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Very special thanks to

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and great patience.

On the quotes in this issue:

Each issue of All About Mentoring contains a sprinkling of quotes from authors gathered in the hope of provoking our thinking, making us aware of new ideas, and connecting our mentoring work with a larger world of teaching and learning. The quotes in this issue are taken from a single writer, Mike Rose, who is a professor in the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. While some of Rose's work has dealt with the schooling of young people, other writings have focused on the skills, insights and learning of working adults. All are relevant to us and carry a critical message: "But it is not terror that fosters learning, it is hope, everyday heroics, the power of the common play of the human mind."

(Lives on the Boundary, 242).

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EDITORIAL



The Weight

*But when we get to the end
he wants to start all over again*

“Stage Freight,” J.R. Robertson

Where were we?

The “academic revolution” (Jencks and Riesman’s 1968 term) of the last half-century was directly linked to a critique of higher education and, indeed, to schooling more generally. Three dimensions stood out.

One concerned access: too many people were being denied entry to university because of barriers of race, gender and class. Too many people were stuck without the opportunity to earn the certifications that could lead them to better jobs, more income, a new status, and a more prosperous life for their children. ‘Open up those doors,’ people demanded. ‘Break down those stately ivory towers. We want in.’

The second critique concerned the methods of teaching and the assumptions about educating that administrators, teachers and students took for granted: too many were not learning. Too many classrooms were shaped to puff up the authority of teachers, to squash students, and to perpetuate narrow, if not completely distorted assumptions about knowledge. ‘Notice us,’ people implored. ‘We have voices, experiences and histories.’ ‘Make this relevant; we’re not cogs in a machine.’

And there was a third dimension too. The university was, as Kenneth Clark wrote in

April 1968, part of a “sick society.” “This is a sick, sick society in which our educational institutions are chief instruments in the perpetuation of the sickness, in training human beings to rationalize the sickness and to exploit it for themselves.” ‘It’s our obligation to imagine communities of learning committed to a truly democratic society,’ people protested. ‘We need alternatives that don’t perpetuate a “sick” status quo and alienated souls living alienated lives. We need change.’

Empire State College joined many other “anti-university colleges” (Jencks and Riesman) to take on all three dimensions: these institutions provided more access for Blacks, women, working people and adults, and more flexibility of place and time; they developed alternative degree programs, contract learning, models of mentoring, and what Ted Sizer in his wonderful *Horace’s Compromise* (on life in high schools) called “personalized instruction.” And, too, they nourished what Jencks and Riesman describe as “nodes of resistance” to the society at large. Here were mini-democracies in which the experiences of dialogue, compromise, and shared deep exploration offered all of us practice not in conformity but in critique.

Where are we now?

While the current economic crisis has slashed expenditures for public education and made access too precarious for far too many, it’s impossible not to be aware of the changes in higher education across the world. Places like Empire State College didn’t exist when Jencks and Riesman wrote, and look at the success of new for-profit institutions in the United States like The University of Phoenix, Kaplan and Capella. They are providing extraordinary access. Canada’s Athabasca University has about 40,000 students; The Open University UK now has more than 200,000 students; the Bangladesh Open University has close to half-a-million students, and the China Central Radio and TV University (China OU) enrolls more than three million. There is no doubt that the educational landscape has changed forever.

Many of these institutions (whatever one thinks of the money-making goals of the

for-profits and the various kinds of social-changing goals of the others) also are incubators of innovation, trying out new ways to connect teachers and students, calling on new technologies to design and make learning resources more accessible, crossing intra- and inter-institutional barriers, questioning the legitimacy of old ways, and extending expertise beyond the hold of any single university. The call – the demand – for a more “open university” continues to be heard. Millions can attest to that. To deny this “academic revolution” would be silly.

And yet, what about Clark’s powerful claim that in a most fundamental way, the university only perpetuates the status quo and “rationalize[s] the sickness” of contemporary society? That is, what about the ways in which even institutions-of-change, those that led and continue to lead the “academic revolution” have been overwhelmed by the weight of this world?

We can’t dodge these questions through self-congratulation, however heart-felt. We can’t shy away from acknowledging the specific ways in which, right now, we are reproducing the “sickness” that so many institutions wanted to cure.

There are so many examples that nibble away at us: a preoccupation with finding and managing efficiencies; an obsession with manufacturing and packaging pre-set programs; the reassertion of the power of experts, power-points in hand; the fantasy of creating clever courses that, in the end, preclude meaningful student participation; the ghost of the traditional classroom as the implicit model of proper instruction (whether online or face-to-face); a reduction of the student to the role of anonymous consumer buying the stuff offered up by the well-stocked seller and ready to complain if it’s not delivered; a world-wide reserve army of low-rung faculty called on to fill in the instructional gaps; a fantasy that if only we could find the perfect technical fix, we’d be finally freed from the bumps and bruises of dealing with one another; more elaborate divisions of labor that echo the academic bureaucracies we once railed against, and, overall, the myriad ways in which we, as individuals and institutions, succumb to a

mad race of thoughtlessness, which is what we claim we hated from the start.

Many have argued that the history of education can be characterized as a long series of “academic revolutions” spurred on by critique. More people more effectively learn more about what they need to learn, and society as a whole becomes fairer and healthier over time. But, so often, our resistance to the sickness around us is just too weak. We’re weighed down, make excuses for our behavior, get angry at others, are frightened, and, so many many times, we reinvent what we did before.

Perhaps, right now, alternatives are in order: we might just have to “start all over again.”

Alan Mandell

From *Why School? Reclaiming Education for All of Us* (2009, 37-38)

All of the foregoing helped me develop a sense of myself as knowledgeable and capable of using what I know. This is a lovely and powerful quality – cognitive, emotional, and existential all in one. It has to do with identity and agency, with how we define ourselves, not only in matters academic but also in the way we interact with others and with institutions. It has to do with how we move through our economic and civic lives. Education gave me the competence and confidence to independently seek out information and make decisions, to advocate for myself and my parents and those I taught to probe political issues, to resist simple answers to messy social problems, to assume that I could figure things out and act on what I learned. In a sense, this was the best training I could have gotten for vocation and citizenship.

A Tale of Freedom and Temptation, Part 2 of 2

Eric Ball, Center for Distance Learning

What follows is the second of a two-part series about the development of the Center for Distance Learning (CDL) course Food and Drink in Cultural Context. In this part, Eric Ball discusses the development of a revised version of the 2003 course (discussed in the previous issue of All About Mentoring #36) during 2008 - 2009. Also included in this issue of All About Mentoring is an essay by colleague Menoukha Case, "A Tale of Negotiated Agency," that also takes up the experience of the course, Food and Drink in Cultural Context.

Dialogue and choice: A critique of version one and where to go next

For the next few years after creating Food and Drink in Cultural Context, I continued thinking about how it was working. I could see that students were demonstrating knowledge of food and culture. Comments from students in the course on end-of-term surveys and the Student Assessment of Learning Experience (SALE) suggested that, on the whole, there was significant student satisfaction as well as student perception of learning. My own overall sense was that there was learning going on each term, even if I secretly remained skeptical about whether it was sufficient or appropriate, let alone transformative or even just meaningful in terms of addressing the so-called human condition (one of our definitions of liberal learning). I was therefore tempted to tell myself, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Nonetheless, in terms of both my evolving understanding of mentoring and education in general, and my actual experiences as an instructor with students in the course, I remained unconvinced that the course had become what it might. Above all, I became preoccupied with various aspects of one particular concept as it relates to dialogue – choice.

I continued to take as my starting principle the idea that "[c]uriosity and thus learning

thrive when connected to and/or emergent from contexts which are familiar and meaningful to the learner" (Herman and Mandell 2004:27). And, I continued to believe that critical learning not only thrived, but was probably predicated on such familiarity and meaningfulness. Increasingly, though, I was less sure that I had created a space and a structure that was consistent with this principle.

Sure, I had relaxed the seemingly heavy-handed approach of many other academics in the critical humanities by including a range of reading materials during the term and by intending these readings primarily for preliminary exposure and inspiration, but how could I be sure that I wasn't still being too heavy-handed? What if that which looked like a broad range to me was in fact, from the perspective of students' potential interests, really just too narrow? For example, was it really necessary to include a fixed set of "course concepts," however underdetermined these might be, as tools for enabling students to learn to be less uncritical? Was it really necessary for all students, every term, to be exposed to the exact same "variety of interpretations and approaches" – things which I had already determined in advance of my knowing anything about the students? In short, what if I was still presuming far too much about what was "familiar and meaningful" to individual students?

In practice, I was finding out that there were "food and culture" topics that students believed they had a genuine stake in that weren't much covered in the predesigned course readings and assignment options – such as culturally-related ethical issues in food marketing, and socio-cultural expectations about food, fat and body image. The problem, though, was that I wasn't learning about these interests until students disclosed them in the closing assignment. Did it really take 15 weeks before students could discover what they

were interested in and curious about? Naturally, I sent them on their way with recommendations for further reading or individualized studies related to their newly articulated areas of interest, but was it too late? On the other hand, maybe all the predesigned learning activities (and the time students spent reading through the many predesigned options) were distracting them from realizing and articulating such interests much earlier. If they could have been encouraged to realize these sooner, they would have had an opportunity to act upon my recommendations during the course.

I realized that I could slightly modify the content of the course to cover such topics in future terms. Statistically speaking, this might have improved my chances of responding to the bulk of students' areas of interest, but it still would not have addressed the fundamental problem: there would potentially always be a student whose contexts and interests I had not anticipated, and who would be sufficiently distracted by the given course content to delay recognition and articulation of heartfelt content until the end. This was a problem and not only a challenge because Empire State College traditionally values student-centeredness, implying that we seek to put every student at the center of our decision making, not only those students with more statistically-likely areas of interest.

What about the manner in which I had tried to encourage dialogue about the learning objectives? Sure I asked students outright what they wanted to learn and why, and put the learning goals I intended on the table from the start. But I grew skeptical about whether this was a particularly effective way to encourage dialogue. Or, to put it another way, I worried that in many cases I had primarily created the conditions for a simulacrum of dialogue. After all, dialogue occurs in discursive contexts. Many students entered the course already conditioned to understand in particular ways what it means

to be asked by the professor what one's reasons for taking a course are. Students could have readily interpreted such a move as just another hoop to jump through – an icebreaker assignment in which they were expected to say a few things that the professor ostensibly hopes to hear; an opportunity to feign interest in something to gain the approval of an authority figure; or, conversely, to indicate no particular interest whatsoever so that the professor will go easier on him or her in evaluations.

I had assumed that many students would recognize and value any opportunities to have a voice in the direction and content of their learning. Having taught the course many times, I became less confident about this assumption. When students turned in their first small assignment (describing their interest in the subject matter, what they might like to learn, and why they signed up for this particular course), I made a point of responding to every one of them in ways that emphasized the freedom they were granted, and suggesting possibilities for doing the course in a way that more closely aligned with their particular interests, regardless of predesigned options for readings and assignments. Rarely, though, did they take me up on it. I would receive a nice “Thank you” or “Okay, I’ll think about it” and the (simulacrum of) dialogue about the direction and content of learning would come to an end.

To be sure, in a class of about 20, there might be one or two – perhaps the more adventurous spirits – who did take advantage of such freedom, and actively tailored their work in response to their interests. For everyone else, though, the most that happened was that different students chose different assignment options (from the predesigned options) as well as various orders in which to do their assignments. Yet, since I did not require them to provide any rationale for their choices, it remained unclear why they were making those choices, and to what extent they themselves knew why they were making them. Were they making choices so that their work would connect to what was particularly meaningful to them, at least unconsciously?

I realized that I could modify the course slightly to require them to provide an

explicit rationale for each choice they made, but I had a hunch that: first, this would be perceived by many as yet another hoop to jump through; and, second, that this might be an overly convoluted and “a posteriori” algorithm – examine your options, select, and explain – for encouraging students to connect their individual choices with their particular contexts. After all, one could passively read through options and make a selection without being able to offer any explanation for that selection. (If, on the other hand, one had been contemplating the reasons as part of the choice-making process, the explanation would be nearly automatic.)

As a result of a “debate” at an All College Conference between then president, Joseph Moore, and Northeast Center mentor, Sylvain Nagler, that I had recently attended about the rolling out of the learning opportunities inventory (LOI), I had been thinking a lot about this issue. One point that came out in that discussion was the potentially significant difference between trying to articulate a learning interest/need and then finding (or inventing) a study appropriate to that interest/need, versus examining a catalog of study options (even one that includes the option “other” – to invent a “totally individualized study”), making a selection, and then (ostensibly) justifying it after the fact. A second insight that emerged was the fact that one or the other of these approaches could wind up institutionally privileged, intentionally or not. Thus, despite Moore’s assertion at the college assembly meeting that “the [LOI] technology is neutral” – that it leaves it up to the mentor and student to decide on either a contemplate-then-make-a-choice¹ or a make-a-choice-then-justify approach – the particular policies, procedures and LOI technological supports that existed, especially given the current socio-historical context (and the subjectivities of many students as learners constituted by this context), strongly encouraged students to do only an impoverished version of the latter: make-a-choice-then-justify-if-you-feel-like-it.

When it came to Food and Drink in Cultural Context, the upshot was that I realized that fundamental aspects of my course design reinforced the make-a-choice-then-justify or make-a-choice-then-optionally-

justify approach (at the expense of a contemplate-then-make-a-choice approach) for connecting students’ individual contexts with their learning activities. I had fallen prey to the dominant institutional hallucination (“common sense”) that make-a-choice-then-justify and make-a-choice-then-optionally-justify approaches were always pedagogically preferable, if not the only games in town when it comes to group studies such as online courses. As a corollary, I realized that there was a world of unexplored possibility opening up in front of me when it came to the design of an online course. That is, I realized that there might be completely different ways to structure a course to support my original intentions by more carefully and more patiently enabling and encouraging students to contemplate before making choices.

Of course, this is not to say that all students would need to be encouraged to contemplate before making educational choices. Some would already be in the habit of doing so. But I was reasonably sure that many of them would not have had such experiences, especially based on my work with students over the years. In addition, conceptually speaking, it made sense that many so-called “busy working adult students” – juggling multiple responsibilities – would not habitually pause to contemplate even their own interests and learning goals provided they were handed a list of safe options to sift through and select from. Numerous experiences with actual students, and those recounted to me by several colleagues, persuaded me that many students’ short-term desire, whether or not it was ultimately in their best interest as learners, was to be told what to learn and how and to be given assurances that by simply doing what they were told they would likely achieve their stated pragmatic objectives.²

I also was suspicious that as people living in a particular kind of consumer society, our subjectivities as choice-makers were strongly conditioned by consumerism’s particular dynamics.³ Many of us, it seems, are more likely to flip through catalogs and wander up and down the aisles checking out the merchandise than to contemplate what we might desire to consume, and then to seek it on the market. We can even hire people to do the actual browsing and shopping for

us! When it comes to buying goods, maybe that's not a bad thing. But I do worry that when it comes to learning, and especially when this learning also includes learning to be an agent of one's learning, it is not so desirable. In other words, a different kind of choice-making subjectivity – one that does not resonate with that of the typical modern or postmodern shopper – needs to be nurtured and cared for in a “safe space” of effortful educational dialogue.

To summarize: dialogue between educators and students about the content and direction of learning activities is a necessary condition for connecting students' learning to contexts which are familiar and meaningful to them, but it is not a sufficient condition. If the institutional, social, cultural and/or historical context of such dialogue is such that it constrains what its participants can “say” to the point of excluding the very choices that would connect the activities of learning to their familiar and meaningful contexts, such discussion fails to be dialogue. And since it is unlikely in the real world that there could ever be established a neutral context for some kind of pure and authentic dialogue where nothing of potential value is excluded, it is especially important that educators try to come to grips with the particular textures, opportunities and limitations of the contexts in which they and their students operate, so that they might discover and remove the barriers to dialogue over which they do have some authority and control. In particular, in the context of modern or postmodern consumer societies, our most likely habits of choice-making comprise one such barrier – overly conditioned as such habits are, or at least constantly reinforced, by a particular shopping ethos at the expense of an ethos of contemplate-then-make-a-choice.

For my work on the Food and Drink in Cultural Context course, then, the practical criticism was that it had left a major barrier to dialogue in place. By offering lists of predesigned assignment options (and by offering the choice to design one's own options), it reinforced a particular shopping ethos as the only choosing game in town. It made it that much more difficult for students to learn or practice an ethos of contemplate-then-make-a-choice. For some students, it likely raised the task of pondering and acting upon

what they wanted to learn to an almost insurmountable degree of difficulty.

The practical challenge became: How might I remove this barrier? What kind of course structure would better encourage students who are not likely to contemplate before making a choice to do so without forcing other students who are already likely to do so to have to follow step-by-step algorithms that supposedly model the contemplating process? Moreover, since some students would likely feel very uncomfortable or even annoyed by the fact that they were being asked to contemplate-then-make-a-choice, how could this encouragement happen without fostering so much frustration and despair that they give up altogether? In short, what kind of course structure might provide enough comfort for students to be willing to stick around and endure the potential discomfords entailed by learning in the context of my assumption that learners should be, or learn to become, freer and more responsible agents of their learning – whatever such learning happens to be?⁴

Seeds of a revised approach: Questions and freedom

Given all this, I found it imperative to try giving Food and Drink in Cultural Context a complete overhaul and to make the move to Version 2.0. I would leave the overall intentions and scope of the course about the same, but go back to the drawing board when it came to the implementation. Were there others kinds of course structures which could more effectively remove the barriers to dialogue that I had implemented by using predesigned options in Version 1.0? Were there other structures which would indeed provide that “safe space” for students to practice, in an unconvoluted way, contemplating before making choices, in order that their learning activities more closely and meaningfully address their unique contexts?

Two particularly forceful and broad convictions became clearer in my mind, comprising principles informing how I could proceed. One of these was that, “[a] single question, so long as it is important to the learners, can open the world” (Herman and Mandell 2004:16). In earlier work, a temptation that I succumbed to over

and over again was that of authoring (in advance) required or optional questions for students to address – especially assignment questions and discussion questions. I became convinced that I needed to try out doing the opposite: to encourage students to learn how to author their own questions without overly intimidating them by asserting that this is something easy, or that a college student is supposed to know how to do this already, let alone how to do it well. Indeed, the more I thought about it, the more I realized that much of what we do as educators leaves students dependent on various “authorities” (teachers, journalists, advertisers, etc.) for their questions, leaving many of them unable to formulate useful and important questions for themselves. If throughout a formal education the students' questions are constantly handed to them by us educators, how can we expect them to be particularly skillful at formulating their own questions by the time they graduate?⁵

Secondly, I adopted as a working hypothesis the idea that for many students who have difficulty focusing their attention temporarily on a particular line of inquiry (even when it is of their own choosing), articulating curiosity in the form of a question might resonate with the development or practice of another question-related habit that seems especially pertinent to inquiry – namely, asking evaluative questions of oneself: “Is the work I am doing addressing my stated interest?” “Am I making unwarranted assertions?” “Are my arguments illogical?” “Am I communicating to my audience with sufficient clarity?” – and so on. Sensitized to the socio-cultural relativism of communicative norms (e.g., Briggs) and even of patterns of thought (e.g., *The Geography of Thought*), I realized that this might seem commonsensical to me only because of my own socio-cultural background and conditioning.⁶ So, while I decided to maintain the emphasis on questions per se (instead of, say, “articulations of curiosity”), I did so under the assumption that while working with students, I might have to back away from it, especially on the occasion of a student who was made so uncomfortable by this form as to completely give up.

