" (our working name for the print materials which we would distribute to new mentors). While we distributed this binder at the New Mentor Workshop this year, it is my hope that this material will greet all new mentors (part-time as well as full-time) when they arrive for their first day on the job (if not before).

Issues, Questions and Recommendations

As with all learning, I ended the year with more questions than when I began. I have collected my questions, and some of my own answers under two headings: A dispersed college and institutional change.

A Dispersed College

Distance is an essential feature of everything we do at Empire State College, from orienting and developing new mentors, to working with each other on committees, to working with our students, to relationships with our administrators and colleagues. Physical distances mean that mentors are not always located near their dean or other colleagues. Some programs are distributed across the state; other centers have many faculty at one site and only one or two at distant units. Because of these distances, different practices, cultures and even vocabularies have developed in different locations.

Mentorsite is one way in which we try to overcome the distances among us. We want to share our knowledge across the college; we want to collaborate with a wide range of mentors to develop a useful and usable resource that conveys the great variety and flexibility of what mentors do at the college.

Nevertheless, as we have worked to develop this shared resource, our ignorance of each other's cultures and practices has sometimes resulted in unintentional offense to our colleagues. We are just not always aware of language that excludes programs or centers. This problem is compounded when we orient new mentors. We think we know which concepts and principles have relevance collegewide, but we have come to realize that we do not know the specifics that each mentor will need to do the day-to-day job for which she was hired. Instead, a major portion of the orientation and development of new mentors must take place locally.

But what does "local" mean? And who does what in orienting and developing new mentors? And which new mentors are oriented? What are the roles of the dean, the faculty chair, the "buddy," and the unit secretary? Do deans across the college agree on their role in orienting new faculty? Do chairs? Is there a shared understanding of how part-time mentors are oriented? Or, in fact, is there even a shared definition of "part-time mentor?" How can the Mentoring Institute design an orientation process for a group of new mentors when each new mentor receives different support through her "home" center?

I think the New Mentor Workshop should address the values, concepts and principles that we share across the college. I also think that we should help our new colleagues understand that there are differences among the programs and centers and that understanding that these differences exist is important. It also seems clear to me that, in order for this to be effective, that there also must be a shared understanding among the Mentoring Institute, deans, chairs and provost of what new mentors need to know and whose responsibility it is to provide appropriate resources and support for each piece of that knowledge.

Institutional Change

One of the reasons for revising the Mentoring Handbook as an online resource was so that it would be easy to maintain as the college changed. However, the idea was much easier than the reality. How do we revise Mentorsite for online registration, calendar, changes to educational planning and prior learning, as well as whatever comes out of the "Front Porch" initiative? The college is changing so rapidly that we know that some material is obsolete. But we do not yet have an understanding of what will follow.

I think that we, the faculty, need to consider these changes and determine what we believe to be good practice. We need to reach shared understanding of what faculty should do before we revise our shared materials. How will we do this? How can we, the faculty, maintain control of the academic program unless we write our own "good practices?" What is the role of the administration in reviewing or "approving" what we have written? For example, the Glossary of Terms is currently in administrative limbo; it is ready to post but the administration wants to "review" it. For what purpose? With what criteria? Who defines what terms in what ways? How do we create a common language that is meaningful and reflects our ideas and our values?

Our new colleagues are the future of the college. We celebrate their joining us and we enthusiastically welcome their ideas, expertise, experience, currency, insights and energy. Our new colleagues know how to learn and they know how to teach; they are experts in their fields and they, justifiably, question what we have to contribute to their knowledge and understanding of their work. We do not directly influence their personnel reviews, we do not work at their center or program, and for the New Mentor Workshop we have taken them away from

that program for several days (including travel for which they will be reimbursed later, having just undertaken the expenses of relocating). How can we convince them that there are things they need to know? How do we situate their work within the college, especially if they are hired to develop a new program that we only vaguely understand? How do we convince them that what we know is relevant to their career at Empire State College since the institution is changing so dramatically?

Next steps

As we work to prepare for online registration, where students will, at some point, have access to learning opportunities from across the college, we need to reexamine how we bring new mentors into the college and how we support their professional development. Our current practice tends to perpetuate boundaries among the centers and programs since there is no unified strategy for new mentor training and development. Further, as we move toward these new systems, some faculty question their own skills to work with students across geographic boundaries; the college needs to support the development of training/development resources for working at a distance as well as the technologies to do so.

Finally, we, the faculty, need to learn to use the resources we already have to share the knowledge and understanding that we already have. Mentorsite houses a variety of resources for all mentors, but it can hold so much more. We can use Mentorsite to share handouts, learn about teaching and learning at a distance, share training materials across centers and programs. However, we can only share what we are given. Each of us, the faculty of Empire State College, knows something that would benefit our colleagues. Please think of Mentorsite as one way in which you can share your understanding of your work at Empire State College with your colleagues.

Beyond the Coast of Bohemia: Distanced Students, Cultural Context and Social Networks

David Starr-Glass, Center for International Programs

Communication is not a matter of transporting information and experiences from the interior of one subject to the interior of another one. Rather it is a matter of being-with-one-another becoming manifest in the world, specifically by way of the discovered world, which itself becomes manifest in speaking with one another.
Heidegger, 1985, p. 263

T his essay is essentially a reflection on a number of related issues: a personal transition from one-to-one mentoring to online mediation, the significance of online educational experiences being considered social networks rather than communities of learning, enhancing social networks by creating a strong social presence online, and being a better – albeit distanced – mentor for my students. All of these issues revolve around a central point that is easy to state, somewhat more difficult to enact: How can I further "being-with-one-another" in the process of jointly discovering the world with those who are distanced, linked technologically, and who may never be physically encountered?

Until several years ago, my teaching was mostly face-to-face: mentoring with Empire State College and lecturing with other regional higher education providers. Today, much of my educational engagement is divided into:

- Facilitating management and introductory business courses online with European division of University of Maryland University College (UMUC), working with students who are almost exclusively serving in the U.S. military; and

- Teaching online courses blended with one-to-one e-mail interactions, and limited face-to-face contact with the Empire State College Prague Unit. With my Empire State College students, I guide them through the selection of

a viable research question in business and economics and support them in the implementation of their research and in the completion of the mandated undergraduate dissertation.

These two student populations are strikingly different, as are the dynamics of our online interactions. While I will comment on these differences later, in this reflection I focus predominantly on my Prague experience. However, before looking at the dynamics and possibilities of engagement with students online, I would like to take a little time setting the scene.

The Coasts of Scotland

I began this essay in a small university town on the east coast of Scotland. I had the good fortune, and privilege, of spending a month at the University of St. Andrews in the summer of 2005. The visit was supported in part by a grant from the United University Professionals and the State of New York, and their generosity and insight in funding this professional development are gratefully acknowledged here. The grant allowed me to spend time researching Czech history and political change at the School of International Relations. My gracious and convivial host was Professor Rick Fawn – an energetic and ebullient Canadian, a good and thoughtful friend, and an expert in conflict especially in the former Czechoslovakia (Fawn 2003, 2000).