My second broad conviction was that I needed to remove “classroom management”

– the placement and enforcement of mostly arbitrary procedural prescriptions on students – from the picture as much as possible. As I thought back on my own college experiences, I recalled how classroom management was of course prevalent, but not nearly as prevalent as it seems to be in this college. I worried that for many students, courses predicated on lots of classroom management were doing more to encourage or reinforce deep learning about “following the rules,” about learning as a necessarily passive activity, about “what school is,” about “what teachers do,” and about “how education sucks,” than deep or lasting learning about the subject matter at hand. On a more practical note, I thought this would address the practical criticism of “individualized” courses (often leveled by those who have not tried them) that they take more time to teach; that is, why not convert as much of the time that is usually spent on the enforcement of arbitrary prescriptions to time spent on more substantive work with individual students in terms of actual content and direction of learning?

If students were in fact free to pursue questions that genuinely interested them, I thought they might be enticed into undertaking learning activities, and as an instructor, I would not feel the need to do so much managing or policing of the classroom. Of course, inasmuch as many students had already become accustomed to such policing in their schooling, even at the college level, I realized that it wouldn't be easy to convince them that they were in a different situation, in order that they might be more easily and thoroughly enticed. And, I gradually came to understand that the only way that I would be able to imagine creating and trying out a course structure that would address all of the aforementioned concerns was to replicate – as much as possible – a relatively free and open version of the conditions of “real life” academic inquiry. For example, as a scholar, I have had a fair amount of freedom to determine what my questions are and how to address them, but no predetermined list of questions from which I am expected to choose. I have a lot of flexibility when I develop my schedule for working on my projects. I can aim to produce something for this journal or that

journal (each with differing expectations regarding the length, style, methods, and so on). I can choose to give conference talks and then write a paper, to write a book for an academic publisher or a trade publisher, to write for more or for less reputable journals with higher or lower standards of peer review. If the expectations of one of my professional associations become too limiting, I can join a different one and try out my ideas there. I can work more independently or seek out collaborators. I can read then write, or write while I read. And so on.

Why not let students experience analogous freedoms as learners? The only potentially good argument I could imagine against such freedom was that it might undermine the very possibility or likelihood that students would learn at all because so much freedom (the lack of “training wheels” as it were) would leave them so dumbfounded or frustrated about how to proceed, so generally unsatisfied with the experience, that all good intentions would be thwarted. I thought that such an argument was patronizing and infantilizing of students, but then again how could I be sure that as learners some students were not “infants” (perhaps through no fault of their own)? Nonetheless, I continued to believe it was too presumptuous to recreate the course under infantilizing assumptions. The real issue, it seemed to me, was not one of forcing on the “training wheels,” but of trying to ensure that students felt supported, so that they would be more likely to embrace freedom instead of fearing it, and know where to turn for extra support should such freedom ever begin to feel overwhelming, or should it lead them down a path where they stumble and fall (of course, a potentially significant moment of learning nonetheless). In short, I decided that freedom and support were two of the most important ingredients for the new version of the course I was starting to envision.

The “learning contract”

I began to sketch the basic philosophy, structure and activities of the “course,” guided by the form of the Empire State College “learning contract” with its three sections of purpose, learning activities, method and criteria for evaluation. I

described the purpose as follows, aiming to be succinct:

The purpose of this course is to plan and conduct critical inquiry, individually and collaboratively, into particular issues of food and culture that are of especial interest to the students (and instructor) who are participating. It is assumed that students who take this course are as interested in understanding these issues as is the instructor. Also, while it may be presumed that the instructor and the students already possess varying degrees of (provisional) knowledge or expertise about food and culture, it is also assumed that no one “has all the answers” about such issues already.

Note that I provided no advance definition or description of what might be considered “critical inquiry.” Also note that the stated assumption that “students who take this course are as interested in understanding these issues as is the instructor” was meant to be a strategic assumption (“the course proceeds as if this were the case”), not necessarily an empirical claim. My hope was that even though different students might end up having widely varying interests in each other's particular issues, the fact that they had all come to a course on food and culture could mean that there also was a baseline shared interest in any and all food-related issues. I thought this was important to mention because, just as a scholar might be more interested in his or her own particular research, s/he is still ostensibly interested enough in broader questions to engage with other colleagues about their particular projects.

I attempted to provide a snapshot of the flow of the semester by describing the fundamental, though very open-ended, learning activities (which I will discuss in more detail below):

The primary learning activities of this course will include:

- Preliminary brainstorming of issues surrounding food and drink in cultural context, centered around our attentive viewing of several pieces of video material;

- The formulation (on one's own, or as part of a voluntarily convened "team" of students) of an open-ended question which "matters" about a food-and-culture-related issue – inquiries into these questions will comprise the bulk of students' work throughout seven weeks of the term);
- Turning in as few or as many drafts of one or more papers and/or projects representing the student's, or student team's, inquiry (for feedback and constructive criticism from other students, and from the instructor);
- Reading a variety of academic papers or other materials about food and culture and, when feeling compelled to do so, posting comments about them. (Such materials will be posted by the instructor, and intended to supplement and/or to problematize students' ideas, concepts, factual knowledge, etc. as inquires are being conducted.)
- Evaluation of the inquiries of others, and "self-"evaluating one's own (or one's team's) inquiry, making sure to take into serious account the evaluative comments of the instructor and other students.

I also made it explicit that the online course was not so much a repository for instruction, but rather, "a virtual space to support the kinds of communication (between students and instructor and among students) which are likely to be important ingredients to successful inquiry."

Since students were bound to notice the open-endedness of the activities described, and thus possibly to feel imminent panic, I also attempted to provide some supportive language that acknowledged, yet also provided a rationale for, any discomforts of freedom:

For students who are accustomed to the imposition of rigid structure in their studies, and who may even crave to be "told what to do" in precise detail every step along the way, the open-endedness of this course may feel uncomfortable, at least at first. However, the imposition of rigid learning activities by an instructor arguably does a disservice to students

in the long run, since the very nature of critical inquiry involves dealing with unpredictability and open-endedness through getting oneself organized, through ongoing planning and re-planning, and through seeking reasonable kinds and quantities of support from others when deemed appropriate or helpful. The very (minimalist) structure of this course is thus meant to create conditions for inquiry that are as realistic as possible, albeit within the parameters of a 4-credit asynchronous virtual class.

In addition, instead of getting into a lot of detail about "netiquette," or requirements about how and when students should respond to one another, I briefly emphasized the overall spirit of collaboration I was trying to promote in the interest of comfort, in the interest of learning:

It also is assumed that all participants will contribute to ensuring that the environment for these activities is characterized by, and encourages, mutual respect, mutual support and mutual constructive criticism.

I also tried to let students know that they could always ask for help, but in a way that continued to emphasize collaboration:

The instructor will be available to address any "practical" questions or concerns that might arise concerning the clarification of expectations outlined in this learning contract or anywhere else throughout the course. Except where personal issues or privacy is concerned, students will be expected to ask such questions in a public space (i.e., not by "course e-mail"), just in case there are other students who might benefit from the questions or answers. We are here to learn together.

Of course, I realized that some students might feel too intimidated to ask even impersonal questions in front of other students, fearing they might look "stupid." My assumption was that if it came down to a student having to decide between not asking such a question at all versus asking it in private despite the stated expectation, they would choose to do the latter. (There was nothing else to prevent them from doing so.) But I realized that this was an

assumption, not something I could always take for granted. In teaching, I would need to stay on the lookout for any indications that a student was possibly confused about expectations but reluctant to ask about them.

When it came to describing the method and criteria for evaluation, I realized that unlike in many other courses where the focus is exclusively on the instructor's evaluation of the students, a more collaborative approach was in order. I put together some words that sought to de-emphasize evaluation as a schooling moment per se, and instead focused on evaluation as an integral part of inquiry in general:

Ideally, inquiry is rooted in the inquirer's desire to learn. Inquirers primarily seek the rewards that come from what is discovered or learned (or even what is unlearned) – not from the awarding of grades per se. Thus, very little attention will be paid during this course to grades (none, in fact, until the very end).

At the same time, it is just as important to recognize that quality inquiry is rooted in ongoing critical appraisal and evaluation of one's work – both self-evaluation, and the appraisals of other interlocutors and peers. Therefore, throughout the term, the instructor and fellow students will be expected to provide evaluative comments and constructive suggestions to each student and/or student team about their work – especially when, but not only when, these are solicited by the inquirer or inquirers.

Evaluative feedback and constructive criticism will be expected to be provided about the learning which is demonstrated in the actual results of inquiry (e.g., papers and/or projects), and in statements made in general discussions (e.g., about readings).

Having framed evaluation in this way, I then listed the evaluation criteria that I might normally use as the faculty, but tried to make it explicit that students should be thinking in terms of such criteria when evaluating themselves and one another, and not only waiting for "the authority" to come in to pass judgment on their work:

In providing such evaluative feedback (to self and others), the students and the instructor should focus on a number of conventional academic criteria: Learning should be evaluated for its demonstration of close and sound familiarity with readings or other materials that are being considered. Learning should be evaluated for its being coherently sustained and precisely written or articulated. It should be evaluated not for individual opinions per se, but rather for the critical reflection and substantive evidence and/or credible argumentation offered in support of such opinions. It should be evaluated for its engagement with questions, concerns or disagreements raised by those who have critiqued or appraised it in an earlier iteration. It should be evaluated for thorough and complete documentation of sources, consistent with academic expectations and with all relevant college policies.

This also was the first place in the course where I would emphasize that in fact a self-evaluation ought to be a “self”-evaluation. That is, it ought to take into consideration (though not necessarily agree with) the evaluations that others have made of your work:

Students whom the instructor deems should receive credit for this course (that is, who have “passed”), will receive a final narrative evaluation. Ideally, this evaluation will be a draft of the student’s own critical “self”-evaluation – although it comes not only from the “self,” but also takes into account the evaluative comments of the instructor and other students.

Note the insinuation that if a student’s “self”-evaluation took into due consideration the ongoing evaluations of the instructor and of other students – that is, insofar as such evaluations were in fact provided in light of stated evaluation criteria – then such a “self”-evaluation would likely approach an “objective” appraisal of the student’s work. This was meant to suggest that the rigor of an evaluation (its potential to approach “objectivity”) was not rooted in breaking things down in advance through rubrics, percentages and other numerical

calculations, but rather through applying shared evaluation criteria as reasonably as possible in an ongoing way as part of a collaborative process. (I leave it as an exercise to you, the reader of this essay, to determine how to deal with the question of final grades, as distinct from the final narrative evaluations, in a manner that is consistent with the intentions and spirit of the course as I have described it.)

Learning activities restructured

The premise of the course is that each student will conduct inquiry that addresses a question that emerges from his or her own contexts, using methods which might be experienced as meaningful and also challenging.

What do you want to learn? Brainstorming Issues

I decided to design the first several weeks of the course in a way that might facilitate students settling (provisionally) on issues and questions of genuine interest to themselves (and presumably others).

On the one hand, I realized that it would not be prudent to assume that all students coming into the course would be immediately aware of what they wanted to learn about “food and culture” if asked outright. On the other hand, I also realized that there might be one or more students who were so aware. I considered the possibility that I could just ask students outright what they wanted to learn, and to provide optional activities for those who needed extra support for figuring out a tentatively satisfying answer to that question. However, since I wanted to create conditions for inquiry that acknowledged its ultimately inescapable sociality, I decided to approach it differently.

In the first module, “Brainstorm Possible Issues for Inquiry,” I began by introducing briefly the concept of an issue as a matter of public concern and debate. I worried that the imposition of issues, as opposed to allowing topics more generally, might create unnecessary discomfort for some students. After all, even a student who already had an idea about what s/he wanted to learn about food and culture might find it daunting to have to settle on a single

issue. On the other hand, I believed that any topic, ultimately, is inseparable from one or more issues (especially from a humanities perspective, and this is a humanities course) and that the emphasis on issues might help students refine their focus, while also beginning to prepare for the critical spirit that would follow throughout the course.⁸ Keeping all this in mind, my idea was not to punish students for suggesting topics which were not issues in any obvious way. On the contrary, if students did this, it would provide an opportunity to raise questions (e.g., “In what sense is this topic a matter of public concern or debate?”). If students had topics they wanted to pursue, but were unable to formulate as an issue, my plan was to allow them to go forward anyway, with the hope that eventually discerning issues in their topic might become a significant aspect of their learning in the course.

After the brief introduction to the concept of an issue, I required students to view several food-related videos (usually documentaries or films) and to brainstorm issues that they thought the videos focused attention on, as well as any others that they thought were not evident there but were nevertheless important in some way. My justification was that this activity would help students who were looking for ideas to brainstorm possible areas of interest, not by asking them to choose from a predesigned list of options, but by thinking about the videos and interpreting them in whatever ways they were comfortable doing so. (I settled on videos as a way to highlight some possible issues that might be in the air for the public in general, but in a more sustained way than something like newspaper articles. The course activities did not depend in any integral way on which videos were used, and could be effortlessly changed from term to term as appropriate.) On the other hand, it would encourage students who already had ideas about what they wanted to learn to contextualize their interests with respect to other cultural materials. Additionally, it would provide all students an opportunity to learn together about what some potential issues are, as well as how these might be articulated. Students (not to mention the instructor) would be free to respond to one another’s contributions (or not) to the

extent and from whatever perspectives made particular sense to them.

Following two weeks of brainstorming issues, I set aside one week for students to compile a “master list” of issues. I thought this activity might be useful to different students in different ways. For example, for at least some students, it could be an opportunity to revisit the many issues that had been brainstormed in the previous two weeks. As more students chimed in with their own individual lists, there would likely be overlapping issues and different ways of saying the same thing. Additionally, it would lead to a product (master list) that might prove useful to students who would still be craving for a menu of options of what to study. However, this menu would have come from the students themselves, including, in part, from the very students who might be craving it. It seemed to me that this might offer another bridge toward contemplating-then-making choices for such students. Finally, inasmuch as I left the logistics of the activity up to the students, I thought it was yet another way to emphasize the freedoms (and associated responsibilities) of real-life collaborative inquiry. Additionally, it might allow for a student who felt weaker on the issues but stronger on organizing skills to contribute something more.

What do you want to learn?

Formulating a Question

In the second module of the course, “Formulate Your Question for Inquiry,” I asked each student to settle on one issue of interest, and then to attempt to come up with a “working question” that would become the starting point for their inquiry over the next six weeks. The assumption was that some students might find this relatively easy to do while others would perhaps find it very challenging. I thus strove to make the activity and its purpose as clear as possible (see Figure 1 for the text of the document). I created a public discussion area where students could turn in their working questions for everyone to see, and where everyone was encouraged to provide constructive feedback to others as appropriate. This discussion area also was where the instructor would be able to offer constructive feedback as well.

Figure 1

From an Issue to a Question

Choose “Your” Issue

The core of your work this semester will involve conducting inquiry into one specific issue related to food and culture. Thus far we have been brainstorming a wide variety of issues, but the time has come for you to hone in and settle on one issue in particular that especially interests you or about which you feel especially curious. The assumption here is that the more engaging you find the issue, the more likely you will be able to rise to the challenges of investigating it for several weeks and of writing about it.

Think back over everything that you and your colleagues have been thinking about and discussing so far. Take another look at the range of issues in the class’s “master list.” Choose an issue that really grabs you. Note that it isn’t necessarily that you literally pick an issue, word for word, from the master list. Moreover, you may discover during your research that you need to modify what your issue is, or how you conceive of it. That’s normal! That’s part of the research process. Nothing here is written in stone.

Formulate a Working Question about Your Issue

Even a single issue usually turns out to be a pretty large beast, and the more one looks into it, the more dimensions to the issue one discovers, and the more information and resources one uncovers. Thus, to help encourage you to sharpen and refine your focus on the issue you have chosen, your next assignment is to formulate a specific working question about the issue that you wish to investigate.

We all ask questions all the time, so “formulating a question” might sound like a simple, even trivial affair. However, figuring out “how to ask a good question” in an academic setting is in itself a great challenge and (hopefully) a significant accomplishment. No one is assuming that you already know how to do this! Indeed, this is an important part of the learning that should occur during this course.

Once you have settled on a particular issue that you would like to spend some time and effort exploring, ask yourself: “What do I seek to learn or understand about this issue?”

The question you formulate should be rich enough for you to pursue it in some depth. That is, it should involve more than unearthing some factual information, and it should be broader than a simple “yes or no” question. Obviously you haven’t even begun to do any research on your issue yet, so don’t be surprised if trying to come up with a good working question is a challenge. Just do your best, and try to “trust the process.”

Also keep in mind that you will almost inevitably find that your question will evolve as you go to work on addressing it. That’s why it’s really just a “working question.” A good question will guide you well, but sooner or later you may find that you need to modify or change it once you start learning more about the area that it leads you to investigate.

An example

Let’s try an example (and this is only an example to help illustrate the point about formulating a question).

Suppose that you were really interested in the issue of “eating local food.” (It is clearly an issue which is publicly debated – there are groups who argue that it is necessary that we “eat local” for the sake of the future of the planet, and others

who argue that it is not realistic to “eat local” on such a large scale, and mostly a privilege of the wealthy.) What are some possible questions you might formulate about the issue in order to guide an in-depth inquiry? Here are some possibilities:

- What have been the experiences of people who have experimented with eating locally? (e.g., such as those who have tried the “100-mile diet”) (e.g., Do they find it too difficult to pull off? Do they enjoy what they eat?)
- How does “eating locally” clash with desire to eat the traditional foods of one’s cultural or ethnic heritage?
- What have been the primary arguments for and against “eating locally”?
- To what extent is “eating locally” more of an ethical or moral imperative as opposed to a merely practical problem?
- How have farmers’ markets changed the ability of people to “eat local” in recent years?
- Who (or which constituencies) stand to gain or lose the most if more people start eating locally?

In formulating a question for the issue you have chosen this semester, you should try to ask something that genuinely matters to you, a question you really desire to address through your research and analysis.

Help One Another! Use the Help You Are Offered!

Once you think you have your question, please go to the next section of this module to post it to the instructor and to the class.