As a native Scot, I have always loved the University of St. Andrews. Established in 1413-15, it is Scotland's oldest university and bears a striking resemblance in architectural beauty, collegiate spirit, and academic excellence to the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge. The exact date of the university's founding depends on when whether you take the date in which papal permission was given, or the year in which the first graduation took place. Apparently there were only two founding faculty members in 1413 and it took a little time

David Starr-Glass

until the third arrived and constituted the forum necessary to confer the first degree. The story is probably true and may convey something of the university's intimate, relaxed nature even from earliest times.

The university is well integrated into the small seaside town of St. Andrews, where there are now only two major economic players: the university and the equally famous Royal and Ancient golf course, which draws thousand of players and spectators to its biannual tournaments. St. Andrews is the home of golf. As it happened, 2005 was a tournament year and I left town just before the golfers took over the place. I was present, however, for the university graduation at which Prince William earned his M.A. in geography (traditionally the M.A. is a first degree at the ancient Scottish universities). His proud grandmother, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, attended.

St. Andrews is a small town; indeed you can walk its circumference in less than 20 minutes. It was a major religious and

pilgrimage center in Scotland and the remains of its cathedral dominate the skyline. The sea is always in evidence and a walk by the shore is a bracing experience. You might actually have seen the beach: it features in those opening minutes of *Chariots of Fire,* which was filmed there. Also in evidence are the undergraduates in their distinctive scarlet gowns. The gowns, I was pleased to see, are made of a fabric suitable for the prevailing Scottish cold and damp: practicality, rather than pomp, has always been considered a Scottish virtue. Dropping into a café for a cup of coffee often meant overhearing professors and students arguing refined academic points or discussing the results of the recent soccer match: learning as a social experience. As with the Oxford and Cambridge, mentoring is the de facto style of education.

So what is a Scottish-Israeli, who teaches management and organizational psychology, doing studying the antecedents of the Czech Velvet Revolution in St. Andrews? The answer is a confluence of several streams of personal interest. In 1968, when I was an undergraduate at Scotland's second oldest university (the University of Glasgow, 1451), I was deeply affected by the brutal repression by the Warsaw Pact alliance of the Prague Spring. At a time when other dour, pragmatic, and politically distanced Scottish students were concerned with US involvement in Vietnam, I was profoundly moved by the efforts of the Czech people to give socialism "a human face." But the human face was something that did not please Moscow, and the tanks were sent in as a gesture of fraternal solidarity. The self-immolation of the Charles University student Jan Palach on January 16, 1969 (Palach Memorial Pages, no date), and the deaths of other Czech students that followed, had a profound impact on me. Little did I know that half a lifetime from then I would be a frequent visitor to Prague, surely the world's most beautiful city, and that on each visit I would lay flowers on the site where Jan set fire to himself in front of the National Museum.

My interest in the Czechs, and the Czech Lands, was considerably energized three years ago when I became a member of the visiting faculty team that work with the Empire State College unit in Prague. As a

teacher of intercultural management, and someone who has lived and worked in many different cultures, my first concern in this new position was to learn some Czech (an ongoing challenge) and to understand more of the complex social and cultural context that surrounds my (mostly Czech) students. As my involvement with the Czech Republic increased, and as I formed deep and lasting relationships with Czechs, I felt the need to dedicate some time and effort to understand more about Czech language, literature, social-economic context, and history. That need, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, took me to a beautiful and quiet university town on the east coast of Scotland.

The Coasts of Bohemia

Although at times the Crown Lands of Bohemia have expanded northwards to the Baltic and southwards to the Adriatic, Bohemia is fundamentally landlocked. This detail did not prevent Shakespeare from having Antigonus say in *The Winter's Tale,* act three, scene three: "Thou art perfect then our ship touched upon the deserts of Bohemia?" For Czechs, the fact that their country, which is at the very heart of Europe, was thought to have a coastline is taken as a further indication of the insularity of non-Czechs. Derek Sayer (1998) used the ambiguity, or at least confusion of reality, as both the title and overarching motif for his *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History,* an elegant and reflective study of Czech history and national identity.

More generally the "coasts of Bohemia" has come, for me at least, to serve as a metaphor for our unrecognized ignorance of the other. It is in this later sense that I understand the Bohemian coastland – a confident assertion of what we understand to be the case, notwithstanding facts to the contrary, or suggestions that we are likely misinformed about the object of our confidence. Or put another way, Czechs are who they are, not who we might imagine them to be. Despite their endearing informal greeting of "Ahoj," it turns out that most are not mariners, pirates or beachcombers.

The coast of Bohemia is, metaphorically understood, particularly relevant in dealing with international students, or students in international programs. Sometimes, the difference that we believe

constitutes a coastline turns out to be a mirage; sometimes we fail to understand real difference and leave it uncharted in our voyages. Part of the confusion is that, certainly with the students I work with in Prague, they speak an excellent, grammatically correct English. It is easy to think that we are communicating in a common language, but communication is a little subtler than commonly agreed upon nouns and verbs. Carey (1975, p. 17) sees communication in richer, more problematic terms: "a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed." What interest me is exploring that symbolic process and those transformations. A useful way of doing that is to be able slip from English into Czech. While my Czech is never likely to be as good as the English these students have acquired, the demonstrated willingness to engage in the "other's" language, the acceptance of linguistic vulnerability, and the legitimization of different productions of reality, leads to richer communication opportunities.

Another confusing issue is that these Czech students have decided to earn an American degree, even though their own higher educational system provides excellent educational experiences. This might be interpreted as a vote in favor of one educational system and the rejection of another. However, the issue is again much more subtle and complex. Whatever these students are doing it is usually not rejecting national institutions or a national value system. Almost all of my business students have remained in the Czech Republic after graduation; most are concerned about making a contribution to the transforming economies of central and eastern Europe; and most self-identify as Czech first, European second.

If the process of education is linked with the "transformation of reality," then working with students, particularly ones who reside in their own country, suggest that we respect, acknowledge, and appreciate their unique cultural matrix and history. The student's present configuration of reality, and his or her re-creation of it, is deeply embedded in unique and distinctive social and cultural contexts. Transformations of reality, I would suggest, tend not to be spontaneous: they need initiation,

or a catalytic intervention. Similarly, transformations tend not to occur unless the products of transformation are considered advantageous – no matter how precariously or tangentially so – within the future envisaged social and cultural context. It is exceedingly unwise and unhelpful to characterize learning as a process divorced or isolated from the social and cultural context of the learner

If the process of communication is, "a matter of being-with-one-another becoming manifest in the world specifically by way of the discovered world," as Heidegger claims, then it seems advisable to begin with a better appreciation of the "other" as a prelude to a more effective and sustained process of shared discovery. Constraints on the depth of contact, and the length of the learning relationship certainly in distance education, suggest that a more culturally and socially informed initial understanding of our students might facilitate faster, deeper communication. But it is not simply an issue of respecting difference in others: as I will suggest later, cultural awareness is required to construct online learning environments that are socially attractive, meaningful, and salient to students.

Community or Social Network?

Originally, I engaged in the process we call mentoring. It was a one-to-one, face-to-face engagement that attempted to provide a framework for the mutual construction of meaning. I say a "construction" because I have always understood learning as a process of construction, rather than an objectivist filling-empty-vessels endeavor; "mutual" because I understand learning as affecting and altering all of those who engage in that process – a co-construction. I literally sat under a shady olive tree in Jerusalem, enjoying another cup of coffee and the dynamics of this mutual co-construction. Of course, sometimes the process just did not materialize. Sometimes, we did not engage in anything very significant at all.

At times in the past, I have considered these co-constructions of meaning as special territories peopled, and mapped, by those who engaged in them. Perhaps it was with this notion of territory in mind that I would speak metaphorically of "communities of learning." At times these communities included only two of us; sometimes, at others they referred to the collective engaged in mentoring here in Jerusalem; sometimes they referred to a distinctive but borderless sense of belonging to something greater than the individual, a sort of institution-as-community. However, it now seems to me that this notion of "community of learning," particularly as applied to distant students

Yet it seems to me that the online educational experience can create and sustain social networks and that these networks, in turn, might constitute a significant structure that influences how we explore the world and acquire knowledge.

and online courses, is more rhetorical device than sociological reality.

Of course, community has such a pleasant ring to it, indeed that is part of the problem. While theories of community have a long history of being problematic, they also are complicated from the outset by a concern, even anguish, for the putative disintegration of community in the writing of Comte and Durkheim. In his classic *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft,* Ferdinand Tönnies differentiated between two different, perhaps polar, social states: *Gemeinschaft* (community) with its intimacy of human relationship and appreciation of the individual's contribution to the collective and *Gesellschaft* (society), which emphasized impersonal alliances and contractual connections and responsibilities. This dichotomy, while certainly helpful, often leads to definitions of community, and differences in methodology, being framed

in terms of nostalgia for an endangered inclusiveness and sense of belonging (Bell and Newby, 1972). These considerations of community certainly resonate with many of us engaged in mentoring, and the notion that we create "communities of learning" is both pleasant and understandable: a preservation of the humane in an increasingly sterile overarching society. Perhaps.

While I frequently had doubts about the extent of the learning communities that I co-created, or belonged to, moving from face-to-face to essentially online delivery caused me to seriously examine the nature of such communities: my perspective is essentially grounded in organizational communications and sociological theory. While notions of community have been traditionally based on territory, and have seen community as providing a number of functions, my online interactions are placeless and provide limited obvious social functions for students. What we engage in when we create a successful online learning environment does not easily fit the definition of a social community. Instead, such environments seem to provide participants with a "personal community," or more specifically, perhaps, with a social network. Commitment to, and identification with, these social linkages is tenuous; the number of social functions that they provide is limited; and the time spent engaging in them is slight. Yet it seems to me that the online educational experience can create and sustain social networks and that these networks, in turn, might constitute a significant structure that influences how we explore the world and acquire knowledge.

When I made the transition to online instruction, I explored and tried to preserve many of the techniques and practices of face-to-face mentoring (Starr-Glass, 2004). On reflection, this probably was useful even although it is important to recognize that online technology and dynamics are not meant to – and indeed presently cannot – mimic face-to-face, or one-on-one pedagogy. It was soon obvious to me that

the asynchronous, placeless, fragmented contact could not produce the richness of relationship associated with mentoring. It was equally clear that online instruction possessed different attributes and provided new opportunities that were useful for engaging in meaningful communication and purposeful construction of knowledge.

Creating virtual places in which students can visit, interact, reflect, and revisit may provide a sense of "useful connectedness" that allows all participants to pursue individual work recognizing the presence, interest, support, and contributions of others. Social networks are what I mean here by "useful connectedness." The object is not to begin and end an online course but rather to introduce these students, most of whom have not had any online coursework before, to a process of connecting, exploring, sharing, supporting, and being able to transfer this experience into ways of remaining connected in the future – connected to one another, to new participants, to ongoing professional development, or perhaps to lifelong learning.

But perhaps I should confess to two other agenda that transcends the individual student and the individual course. The first is that that mentoring creates an emphasis, perhaps even an overemphasis, on the unique relationship and interactions between those engaged in the mentoring process: it seems illusionary, perhaps ill considered, to speak of communities of two. By contrast, online classrooms establish interconnectedness among, say, 25 participants including the mediator. While the relative strengths of the bonds might differ, the potential in online teaching is to connect a much larger group and tap into the diversity, difference, and energy of the collective.

Secondly, I am keenly aware of the changes in the economic and business environments in central, eastern, and southeastern Europe. These transforming social and economic environments are courageously dealing with the diffusion of new ideas, synergistic engagement of people, re-skilling of professionals, expanding higher educational, and creating more effective value chains in their economies. Social networks, often using electronic communications, are a potent way of bringing about these changes.

The online courses that we set up and teach can suggest a more general methodology of interconnectedness, which may be used beyond the classroom, and beyond the degree, to enrich and strengthen networks of isolated people communication in spite of the limits and confines of regional geographies and economies. In a very real sense, I see the teaching model as more a metaphoric way of spreading a collective net over the difference, division, separation, and the schisms that have characterized many of these economics and civil societies since the implosion of the former Soviet Union, its satellites, and the former Yugoslavia. It is exciting that educational institutions have already set up collegiate networks for the faster and wider dissemination of research and knowledge (see Aladin – ALpe ADria INitiative Universities' Network, no date).

Social Presence Online

One of the most illusive yet critical dimensions in constructing and maintaining an online class is the creation of "social presence." Social presence is a necessary precursor for creating a social network. I will briefly examine the history of social presence theory and then explain why these theoretical considerations impact on creating and sustaining a functioning social network that might engage participants.

Social presence originates as a term in the by now classic communications work of Short, Williams and Christie (1976). As originally coined, it indicated the capacity of a communication channel (such as online technologies and systems) to support meaningful communication. Although somewhat nebulous to operationalize and measure, the idea is straightforward: we tend to communicate with others capable of engaging in the communication, not (usually, at least) with inanimate computer hardware. As Ray Birdwhistell pithily put it: "An individual doesn't communicate, he [sic] becomes part of communication."

> *Question:* How do we make separated, isolated learners sitting in front of computer screens engage in the process of communication?

> *Answer:* By providing them with the understanding that they are "in the

presence" of interested, socially engaged others. This is social presence.

Social presence was originally seen in terms of two related components: intimacy and immediacy, both salient in face-to face situations where they provide cues and clues about the other's interest, intent or ability, to engage with us in a social way. We read and respond to such signals in everyday social settings and it was not surprising that there was a tendency to extrapolate from these contexts to computer-mediated communication (CMC) ones.

Perhaps we may be dealing with a transitional artifact: a new generation of technology already will undoubtedly allow us to replicate synchronous, "face-to-face," lecturing or mentoring. However, the current limitations on the "richness" of communication that can be delivered by online systems means that we have to strive to create intimacy and immediacy cues and clues in online presentations. Of course, CMC contexts do not replicate social experiences: partly because they currently lack the richness of clues and cues of social settings; partly because providing flexible educational options means moving towards asynchronous systems, which distance participants from the spontaneity associated with social interaction.