In addition, read each other’s questions, and offer feedback to your peers – and read feedback about your question from your peers and the instructor. Once again, collaboration is important. Even the most experienced and talented researchers share their questions with colleagues in order to get constructive criticism.

As you receive feedback, if you want to modify or adjust your question before getting started on the research, please do so! Do your best to have settled on a “final” working question by the end of week five. (Though, as has already been mentioned, you may find yourself modifying this “final” working question as you begin to investigate it.)

Hang in There

Don’t be discouraged if this exercise turns out to be harder than you expected! Keep in mind the old proverb, “A stitch in time saves nine.” The more effort you put into formulating your question, the “easier” you should find it is to dive into conducting your inquiry in the weeks to come.

I recognize that many students are used to instructors giving them specific topics or questions and asking students to write a paper about them, how many pages it should be, etc. Doing so would make the expectations of the work less ambiguous, certainly. However, it also would mean that you would be trading in a significant amount of your freedom to learn something you really want to learn. Also, it would deprive you of this opportunity to practice formulating your own questions about things that matter to you, so you can pursue them: Since the ability to formulate good questions is arguably as important for being a successful lifelong learner as the ability to do reading, writing, research, and analysis in addressing such questions, it seems reasonable to encourage this kind of practice as well. Or, another way to say this might be as follows: When it comes to learning, the skill and talent that it takes to come up with your own directions is possibly as important, or more important, as the skill it takes to follow the directions of others.

However, this was not the only way that collaboration was enabled. I also decided that it would be liberating to allow students the option of pursuing a question for inquiry as part of a team, convened voluntarily for addressing a question of shared interest. In other words, rather than deciding in advance on their behalf that students must work alone or must work on a team, I left this decision to the students themselves. Not every real-life inquiry has this much flexibility (e.g., work on a doctoral dissertation), but many do (e.g., a researcher working on a team; a scholar writing a jointly-authored paper). Granted, students had only a few weeks to get to know one another, even if most all course activities were public. Perhaps most students would not feel comfortable enough to join up with others even upon discovering a common interest (assuming they ever would in the rather contrived context of a semester-long class). So it wasn’t clear exactly how much more freedom students were truly being given by this option, but it didn’t strike me that anything was being taken away. And, depending on what happened in practice, I thought it might eventually provide me greater insight into students’ preferred working styles.

Conducting inquiry

The next seven-week module (in a 15-week course), “Conduct Your Inquiry,” comprised the heart of the course. This was where individual students and/or teams would attempt to address the questions that they had come up with. Rather than choosing from predesigned assignments, or even being told what kind or how many assignments they must do, students were free to try out virtually anything they thought might be appropriate for addressing their particular question. The first document (see Figure 2) of the module attempted to ease them into this wildly free, risky, but important endeavor.

Figure 2

It's Time to Address Your Question

At this point, you should have "your question." That is, you (or your team) should have a good working question about a food-and-culture issue that genuinely interests you. Presumably, you are at least as interested in this question as anyone else is (including the instructor). It's at last time to begin work on addressing this question of yours! It's time to conduct your inquiry, the heart of this course.

For the next seven weeks, you (or your team) will be addressing your question through reading, research, investigation, fieldwork, and/or other means, and reporting on your findings through writing/preparing one or more papers or projects which take on that question in an analytical and critical way, and using appropriate academic resources to support any academic claims.

How and where in the world do you even get started? How might you go about addressing your question? What kinds of resources would be helpful in doing so? And, since you are looking into an issue (something which is debated), how can you make sure you consult resources that look at different angles, or take different sides, on the issue?

The next document in this module, "Reference: Conducting Inquiry on Food and Culture," provides a starting point.

This initial document was followed by several more, unpacking the implications of this task and providing a wide range of supports for it. One of these introduced basic ideas about finding, evaluating, and citing sources relevant to the question one seeks to address, providing several links to other Empire State College materials (e.g., on the college's library Web site) on such topics. Another was a compilation of many different resources I had come up with over the years, all dealing with food and culture from a number of different perspectives and in a wide range of genres. It included links to the foremost food-and-culture journals in the Empire State College online library. It included lists of films, of literature, of texts in food studies, food history encyclopedias, other more extensive online academic bibliographies on food, and more. The purpose of this document was to provide a great deal of support as potential starting points for students who might be pursuing a wide range of questions about disparate issues without reducing this support to a number of predesigned tracks from which students must choose. I sought to strike a balance between just sending them out to the infinity of available resources and overly supporting them with a restrictive list of optional tracks. (It was not at all clear to me where such a balance lies, so this was really just a matter of trying something out, and it was something I

expected to continually evolve.) So, while I had many such possible tracks in my head (e.g., food, culture and environment; food and gender; food in literature; food and film; food and aesthetics; food and politics/policy; industrial food and its critics; food and national identity; the cultural politics of food; food and the politics of fat), I resisted the temptation of making the tracks explicit here. While doing so might have made the process of choosing materials to examine smoother for many students, I feared it would undermine the opportunity for them to grapple with the process in a more realistic manner. I should also note that I imagined that one of the many ways that an instructor might provide feedback to students during the course would be to point out certain materials on (or off) the list that might be especially pertinent to a student's stated interests.

Another document sought to provide support not so much for the actual inquiry, but for grappling with the sheer freedom of this seven-week period of work. Once again, I presented some concrete ideas about how one might go about organizing one's (or one's team's) projects, but left these as a series of suggestions, not as menu options. Likewise, in the space of the module, I created six discussion areas where students could turn in work publicly for feedback from the instructor and other students. These were for: inquiry plans/proposals,

outlines, first paragraphs, bibliographies, rough drafts (or papers and/or other kinds of projects) or other/miscellaneous work. Once again, by way of suggesting some concrete assignment-types, I was trying to offer support without quite making it feel like they were choosing from among predesigned options, as much as they were just housing whatever they did. I also included one additional space where students or teams would turn in their final paper(s) and/or project(s) during the last week of this seven-week module.

Coffee shop discussions

Before discussing the fourth and final three-week module, I should also mention the "coffee shop" discussion space. This was a separate discussion space, unattached to any of the four modules, open for the duration of the entire term for "continuing to learn about food and culture in general." Once again, I provided a rationale for this space to students in terms of the ultimate sociality of all inquiry:

This "coffee shop" space is for any and all discussion about "food and culture" not directly related to the other discussion spaces set up in particular modules.

The assumption is that even while you are conducting research into your own specific question and issue, you would be generally interested in related topics about food and culture to enrich your learning about the subject matter overall. And, the assumption is that we are all members of a "community of inquiry" – while we may each be researching something different from the others, presumably we are all generally interested in "food and culture."

Thus, for instance, the instructor will occasionally post ideas or readings of general interest here for discussion. Such materials may be intended to supplement and/or to problematize your and other students' ideas, concepts, factual knowledge, etc., as a matter of more general learning.

Students are encouraged to visit this space frequently and to participate as they find it reasonable to do so. Students also might start their own

discussion threads or post relevant food-and-culture links or materials to share with peers here.

Essentially, this space would provide for the closest thing to more conventional discussions of assigned readings. However, I would not decide in advance, as the course author, what such readings and/or questions about them must be. In a private document that only instructors could see, links to possible readings in the Empire State College online library and possible discussion topics or questions would be provided. But the decision would be left to each instructor, each term, to post whatever he or she deemed to be most relevant or important and whenever it seemed most appropriate to do so. My hope was that I would post readings and questions that responded to whatever else was already going on in the other parts of the course, realizing that this could vary depending on who the students were in each section in each term (and possibly on the choice of videos that were viewed). This also meant that instructors, alone or collaboratively, could build up the private document of potential resources, gradually enriching the repertory of available readings and associated discussion questions from which to choose.

Evaluating inquiry

Throughout the course, the instructor would be evaluating students' work by providing feedback. Students would be encouraged to do so as well, though it was not clear if student feedback would often or ever become truly evaluative in terms of the "criteria for evaluation" stated in the learning contract (or to what extent this could depend on the prodding of an instructor during the term). Nonetheless, the final three-week module, "Evaluate Your Inquiry," was focused on evaluation. As always, I sought to emphasize the collaborative as well as the self-critical aspects of such evaluation. (See Figure 3.) This module also was the place where activities regarding the determination of a final letter grade (for students who did not opt out of such an option) occurred. However, since the question of final grades was left as an exercise to the reader (previously), I omit the description of the particulars here.

Figure 3

Evaluate Your Inquiry

You are now about to embark on some activities that may be unusual or out of the ordinary, depending on your experiences in other studies or courses, here at Empire State College or elsewhere. Namely, you are going to spend some time evaluating your own learning.

Evaluate Your Inquiry: An Essay

Now the time has come for you to spend significant time and effort reflecting on what you have accomplished in this course. What did you set out to learn? What did you learn? Perhaps there were there surprises (pleasant or unpleasant!)? How well, in terms of the criteria stated previously, did the work you (or your team) turned in demonstrate such learning? You might find it helpful to go through the listed criteria one at a time, looking back at the feedback you received from others (including the instructor) as well as making your own self-assessments.

Your assignment is to write a thorough two to three page self-evaluation to turn in to the instructor. (You are not expected to turn this one in to the entire class!) Remember, your goal here is to gain practice and to become more skillful at appraising the quality of the inquiry and learning you do. There is no reason to "show off," nor to "feign humility." Your goal should be to do as honest and sincere a self-assessment as you possibly can. This is your chance to really practice this important, sometimes underestimated, skill.

Your evaluation should certainly include more than a bare nuts-and-bolts self-evaluation. Please see this also as an opportunity to reflect on the learning process, your experiences, and (of course) any new questions that you may have arrived at during the course of your work. (Sometimes the greatest value of a research project is not in the "answers" that were discovered, but in the new questions that were unearthed!)

Throughout the term, you (or your team) have presumably received feedback and constructive suggestions and criticism about the fruits of your labors, which you have shared with us all. As you may recall, everyone (including the instructor) was expected to base his or her feedback primarily on academic criteria as follows (Once again, you should keep these criteria in mind as you write your self-evaluation):

Learning should be evaluated for its demonstration of close and sound familiarity with readings or other materials that are being considered. Learning should be evaluated for its being coherently sustained and precisely written or articulated. It should be evaluated not for individual opinions per se, but rather for the critical reflection and substantive evidence and/or credible argumentation offered in support of such opinions. It should be evaluated for its engagement with questions, concerns or disagreements raised by those who have critiqued or appraised it in an earlier iteration. It should be evaluated for thorough and complete documentation of sources, consistent with academic expectations and with all relevant college policies.

You should turn in your self-evaluation essay by the end of week 14.

Why do this?

Ideally, inquiry is rooted in the inquirer's desire to learn. Inquirers primarily seek the rewards that come from what is discovered or learned (or even what is unlearned). But that doesn't mean that all inquiry is of the same quality.

Learning to do good quality inquiry or research also entails developing good habits of self-evaluation, and learning how to use the evaluative judgments of others advantageously. In short, quality inquiry depends on the ongoing critical appraisal and evaluation of one's work – both self-evaluation, and the appraisals of other interlocutors and peers.

The question of advanced-level work

So far, I have described the revision of the introductory version of Food and Drink in Cultural Context. After I completed this revision, I remained puzzled about how to approach what was an advanced-level revision. In Version 1.0, the distinction wasn't hard to implement because the questions and the assignments were mostly pre-designed by me. As the (ostensible) expert arbiter, I simply included additional requirements for advanced-level students. There were expectations of more writing, more theoretical engagement, more effective synthesis of ideas from multiple scholarly readings, and so on. But what would I do when the questions would be coming from the students that would communicate what advanced-level work would look like?

After all, the process of inquiry was the same no matter what level one was working at: introductory, advanced, even graduate level, or beyond. It seemed intuitively clear to me that the expectations and feedback of an instructor would differ in an advanced-level context – e.g., evaluation criteria would be more rigorously and precisely enforced, less tolerance for obvious misinterpretations, imprecision, logical errors, failing to distinguish between academic and nonacademic sources – but it was not immediately obvious what I would need to change in the materials of the actual course space. After all, it seemed to me that trying to articulate the difference in these kinds of ways would entail using some very abstract, esoteric idioms (of educational scholarship and/or bureaucracy) which probably wouldn't mean a great deal to most of the students themselves, and therefore would not go very far in helping them understand what kind of a standard to which I (as well as they) should be holding them.

It was tempting to give up and just inform instructors that they (and I) should simply hold students to something like a “higher standard,” thereby continuing to bring in some of the same advanced-level expectations of the original version of the course, but in a more dynamic way. However, I decided to seek the advice of a colleague who was familiar with the revised introductory version. After presenting my

dilemma and discussing it, we arrived at an additional aspect of advanced academic inquiry. Namely: the more advanced inquiry that one is doing, the more squarely within specifically academic discussions and discourse one's work is conventionally expected to connect.

Thus, for example, at the graduate level and beyond, one is expected to strive for mastery of the academic discourse relevant to one's questions, and to frame one's own (increasingly original) work in terms of the questions, concepts and methodologies that such scholars would consider legitimate. In the introductory level of the course, through the use of the nonacademic videos for brainstorming, the expectation was that students would strive to frame their work, original or not, much more generally – not so much in the terms that scholars use, but in terms of the ordinary language of the public. Then, through the work of inquiry, students would be encouraged to find their way into various intellectual and academic sources.

It seemed to me that the way to address the question of advanced-level expectations was to expect something that was actually between introductory- and graduate-level work. That is, the expectation would be that students should be better prepared to frame their very questions not only in the terms of broader public discourse, but also in terms that showed an emerging grasp of some of the language, questions and concerns of academic scholars of food and culture. What I liked about approaching things this way was that it also lent itself to an elegant practical solution to the question of how to modify the introductory version of the course for advanced level in ways that would make the higher-order expectations much more concrete for students.

Thus, instead of simply viewing the videos, I required advanced-level students to read strictly academic works, providing a fair sample of the range of questions and methods that scholars have used over the years to address various questions related to food and culture. Then, when students were asked to articulate their working questions, they also were required to acknowledge, use, and address the academic world of food studies, demonstrating an emerging

understanding of how their own questions might connect with it. I emphasized this thread throughout the course. That is, rather than trying to explain to students in very abstract ways what advanced-level work should look like, I encouraged them to get a sense for what such work is all about through joining the scholarly conversation – by reading such work, then trying to make their own papers and/or projects more evidently a part of it.

Additional challenges

As I was working on the creation of Version 2.0 of the course, I became increasingly aware that “teaching” it as an instructor was going to present me with many new challenges. I had built into this version significantly greater freedom for the students and for the instructor. This meant that the kinds, the amount, and the timing of feedback that I could provide would be much less mechanically constrained. It meant that I would encounter interesting and complex pedagogical questions that were unlikely and/or impossible in the previous version of the course. Indeed, during the first term that I tried out Version 2.0 (at the introductory level), many issues and questions arose. Insofar as some of these made me think about if and what in Version 2.0 might need some immediate tweaking, such questions were directly relevant to the design of this new version, and thus I will discuss them here briefly.

The materials for brainstorming

I chose to use several videos as a way to enable and enrich the initial weeks of brainstorming about issues. In the first run, I included “Mondovino” (a documentary about globalization and the wine industry), “The Future of Food” (a documentary about possible implications of genetically modified foods and related policies), and Henry Jaglom's “Eating: A Very Serious Comedy about Women and Food” (a fictional portrayal of eating disorders among white middle-class women). The course activities, and my repeated reminders, sought to let students know that these materials were truly meant to enable, not constrain, the brainstorming process. Students were encouraged to introduce

issues prompted by the films, but also any others that came to mind.

Yet, it was extremely rare that a student mentioned any issues that were not in some way inspired by one or more of the videos. This gave me pause. Had I really chosen materials which for the most part raised the kinds of issues that really spoke to most students' lives? (I thought it was important not to just assume, conveniently for me, that this was the case.) Or, were students so accustomed to having the content and direction of their education directed by their educators that they were simply not able to believe, accept or buy into the idea that they were free to raise other issues? Or, was it that students were not yet prepared or willing to put in much thought about what they were interested in? Maybe they just thought that the most expedient way to get their homework done was to respond directly to what they saw in the videos.

I decided that it might be worth changing the videos from term to term to help determine if there was indeed any correlation between what was assigned, and what issues students tended to come up with. But even if it turned out that there was such a correlation, I also wanted to be cautious about becoming unnecessarily worried by this fact. I realized that I also should pay close attention to which issues students ended up most interested in by the end of their work. That is, I needed to remain open to the possibility that for some students, learning to recognize and articulate their own interests (and the potential benefits to inquiry and learning of doing so) might only occur after they struggled with the consequences of their not having done so when they had the chance. Would such learning not also have significant value, even if it resulted in compromising "how much" they learned that term about food and culture per se? I was prepared to say that it would, and that the more broadly "humanities" or "liberal" learning entailed ought to trump for the time being the specific concern with "food and culture" per se.

Natural science questions

The first time I taught the new version, I quickly realized that many of the foremost

questions about food on many students' minds (perhaps because of my choice of videos, perhaps not) dealt with such issues as human nutritional health, psychological well-being, food safety and environmental sustainability. Moreover, they framed their questions in ways that, to me, implied investigation and assessment of the literature in the sciences (for example, is x healthier than y? Is x an environmentally sustainable food practice? What are the effects of food x on biological development?). Course documents explained to students that they could formulate almost any (working) question "about food and culture" they could imagine, provided it wasn't a natural science question per se. But I quickly learned that it wasn't going to be this simple.

I needed to remain open to the possibility that for some students, learning to recognize and articulate their own interests ... might only occur after they struggled with the consequences of their not having done so when they had the chance.

On the one hand, it was perfectly clear to me that the issues from which students derived such questions were rich and complex, and at least as many nonscience questions might be pursued in relation to them as strictly natural scientific questions. When students formulated and posted natural science questions of interest, I attempted to respond to them individually (publicly, of course, so that all might see). I would affirm their articulation of an issue; I would affirm that there was public debate regarding their specific question. Then I would try to explain possible aspects of the debate in question that were broader than strictly scientific debate. I would mention other food and science studies (like the Center for Distance Learning course on

nutrition) that they might undertake to investigate the strictly scientific aspects of such questions. And, finally, I would provide some concrete examples – emphasizing that they were only examples – of nonscience questions directly relevant to their issue, trying to pull them toward more humanities or humanistic social science directions. I thought that after I responded this way to one or two students, the class as a whole would begin to catch on.

Of course, I had no reliable way of knowing whether students were just not bothering to read or grapple with my posts, or were not able to make sense out of a distinction between science- and nonscience-type questions. Either way, I decided, I needed to do something. How could I possibly imagine myself or any other instructor responding over and over again to significant numbers of students in a struggle to explain the distinction? My immediate thought was to create an optional module which trained students to recognize the distinction, and to help them think through how to take an issue with potentially scientific dimensions and formulate "science" and "nonscience" questions in relation to it. Whenever it was appropriate, I would point students to this optional module for rehabilitation.