In his insightful inquiry into social presence, Chih-Hsiung Tu (Tu, 2002; Tu and McIsaac, 2002; see also Tu Chih-Hsiung Tu, no date) reformulates social presence, understood as "the degree of feeling, perception and reaction to another intellectual entity in the CMC environment," into three clusters of concern: social context, online communication and interactivity.

Social context refers to the notion that participants online see themselves, ultimately, in a social setting and try to develop social relationships, and form impressions of others through intuitive textual analysis of postings. Posting are understood to be the product of others, not random computer generated statements, and we try to form images and impression of the senders. The activity, or task, that participants are given can change the intensity of this social context. By carefully designing and moderating online environments with high degrees of personal

disclosure, tapping into an understood cultural base (being in the military being Czech), setting up social places for online conversations unrelated to the subject matter of the course ("water cooler" discussions, song/lyrics sharing, seasonal greetings centers, etc.), requiring exchanges and comments on other's work, we can increase the level of social context.

Online communication also affects the perception of social presence. Generally, it is heightened by increased activity and to an extent correlates with the participant's perception of his/her computer skills. In online settings, I am generally very active and very interactive. While online classroom technologies can hinder this, my aim to present fast feedback and genuine interest for all comments posted. Often, although it has to be resisted, students will pick up discussion via e-mail. It is preferable, however, to do this in a shared, social environment online. Also, at the beginning of the course, I identify first-time online learners and check up on their progress in the first few weeks. Interestingly (and here I am referring to UMUC experiences), when I ask students if they are first-time online users they tell me that they are terrified, confused, apprehensive, or "scared out of their minds." Equally, when I conduct exit reviews with these students, all are highly positive about the online experience and comment on how easy it was to handle to technology (the biggest fear) and make friends and social connections (the second biggest concern for those used to face-to-face instruction).

Interactivity is the degree of feedback that is provided and considered salient by users. The degree of interactivity within an online learning environment is, again, something that the designer/moderator can influence greatly. Mandatory participation (reflected as part of the course grade), group projects, and requiring quality feedback (and explaining what constitutes quality in giving feedback) all heighten the notion of an interactive environment where others are helpfully connected.

Interactivity, online communication technique, and social context are facets of what is an intuitive, but not so easy to operationalize or measure, construct that we call social presence. While each

is a significant component, no single dimension explains or replicates social presence. In designing and moderation online educational environments, careful and thoughtful consideration must be given to creating and sustaining social presence. The general premise is that the more social presence that can be engendered, the more "relevant and meaningful" the interactions and the learning is for the participant. This is certainly supported by my mandatory course evaluations and shared personal messages from students. The exciting research question, of course, is where there is a correlation between meaningful online experiences and the kind, quantity, and quality of learning. My goal has been not just to increase individual satisfaction and enjoyment in online courses, but to develop social presence that encourages, and promotes, the building of friendships, linkages, and what I think we can call social networks – networks that I know exist to some extent after the course has ended.

Contrasts, complications and challenges

When I started teaching online with UMUC, I was concerned – just as I had been when I first started with my Czech students – to understand more of the organizational and student culture. Almost all of my students are active member of the U.S. military, or their dependents: many of my students are in war zones, or troubled areas. Fortunately, in an online faculty development workshop, I saw that a bright, articulate colleague also was a former high-ranking officer in the U.S. Army. I asked him about the cultural dimensions of the military that might be important for me to appreciate. He explained the various acronyms that I would likely see (part of the jargon) but then told me that, apart form those, there was no military culture issue. Hmmm. It is worthwhile remembering that culture is such a "blueprint for social behavior" that we, who are embedded in it, often are oblivious to it.

In my online business and management courses, I deliberately make being in the military a salient feature. When we discuss organizational culture, we look at the military (students seem a little more aware of this that my colleague). When we

examine the roles of managers, we look at the student's commanding officer and write a job description. When we talk about business ethics, we compare and contrast this with ethical issues in the forces. I think this is called "discovering the world." I think that also it is rediscovering and reclaiming our worlds: seeing the familiar and experienced as revisited, reformulated, and better appreciated.

In facilitating my UMUC classes, awareness of, and sensitivity to, the ambient culture is something that I believe significantly impacts on the social presence of the classes. It is more than understanding the occasional acronym. It is identifying with daily concerns and challenges that these students face. It is an understanding that assignments are late when your camp is transferred from one location to another in Iraq. It is an understanding of the fears and anxieties that these men and women face in Afghanistan, Bosnia or Kuwait. It is recognition that some of these students are required to make life and death decisions, have been decorated for gallantry in the face of the enemy, and that some may be facing that enemy tonight. And it is allowing those feelings, anxieties, and named fears to find a place within our placeless space, where we can share, support, and acknowledge one another. Management studies seem in this shared and experienced ambiance, to be more "realistic," more "appropriate." Having a 19-year-old son currently in the Israeli Defense Forces tends, of course, to heighten that sensitivity.

The students in Empire State College's Prague Unit also have their concerns and struggles. However, the level of social presence that we build in these courses is distinctly limited. Their individual communication skills are excellent, but they are almost all new to online work and see it as an addendum (and a rather distanced addendum at that) to their face-to face commitments in Prague. The social context is distinctly challenging, in part because these students already know one another as a social group in Prague, and in part because Czech patterns of communication and social ease differ from those of U.S. students. Lastly, interactivity is a casualty of the excessive instrumentality that most students attribute to the courses: the work focuses

on a product (a proposal and a thesis), not on an interaction or process. If viewed as an exclusively online teaching proposition, the Prague students present a difficult group with existing social frameworks, cultural predispositions, and attitudes towards distance learning, which tend to preclude an active, or enthusiastic, engagement in the venture.

However, these students do not rely exclusively on online teaching. Occasional faculty visits, and a tradition of one-to-one e-mail support, change the dynamics of the relationship. Here, while I would like to see social networks being established and sustained, it is more the "personal community of two" that develops. In spite of a desire to raise the profile of these online courses, I find that there are significant theoretical difficulties in transforming these courses into social networks. The solution, which may be an interim one, and which has certainly not been fully analyzed, is to emphasize social presence between individual students and myself, rather than with the group.

By building a level of connection and interrelatedness, despite my limited physical presence with these students on faculty visits, the hope is that in the future I will be able to act as a locus in developing and promoting wider social networks among students and former students. Firstly, these considerations extend the educational experience in time: potentially linking current and former students with specific business sector or regional interests. Secondly, these thoughts about social linkage are grounded in a consideration of alumni solidarity and contribution to their society, and centers of higher learning being the loci for the diffusion of new ideas and practice in transforming societies and economies: a spatial extending our educational experience.

In working with students at a distance, specifically those in Prague, a greater understanding of their culture and social context leads to more improved channels for communication: the quality of communication is enriched. The coasts of Bohemia are an obstacle to understanding and that obstacle inhibits the flow of ideas from our students to us, and from us to our students. The more I understand of these

students, as individuals and as a collective, the more I appreciate the significance of reducing obstacles and allowing for a freer, richer exchange. That richer exchange will hopefully result in a real and truthful testimony to our ability to explore our worlds and to recreate them. It is an old idea in education, and surviving Czech idea as well.

In our country everything is forever being remade: beliefs, buildings, and street names. Sometimes the progress of time is concealed and at others feigned, so long as nothing remains as real and truthful testimony.
                                    Ivan Klima (1991)

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Jonestown Revisited:
From People's Temple to People's Tragedy

Lear Matthews, Metropolitan Center

Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our mind.
                    Bob Marley

November 18, 2005 marked the 27th anniversary of the Jonestown (People's Temple) tragedy in Guyana, South America, and I would like to reflect on a hidden dimension that has not been given serious attention. Within the context of globalization, the question of how developing nations become vulnerable to sundry international influences is an integral part of the debate on post colonial economic growth, modernity, and dependency. Notwithstanding the role of institutions such as the International Monetary Fund in this debate, the story of Jonestown symbolizes the efforts of a nation struggling to deal with conditions of poverty, with tragic consequences. This article provides an alternative view of the creation of that mysterious, and sadly, infamous community in the jungles of Guyana.

The Jonestown disaster on November 18, 1978, in which more than 900 lives were lost, occurred after members of a religious group drank cyanide-laced Kool-Aid. Reportedly, a significant number of the dead were African Americans, and about a third of them were children (Pogash, 2005). Led by a controversial, white American preacher named Jim Jones, it is believed that some of the temple members were shot as they attempted to escape. The massacre took place on the day after California Representative Leo Ryan, who had visited the settlement on a fact-finding mission, was shot to death.

Lest we forget, that event triggered an international furor, eliciting heated discussions about cultism, cooperation, politics, racism, terrorism, and the role of religion in violence all issues that have global currency today. There also have been lingering questions about the clandestine nature of the Jonestown project, and benefits incurred by officials from both Guyana and the United States. Unfortunately, for many North Americans the tragedy was their "introduction" to the nation of Guyana and to the erroneous belief that the majority of those directly involved were native Guyanese. A recent *New York Times* article titled, "Beyond Kool Aid: Looking at Jonestown and Its Ideals," reported on a play about the group's utopian existence, the massacre, and the events that led to it as told by survivors (Pogash, 2005).

> *It was an experiment in human organization, involving a migrating people searching for a better life and enticed by officials of a state struggling to conquer the problems of underdevelopment.*

Jonestown was the brainchild of an ideologue, who was initially supported by officials in the United States, and encouraged by the ideals of postcolonial nation building. Determined to implement its indigenous agricultural expansion program, and to overcome resistance of people to reside in the interior of the country, the government of Guyana offered resources and encouragement for hinterland development, including in its policy the invitation to foreigners to settle in the interior. Given that policy, Jonestown, which became one of the largest and most advanced communities in Guyana, and appeared to be entrenched in the government's development plans was created (Matthews and Danns, 1980). This surrealistic community was given government's blessing and sponsorship as a prototype settlement, exemplifying the sort of collective activity that those in power in Guyana thought was instrumental in the transition to cooperative socialism.

Ironically, at a time when Guyana was experiencing shortages of certain basic commodities, the Jonestown community, which was virtually unknown to most Guyanese, had access to resources restricted from distribution within the larger society. That community was granted special privileges by the government, including tax exemptions, special radio time to promote its "development activities," immunity from customs and police regulations, and the receipt of equipment such as weapons, without any scrutiny by government officials (Progress Report on Jonestown, 1977). This enabled the establishment of a settlement with modern facilities. Although the intent of the Guyana government was to use the settlement as a model in local community development, the utilization of indigenous resources as is normally encouraged was not part of the practice at Jonestown. Therein lay the contradiction in policy as it relates to hinterland development in Guyana.

Also known as the People's Temple Agricultural Project, most of the settlers were poor and working-class Americans who were frustrated with pervasive racism and conditions of poverty in the United States. Jones, who promised his followers a peaceful self-sufficient existence, first established a religious organization in California in 1963, and thought that, in Guyana, he had found a country that would be receptive to his plans for an idyllic community (Steele, 2005). It was an experiment in human organization, involving a migrating people searching for a better life and enticed by officials of a state struggling to conquer the problems

of underdevelopment. Members seemed to believe that they could create a community of equality, free from the problems they encountered in the United States. Although this north-south migration deviated from contemporary immigration patterns, like immigrants to North America today, participants were after an elusive "dream." It is interesting to note that at that time, unrelated to Jonestown, a small group of African-American political activists also sought refuge in the Caribbean including Guyana (Carrillo, 2005).

Religion, used to attract people to join the People's Temple, was a device for preliminary indoctrination, conversion, and control, all sustained by harsh discipline reminiscent of a slave plantation. It was a community of obedience and compulsion in which members were largely coerced and constrained with Jones and his lieutenants the controlling authority (Kildoff and Javers, 1997). Officials in Guyana promoted Jones' reputation as an evangelical faith healer, thus solidifying their public confidence in him as a credible community organizer. Not only did Jones encourage members to develop otherworldly expectations, but also to expect a utopia. As one survivor reported, "People's Temple was a political movement as well as a religious sect. Jones deliberately sought out poor blacks to join the temple, which fed, clothed and housed them and provided healthcare" (Pogash, 2005, p. 5). Many observers viewed the group as

a religious cult, and saw the tragedy as a deadly mind controlling act by a crazed cult leader over his needy and weakened flock (Naipaul, 1981). However, the ultimate sacrifice of mass suicide may have been a reaction to the belief that "external forces" were encroaching upon the kingdom of a megalomaniac, and the inevitability that the ideals of a promised serene and productive community was about to be destroyed.

In conclusion, the reason for the creation of Jonestown emerged from three divergent motivations – the residents' desire to create a better world, the government's desire to develop the hinterland, and Jim Jones' determination to establish a personal power base when he left the United States. The social and psychological forces which influenced the behaviors that led to the massacre will never be fully understood. However, what started out as a utopian experiment in community building, ended up an improbable venture, embarrassing to the Guyanese government, and a deadly alternative for hundreds disenfranchised Americans. Perhaps Bob Marley's plea for mental emancipation should inform decisions about personal choice and planned change, in order to avoid similar tragedies in the name of seeking salvation or nation building.

Writer's Note: The author is from Guyana, where he resided during the Jonestown tragedy.

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Found Things

THE EMERGING ROLE

ADVISEMENT

The advisement function is not peculiar to Empire State College. Faculty everywhere become involved in listening to and talking with students in a variety of ways. However, at Empire State College with its regular face-to-face mentor-student relationships and few natural student peer groups, it is almost inevitable that mentors will find themselves in advisement situations. Mentors talk of three types of advisement relationships with students: academic/vocational advisement, as sounding board for personal problems, and as ombudsman.

The major and only part of the advisement function prescribed in the official role statement relates to student concerns about academic/vocational plans. Although Empire State College has a primarily adult student body, the Student Biographical Inventory, a comprehensive survey instrument developed by the college's Office of Research and Evaluation and administered to all incoming students, indicates that two-thirds hope an Empire State College degree will lead to a promotion or a new job while 70 percent anticipate further studies beyond the bachelor's degree. Mentors report that students ask for counsel in evaluating graduate school options, the current job situation, possible career reorientation, and the like. With some students, these subjects come up often, particularly during conferences to discuss degree program and the portfolio for advanced standing. While not specifically trained for such advisement activities, mentors find that they are often the most accessible and concerned professionals at Empire State College who can listen and sometimes help.