As someone with a background in the sciences myself, but who also has done reading in the sociology of science, the sociology/anthropology of scientific knowledge, and the philosophy of science, I was aware that I shouldn't make too much of this science/nonscience dichotomy. As far as I was concerned, to address the question, "Is x healthier than y?" ultimately involves the sociology of knowledge, the politics of science, and cultures of knowing, as much as it does laboratory testing and reckoning epidemiological data. But my sense was that students were not asking these questions with these other dimensions in mind. They seemed to be asking them in the spirit of: People have done tests on these things, they have come up with the answers, and I want to find out what these answers are. What was important, I thought, was helping them distinguish the kinds of questions that might guide a medical researcher, say, from those which might guide a cultural anthropologist, an ethicist or a social critic. I figured that this would help them figure out which kinds

of questions were more or less appropriate for their own inquiry in this course.

But I soon realized I was on a slippery slope. It now seemed like, at least for some students, to come up with a working question that genuinely interested them and that they would be able to pursue in this course, they first needed a fair command of what the natural sciences and humanities were all about in order to distinguish between their respective kinds of questions. But this seemed to undermine the whole premise of the course, not to mention the fact that for many this was an introduction to the humanities as a part of general education. For some, it could be the first and last humanities course they would ever take in their lives. It also was likely that there would be students taking this course who never took a college-level science course in their lives. Now they would need to pick up a working command of what guides natural scientists before they could even get started on a humanities inquiry. This struck me as absurd. I realized that I had to try looking at the problem from another angle altogether.

So I tried a little thought experiment. Some students would know enough about science so that after little or no explanation they could steer clear of formulating a science question. Others would not. What if I just let them proceed anyway? Sooner or later, would they not come to realize that their question led them to the work of scientists (especially after I questioned them on the legitimacy of journalism as a reliable academic source if this is as far as they got)? And, once this happened, once they realized that they were pursuing a scientific question all along, could I not encourage them to consider (if they didn't already wonder on their own) why they hadn't expected this to happen when they first set out? Wouldn't this question, in turn, raise new questions about, say, knowledge in modernity? That is, a student could be encouraged to ask him or herself (though not likely in these words!): What social or cultural phenomena conditioned me, and others around me, to use words ("E coli," "saturated fat," "evolution," "carbon footprint") and concepts from a specialized scholarly discourse ("biology," "ecology") in everyday life, and to assume that I was able to do

so intelligibly even though I didn't possess knowledge of that specialized discourse? (Note: this is a question that could be asked about any specialized discourse, and without assuming that the specialized knowledge of that discourse is scientific, let alone necessarily superior.) Inasmuch as such social conditioning occurs, whose interests are served by it?

In other words, could not the experience of pursuing a science question without really understanding that or why it is a science question at the outset wind up as an occasion for valuable humanities learning, for understanding more about a symbolic universe one inhabits, or for beginning to uncover certain assumptions about the operations of "knowledge" and "language" (and "power") in one's world that were hitherto invisible as taken-for-granted "common sense"? To put it another way: having emerged from a question of genuine interest to the student, would this not be a more ground-up way for a student to begin learning, or at least suspecting the relevance of, something like the sociology or cultural politics of knowledge? And, at the same time, the student could discover on her own that if she wanted to go further regarding the scientific question per se (instead of being told to take the instructor's word for it that her question was a scientific one, and thus off limits), she would need to learn more about the science in question, and/or that she would need to formulate other related but nonscience questions to pursue.

Of course, even if this were all true in theory, it raised many questions about how an instructor in practice would be able to lessen the likelihood that students would simply get so frustrated that they would give up altogether. After all, it seemed like this would depend almost entirely on the effectiveness of the instructor during the term, paying close attention to students' postings, asking the right questions to challenge assumptions, but without injuring students' sense-of-self – inasmuch as this is tied up with unexamined assumptions regarding her social or symbolic universe.

As part of this, I decided that I would need, over time, to build a repertory of good reading suggestions that I (and other instructors) could draw on when responding

to different students. For example, if a student chose to focus on something related to "healthy food" in the context of his or her own context of the U.S., I thought it would be useful to suggest a reading that considered how "health" or "nutrition" might be defined differently in another cultural context. If a student was investigating something dealing with food and technology in the context of the U.S., I thought I might recommend a reading about Americans' particular historical relationship to science and technology in general. In short, it seemed there was only so much one could do in advance to the course space itself to foster comfort. On the other hand, the building of a high quality repertory which instructors could draw on selectively during teaching could improve the likelihood of critical and challenging but supportive feedback to students. Such a repertory could even be edited and built up collaboratively over time by any or all instructors who taught it.

The freedom to opt out of freedom

What if a student entered the course, read the learning contract, and said: "Hey, I don't learn well this way. It isn't that I am not, or unwilling to become, an agent of my learning. It's just not the way I'd prefer to go about learning about food and culture. A more traditional course would suit me." In spite of all my arguments (or perhaps it is because of them?), should I not remain open to the possibility that there may be instances where less freedom is more compatible with valuable learning? This strikes me as contradictory. But I continued to wonder if there were ways to provide greater freedom that also could accommodate exactly this kind of scenario. After all, despite my best efforts to make Version 2.0 supportive, maybe for some students – active, engaged, willing students – it just was not.

One idea I had was to add a button after the learning contract: "If this approach does not suit you, click here to take a more traditional course instead." A student would click on it and go away from Version 2.0 and into Version 1.0. But this raises the question of choice-making subjectivities again, which I earlier discussed: It assumes that students will contemplate which of two options is more suitable for them as learners

before making their choice. If they failed to do so, they might, as a reflex, choose the option that was more familiar to them, and the more familiar option might be familiar for the wrong reasons. That is, because like so many of their other educational experiences, it constituted them as largely passive when it came to the content and direction of learning. And it might be familiar for reasons that turn out not to be in the interests of the student's well-being.

Then, I thought, maybe students should not be allowed simply to click away their freedom. Maybe there should be a way out of Version 2.0, but only if the student and mentor could agree that, indeed, this was more likely to benefit the student as a learner than staying in. But this raised new questions that I was unprepared to address: How would the student know what kind of argument would convince the instructor? What kind of criteria would an instructor tell students are likely to persuade him or her, but without simply telling them the magic word that would let them escape taking greater responsibility for the content and direction of their learning?

Yet another thought made me wonder if the course was not after all more or less fine as it stood. This version of the course did encourage students who had questions or concerns about anything in the learning contract (or anywhere else) to speak up. If a student felt especially unsupported by the ambiguity of the activities and expectations as these were spelled out, hopefully he or she would contact the instructor. Then, it would be up to the instructor and student to discuss the situation and decide how to proceed. If it turned out that the student could truly benefit from a more faculty-centered course, perhaps one of them might propose that the student find an attractive syllabus for such a course online, or to design his or her own syllabus to follow. There was nothing in place to prevent an instructor from doing so.⁹ Granted, the instructor of this course, acting more like a tutor than an instructor per se, would not be able to offer to the student the kind of expertise on the materials in the syllabus that its original author might have in a conventional classroom. But, it seemed to me, as a college without traditional departments and other infrastructural

mechanisms of quality control regarding this kind of more conventional academic expertise, this was already how things tended to work better at this college overall.

Even if this was sensible, the fact remained that students were not likely to say exactly, "Hey, I don't learn well this way. It isn't that I'm not, or unwilling to become, an agent of my learning. It's just not the way I'd prefer to go about learning about food and culture. A more traditional course would suit me just fine, thank you." Instructors would need to be on the lookout for signs of any students who might be thinking along these lines but reluctant to speak up (while struggling to move forward with assigned activities). Also, instructors would need to figure out how to discuss effectively with a student who expressed discontent with the course expectations as they stood – to distinguish those instances where students were genuinely looking for help from those where students were apparently only looking for an easy way out of learning to take greater responsibility for their own education.

"Final" thoughts

I will conclude with some meta-observations about freedom and temptation. As I was writing this piece, I had an opportunity to reflect on the choices I made as a course author, instructor and CDL area coordinator. And as I did so I considered the context in which I made them, and what kinds of freedoms, supports and choice-making subjectivities were assumed. It struck me that the context of the CDL course development process, as I have experienced it, was analogous to the first version of my Food and Drink course: There were a number of predesigned course model options from which faculty could select. Then, once an option was selected, there were predesigned steps to follow to flesh out the content of the course within that model. In this way, a course was very likely to end up looking like what certain ostensible experts determined to be a high quality online course.¹⁰

At the same time, there was significant freedom to depart from any of these predesigned options, including the freedom to invent a model of one's own. (Indeed, the first version of Food and Drink in Cultural

Context became another predesigned option that CDL offered to developers henceforth – the so-called "Ball model" – back in the pre-ANGEL days when we used the SUNY Learning Network's platform.) Perhaps this freedom was not as prominently advertised as the "design your own project" project options in the first version of my course, but it existed nonetheless.

So, in light of my critique of the first version of my course, I wondered whether this freedom was being overly compromised by the prominent offering of predesigned options for course development to CDL area coordinators and course authors. To what extent did this condition us course authors to succumb to the immediate temptation of picking an option without first contemplating why such an option was especially appropriate to our objectives as educators? To what extent did it focus our attention on filling in the standard documents, while diverting it away from asking questions such as: "How might I design this? Why might I design it this way? In what ways might such a design support or undermine my educational intentions?" "Why these intentions?" Also, to what extent did it reinforce shopper subjectivity as the only choice-making subjectivity in town, including in educational contexts (and in doing so, condition us to be unlikely or unwilling to consider the educational potential and efficacy of other ways to structure an educational process not predicated on selecting predesigned "options" and "tracks")? That is, how were the assumptions of the very CDL course development process potentially resonating with assumptions that "flexible" and "dialogical" and "individualizable" courses must offer predesigned options if they are to be student centered?

Of course, a successful course development process will involve lots of support to developers, just as a successful course involves lots of support for students. The question, though, for me, has to do with the nature of those supports. To what extent are these supports offering a simulacrum of support at the expense of other kinds of support that could more effectively lead to our authoring of courses better able to facilitate valuable learning among our students, and, of course, ourselves?

From personal experience, I have found that CDLs and Empire State College's opportunity and support for sustained collaboration with other mentors on course development (in which we listen, discuss, and even challenge our own and each other's assumptions and arguments, as opposed to merely "dividing up the development work") has helped me to grow as a course author more than access to any predesigned anything. Similarly, I have been greatly supported by access to presentations and writings by faculty in and outside of Empire State College which strive not only to describe how, but to explain why, various moves are made in all manner of educational situations – in classrooms, in one-to-one primary mentoring, in online courses, and so on. (Such texts, for me, go completely against the grain of any rigid theory-versus-practice distinctions in education.) As well, I have felt supported by theoretical critiques of various educational and cultural assumptions because, even if these do remain removed from practice, they have offered me some help in uncovering at least a few of the blind spots in my own thinking, convictions and practices. Finally, I have felt supported by a particular culture in the college – still very much alive among at least some mentors at Empire State College – which encourages not only collaborative sharing, discussion, and debate about our practices, but also self-analysis and criticism. Indeed, it is exactly this culture in the college which made me feel that it was imperative that I make an effort to write this "rationale essay" – to try articulating for myself, and for others, why I have made the choices that I have when it comes to Food and Drink in Cultural Context.

I do worry, though, that, as of late, relatively too much emphasis and money is being put toward supports for course and curricular development in the shopper-subjectivity spirit of predesigned options, and not nearly enough on these other kinds of contemplate-then-make-a-choice supports.

Finally – I implore you – please do not be tempted to take my newest version of Food and Drink in Cultural Context as the basis for yet another predesigned option. Well ... if you contemplate what you are trying to accomplish, and continue to suspect that

it might help you accomplish such things, then, yes, please feel free to take it. Or maybe ask me if I can collaborate with you on developing that course you have in mind. But please don't be disappointed if, by that time, I will have recognized many of the oversights, missteps and flaws in the implementation I described above, as well as those in this rationale you just read.

Notes

- ¹ I am using the more cumbersome phrase "make-a-choice" instead of "choose" in order to remind that one of the options is to invent something – that is, to make something, as opposed to merely selecting it. In the context of the LOI, this could mean choosing to work with a mentor to develop a "totally individualized study." In the context of my course, this could mean a student chooses the "Develop Your Own Project" option for an assignment.
- ² Please note that I am not criticizing the connecting of education to pragmatic objectives. Rather, I am questioning the assumption that pragmatic objectives are transparent, and the assumption that educators usually know (though we often like to believe that we do) what and how each student should learn in order to achieve such pragmatic objectives.
- ³ Please note that I said a particular kind of consumer society. I do not mean to imply that there is anything wrong with being a consumer per se, or that valuations rooted in economic exchange are inherently bad. However, as a believer that a system of just economic exchange needs to be predicated on freedom in the broadest sense, I am wary of the dominant socio-economic assumptions and arrangements of late modernity.
- ⁴ Before I continue on to describe my attempts at addressing these questions in practice, in Version 2.0 of the course, I should address a possible contradiction. Given what I have just discussed, it appears that I have decided in advance of dialogue that all students

must learn, if they haven't done so already, to become free and responsible agents of their learning. Haven't I presupposed a universal learning objective for all my students without knowing anything about their particular contexts and needs? I think my earlier argument shows that what this amounts to is only having decided in advance of dialogue that all students must participate in dialogue in order for us to proceed. I don't see any way around this, since even to determine that dialogue is not necessary in a particular student's case would itself presuppose the dialogue that would enable the educator (or the educator and student) to arrive at such a conclusion – an obvious contradiction. It even takes dialogue to reach a point where it is recognized that dialogue is no longer necessary.

- ⁵ I wondered if emphasizing the pursuit of curiosity in the form of questions was itself still overly prescriptive, however weak a prescription it was. After all, are there not other ways to articulate one's curiosity without using the interrogative sentence? (Very generally – "I'm curious to learn more about Italian food." – or very specifically – "I would like to understand the potential exclusionary effects of the historical construction of national cuisines.") I provisionally satisfied myself that, first of all, any statement of curiosity could be re-articulated as a question and vice versa. Moreover, I had an intuition that the very general statements of curiosity ("I want to learn more about food and culture" or "I want to learn more about Italian food") with which many students had been entering the course, once converted into questions ("What is something about food and culture that I don't know?" or "What is true about Italian food that I don't know?"), highlighted somewhat just how unfocused they were, almost implicitly calling students to think more carefully about what and why they wanted to learn about such topics. [It strikes me that these general articulations of "curiosity" again connect somehow

with the subjectivity of the typical modern or postmodern shopper. (“I’m in the mood for something related to food and culture but I don’t know what or why, and neither do I need to press myself to consider what or why ... something will just come along.”)]

- ⁶ Maybe for some others it’s more “natural” to say to oneself: “It’s time to determine whether I am indeed addressing my stated interest;” and “Let me examine my arguments for logical errors.” (One might even wonder to what extent the assumption that one should check on one’s own work as it proceeds is socio-culturally arbitrary. In a context where regular ongoing collaboration is strongly privileged over individualism, one might imagine that one person rather “unreflectively” produces some work while another checks it for her and responds, and so on. My hunch is that most contexts usefully combine habits of individual self-evaluation with habits of collaborative evaluation by others, but this nothing more than a hunch.)
- ⁷ This raises the question of whether I, as an “expert” on academic criteria for evaluating inquiry, should have

prescribed the “shared evaluation criteria,” or if even these ought to be subject to dialogue and negotiation between students and the instructor.

- ⁸ That is, I was seeking to help prepare students who might be uncomfortable with “debate” or having questions asked of them about their assertions or assumptions.
- ⁹ Since much of the instructor’s work involved providing individualized feedback, as long as the student wasn’t expecting the instructor to deliver lectures on the content of the syllabus just for him or her, it seemed like the workload could be made comparable.
- ¹⁰ Doubtless, these ostensible experts were considered actual experts within their own professional and academic communities (e.g., Sloan-C). However, insofar as many of the assumptions upon which these communities predicate their research have been left either unexamined, or in fact outright contested and disputed, by many other sophisticated academic fields, I am compelled to take such expertise with a large grain of salt.

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Sabbatical Report: Dancing with Difference

Adele Anderson, Genesee Valley Center

From March through August 2009 a sabbatical in community and inclusive dance gave me the chance to improve my command of the literature in a relatively new scholarly focus, while growing my creative capacities in technique, choreography, production and performance. I had previously participated in meetings of the Dance Critics Association, the American Society for Aesthetics and Liz Lerman's dance intensive at Indiana University; I also had interviewed Judith Smith, artistic director of AXIS Dance Company in San Francisco.

On sabbatical, I read in inclusive and community dance literatures, viewed performances in New York City and regional college dance departments, reviewed many media-recorded performances, and performed at home in Rochester, in the Elizabeth Clark dance ensemble. I created

and performed a light humor piece at the 2009 Women's Studies Residency. During the same period, I gave two public dance workshops in Rochester. Further observation and consultations culminated in my participation at the Kitty Lunn Dance Intensive held at NYU in August 2009. I learned wheelchair partnering and technique among an international group of classmates with and without disabilities.

Rochester-based teaching artist Elizabeth Clark, formerly of the Juilliard School, Columbia University, and the José Limon Dance Company, is an Empire State College adjunct and my home mentor in dance. She has supported my development in artistic practice beyond measure. After returning from sabbatical, I presented a paper at the American Anthropological Association, December 2009 and developed several related studies for Empire State College

graduates and undergraduates. The topics range from modern and contemporary dance history to nonwestern dance, cultural theory of dance, and disability culture studies of the arts.

Colleagues are welcome to write for a copy of my sabbatical annotated bibliography. My latest work in progress with Clark is "American Working Women – An Appreciation," inspired by Lerman's concept of "nonfiction dance." This suite of dances, visual media, and audience interaction will be performed in Rochester March 28 as part of Women's History Month. We recently received a positive initial response to take this program to the Washington University Women's Center in St. Louis later this year. The comments below highlight several ideas and issues that I encountered on sabbatical.



Kitty Lunn (seated, center), Andrew MacMillan (kneeling, front right), and the physically integrated Infinity Dance Theater's Summer Intensive, 2009.

As the second decade of the 2000s opens, few frontiers remain unexplored in dance. Bodily representation, contested movement regimes and cultural signification have been explosively diverse over the last 30 years; dance, like other arts, seems to have reached every extreme, admixture and vantage point possible. Although concert dance may indeed be exhausted, dis/ability-integrated dance as a serious contemporary form, and not as therapy, is still on the frontier. Ensembles integrating performers with disabilities also illustrate the difficulty, in the Western and global art world, of making arts serve social justice or provide a public healing space.