A second aspect of advisement is not part of the stated role. Personal advisement comes almost naturally out of the regular face-to-face meetings though mentors do not always welcome it. It can involve any number of things that may be disturbing students: family concerns, financial affairs, business affairs, health. While these are matters that many feel should not enter an academic relationship, mentors sometimes find it necessary to listen and talk with students about such concerns before serious academic discussions are possible. In fact, for some students, their personal concerns (e.g., the role of women) may be closely intertwined with their intellectual interests. As one mentor noted: "There is often an awful lot of baggage to clear away before we can get down to the assignments." Each mentor seems to develop over time a personal sense of how much "baggage" can be dealt with and where the emotional problems are too powerful to allow intellectual discussions. In these situations, some mentors have helped students identify professional therapeutic help.

A third aspect of advisement that mentors again find a part of their activities is a catch-all category, ombudsman. Again, as the person most concerned about particular students, mentors find that they must often act amicus curiae in procedural matters. For example, many mentors talk of spending time in trying to untangle such things as student tuition and financial aid problems. One mentor became involved in a hassle over course enrollment at a nearby SUNY institution. Mother mentioned having to help a student discover why her New York State Scholar Incentive Award had not arrived. An important consequence of this type of mentor intervention is that student confidence is gained. This in turn can improve the academic relationship.

In summary, academic/vocational counseling is the only official element of advisement for Empire State College mentors. However, other matters sometimes enter the relationship. Mentors find that they must learn quickly to draw the line.

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Mentors indicated in the interview study that promoting student intellectual development is the most important single aspect of their role. Certain items in the Mentor Questionnaire responses show that this continues. For example, one element of this area is direct instruction and one-fifth of the average mentor's time goes into direct instruction. However, there have been changes in the nature of these activities.

Student program planning often received a light touch in the early stages of Empire State College. If students had a sharp sense of what they wanted, the mentor would help design a cohesive program of study (now termed degree program). On the other hand, many students did not have a clear direction upon entrance and would undertake what many mentors described as an "organic program of study" which featured explorations into a variety of areas.

Some of the earliest students never focused on any concentration area, a situation not possible now.

In the past year with the advent and clarification of a degree program statement, mentors spend much more time helping students determine a concentration and appropriate ancillary areas to study. This process is closely tied to the development of a portfolio that documents prior formal and nonformal learning in relationship to the degree program.

Portfolio assistance has been a significant part of the mentor's role in student intellectual development since Empire State College's founding. Students often are baffled by the painstaking task of reconstructing significant parts of their lives to determine where college-level learning occurred. With Empire State College's increased emphasis on relating such learning to an articulate degree program, portfolio development is even more demanding. Mentors play a major role in this process of developing goals, identifying appropriate prior learning, and synthesizing then into a coherent package.

A third aspect of the mentor's role in student intellectual development is learning contracts. Here again mentors help in design, but also serve in instruction. Two styles are visible: mentor-as-tutor and mentor-as-facilitator.

The first style, tutor, emphasizes regular face-to-face meetings with students to examine and discuss selected issues and topics in the mentor's primary area of academic interest. The focus is content and the mentor role is the teaching of the content. These meetings often involve intense intellectual discussions where ideas, concepts and data are reviewed, analyzed and criticized. In addition, student work is examined – papers, readings, logs – and future directions plotted. Although the learning contracts provide structure, many other topics, problems and issues are encountered during these mentor-student meetings. Overall, the mentor is as one the primary teacher and resource for the student.

The second style emphasizes the process of learning and the mentor tends not to teach content but rather helps students identify important learning resources and learn how to use these resources. A mentor-as-facilitator suggests questions or issues to examine, encourages students to critically evaluate evidence and arguments, discusses methods of recording observations and reflections, and lays out the basic requirements and structure of papers and final reports. Mentors having this style often reach across several disciplines and thus deal with a variety of student objectives and interests. They act as broker by helping students connect with resources rather than by interceding for them.

Few, if any, mentors exemplify one or the other of these two styles all of the time. A given mentor might serve as tutor for one student and be more of a facilitator with the next. Similarly, a given mentor might use both styles at different times with a single student. Thus, the above descriptions should be viewed as two poles of a continuum with some mentors generally using methods more conducive to one style or the other and probably no mentors always "tutoring" or "facilitating." However, at the time of the 1973 interviews, the process-oriented facilitator mentors seemed to be in a distinct minority, probably in part, because the mentors' traditional backgrounds had not prepared them for facilitating and, in part, because the institution had not developed adequate ways of tapping external learning resources.

Affective or personal development areas – improving interpersonal competence, increasing awareness, clarifying purposes, becoming more self-reliant, becoming more self-understanding and understanding of others, and increasing self-consistency – also are described in college documents as important to Empire State College. However, the institution does not prescribe that these areas be specifically mentioned in learning contracts. Thus, regardless of whether a mentor is more tutor or facilitator, few consistently relate student work to the personal development areas. This does not deny that personal development takes place. In fact, 10/30 (Palola and Bradley, 1972) plus recent analyses of the Student Experience Questionnaire (SEQ) and some rating forms found significant gains for students in these areas, in part, because of the nature of the institution. However,

content analysis of student learning contract digest and evaluations indicates that explicit attention is seldom given to these areas by mentors.

EVALUATION

Evaluation, which takes 15 percent of a time according to the Mentor Questionnaire, is a function occurring in two different but related ways. First, mentors serve on committees, which review student degree programs, portfolios and candidacy for graduation. Candidacy review takes place upon notification that a student is entering his/her final contract. The committee ensures that all parts of the formal degree program are completed. These committee assignments last for varying numbers of months and may require as little as no hours to as much as six or eight hours a week.

While evaluation of advanced standing and degree programs is a group judgment, most evaluation of learning contracts generally involves only a student and mentor though the views of others with whom the student has worked also are considered. Mentors generally use papers, logs, discussions and other means to make their evaluations on a learning contract digest and evaluation (D and E) form, which becomes, after review by an associate dean, part of the permanent transcript. These D and E's are narrative rather than simply letter grades and describe what was done, why, and how well. A particular institutional problem with such clearly subjective evaluations is maintaining consistency in standards among students for a given mentor, across mentors in a single center, and across the entire college. This is especially acute given the variety of students, student activities and resultant product. One reason that contracts, degree programs, and D and E's are reviewed by committees, an associate dean and officers at the Coordinating Center is the importance of maintaining consistency.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The volume of material published in recent years about the need for self-renewal of colleges, universities and their staffs underscores the importance of professional development activities for mentors (an incomplete list includes: Freedman, ed., 1973; Group for Human Development,

1974; Nesmith, ed., 1974; Bergquist and Phillips, 1975).