Although different-bodied dancers had long defied cultural pressure to remain hidden away in special settings, to lend their bodies as experimental subjects in endless searches for cures, or to simply serve as rejected-body examples for a mythical pursuit of perfection, their embodied difference onstage still registers with audiences in qualified and troubling ways. They succeed beyond the avant-garde or community art scenes when they are spectacular in acceptable ways; they must defy certain audience expectations even as they achieve others.

Dance that integrates performers with and without visible impairments, or differences in bodily characteristics or abilities, includes a range of bodies extending well beyond canons established by better-known and better-funded genres. Visibly disabled performers are subject to a triple social discipline – critical artistic evaluations, the medical gaze and public stares. The full view of bodies onstage allows easy political reading of stereotypes with iconic force.

Maybe this is one reason that internationally touring integrated ensembles so often use highly trained athletic bodies, not only in their normate-bodied partners without disabilities, but also as a characteristic of the disabled dancers. There are ways in which this can result from the intensive training, which habituates the body dramatically over time, or from practical necessity for achieving spectacular physicality onstage. But the virtuosic surface itself serves a visual appeal. The combined virtuosity and shock value of David Toole, formerly of the UK

company Candoco, executing tango without legs, dancing on his arms, or the audience's fascination with beautiful, slender and shapely Lisa Bufano, springing about the stage on blades and gliding her fingerless hands over her neck and head, in Heidi Latsky's GIMP Project, preempt anticipated audience rejections of a body based on a lack of virtuosity or a lack of beauty.

But these readings are unstable and fragile. They depend on particular embodiments and are easily derailed. Conservative critics still hold court. Alistair Macaulay, sitting next to me at the Dance Critics Association's Kennedy Center conference two summers ago, was still lamenting the lack of a Balanchine successor in American dance. In the '90s he had dismissed Candoco and Toole as "victim art." Like the great critic Arlene Croce, who infamously argued that Bill T. Jones' use of people with AIDS in his piece "Still/Here" undercut her ability to do criticism, Macaulay made the objection often traced to Kant, against mingling sentiment into works of art. These artists were not playing fair by the agreed conventions of artistic evaluation.

Similar criticisms have been leveled at avant-garde artists, but the case of disability raises a question of another kind of aesthetic rejection that lurks below the surface. Looks can offend in ways that conflate taste with intolerance. Disability scholar Tobin Siebers compares aesthetically couched public rejections of disability (think of those who object to eating in restaurants with people who require assistance, or who are uncomfortable with expression of adult sexuality by people with disabilities) to rejections of the "disorderly" visual bodily representations of artists Karen Finley, Robert Mapplethorpe or Jose Serrano, veterans on another front of the culture wars. Governmental de-funding of the "disorderly" arts in the U.S. illustrates how transgression of canon can bring consequences beyond the aesthetic. Such powerful interventions bear directly on the question, as Liz Lerman puts it, of who gets to dance?

Different-bodied dancers had begun to do to dance in the 1980s what Warhol did to the '60s avant-garde; they raised the postmodern ante. Highbrow dance artwork

was previously encoded on normate, highly trained, virtuosic bodies even when it incorporated lowbrow materials, unexpected media, or radically formalist, abstract methods. (Think of Dunn at Judson Church, or the earlier Kaprow "Happenings.") A new choice of bodies and the use of their difficult and unresolved personal histories was what broke down Croce's infamous "undiscussable" assumption – but what she really meant had to do with what a serious and worthy dancer's body looks like and what kind of image, narrative or experience that body should be allowed to dance.

More than 15 years after the Croce/Bill T. Jones affair, the global art world has moved well beyond such undiscussions, even beyond the postmodern anti-aesthetic. Some recuperate beauty, others social practice, and still others choose direct political intervention. But bodily rejection and public shaming on aesthetic grounds still pervade the art world. If anyone doubts this, they need only glance at the toss-off review Joan Acocella writes in the October 2009 *New Yorker*. It was in response to Lucinda Childs' recent live performance, alongside Sol LeWitt's film, of her 1979 Minimalist piece "Dance." Acocella glibly implies that Childs, now middle-aged, the Guggenheim laureate whose works famously subverted conventional beauty with everyday movement, is no longer beautiful enough to watch performing her own choreography.

There is no one kind of integrated dance. It has many sources. Pioneers in different-bodied dance integration, Liz Lerman on the East Coast and Anna Halprin on the West Coast, made dance for years with bodies of untrained people from neighborhoods, oncology units, retirement centers and other nondancer sources. They included people who had started dance "too late," or who had retired from dance or other careers. In the '70s and early '80s, this work was not regarded as "inclusive" so much as an eccentric therapy, spirituality or community art – recreation. The 1980s wheelchair dance pioneers Mary Verdi Fletcher of Cleveland Dancing Wheels and Kitty Lunn of Infinity Dance in New York both came to disability dancing from professional dance backgrounds. (Verdi's mother was a dancer; Lunn had begun her career as a classical and then Broadway dancer.) Their work was

at first staged in mainly quasi-therapeutic, bracketed-off settings like the Paralympics. Today the venues have expanded.

Content and subjects figure into this emergence. Autobiographical and identity-political narratives, sometimes with audience confrontation, was in use by artists like Spaulding Gray, Bill T. Jones, David Dorfman and Bondell Cummings. These artists paved an avenue for integrated and disability dance to legitimate new voices and stories. Heidi Latsky's GIMP project works in the confrontational approach, but many ensembles also have moved on. AXIS dance broke with its founder, Thais Mazur, over ten years ago when members, including wheelchair user and artistic director Judith Smith, no longer wanted to dance about disability. Kitty Lunn's recent work includes solo characters from history and literature, such the artist Frieda Kahlo. Lunn does more than make use of the biographical details of disabling spinal injury and chronic pain that she shares with Kahlo; her dance is about the art-making that is at the center of both lives. Lunn successfully captures and particularizes a broader human experience through her singular embodiment of it.

Visibility of bodies on stage is arguably complicated when performers with less visible or differently visible impairments appear, such as people with cognitive, affective and learning impairment. Audiences need to know who is dancing. A moderately successful piece can become spectacular because of who is doing it – that is, someone for whom it should not be possible under normate expectations. The surprise makes it new. The U.K.-based troupe Anjali, whose dancers all have learning disabilities, succeeds when public knowledge of their disability combines with intricate memorization and well-crafted performance directed by their normate choreographer, especially when the narrative or content conveys roles and situations that are fully adult, like the bar-room scene in the piece “Save the Last Dance,” which opens to the Elvis Presley song, Are You Lonesome Tonight?

Norms shift only slowly. For most concert publics, dance remains subject to the conservative appeal of images that historically signified unspoiled identities.

Parents reproduce the divisions when they enroll children in competitive variety dance schools or send daughters to ballet class to acquire beautiful bodies. The many who anxiously ask if their normal child will be held back by the presence of a special needs child in the class, as dance teachers report to me, reproduce it. Lunn, on the other side, recalls the many anxious parents of disabled children enrolling in her wheelchair dance classes who portray their child as “the most disabled child who ever lived.” The double divides of apprehension and fearfully anticipated rejection work to perpetuate segregated practice down generations.

Yet powerful and stunning works with different-bodied dancing, acting and performing continue to be realized onstage. They are one art world outcome of newer ideas in conversation with older disciplines, older beauties and truths. They require audiences to become open, willing to look at the artwork until both the gaze and the stare are worn out, seeing beyond easily received readings. They are located variously along the continuum of hard-pressed artistic development. Some successfully breach the restrictions of social and aesthetic convention. And they cannot do it alone.

As noted above, colleagues are welcome to write for a copy of my sabbatical annotated bibliography. What follows is a small selection of related texts.

Costello, Diarmuid, and Dominic Willsdon, eds. *The Life and Death of Images*. Cornell University Press, 2008.

Kuppers, Petra. *Disability and performance: Bodies on edge*. New York: Routledge, 2003.

Lepecki, André. *Exhausting dance: Performance and the politics of movement*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Sandahl, Carrie, and Philip Auslander, eds. *Bodies in commotion: Disability and performance: Corporealities*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.

Seigel, Marsha. “Virtual criticism and the dance of death.” *Theatre Drama Review* 40 (1996): 60-70.

Siebers, Tobin, “What can disability studies learn from the culture wars?” *Cultural Critique* 55 (2003): 182-216.

Readers also may find a few examples of the artists discussed at the addresses listed below. Keep in mind that Web pages can migrate. If a particular piece is unavailable at a site by the time you reach it, try using Google to locate other examples by the artists including the word YouTube in your search.

Anjali Dance Company, performing “Save the Last Dance:”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgk2bb_GCxE

David Toole, formerly of Candoco, performing “The Cost of Living:”
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcpcujComks>

Kitty Lunn and Andrew Macmillan of Infinity Dance Theater, performing “Lead Me Home:”
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bt0THCRchu4>

Lisa Bufano, in Heidi Latsky's GIMP project, performing “Five Open Mouths:”
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTw1AVpVRbs>

An Educator's COYOTE[®]1? The Future of Ethics May Not Be What It Used to Be

Morris Fiddler, DePaul University, School for New Learning

Looking for some guidance

Consider the following as a code of ethics for educators:

1. Utilize, to the extent possible, the most questionable knowledge and practices in serving all learners.
2. Ignore the ethno-socio-cultural heritage, special circumstances and dignity of adult learners.
3. Pursue all interest, including those that are or might be considered, as conflicts.
4. Interactions between learner and educator are as confidential as the next person you can relate them to.
5. Respond to adult learners uniformly, consider individual needs as inefficient and unfair treatment from one person to the next, take full advantage of the status differential between student and educator, and exercise the authority of knowledge in designing solutions to meet needs of learners.

The code can easily go on, drawn as “anti”-statements from the work of Siegel (Siegel, 2009 as cited by Sork, 2009). The likelihood of gaining agreement on such a code let alone adhering to it is obviously slim to near zero, yet the opposite of each of these principles (and five others) is the real outcome of Siegel's sincere effort to join the discussion of what a framework for ethical behavior in adult education could or should look like. With the antitheses being individually and collectively as distasteful and not worthy of much further conversation, I wonder what value any “code” has if the violations elicit such reactions as I assume both you and I have to the sample above. And I wonder what such (negative) reactions tell us about the nature of ethics itself. (My apologies, first, to Dr. Siegel.)

I think it's fair and safe to say that any discussion or dialogue that even utters the term “ethics” let alone seriously converses about it has, by definition, positive intent. I also think it is fair to say that the term “ethics” is now in sufficient common parlance both to carry multiple meanings no longer owned by philosophy alone, as well as to reference multiple conceptions of the role or purpose of “ethics” in our lives. As Weston (Weston, 2009) urges, perhaps we would do well with a meta-ethic, a conception of just what the role of ethics should and could be. My common experience with both the concept and term “ethics” in active conversation with colleagues, friends, students – formally and in courses I've taught on ethical decision making, and, passively, with radio talk show hosts while driving, is that we turn our attention to discussions of ethics because we either believe others' behavior needs some guidance or, in our quiet moments, we (I) do. And, most discussions of what a meta-ethic can or should look like are traceable in some way to this desire for “guidance.” There's nothing like the question “what should I do in *this* situation?” to get the ethicist in the crowd activated. I could write a “true confessions” on those moments if I thought it would sell.

But, it's probably just as true that we all become ethicists multiple times a day when we genuinely reach for an answer to “just what *should* I do ... ?” and could benefit from an overarching yet internalized meta-ethic to navigate those decision-making waters. Might this, in turn, provide guidance of a different sort or perhaps offer up a different set of choices for behavior as an educator than we would probably consider with our common understanding of ethics? That gets me curious. The distinction between ethics-to-guide and ethics-to-understand has the possibility of wings with which to fly that is more useful than a set of boundaries to negotiate.

I was taught about ethics with the unspoken premise that our behaviors could be guided by reasoning; it was mostly a matter of what assumptions to build the reasoning on. In ethical terms, from what principles or value(s) should I reason forth? And to a great extent I've passed that on though I failed myself years ago when I could “reason” to justification of the Holocaust let alone other decisions and behaviors that I believe – and have to believe – most people simply find immoral. Hmm. Morality ... ethics. The most demanding philosophy exam I ever encountered was a single question: “Define your terms.” So, a moment to define some terms, as I choose to define them for purposes here.

I've always been a big fan of gangster movies, primarily because they depict very ethical people committing immoral acts. The values of the “bad guys” are clear – loyalty, greed, respect for hierarchies (albeit with plot line challenges to them), family and a few others. Behaviors and rewards are aligned with these values while in the commission of pursuits that just about everyone of us can agree are simply on the “wrong” side of morality. Fascinating ... and also instructive.

Ethics are the values we adopt – and we each may adopt different sets of them – and the behaviors we align with them. Where it gets interesting is pausing to consider what we mean by morals ... the “shoulds” and “should nots” of what we do. The two terms – ethics and morals – are often conflated, used interchangeably, and I urge attention to their distinctions not just for linguistic purposes, but because of what contemporary research may be teaching us about them, particular the latter: morality.

Despite this past year's rancorous “town hall meetings” and the police blotters that dress up as newspapers, most people in the world actually get along and seem to possess some sort of common compass that

guides us through the complications and social entanglements we encounter every day (Gazzaniga, 2008). We really tend, as a common humanity, not to like abusing or cheating or stealing or harming others. Is this what we learn through our religious institutions, families and other presumably rational transmitters across generations and political boundaries? Or, framed another way, when facing either everyday or not-so-everyday decisions of right and wrong, do we all draw on rational processes that start with some set of values and end with reasoned behaviors, i.e., a common, reasoned ethic? The esteemed members of the philosophers' hall of fame would have us believe so. Yet, those that wonder and pursue a systematic inquiry of late are offering a different possibility to understand ourselves. What might we learn about ourselves by reacting to the anti-statement of an ethical code that led this walk through the morality forest?

Is the moral home modular?

What is now becoming a fascinating convergence of research from neurology, evolutionary psychology, neurobiology, genomics and consciousness studies (one of the contemporary embodiments of philosophy), is a very different picture of how we arrive at moral judgments. It is something like the following that seems to be emerging: a stimulus of some sort elicits an automatic process of approval or disapproval which may, and usually does, lead to an emotional state from which a "moral intuition" emerges that may move us to action. All of this takes place long before reasoning sets in unless we slow things down with great intentionality and mindfulness. It is only afterward that we reason about the judgment or action – seeking to rationalize our instinctive or automatic reaction(s). And we call that "ethical decision making" (Gazzaniga, 2008; Hauser, 2006; Haidt, 2007; Damasio, 2003).

Occasionally, the rational self actually does truly participate in the judgment process via the filters that we acquire throughout our lives that are attributable to the influences of our environments and culture(s). It's hard to think of Kant, Aristotle, Gilligan, Rand, and the rest of the pantheon of ethicists as afterthoughts (after-thinkers?), and in

the end, they probably won't hold such a position. But they may *not* provide the leading edges to our ethical decision making that we think they do.

This is the contemporary proposal, different than what we have probably grown up with and grown accustomed to believing. But if true and if the evidence and experiments that are leading to it continue to support it, the implications for how we understand ourselves and others and what we might do with that understanding are at least pretty fascinating if not a "killer app" (Downes and Mui, 2000) for social interactions, including mentoring.

A little more meat on these bones would help.

The bits of moral programming that enable fast and automatic responses to environmental triggers have been termed "moral modules" (Haidt and Joseph, 2004). Associated with each of these "moral modules" seem to be a roughly definable set of emotions that allows us to work backward from the emotions we see, or experience, to the moral module in play. In the least, these correlations simply help us to fill in more of the picture of what is transpiring when I, or the person I'm with, reacts to this or that situation. While there is considerable discussion over the number and naming of these moral modules, the following are a set that seem to be making the rounds in the research and conversations of those actively pursuing this line of inquiry:

Reciprocity: the social contract that provides the basis for social exchange, taking the form of: "If I do this for you, then you will do an equal amount for me sometime in the future." Reciprocity and affiliation are closely connected. We have a strong tendency to engage in reciprocity with those with whom we have or share a trust and we trust those who reciprocate, even if it's not initially (or ever) with us per se. The "moral emotions" connected with reciprocity include: sympathy (a frequent trigger to start an exchange), contempt, anger, guilt, shame (the constellation that comes forth when reciprocity is violated) and gratitude. Such virtues as trustworthiness, patience, justice

and fairness are probably derived from reciprocity; reciprocity, however, is not built directly on fairness and is its own state.

In-Group/Out-Group Coalition: the recognition of coalition (Kurzban and Tooby, 2001) serves to highlight patterns of cooperation, competition, and political allegiance. There are many arbitrary cues of this coalition – such as accent, manner of dress, skin color – which, by experimental evidence, turn out to be significant only if they hold predictive power for coalition connections (with me/against me). There are connections between reciprocity and in group/out group coalition recognition and the emotions associated with the latter both overlap and are distinct: guilt (for not supporting one's group or affiliation), embarrassment (for letting the group down), gratitude, anger (one group vs. another) and shame (for betraying a group). Trust, cooperation, self-sacrifice, loyalty, and heroism are among the connected virtues.

Purity: or its related emotion, disgust (which apparently a uniquely human emotion in the animal world (Gazzaniga, 2008). Purity, as a moral module, is believed to have its roots in the defense against disease (e.g., bacteria, parasites, fungi). A more nuanced elaboration of our purity response distinguishes three groupings: things that remind people of their animal nature, such as death, sex, hygiene, obesity and deformities; things thought to put interpersonal contamination in play, such as wearing another person's clothes particularly those of a disliked person; and then things that represent moral offenses such as violation of a person's rights or a person's place in society. These latter two categories manifest differently in different cultures or countries.

Suffering: sensitivity to signs of physical pain in others, a dislike for those who cause such pain and a desire to minimize or prevent such. The moral module of suffering and concern for it engenders sympathy, empathy, and

compassion with accompanying virtues of kindness and probably righteous anger.

And the last putative “moral module” is:

Hierarchy: how we navigate in a social world where status matters. Hierarchy, and our response to it, seems to exist in even the most egalitarian of groups and societies. Some individuals emerge as more fit, more attractive, more submissive or more dominant. While guilt or shame is most associated with the module of reciprocity, these emotions also can serve to shape behaviors in socially acceptable ways, thus helping one to navigate a hierarchical social system. The derivative emotions of respect, awe and resentment expand our repertoire and lead to virtues of loyalty and obedience.

Why do we not all respond the same if these modules are universal and the outcome of human evolution? Research on this question is pointing to individual and cultural differences being, in part if not a good measure, derived from how the set is stacked, the valence attached to each by the influences of our environment, and the interactions amongst the five.