During the first two years of the college, a few mentors received leaves for educational travel. For example, one attended a conference in India on his speciality. Others have gone to such places as Russia, Italy, France and the Far East. A few others joined the learning resources faculty for short periods to work on learning modules, packaged study guides for use by a student working alone or in groups. Some mentors developed group studies on various topics or planned short-term residential workshops. For example, one ran a summer residency on the arts at the Saratoga Performing Art Center. A few worked on personal research, some with grants. Several mentors presented professional papers at conferences. These have been about mentoring itself and normal disciplinary topics. These activities have steadily increased and now overall, well over half of the mentors have had some type of professional leave. In fact, at one learning center, all full-time mentors had a leave in 1974.

COLLEGE DEVELOPMENT

Faculty involvement in the development of Empire State College comes primarily in three areas: curriculum, governance and personnel matters. Until the fall 1973, such involvement was modest as the college had no bylaws and the urgency of many decisions required swift executive action. During that fall, several task forces were created to develop Empire State College's nine comprehensive areas of study. Since then, mentors have increasingly participated.

Faculty have traditionally maintained primary responsibility for curriculum development. However, the nature of Empire State College's creation precluded full faculty involvement in the initial stages. Empire State College began with the coterie of administrator-planners who laid out guidelines on which the institution was to build. As faculty were hired, their hand in the modification of these guidelines was expected to grow. This happened, but not at the rate expected, in part, because it took nearly two years to develop and approve bylaws. Before this, faculty took part in various regional center curriculum workshops (e.g., on learning contracts, programs of study, etc.) served on

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Figure 4

Empire State College Mentor Role: The Mentor View

Function	*Activities*	*Explanation*
Advisement	Academic/Vocational	Help students grapple with graduate school and vocational planning
	Personal	Listen on personal matters concerning students
	Ombudsman	Assist students with "red tape"
Student Intellectual Development	Degree Program	Help design individualized, comprehensive study plans
	Learning Contracts	Help identify learning activities and resources; instruction
	Assessment/Prior Learning	Assist in portfolio development
Evaluation	Committee Assignments	Review portfolios, degree programs, graduation candidacy
	Learning Contracts	Review student papers, journals and other work
Professional Development	Leaves	Travel, research, etc.
	Reassignment	Temporary moves to other Empire State College positions
	Reading, Workshops	Keeping up in one's specialty and interest areas
College Development	Curriculum	Participate in efforts to develop Empire State College academic programs
	Governance	Participate in center committees and College Senate, Assembly and Standing Committees

Systematic Collegewide procedures for widespread faculty involvement in curriculum development and revision post-date the mentor interviews but pre-date the Mentor Questionnaire. Thus, the Office of Research and Evaluation hoped to learn whether there were any apparent changes in the amount of mentor involvement in college curriculum development over the year. The same holds true for governance and in personnel matters where mentor involvement has steadily increased from the early days of the college. These issues are discussed in a later section.

collegewide advisory committees and task forces (e.g., on group study, master plan, academic quality) and, as individuals, served for short periods of time with the learning resources faculty designing modules. In addition, all mentors make substantial contributions to college curriculum development in their daily mentoring activities. Each contract and degree program written gives the institution a better sense of what it can do and how to do it.

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SUMMARY

The Empire State College mentor role as described by the mentors, has five aspects: advisement, student intellectual development, evaluation, professional development, participation in college

development (Figure 4). Mentors generally serve students in face-to-face conferences in which they together discuss student concerns, design degree programs and learning contracts, work on portfolios for advanced standing and discuss contract work. Mentors also make evaluations of student work in these sessions. Another part of the mentor role involves small groups: governance meetings, modest amounts of group study with students, orientation presentations, assessment and graduation reviews, committee assignments and participation in various curriculum development task forces. Overall, mentors seem to be performing the role set for them in the "official" statement.

As one follow-up to our June 2006 Academic Conference, "Prior Learning Assessment: How Student Prior Learning Alters the Academic Landscape," *All About Mentoring* will publish a special issue dealing with relevant topics. We are looking for materials on a wide range of issues, questions and problems concerning academic planning and the assessment of prior learning. Reflections on theories of experiential learning, on the goals, demands, and day-to-day work of prior learning evaluation, and on theories and practices of academic planning (among other topics) would be most welcome.

This issue of *All About Mentoring* will be published in spring 2007. Please send your contributions to Alan Mandell by January 15, 2007.

Crystal Scriber, 1988

In Memoriam Crystal Scriber

Deborah Amory,
Central New York Center

Nearly 50 people gathered on March 3 at Reed and Jackie Coughlan's house in Clinton, New York to remember and celebrate Crystal's life. The event was appropriately elegant, with delicious and plentiful catered food, beer, wine, water and coffee. Nearly all of the long term and many of the newer mentors, professional and support staff from the Central New York Center were able to attend, as were John Spissinger and Darrell Leavitt from Plattsburgh, along with former students, mentors and staff, and a few friends from the area. Joe Moore, passing Utica on the thruway, was able to drop by later in the afternoon to pay his respects. Everyone's presence was tremendously appreciated, as were the calls and e-mails from those who could not attend.

A recurring theme in the days leading up to this gathering was that, given current events in the college, and the general state of the world, Crystal's passing gave us all pause to stop and think about what really matters. What really does matter is how we lead our lives and how we bury our dead, as Zora Neale Hurston once put it. And as Joanne Corsica admonished me, "we might bicker and fight like hell, but we also know how to come together and support each other in times like these."

Reed and company set up a collection of Crystal's photographs, artwork and publications so that we could see and remember Crystal's work and life. It struck me how vibrant the colors were, how impressive the accomplishments. And after

having the chance to view the artwork, greet old friends and colleagues, sample the delicious fare, we gathered in the living room to share thoughts and memories.

Peter Perkins, whose career with the college started in Utica, described being very creatively mentored by Crystal. He also read e-mail expressing condolences and sympathy from afar, including that of Alan Mandell, Wayne Ouderkirk and Alice Lai on behalf of the arts area of study mentors. I read some prepared remarks, and over the course of an hour or so others shared their stories of Crystal, Utica, the center and the college. What follows is an eclectic sampling of words and thoughts that hopefully captures some of the spirit of the event.

The woman who owns the stable where Crystal boards her horse recalled the day that Crystal announced she was simply going to ride her horse home. "But Crystal … he hasn't been saddled recently … it's a long way … ." Ride her horse home she did. It must have been a sight to see Crystal leisurely trotting her horse along those lovely, winding country roads in Clinton. The horse lady allowed that usually, it's the trainers who tell the horse owners what to do; with Crystal it was always the other way around.

John Spissinger artfully recounted the assessment-meeting-with-chickens story, years ago at Reed's house. Crystal was a devoted environmentalist and shared John's passion for sustainable living. As John had started raising chickens, he offered to share a brood with Crystal, who loved the fresh eggs. Crystal said sure, bring a half dozen, so John showed up for the assessment meeting at Reed's house with five chickens and a rooster in hand. They put the carefully constructed, ventilated box in Crystal's car … and somehow by the end of the assessment meeting, the chickens had all escaped. They were happily perched in a row on the back seat of the car, as if in their roost, pooping away. John did note that when Crystal eventually had a fight with the rooster, and ended up in the emergency room, it was the rooster and chickens who met an untimely fate, joining others in the pet cemetery behind Crystal's house.