Stacking the deck

To offer a few illustrations of using the five modules, let’s first return to Siegel’s earnest effort to capture a set of ethical principles that educators might or should adopt to guide decisions and behaviors and give them a fairer representation as a foil while also “trying on” the set of moral modules as interpreters. Not surprisingly, the proposed code of ethics hovers around “reciprocity,” “in group/out group,” and “suffering,” – and if there were a fourth that some touch on, it would be “hierarchy” (and its navigation). What comes from this point-by-point categorization is an affirmation that this approach to thinking about morality and judgments may provide a meta-strategy for both understanding choices and behaviors as well as perhaps (and I want to emphasize the tentativeness of that word “perhaps”) a way to start simplifying the entire conversation as to whether, as educators, we should or should not have an ethical standard to work by and, if so, what it might look like. (This is distinct at the moment, though not in the extended conversation, from whether we have internalized such a set of “standards” but are not aware that we even have it.)

Mentoring, mediating or collaboratively going our own ways

What prompted all of this reflection was a recent revisit to my conception and experience of mentoring or at least what colleagues and I have called mentoring. The more I think back and listen currently to adults in the role of student with whom I work in a presumably “mentoring” arrangement, the more I am realizing that I have been blind to the following: the driving motivation of the person walking in the front door is, more than less, a desire a) to become a part of a group of which he or she feels almost a member of or not at all – his workplace, her social class, another socio-economic class, a peer; b) to change status economically or socially; and/or c) to be capable of “giving” in a more equal way to their workplace or organization in order to make more equal the relationship and possible even heighten the return. If my characterization of this set of motivations is indeed accurate, then decisions to enroll in school (again) are mostly derived responses from desires for a coalition (in group/out group), an improved navigation of hierarchy, and to even the reciprocity playing field. I suspect that this comes as little surprise to anyone who has worked with adult learners.

“Universal” Code of Ethics (Siegel, 2000)	Derived from Primary Moral Module
Utilize, to the extent possible, the best available professional knowledge and practices in serving all learners.	Reciprocity
Respect the ethno-socio-cultural heritage, special circumstances and dignity as human beings of all adult learners.	In Group/Out Group
Avoid conflicts of interest, or the appearance of conflicts of interest, in all aspects of their work.	In Group/Out Group
Respect and strive to ensure, as appropriate, the need for confidentiality of each learner in interactions between learner and educator.	Reciprocity
Respect the unique and diverse learning needs of adult learners; respect the need of each learner for honesty, understanding and fairness; respect the real or perceived disparity in position between educator and learner; and respect the right of learners to participate in any solutions designed to meet their needs.	In Group/Out Group
Be cognizant of, remain sensitive to, and communicate the real or perceived negative impact of institutional or organizational policies and procedures on the learners, the institution or organization, and the community as a whole.	Hierarchy
Present advertising information concerning services and programs that is clear, complete, accurate, and descriptive of the actual services and programs being offered.	Reciprocity
Present services and programs that are fiscally responsible to all stakeholders, with results based upon objective and honest assessment.	Reciprocity
Assist in empowering learners to participate actively and effectively to improve the general welfare of their immediate and global communities and promote the concepts of a just and equitable society.	Suffering
Avoid doing harm to learners.	Suffering

What revisiting this in the context of an ethical/moral analysis has been pointing to is that my “mentoring” is and has needed to be much more about socialization than I have been acknowledging and, I think, much more than the rhetoric that has been written about good mentoring has highlighted. Indeed, I’m not sure why it’s called “mentoring” if the relationship is first built on socialization into academia, into a workplace, into a social group – and the expectations associated with each. Without citing the oft referenced works on mentoring, I am finding with fresh eyes that it is considerably more about the mediation of socialization than it is, for example, about personal development directed, in the academic milieu, toward greater levels of facility with cognitive, perceptive, affective, and behavioral complexities of inquiry and performance (Kolb, 1984). If it were, the battle cry and goal of mentoring would be “kill the mentor;” that is, to build the relationship such that the “protégé’s” final act of graduation would be to symbolically if not literally destroy the relationship. That is mentoring success ... or perhaps how we would do well to imagine it.

My point is this: the approach response of a great mentoring relationship is the creation of reciprocity between the mentor and student, mentor and protégé and the capacity of the student to create such reciprocity with whomever or whatever he or she targets for such a moral transaction. Whatever the *ethical* framework he or she adopts to frame or rationalize those transactions with the world is secondary – downstream – from a “yes I can and yes I should” response to these moral drivers and their stacking and the related emotions that lead the way.

“Mentoring” – or its hand-me-down cousin, “advising” – in the context of education (an institutional activity) will no doubt continue to be revered for its capacity to socialize. From that legitimized place in society, the practices of mentors and advisors are tacitly, if not explicitly, extensions of the moral expansion of students’ affiliations and abilities to navigate the hierarchies of life, promote entry to the desirable and desired “in groups,” and shore up the capacity to engage in reciprocal relationships. It’s what good institutions should do in a society.

It is a common conversation that power and associated privileges, as well as their distribution between a mentor and a student or protégé, is a fulcrum for ethical analysis and decision making (Hansman, 2009); if it weren’t so already, the moral analysis invoked here would have predicted it. Power stuff is a part of navigating hierarchies and responding to them effectively if not appropriately. Additionally, if my attention to reciprocity is given a high valence in my module stacking, I temper desires or tendencies to abuse power; if I don’t give it such a valence, I’m not too concerned about power differentials, particularly being on the institutional side of things, as mentors are by common practice, let alone by definition, in the academy. As a student, perhaps a bit shaky in the “reciprocity module,” the intersection of power and my moral stacking may need some considerable cultivation. Another hmm ... and what are my expectations of reciprocity between myself, as a mentor, and a student?

One of the major lessons of the contemporary view of morality described here is that the mentoring of someone’s cognitive capacities is unlikely to help that person attain “autonomy, freedom and development.”

The point of this is not to diminish the real transactional challenges of academic mentoring, but to understand that they are necessarily defined rather narrowly relative to Freire’s contention that “mentors should ‘transcend their merely instructive tasks ... assume the ethical posture of a mentor who truly believes in the total autonomy, freedom, and development of those he or she mentors” (Freire as quoted by Hansman, 2009). Indeed, these may even be subordinate functions of mentoring within

the morality of the academy except by self-proclamation. One of the major lessons of the contemporary view of morality described here is that the mentoring of someone’s cognitive capacities is unlikely to help that person attain “autonomy, freedom and development.” It will probably help academic success, to be sure, but also will be, by definition of how our human-ness seems to function, inadequate. Is this what forms the real ethical dilemmas we face as well-intentioned mentors?

But what if mentoring was derived from the moral trajectories of not only building capacity for navigating hierarchies, facilitating affiliations, and expanding the repertoires of reciprocity, but also for the reduction of suffering and heightened responses associated with purity? We can reason backwards from any ethical premises or argument we choose to accept or reject one or another take on mentoring let alone all of our relationships; we’ve been doing that for quite some time, engaging sincerely in what may very well be mostly afterthought. Insightful researchers are telling us that “gut reactions” are worth listening to, that they are the basis of a pretty good proportion of our humanity, and we have much to learn about and from them. My gut tells me that mentoring, defined in these terms, has some effective alternatives to the hand wringing that many of us engage in under the tent of ethics or the search for it.

Notes

- ¹ COYOTE ... a 30+-year-old organization among sex workers advocating for rights; the acronym stands for Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics ... I respectfully borrow the acronym and leave a discussion of the organization for another time.

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From *Lives on the Boundary* (1989, 236):

Canonical lists imply canonical answers, but the manifestoes offer little discussion of what to do when students fail. If students have been exposed to at least some elements of the canon before – as many have – why didn't it take? If they're encountering it for the first time and they're lost, how can we determine where they're located – and what do we do then?

Two Poems

Celest Woo, Hudson Valley Center

Firebreak

the winnowing time is back again
 it lengthens with each pass
 threshing out, fleshing out
 faithworthiness, the task

the chaff and wheat resemble one
 another – there’s the rub
 between the wheels of growth and death
 the grain comes forth with blood

chaff and wheat, goats and sheep
 separation comes
 in good and forward-looking steps
 to cull the harvest home

distinguishing is difficult
 the two mix and disguise
 the past can prove false counsel
 for the crops can change their sides

truth hides within the millstone
 invisible and hard
 around the neck it weighs and drowns
 flat, it grinds forth food

always unexpected, what
 final division shows
 the husk conceals hope, wisdom
 and straight gold wheat betrays

God’s ways can be unethical,
 immoral, even, says
 a weed tossed by the wayside
 tramped down but reborn,

for ethics are for neat-plowed rows
 untouched by searing thread
 the scars of war teach different ways
 to grasp life by the hand

sacramental bounty grows
 despite each season’s deaths
 the autumn’s sadness also calls
 each bleeding grain to feast

(Previously published in *Burnished Sol*, Columbus, OH: Pudding House, 2009, p. 13. “Firebreak” also was a first prize winner, Faculty/Staff category, Long Island University 32nd Annual Poetry Contest, 1998.)

Looking for Winter

This is the reason. A bite-size dollop of snow
 festooning a fistful of red berries
 nestled in a knot of winter-brittle branches
 chocolate enough to eat.

The little indentation near the top
 of that squirt of snow (slightly off-kilter)
 makes the lump an elf-cap, a frost-fuzzed hood
 with the tassel bent over trying to glimpse
 the impish smirk on the face it adorns.

Or, that scooped-out cavity invites
 the head of some forest mite so tiny
 she would leave no footprints in the snow;
 it would pillow her cheek just how that
 smooth hollow beneath your shoulder and
 collarbone cradles mine.

God's been out spitting shaving cream,
 or perhaps kicking his heels up
 in a jig among the clouds,
 dislodging a mischievous divot of snow
 and sending it to splat perfectly in this hedge.

Deciduous hedges, nonexistent in L.A.
 – or else perpetually uncertain when to strip
 and flash the passers-by in their brown nakedness.

This is why I came east and north, to find
 winter encapsulated in a mound of snow
 sitting like Cool-Whip, ready to be spooned
 onto my tongue (red to match the berries), tasting
 just sweet enough that sugar is an afterthought.

(Previously published in *Nassau Review* 8.1 [2000]: 121.)

Lifelong Learning and Empire State College or Life After Empire State College

Rhoda Wald, mentor emeritus, Long Island Center

I sat there in the middle of the boxes, boxes everywhere, big ones, small ones and ones too heavy to move. I couldn't find the dining room table anymore and, as I looked around that early morning in late August 1998, I had this terrible sinking feeling. What was I doing? I was in the throes of two major transitions, retiring from my academic position and relocating to Boston.

I am a born and bred New Yorker and lived there most of my life, except during the early stages of my marriage and when I worked abroad. But the retirement incentive was too good to reject. And since my three children, their families and six grandchildren live in Boston, a rare coincidence when so many families are dispersed all over the country, combining retirement with a major move seemed logical, rational and timely.

That didn't make it easier. I was facing all the challenges of a new phase of life and it was difficult for me to think of life without work. I no longer was a professional and academic and retirement, combined with relocation, seemed even riskier. But Boston was not completely strange to me. My three children were married in Boston. For over 20 years, I went back and forth many times a year to visit my family, to attend family celebrations, births of grandchildren, and care if someone was ill.

Now, ten years later, I realize that Empire State College had an impact on various aspects of the transition. Through Empire, I spent some time in the 1970s in the Harvard community. I was a visiting faculty member for several months at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, representing nontraditional higher education and Empire State College. In 1990, while on sabbatical, I had a month-long fellowship through the Association for Religion and Intellectual Life at the Harvard Divinity School.

I moved to Boston the first week of September 1998. The apartment I leased

was wonderful, a large two bedroom, two bath apartment with a patio and a long expanse of living, dining room. I even had an alcove for my computer and bookcases, something I did not have in the last place I lived. After years of parking in the open driveway of my home and in the street after I sold the house and moved to an apartment, the covered garage was heaven. I would not have to worry about snow and getting into a cold car, and it does snow in Boston, often and heavy.

Although I had my retirement income and Social Security, it seemed strange not to get a paycheck. As a newly retired person, not having an income that came from employment was a difficult adjustment. I thought I needed to work, not a full-time job, but some added income to allay my anxiety and now high rent.

For a long time I looked for an entry in the world of higher education but I could not find anything that was desirable. Universities were beginning to retrench and were moving into distance learning. I was offered teaching jobs, but I did not really want to teach in a traditional college environment. What I really wanted was a setting that called on my administrative and creative abilities. I wanted to administer a small project, much as I did at Empire State College with the Child Development Associate (CDA) and sabbatical projects or work in some capacity in a nontraditional setting.

In my wanderings for an apartment, I met a broker who urged me to acquire a real estate license and work for him. I helped a buyer find something the first month I was working in real estate. What was interesting and seems really funny was that my years at Empire State College paid off in the real estate world. At Empire, responding to individual differences is the heart of the program. In the real estate world, I found myself also responding to individual differences almost as an automatic reflex.

I knew what people wanted and did not waste their or my time taking them to the wrong properties. Because I worked that way, people trusted me.

I made some money over the years but the real gain was gaining confidence driving all around Boston. People I know who have lived here their entire lives never went to some of the places I've been to. And Empire also played a role in my ability to drive anywhere and adapt so quickly to the erratic arrangement of Boston streets.

When I lived in Jerusalem for one year administering the Empire State College program there, I rented Amnon Orent's car. Jerusalem is somewhat like Boston, not designed as a grid the way New York is, but rather in curves and unexpected junctures. Boston was built on landfill and potato farms. I have no idea why Jerusalem is that way; probably the city just grew serendipitously. If I could drive in Jerusalem, I certainly could manage Boston, although it is difficult to say where the most precarious drivers are.

At the same time that I was enjoying my closeness to my family and adjusting to another city, I knew I had to create a life of my own, a life of satisfaction, intellectually and socially – a life of independence. I knew about programs for retired people because I advised students studying issues in gerontology. I applied and was accepted to the Harvard Institute for Learning in Retirement (HILR) connected to the Harvard School of Continuing Education. There are almost 400 programs in the country organized for retired people or older adults attached to academic institutions. The model is peer learning and teaching. At HILR there are approximately 500 members and this past fall semester there were 67 study groups.

In addition to having the major responsibilities for my family, financially and otherwise, I pursued a doctorate and,

at the same time, held full-time work responsibilities. The opportunity to study leisurely and pursue new interests was tantalizing. I knew only a few people in Boston; the possibility of making friends through such a community was reassuring. It seemed perfect for me. I could be with peers who shared interests as well as life experiences.

During what is now a ten-year period, I've taken many courses over a wide range of topics and led five. The Empire State College concept of lifelong learning is certainly the HILR model. The first course I led, Life and Death, Affirmation and Meaning, was held at the Brandeis Institute for Learning in Retirement. Although I mentored this topic to many students at Empire State College, I had some apprehension about teaching this subject to a population in their 60s and 70s, a group for whom the topic was timely, but, perhaps, painful. In actuality, it turned out the participants welcomed the opportunity to explore issues related to their stage of life.

This experience was the impetus for me to think about how, when and where subjects related to the older adult could be taught to people who were actually confronting these issues. As an older retired adult, this experience mirrored my own consciousness, questions and unresolved issues.

At Empire, in addition to studies in education, I was a mentor for a range of topics under the general heading of "adult development." Aging studies are a natural progression within adult development theory. Although there are many kinds of programs for older adults, courses and other learning activities that frankly confront the dilemmas and transitions of the later stages of life are generally not available. Just four or five years ago, even HILR did not encourage conversations about aging, either informally or formally, in study groups. There was a conscious reticence about courses and discussions on aging. The general attitude was that people were not interested in these topics. There has been a dramatic turn-around regarding that discomfort in the last several years, and several of my colleagues and I have been at the center of this new direction.

In 2004, the curriculum committee initiated a series of dialogue meetings for the various

disciplines including aging studies. Aging studies evolved into various activities, which we called Conversations on Aging. I was the coordinator. Several study groups regarding aging studies also emerged; I taught three, which focused on the culture of aging in the various disciplines – psychology, behavioral sciences, spirituality, and literature and poetry. Another more informal group was interested in conducting research on the older adult: we were a small group; there were six of us.

After going back and forth about what we wanted to do and since our resources were limited, we decided to write personal narratives from which we could extrapolate major themes. The concept was introduced to us by a fellow member who was a retired anthropology professor from Brandeis. A monograph consisting of our personal narratives and short theoretical essays was published in 2007 and we were encouraged by the dean of continuing education at Harvard and the director of our program to expand our work.

For the last several years we have done just that. We brought people together in small writing groups and interviewed others. Our book, *New Pathways for Aging*, published in September 2009, is a collection of 27 personal stories, interspersed with theoretical essays about this stage of life (website: PathwaysforAging.org). The results turned out to be much richer than we anticipated. The narratives were diverse,

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as each contributor explored the defining moments leading to retirement and offered testimony to issues of loss, illness and relocation. These narratives are stories of resilience, courage, creativity and hope. We developed a rewarding intimacy through our writing and sharing and consider this process an essential component of our model. We also identified several major themes in our narratives that introduce each chapter: identity, the culture of aging, learning, community and mortality.

At this juncture, approximately 200 people have been involved in one or more of the conversations on aging, the formal study groups and the more informal writing groups. We have changed the culture of HILR. The collective of a highly functioning community of older adults also helps promote dignity and a positive self-image for everyone. We began to understand on a deeper level the issues and complexities of this stage of life. It may be ironic, but studying our own aging led us to relish our mental and creative abilities and know that they are not dormant. And this March, we are presenters at the annual conference of the National Council on Aging in Chicago.

I began this essay with the two issues I was facing in 1998: retirement from an academic career and relocation from New York to Boston. The relocation has also exceeded my hopes and expectations. I've made a great many friends here whom I see on one social level or another. I don't know how I would feel as an older retired adult if I were not a member of a community of peers. How would I fare in the larger community? But whether it is a result of this experience or my own personal character, my self-esteem is intact. And my family is pleased to have me near them and delighted that I am occupied and enjoying life.

For me, involvement in intellectual programs also provides a community that nurtures feelings of affirmation and meaning, which is a sharp contrast to the sense of alienation and isolation I often feel as a mature, adult woman in contemporary society. Basically, my passions have always been around my career and my family. Increasingly, my interest in the field of aging studies almost feels like a passion. I work hard at maintaining a healthy, vigorous self-

image and a sense of empowerment and at transmitting these ideas to my peers.

Writing has some elements of passion and creativity and often I am at the computer at five in the morning. I started writing about 25 years ago when I sold my house and went from room to room remembering what happened there, who we were, and how we developed. For me, writing restores and sustains memory in a way that supports reflection, clarification and the search for meaning. The gift of returning to the past leads to greater understanding of the present and the one life I have – it's issues, its unique qualities and my place in a larger scenario. Writing has helped me clarify this stage of life and the transitions of retirement and relocation.

On another level completely, one of the recurring issues of this stage of life is the continuing awareness of illness and death. I am constantly reminded of my own mortality – sickness and death are around the corner. Illness and death are part of the everyday climate of my world. I think that this level of experience is mysterious and difficult, and we have not developed any fruitful conversations about the very last stages of life. These illnesses and deaths also are reinforcements that life matters, that each day is important and one must make the most of the moment, physically, intellectually and emotionally.

Empire State College provided a permanent lens for me to view lifelong learning in a new setting and with a totally different population. Consciousness regarding individualized education and application to the range of ethnic, religious and experiential differences is expanding and enriching. The flexible curriculum of Empire

State College provided me with the impetus to think out of the box in my present setting in which most people have high-level traditional forms of education. My long-standing interest in adult development led to explorations of the later stages of life in ways I had never considered before.

All my professional life I've been connected in one way or another to alternative education. Many years ago, I began in early childhood education and I have now traveled the entire life cycle, from young children, to undergraduates and graduate students of traditional college age, to the adult students at Empire State College, and now, to people at the later stages of life. There are few nontraditional programs for people at any stage of life that do not capture my heart and imagination.

Finally, about Boston: I feel I shall always be somewhat of a stranger in this city. None of my history is here. My history is someplace back there in New York, in the houses, and apartments of my youth, my marriage, my single parent period, my life with past lovers, and my career. I have trouble saying this aloud in Boston: I am still a Yankee fan and I was thrilled that the Yankees won the World Series in 2009. But Boston is where I live and it is almost home. Not quite, but almost.

I am fortunate. To have experiences that are engaging, to feel creative and productive, to have good friends, to have health and family ties, to be involved in the intellectual life, to write a book at this stage of life – all of these are blessings. On the whole, I am alive and well, and continually engaged in the discovery of new pathways in the journey of lifelong learning.

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Postscript

I always read all the mail I get from Empire State College and look for familiar names and new programs. Feel free to drop me a note: rhoadawald@rcn.com.

Unlearning “Good” Habits: Taming our “Lust for Stuff”

Robert Altobello, Hudson Valley Center

In this discussion, I want to explore the relationship between consumer/acquisitive materialism, the emotions, and how the connection between the two relates to some problems in environmental ethics. I then discuss the notion that consumer-driven materialism is incompatible with an environmental ethic that values long-term sustainability of our environment. I also want to show how mitigating the materialism will require changing the deep-rooted emotive patterns that attach motivational strategies to material goods.



Robert Altobello

Unlearning “good” habits: taming our “lust for stuff”¹

I remember talking to my uncle shortly after his wife of 40 years had died. I asked him how he was really doing, and he said he was “doing fine.” I told him that if he ever needed to talk with someone, or just needed some company, to call me, and we could go out for a beer. His reply was “thanks,” but he was “really fine.” Then he elaborated: “Sometimes I do feel a little down, but then I just go to the mall and buy something and that always makes me feel better.” For Uncle Louis, and apparently for millions of others, the mall is like a cathedral or temple. It is the place where he can connect with his most powerful emotions – those that enable him to transcend his pain. I am reminded of President Bush’s advice to the American people following the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001: “Go shopping!” Of course, he should have added, “It will make y’all feel better,” but that information was, of course, tacitly imbedded in his suggestion. And certainly, we should not forget the great sacred celebration of Black Friday when more Americans flock the packed cathedrals all across the country and dance like whirling dervishes lost in communion with their sacred ideal.

George W. Bush once claimed that Americans are addicted to oil, and we may

be. Clearly we over-use fossil fuel; and our lives, country and economy cannot function at an effective level without it. However, though we may be addicted to oil, we are obsessed with material goods. Spiraling consumer thirst is the critical linchpin that drives our economy. Yet, with each dazzling turn of the economic engine, we dig ourselves deeper and deeper into environmental debt. Material goods require material resources. Old ones need to be dumped. Still, we need to keep spending, keep buying, to make the economic engine roar. I am again reminded of President G. W. Bush and his clever plan to infuse life into the slumping economy. He gave us all money (\$400) and urged us to do our civic duty by heading to the malls and buying more stuff! Perhaps to some readers, complaining about Bush may seem a bit out of fashion; after all, he is no longer in power. But then simply look to the past year’s Christmas shopping season. Listen to the news, and learn just how important it is to our economic well-being that spending on consumer goods flourishes; or maybe consider the worries about profits on Black Friday and their significance for our economic well-being.

I admit the rhetoric is strong, and I know that anecdotal evidence does not prove much. I will, however, add substance to the rhetoric as we proceed. But in many ways this essay flows from my observations and inferences. The paper was somewhat inspired by Michael Steinberg’s remark that: “We are mutating into the species best fitted to the capitalist world, and enough remains of our old life that we find the process painful” (2005, p. 143). How this mutation might be possible will emerge as I proceed.

With apologies to Kant and those who, like him, thought that ethical behavior could be grounded in reason, I believe that the connection between emotion and behavior is a major element in the structure upon which moral motivation stands. If this position is correct, then we need to do more than just change the way people think, we need to modify the roots of motivation by altering the emotive patterns that shape our motivational strategies. For example, if we motivate people to “go green” by luring them with the financial gains that will accrue from buying hybrids or energy efficient appliances, it seems doubtful to me that genuine (i.e., long term) benefits will arise as long as the core motivational impetus is animated by acquisitive materialism. After all, exactly what do we think the newborn “conscientious” environmentalists are going to do with their fresh found financial boons?

Of course, I know that it is better that our new environmentalists consume less fossil fuel, but if the net result is buying a new television or computer before we really need it, then we have merely rearranged things and diverted the problem from one area to another. Sure, it may be good for the economy, but that position just deepens the concern. Capitalism driven by consumer materialism thrives on giving people the stuff they need and want; but once the needs are met, the systemic machinery has to create new wants in order to keep

the engine going. And if those new wants stem from materialist thirsts, then we've merely shuffled the marked cards instead of changing the deck.

Reason and the passions

The ancient Greeks had a model for ethical development that focused on the cultivation of virtues. For the Greeks (especially for Aristotle), the virtues were dispositions that caused us to behave in the appropriate (excellent) manner in relation to the matter at issue. The Aristotelian ideal was to align (via ethical training) our passions (e.g., emotions and desires) with our reason so that we would create a kind of harmony between these two sides of our nature, resulting in a condition where our passions willingly (and pleasurably) followed the dictates of our reason. According to the Greek ideal, reason should rule the passions – cognition should exert its superiority over biology. However, the Greeks also were acutely aware of an irrational element in human nature that sometimes saw reason succumb to the irrational promptings of the passions, and taming this irrationality was the goal of their models for ethical development.

The classic Greek model divided people into four stages of moral/ethical development. The least developed character in this model was the licentious (akolasia) man (remember it is ancient Greece). The licentious character is morally bankrupt. In essence, he thinks the “bad” is good. The licentious man does the bad thing, enjoys doing it, and actually thinks it is right. There is no regret or remorse, no inner conflict. He has fully integrated his personality with his licentious ways. Aristotle viewed this type of character (especially if the person reached middle age with the habits intact) as beyond moral training. Minimally, for moral development to occur there needed to be some incongruity between habitual detrimental emotive patterns and reason. From this point of view, good judgment minimally had to see (and wish to change) the irrational pattern.

The next level is that of the weak-willed (akrasia) man. This man is the typical human being struggling with right and wrong. He knows the good, wants to do

it, but still enjoys the “bad” and thus often succumbs to his baser passions. However, the weak-willed man does regret his actions and feels remorse, and the door is thus open for moral development as his reason has not been totally undermined by the long cultivation of irredeemable passions.

Next on the scale is the strong-willed (enkrateia) man. Here we find the man of strong moral fiber. He knows the good, is tempted by (e.g., still enjoys) the bad, but in a gesture of strong moral virtue, overcomes his base passions and does the right thing. Finally we find the possessor of *sōphrosynē*. The term is technically translated as moderation, but it really means a kind of moral mastery. The man animated by this disposition knows the good, does the good, and enjoys doing it (or at least finds displeasure in not doing it). There is no moral struggle in this case; instead we find a perfect symmetry between reason and the passions.

To help clarify the scheme, let's take smoking as the example. The licentious man smokes, enjoys it, and thinks it is a good thing to do. The weak-willed man knows smoking is “bad,” wishes he did not smoke, tries to quit; but when he walks into the smoke-filled room and feels the magic tingle on his taste buds, he succumbs to the demands of his body in spite of his better judgment. The strong-willed man responds in the opposite way of his weak-willed counterpart. He knows smoking is bad for him. Yet he still feels the pleasure as the smoke dances on his taste buds and part of him even wants to smoke. However, in a powerful show of moral strength, he refuses to smoke as the strength of his willpower

is sturdily aligned with his sense of good judgment. Finally, we might envision the man of moral mastery as walking into the smoke-filled room and starting to cough. He finds no pleasure in the smoke. His taste buds respond with dislike. No temptation, no struggle, there is simply this perfect symmetry between what he knows, what he feels, and what is best for his body.

In a sense, the Greek model does mirror elements of good common sense. There is a theoretical attraction in the notion that our discriminating judgments should be able to control and contain indiscriminate passions/emotions that run counter to our clear understanding and conceptions of what is the right thing to do. We expect people to be able to control their irrational emotions, and we often even punish them if they cannot or do not control themselves. For example, the current consensus view is that Tiger Woods should have been able to control himself and shouldn't have allowed his irrational sexual passions to undermine his knowledge of what is right.

Yet, the same problem that haunted the Greeks still haunts us. Firm lines are difficult to draw. We do not always eat correctly, exercise, study, etc., even though we “know” that we should. And, of course, any effective psychotherapist can confirm this: It does little good to tell the person with an eating disorder, “Well, you know you should stop eating the way you do. So, use your common sense and stop. After all, you know how bad this overeating is for you.” The emotional connection to the detrimental eating habit is just too strong. The passion simply takes over, and the “good” judgment is easily overpowered much like the akratic man in the ancient Greek model.

A contemporary perspective

However, we are making progress in understanding this phenomenon. Neurologist and philosopher Antonio Damasio has developed an insightful explanation of the relationship between reason and our emotions/passions. Damasio makes a distinction between feelings and emotions, in which he wants to distinguish an inner process and the outer manifestation that accompanies that process. “I have proposed that the term feeling should be

Minimally, for moral development to occur there needed to be some incongruity between habitual detrimental emotive patterns and reason.

preserved for the private, mental experience of an emotion, while the term emotion should be used to designate the collection of responses, many of which are publicly observable” (Damasio 1999, p. 42). For example, if I am angry and throw the student’s folder across the room, the throwing, my knitted brow, and my red-faced rage are the observable responses (i.e., the emotion), while how I am feeling inside is what Damasio is calling a feeling. We should not quibble about terms here. Damasio is simply trying to use clearly defined terminology that helps us better understand the phenomena associated with emotional life.

According to this model, our emotions are driven by physiological habits that have been developed across our evolutionary history. “Emotions are complicated collections of chemical and neural responses, forming a pattern; all emotions have some kind of regulatory role to play, leading in one way or another to the creation of circumstances advantageous to the organism exhibiting the phenomenon; emotions are about the life of the organism, its body to be precise, and their role is to assist the organism in maintaining life” (p. 51). Of course, emotions can run to excess, but the excess and/or dysfunction does not mitigate the fact that the presence of the emotion originally served an adaptive function.

Damasio also differentiates between primary and secondary emotions.² Primary emotions run deeper and are part of our “nature,” at least that is what the cross cultural presence of primary emotions like happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise or disgust would suggest. (p. 50) However, the secondary or social emotions have a more culturally imbedded underpinning. Damasio lists emotions like embarrassment, jealousy, guilt and pride as paradigmatic examples of social emotions. But even these secondary emotions can have deep roots; and once a person has assimilated the secondary emotion, it too becomes embedded with her physiological constitution. And, of course, there also is a strong evolutionary dynamic at play here. Indeed, cultures will automatically pass on emotions that enhance fitness.

In his *Darwin’s Cathedral*, David Sloan Wilson concurs with Damasio’s core view on emotions and elaborates on their evolutionary role in that “Emotions are evolved mechanisms for motivating adaptive behavior that are far more ancient than the cognitive processes typically associated with scientific thought” (2002, p. 42). Hence, emotions served the evolutionary process because they benefited their host communities, or the individuals who compose those communities.

This perspective helps us understand why emotions like avarice, greed and acquisitive material craving have survived. It is easy to understand how, for example, emotions like avarice and greed might arise as a result of fitness enhancing gathering and accumulating behavior; and people who developed these emotions would have had an advantage in scarce times over those who didn’t develop them, just like the squirrels in the backyard. It also is relevant to note that gathering and accumulating along with their associated emotional attachments are central social mechanisms for driving our capitalist economy.

Another main thread in Damasio’s argument is that emotion is not “a luxury, nuisance or evolutionary vestige” (Damasio 1999, p. 42). Emotions and their concurrent feelings are vital elements in the decision-making process. They help us contextualize circumstance and add value and meaning to what might otherwise be a meaningless flow of activities across the temporal horizon. Damasio provides an abundance of evidence for this conclusion in case studies where brain injury or neurological disease has damaged portions of the brain responsible for the production of emotions. These individuals lack vital decision-making and social skills, and they often display an inability to make basic value judgments concerning themselves and others. “I did not suggest, however, that emotions are a substitute for reason or that emotions decide for us. It is obvious that emotional upheavals can lead to irrational decisions. The neurological evidence simply suggests that selective absence of emotion is a problem. Well-targeted and well-deployed emotion seems to be a support system without which the edifice of reason cannot operate properly” (Damasio 1999, p. 42).

Consequently, according to this model, there is a kind of mutual codependent relationship between rational decision making and emotions. Reflecting back to the Greek dilemma, we can see why this irrational element of the passions was so difficult to tame. Emotional attachment and/or aversion are part of the fiber out of which motivation and intention emerge. They can be seen as embodiments of the logic of survival. (p. 42) Human beings need some level of emoting to function as integrated creatures with an embodied interest in how our interactions with our environments affect us.

Emotional responses are usually involuntary. Think of the tears filling our eyes at the end of films like “It’s a Wonderful Life” or “The Wizard of Oz.” The response is preset. There is little we can do to stop it. Think of the times when you tried to hide your emotional response to a sappy film. Or think of public speaking; if we are nervous, our voices crack, and we completely reveal that which we would much rather hide. Many emotions are like reflexive responses. They happen to us, and though we may be able to control or constrain our behavior in the face of strong societal objections, there is little we can do to control the physiology of the response.

There is an element of evolutionary brilliance in the way emotions trigger responses and motivate actions. The flight or fight response is the classic example here, but we also are charged by the powerful pull of attraction. When we become emotionally attached and drawn to objects that benefit our well-being, we see this brilliance in action – we resonate in harmony with that which embellishes our welfare. The opposite effect occurs in the face of danger. Posture and gait reflect caution, and a palpably vigilant affect animates our sense of presence. In effect, we are wired to give emotional value to objects in our environment, and once this value is given and set, the pattern will usually arise without any conscious intent.

However, this wonderful capacity can (and often does) extend beyond its useful and beneficial bounds. Sometimes we become attached to objects that exceed our biological needs. We loosen the emotional ratchet and extend the scope of the emotion.

The objects towards which the emotion attaches itself multiply. The emotion becomes easier to activate. It becomes much easier to “push our buttons.” Damasio elaborates on the relationship between this widening of this emotional horizon and motivation by noting the implications of this attaching function.

“The consequence of extending emotional value to objects that were not biologically prescribed to be emotionally laden is that the range of stimuli that can potentially induce emotions is infinite. In one way or another, most objects and situations lead to some emotional reaction, although some far more than others. ... Emotion and the biological machinery underlying it are the obligate accompaniment of behavior, conscious or not. Some level of emoting is the obligate accompaniment of thinking about oneself or about one’s surroundings” (p. 58).

This propensity for the objects of an emotion to multiply is the fuel that drives the consumer economy. It also is the way healthy habits go astray, and the problem runs very deep because we are programmed for the trap. When the attaching emotion opens its selective horizon, a more diverse array of potential gratifiers appears, and the involuntary healthy habit begins to run wild across the expanded horizon.

There also is an interesting phenomenon that emerges in relation to this process. We can actually breed new connections. We can create emotional relationships to objects by generating associative connections to the biologically prescribed object. Hence by thinking about something, we can activate the physiological mechanism that produces the emotional response. This capacity is the origin of obsession. Once the new connections manifest, our attachments swell; and the scope of our thirst expands beyond its intended horizon. As Epicurus notes in his “Leading Doctrines,” “The wealth demanded by nature is both limited and easily procured; that demanded by idle imaginings stretches on to infinity” (Epicurus 1999, p. 159).

Emotions, the consumer economy and the environment

Emotions are rooted in biologically selected behavior. However, at times, they tend to be somewhat indiscriminate when their target range extends well beyond their biologically prescribed objects. This tendency is partly responsible for the success and efficiency of capitalism, especially in its acquisitive materialistic form. The economy booms when the purchasing of consumer goods flourishes, and the purchasing of goods flourishes when the market creates enticing emotional attachments to its offerings – an enticement frequently so strong that it often includes a willingness to incur debt and behave in financially irresponsible ways. However, as the horizon of objects swells, the needs (and wants) for more and more gratifiers expands; and if these gratifiers are consumable material products, the conflict between our passion for things and our reasonable environmental common sense puts us right back in the horns of the Greek dilemma – we know better but our emotional attachments drive us in a different direction.

Maybe we don’t know better. Maybe we have become so conditioned to living in relative material luxury that we don’t even notice. I believe that the Damasio position on the emotions and their relation to behavior could be used to explain how attachment to material goods can literally sink into our marrow. We need look no further than the way material products are marketed to see how breeding an emotional connection to material goods so effectively snares us.

Yes, I know the quality of our lives has been greatly enhanced by the scope and extent of material progress. Yet I think it is fair to ask, “When enough is enough,” and how do we tell when we have confused “quality of life” with “lust for stuff?” Admittedly, defining “quality of life” is a bit subjective, but, however we define “quality of life,” part of its meaning has to include a healthy environment that will sustain us. It is really important to understand that quality of life has no meaning without context. If that context is embedded within a framework animated by emotions rooted in consumer materialism, then, of course,

material prosperity and quality of life will have a congruency. The congruency becomes inescapable once our reflexive responses (and the way we think about those responses) are conditioned by the texture and tenor of material-driven social reality. As Steinberg puts it, “Like the erotic, materialism is an affair not of our flesh but our heads. Our conscious and semi-conscious intentions seek their ends through the emotional penumbrae of the products offered for sale” (p. 145).