A few folks, including Debbie Bonamassa, the Utica Unit secretary, noted that Crystal

could turn any event into a party, and for that essential skill she will be sorely missed. Someone mentioned the infamous lobster salad and champagne lunch that Crystal recently organized for Stephanie Cunningham, who has always been unusually happy to drive to Utica to provide tech support. Several people noted that the Utica Unit was like a welcoming family.

Roz Dow recalled watching the Olympics last month, knowing Crystal was sick, and she heard Frank Sinatra sing "My Way." She thought, immediately, that song was written for Crystal. And Roz's husband John described the phone calls at home that he would get from Crystal: "John, did you know that today is Valentine's day?" "Why, yes, Crystal, I did." "Well … I think Roz would like some flowers." And given Crystal's always indirect but solicitous and pointed observations, it only seemed logical to drive post haste to the florist to buy the flowers.

Reed shared the fact that, to the end, Crystal maintained she'd caught the flu when she went to the doctor's office. Hence her name in recent months: the queen of denial. And the other, single word Reed associates with Crystal, and her life, is "fabulous." Reed also explained how fearless a new mentor Crystal had been, chairing the Academic Personnel Committee as a quarter-time mentor, against Reed's well-intentioned advice. She said, simply, "of course I can do that." When Crystal decided to do something, she just did it.

Tammy, Crystal's housekeeper for the past six years, described how she was hired by Crystal initially to care for the garden, only after she had proven to Crystal her gardening skills. She recalled planting hundreds of bulbs with Crystal – or Tammy planting while Crystal directed. And there were Tammy and Reed working in the garden, sweating in the hot summer sun, while Crystal disappeared … and then reappeared with tall, cool glasses of delicious drink for them.

A former student of Crystal's recounted how Crystal had taught her photography, had in fact taught her how to see the world differently, thousands of photographs later. She now notices the dew drops on leaves, and emphasized that Crystal always had a

kind and encouraging word about her work, no matter how bad it might be.

John, Reed's brother, remembered the plentiful feasts that Crystal would cook in exchange for work – and said that the one thing he most admired about Crystal was her absolute refusal to worry about what anyone else thought of her. In many ways, this was a theme throughout the day.

I will end with just a few thoughts about this deeply moving afternoon. What occurs to me is that we are a wild and wacky bunch, us academics, we who live and work in the academy. Someone observed how intense and intimate the lives of mentors are, particularly those who work in small units, over decades of time. This is a fact, and you could see it in the room, and hear it in the stories recounted both privately and collectively. In many ways it's not surprising that Crystal only retired some 27 days before she died. And I think this gathering of colleagues, students, friends and college administrators was a fitting celebration for Crystal Scriber – an artist and an academic, a lady and a diva, remembered in all her dramatic and occasionally shy glory.

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These were the words I spoke on March 3:

If I had one wish today, it would be that I had met Crystal 29 years ago, when she first came to work for the college. When Chris Rounds first showed up for work as well. I wish that I could have somehow witnessed MaryNell Morgan's orientation at the Utica offices, or seen Bob Carey with long hair, cigarette in hand, waxing metaphorical at statewide meetings that – as he wrote in an e-mail to me – always included Crystal and Reed, Reed and Crystal.

That would be my wish, and yet I am thankful that I did get a chance to meet her some two and a half years ago. I will always remember my first visit to Utica, and my first professional interaction with the infamous Crystal Scriber. I had been thoroughly forewarned: she could be difficult, she could be demanding. But I was not prepared for her presence, her self-presentation, the way she could command even an empty room.

When I met her, Crystal was sitting at her desk, working … or pretending to work.

After I said hello, she showed me a digital photograph that she was creating on her computer. I admired the vibrant colors, the artful composition, the beauty of it all. And she leaned back in her chair, and turned to smile at me in that way that she had, and I was immediately charmed. I had been prepared for demanding, prepared for difficult, but not prepared in the least for the charm of Crystal Scriber. Two and a half years ago, when I first met her, that charm, that presence, was still a force to be reckoned with.

Our relationship, unfortunately, was not to be an entirely peaceful one. Crystal became ill during the past year, and we all worked to both support her with the compassion and care that she deserved, and to meet the daily requirements of running the office, serving the needs of her students. It was an extraordinary experience for me to witness the ways in which Crystal's colleagues in Utica tried to help her and even to hold her accountable during the last difficult year of her life. I think we all really had no idea how very ill she was. And as Crystal struggled to maintain her dignity in the face of her illness, Debbie and Roz and Reed struggled alongside her. The compassion,

caring, frustration and love they were able to demonstrate to her in these last months was truly extraordinary. Indeed, may we all find in our lifetimes a friend as devoted and caring as Reed has been, particularly as Crystal's health deteriorated and he was responsible for seeking help from an uncooperative medical system on behalf of an equally uncooperative patient.

In the end, I think Crystal quite disliked me, and in that respect again I wished we'd met in a different time and place. But for what it's worth, I really liked her, when I wasn't feeling frustrated. I could only admire Crystal's courage, her determination to carry on, the spirit that led her to argue with me, with Pat Lefor, and ultimately with Joe Moore over a printer that I had already told her the college simply could not afford to buy. (She disagreed with me, so of course she e-mailed the vice president, and then the president! And she bought the printer anyway.) This charming defiance, this spirited insistence on her own way was one of Crystal's trademarks.

And perhaps I am all too aware that the world can be a difficult place to live. The world can be particularly difficult for those

of us who are different, in one way or another. In Crystal's case I wonder if she wasn't a little too smart, a little too gifted, a little too creative? I wonder whether her defiance didn't perhaps have to do with understanding certain things about the world and refusing to bow to all of its many dictates. For the world can be a difficult place to live. Crystal, I think, knew something of this truth. And while Crystal had her share of difficulties, as we all do, she also had so very much more.

In remembering Crystal, I would highlight her dedication to her students, and particularly the ways in which she supported and encouraged her art students. The annual art show in Utica of student work was simply tremendous. I would also highlight the mutual devotion she shared with her dog Poole, her beloved horse, her dedication to the living spirits of the animal world and her garden, the beautiful house that she built.

Crystal was an inimitable presence in Utica, and in Empire State College, for nearly 30 years. It was her charming defiance, her spirit, her insistence on dignity that most impressed me in these past few years of her life.

Submissions to *All About Mentoring*

If you have read a book or article that interested you; attended a stimulating conference; had a valuable, surprising or difficult mentoring experience, or a "mentoring moment" you would be willing to describe, please consider *All About Mentoring*. If you have a comment on any part of this issue or on topics/concerns relevant to our mentoring community; have developed written materials for your students that may be of good use to others; have a scholarly paper-in-progress or a talk that you presented, we would welcome it. If you have a short story, poem, drawings or photographs; have reports on your reassignments and sabbaticals, consider sharing them with *All About Mentoring.*

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 winter 2007. Please send your contributions to Alan Mandell by October 15, 2006.

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