I am a bit pessimistic about the possible solutions. The problem runs very deep and thinking that we can rectify the problem by “greening” capitalism is (in my view) naïve in that the focus of that project often remains rooted in the same model – substitute “green stuff” for the “old bad stuff.” Of course, as I mentioned above, I would not deny that greening is better than not greening. I merely argue that unless there is a radical change in how people (generally) measure value in their lives, how they emote towards what makes life meaningful, and how our social reality reinforces the inflation of materialistic attachments, we simply are not focusing on the real depth of the problem. We may be able to palliate some of the problems, clean the debris from the surface wounds, but clearing off the surface rubble simply does not get to the root of the problem. Steinberg flails away at the toxic underside of the issue. “The spiral of consumption in which each purchase geometrically multiplies the demand for further ones drives the engine of capitalism and strip mines our physical environments and our inner lives at the same time” (p. 146). However, it is not even necessary to go to Steinberg’s lengths. We need not make any absolute moral judgment against the expanding specter of consumer materialism. I would only argue that consumer materialism is incompatible with long-term sustainability, given the assumption that long-term sustainability is important.

The success of our current brand of consumer materialism, our “lust for stuff,” has both a Pavlovian and Orwellian underpinning. The magic of media-driven marketing activates our lust for more and more material goods by igniting our emotional attachments (ringing the bell);

and once emotions attach to objects via the generation of physiological reactions, the Pavlovian triggers will consistently motivate the appropriate response. From the Orwellian perspective, the dominant value-infusing cultural narrative reinforces and rewards our material attachments through the systematic elevation of material values across the social horizon. We glamorize the material excesses of the rich and famous; we even have television programs that let us all salivate over their “quality of life.” And then to deepen the emotional connection to materialism, there exists a clear correspondence between material well-being and social power along with a deep economic dependency on the “prosperity” developed by the materialist machinery.

Fritjof Capra astutely notes the correspondences that underlie the quality of life issue: “In contemporary capitalist society,” he points out, “the central value of money-making goes hand in hand with the glorification of material consumption. A never ending stream of advertising messages reinforces people’s delusion that the accumulation of material goods is the royal road to happiness” (2002, p. 263).

One could argue that our lust for stuff is, in a certain way, a healthy emotional habit. For centuries, Western civilization has been constructed in such a way that it rewards the behavior of those who possess this trait. In fact, for those living in a capitalist society,

We need not make any absolute moral judgment against the expanding specter of consumer materialism. I would only argue that consumer materialism is incompatible with long-term sustainability, given the assumption that long-term sustainability is important.

there may be no better quality to possess for measuring the value of one’s relative standing in terms of the most common social metric. Sure, we need to control our materialistic expressions according to the social mores, and even at times rein them in a tad when, for example, long term interests trump the immediate desire. However, in the larger reference frame, the “haves” have always done “better” than the “have-nots” because material well-being is part of the fiber out of which we construct our social reality.

I am again reminded of Aristotle and his pessimistic view that if dispositions became settled as we reached middle age, there was little hope to change them. Perhaps, our brand of civilization has reached middle age – a flourishing middle age at that. It certainly seems that the lust for stuff and the tendency to correlate a good life with a materially prosperous life is not only dominant here but spreading through the globalization of capitalism as material values spread across humanity like a slowly metastasizing cancer.³ And like withdrawal from an addiction, any attempt to mitigate the problem is going to be painful (e.g., an assured economic downturn, and a loss of many objects to which we have grown attached including the jobs of making of the “stuff”). Perhaps, that notion (the extreme pain and emotional suffering withdrawing from the “lust for stuff” entails) should send home the message better than anything I can say – our global well-being depends upon a painful withdrawal from our particular lusts.

Another “idol of the tribe?”

Consumer materialism is becoming something like one of Bacon’s “idols of the tribe”; only in this case we have a valuation process instead of an entity assuming the supreme position. Common sense would tell us to begin an educational process and teach people the detrimental effects of this lust for stuff. However, as we have seen, common sense and reason in the face of strong emotional pulls does not always succeed. The irrational (i.e., nonrational) element is sometimes simply too robust. Failure to attend to this irrational element and its tenacity often appears in contemporary literature on religion. There is a tendency

from very smart people to try to argue people out of their emotionally charged religious convictions via hard-headed logic and common sense.

For example, Richard Dawkins in *The God Delusion* and Daniel Dennett in *Breaking the Spell* hammer away at the lack of evidence and illogical arguments upon which many religious beliefs stand. It’s as if Dawkins and Dennett think that deep religious believers are making a logical mistake (which they may be); and if religious people would just listen to the logic of the Dawkins/Dennett line of argument, all forms of religious silliness would vanish. However, deeply held convictions that are infused with emotional value often don’t work that way (as Damasio and the Greeks clearly show us). Once an emotionally charged opinion has settled into the fiber of someone’s internalized value scheme, something more than evidence and logic is often needed to uproot the emotional attachment to the belief (e.g., the power of deep religious faith that defies all reason). And the problem only deepens when the internalized value is reinforced by the existing cultural mores. From the perspective of this essay, the deep and pervasive nature of materialism holds a similar place in our culture – and it’s spreading.

Some are more optimistic than I. Some see the resiliency of the human spirit as more than able to meet the challenge. For example, Fritjof Capra and David Suzuki believe strongly that we can undo the problem by switching our value system away from materialism and focusing on the establishment of strong ecosystems that move thinking and values away “... from linear systems of resource extraction and accumulation of products and waste to cyclical flows of matter and energy; from focus on objects and natural resources to focus on services and human resources, from seeking happiness in material possessions to finding it in nurturing relationships” (p. 266). Certainly, this type of project represents a noble ideal, and clearly it is the kind of social and economic alteration necessary to reverse the environmental decline.

However, motivating that project with materialist emotions still intact may be

very difficult and painful. Attachments are incredibly difficult to overcome and unwind. This kind of social retooling of our values will require changing the way people emotionally respond to and construct their core values. And then that project will only succeed as the changes seep into the collective emotional fiber. As we have seen, attachments embedded in emotional structures are resilient in resisting reconstruction. Perhaps no one knew this better than the ancient Hindus and Buddhists who viewed attachment as the central impediment for spiritual development – in fact in some interpretations of these doctrines, attachments are the cause of all suffering in life.

The Sanskrit term used to describe this phenomenon is *rāga*, and it is usually translated as attachment, craving or obsession. B. Alan Wallace explains *rāga* as “an attraction to an object on which one conceptually superimposes or exaggerates desirable qualities, while filtering out undesirable qualities. In cases of strong attachment, one transfers the very possibility of happiness onto objects, thereby disempowering oneself and empowering it” (Wallace 2007, p. 119). Perhaps it would be a tall order to imagine a world in which the desirable qualities of material prosperity lost their sheen and thus their power to activate our emotional thirst. The reason the Hindu and Buddhist views on this issue of attachment matters is due to the vast amount of study that has been done on this phenomenon over many centuries. And the settled view that emerges from this literature is that developing *vairāgya* (nonattachment) is an incredibly difficult task that in the traditional setting required a lifelong commitment to meditation and yogic practices: to say the least, a tall order in this day and age.

I don’t want to end on a purely negative note. We can point to examples in which people can change when the social structures around them change, and how the way we emote towards things can be transformed. I think of things like smoking and “driving under the influence” and how a concerted social effort changed the way people respond towards these activities (e.g., from relative apathy in my youth to strong social disdain today). I also am reminded

of slavery, racism and sexism and how strong social pressures can change behavior and ultimately change the way people feel about destructive practices. Undermining materialism may take a similarly strong effort, and the effects may not be truly felt until we have raised a generation of people whose values are no longer infused with consumer-driven materialism and the economic structures that depend upon it. So, perhaps, some version of the Capra/Suzuki ideal is something towards which we as educators might strive. We can begin by instilling “awareness raising” content into our curriculum, maybe even help develop an understanding that the problem is not just “out there” (e.g., external) but it also is “in here” (e.g., internal) and hope that the influence will spread.

And, of course, I realize that I could be all wrong!

Notes

- ¹ Thanks to Martin Knowles and Alan Mandell for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay. Thanks also to Elaine Lux and Diana Siberio-Perez for proof-reading.
- ² Damasio draws some additional distinctions to fine tune his model. For example, he adds the notion of background emotions like well-being or malaise and calm or tension. He also distinguishes between moods and emotions, and readily admits that his model and the lines he draws between categories are merely explanatory. However, most of these distinctions are beyond my scope here. I am simply using his general conception of the emotions and its relationship to behavior.
- ³ I believe this metaphor is exactly correct. Cancers are actually types of biological flourishing. By spreading and multiplying, the cancer cells are doing precisely what they are programmed to be doing in order to survive. However, while flourishing they also are sucking the life out of the body by stealing vital nutrients, destroying internal balance, and dumping toxic byproducts that will eventually destroy their host environments.

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Misbehaving in the '70s

Miriam Russell, Center for Distance Learning

Last spring, the Women's Residency motto, emblazoned on our T-shirts, was "Women Misbehaving." Realizing that women historically advanced their equal status with men by misbehaving, I remembered a few of my own small acts of disobedience in the '70s. Aware of an organization called Another Mother for Peace, I sent them a check for \$25 to purchase a necklace that shouted another motto: "War is not healthy for children and other living things." My younger colleagues at the residency were impressed. They told me that the necklace is now an historical artifact because it came from the women's movement that started in the '60s and continued through the '70s.

Back then, I was busy with motherhood and other necessities of married life. Even so, I was keenly aware of the atrocities of the Vietnam War, the protests and marches, including the rise of the women's movement. Betty Freidan's *Feminine Mystique* raised women's consciousness about male dominance. We were well into what scholars now call the "second wave" of Feminism in the '70s. Embracing that "mystique" was hard to do on my back porch during the long summer afternoons waiting for one or the other of my two little boys to break his leg or develop a bloody nose while playing games. There was little opportunity in the suburbs to find self-actualization, let alone meaningful employment. My career was on hold while my husband took on several summer jobs and went to classes for his master's degree in public school administration. With my own master's gathering dust, I kept myself occupied creating macramé belts, hanging plant holders, and watching the Watergate hearings.

Meanwhile in the suburbs, we young wives and mothers were greeted by the Welcome Wagon lady. She brought gifts from local merchants and offered monthly get-togethers at each other's houses for crafting sessions.

In general, it was a nice respite from dawn-to-dusk child care. When a neighbor friend and I attended one of those crafty gatherings in our Westchester neighborhood, countering the standards of a patriarchal society was not on my mind.

About 15 of us were seated in a large circle around the comfortable suburban den, creating small raffia stool seats when two representatives of the Mount Kisco newspaper appeared brandishing a camera. The photographer took each of our pictures in various stages of our crafting project. Afterwards, a reporter (who obviously didn't relish this assignment) addressed the young woman sitting to my right.

"What's your name?" he queried.

"Susan Bartholomew," she answered.

"Don't you have a husband?" he responded in a voice dripping with scorn.

"Yes!" she reassured him.

"Well, what's his name?"

"John."

"Ok, so you are Mrs. John Bartholomew. That's what we need."

Thus he moved counterclockwise around the room, carefully noting each husband's name, giving me plenty of time to consider what my own response would be when asked. As the last in line, I boldly replied with my own female name.

"What's your husband's name?" He was quite annoyed.

"He's not here. If you took his picture, would you be asking him my name?" I countered.

"Well, if you don't tell me your name, I can't put your picture in the paper."

Thinking that my life was not likely to be hampered by not having my picture in the so-called "society page" of the local Mt.



Miriam Russell

Kisco paper, I said, "Fine, don't put my picture in the paper!"

Gasps came from each corner of the room, as my friend and I grabbed our little stools and ran for the door, bursting to let loose our reaction to my audacity. Safely in the car, we screamed all the way home like kids running from a Halloween prank!

In newspapers today, women are no longer identified by their husband's names and some women eschew using their husband's last name entirely. I'd like to think that on that particular day, my small misbehavior made a contribution to the feminist cause.

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The Orphans' Motto: Strangerhood in International Education and Mentoring¹

David Starr-Glass, Center for International Programs

... his [sic] position in this group is determined, essentially, by the fact that he has not belonged to it from the beginning, that he imports qualities into it, which do not and cannot stem from the group itself. Georg Simmel, "The Stranger" (p. 402)

The setting

This reflection arose from experiences that I had in the summer of 2009. I was attending the 20th Summer School for Slavonic Studies, organized by the Foreign Languages and Student Preparation Institute of Charles University, in the idyllic spa town of Pödebrady in Central Bohemia.² The stated objective was to spend four weeks in an intensive Czech language and cultural program probing more deeply into the socio-cultural context of my Czech students attending the Empire State College program in which I mentor. Since the study group consisted of young students and scholars from 15 countries, however, it was inevitable that the learning experience would stimulate reflections on the dynamics of study-abroad programs, which in turn suggested an aspect of mentoring that had previously eluded me.

First, I want to describe the setting of this, my most recent international experience, with particular reference to an "intercultural evening" that was part of the program. Then, I will consider some of the assumptions and models often present in studying abroad, focusing on international business education and posing the argument that frequently inappropriate analogies have been made with the dynamics and literatures of sociology and, to a lesser extent, psychology. This leads to a discussion of what I think is the more relevant (and positive) literature on "the stranger," particularly the seminal work of the sociologist Georg Simmel (1950). I think that this reading leads to a suggestion for considerations, opportunities, and yet

to be explored perspectives in international education and in mentoring.³

The intercultural evening: Symbols, stereotypes and sashes

The Summer School for Slavonic Studies is an annual event in Pödebrady. The 50 participants came predominantly from Europe, with almost every country represented. There was a very small contingent from America and a very large one from Russia. Some were undergraduates intending to spend a semester studying in institutions of higher learning in the Czech Republic. Some of the summer school participants were Slavic scholars and postgraduates. Others, like me, were people who have become enamored with things-Czech and who wanted to acquire a deeper appreciation of Czech language, culture and literature.

We all came together for a month and focused on deepening language skills, exploring trends in literature and film, and acquiring a basic appreciation of contemporary linguistic issues – translation, gender bias in grammar, and feminist perspective on language. We quickly coalesced into a group, forming more or less instant friendships and associations. We lived together in a student hostel, ate together, drank together, went on group excursions, and of course talked. It was evident that from the beginning we related to one another at a personal level, not as representatives of countries or institutions. On the third week of the program, an "intercultural evening" was organized at which volunteers gave presentations of their country's dance and music, which included the ubiquitous PowerPoint presentations of facts, figures and geography.

Late one night, or more accurately early one morning, I was woken by the pleasant sound of a mixed choir. They were singing "Kalinka." Kalinka is the Russian name

for the Guelder Rose, known also as the Snowball Tree, and botanically as *Viburnum opulus*. It is a relatively modern love song that quickly became part of the iconic folk repertoire of Russians and Russians in exile. I correctly assumed that this was a rehearsal for the Russian contribution to the intercultural evening.

For me, Kalinka has many pleasant associations. When I was an undergraduate at the University of Glasgow, I had a passion for Russian literature and had joined the university's Slavonic Society. I was studying in the science faculty and was the only science student ever to have joined the society. I found it rather disconcerting that Glasgow science undergraduates were so remote from other-cultural contacts; however, in those days, my passion for Russian literature and poetry was very intense. One of the membership benefits was being able to drink countless glasses of sweet tea in the dingy subterranean kitchen of the Slavonic Studies Department housed in a fine Victorian terrace house. Another benefit was the opportunity to attend the occasional Russian poetry reading sessions conducted in equally dingy Glasgow apartments by candle light and with a plentiful supply of authentic Russian vodka. Inevitably, as the evening wore on, someone would produce a guitar and start singing. Kalinka was one of the perennial favorites.

When I asked my instant soul mate, Masha, if she would attend the intercultural evening, she expressed some doubt. Masha is a witty and accomplished information technology manager who lives in Moscow, although she always reminds me that she was born in Saint Petersburg. She is also a passionate Czechophile and a serene, deeply introspective Buddhist. We became instant companions, spent a great deal of time together, and enjoyed that magical intimacy of silence that only comes with close friendship. Masha wondered how her fellow Russians would represent their nation

and when I told her that I had heard them practicing, among other things, Kalinka, she became rather upset.

I had never seen her upset before, so we spent time exploring this new territory. She spoke of the present political, national and economic scene in Russia and of the difficulties and conflicts that her generation (she is in her early 30s) contends with in post-perestroika Russia. We talked about nationhood, the selective representations of nationality, and the powerful societal need to reinvent and re-energize issues of distinctive nationality especially in Eastern Europe. Like every Russian I have ever encountered, she displayed a profound love for Russia and felt that the complexity of national history, present reality, and a future destiny could only be compromised by nationalistic slogans, trite cultural baubles, and what she categorized as facile propaganda. Kalinka was, she felt, emblematic of that unconsidered superficiality.

But Masha did go with me to the intercultural evening. We sat together at the back of the hall – beside the fire exit, as she requested, just in case things got too unpleasant. Actually, I thought that it turned out to be an exciting and delightful evening. When the Russian contingent brought out traditional bread and salt to offer guests, we accepted them with good grace. Many of the Russian women were wearing bright red satin sashes or hair ribbons. They also laughed and smiled and glowed with happiness: everyone was obviously having fun. Is it true, I asked Masha, that *krasny* means both “red” and “beautiful” in Russian? She smiled: *krasny* does mean “beautiful” in Old Russian and “red” in Modern. She doubted whether beauty and red could, or should, be equated in the modern Russian lexicon. We laughed, but she was still discomforted by the representation of her country.

Perhaps by their very nature, intercultural evenings accentuate difference, otherness and surface detail. During our stay we had come to know one another as human beings, authentic personalities, rather than as representative of national stereotypes. Masha and I had certainly spoken enough about the complexities and idiosyncrasies

of Russia (I have many Russian friends), of Israel (she has many Israeli friends) and, for that matter, of Scotland (her great-great grandparents emigrated to Czarist Russia from Scotland, my “auld country”). Perhaps, when asked to showcase national identity in the form of a ten-minute presentation, we inevitably underscore differences by resorting to the simple, the stereotypic and the kitsch? Of course, there is much to be learned from what we include, accentuate and exclude in these presentations. Red sashes are part of the Russian story, after all, but I did not think that they constituted the essence of that story. Besides, I happen to like Kalinka.

She conceded that I might have a point but remained skeptical. An area of sensitivity had been uncovered and she was genuinely troubled. Finally, she told me that she had to discuss the matter with her fellow Russians. It turned out that they were very sympathetic to her issues. National identity and identification, our inclination to resort to stereotypic masks, and contemporary complexities were all thoroughly explored in a good-humored and respectful way later that night.

In the end, we agreed that the intercultural evening was good-natured entertainment. It was designed to elicit what has been termed the “sari, samosas and steel band” response. National representations were colorful, differentiated and consciously stereotypic. They were not intended to be overly subtle. In the past three weeks, we had met as strangers and formed friendships based on a human connectedness that placed little importance on nationality. We did not believe that we were primarily national or ethnic representatives and those aspects played only a minor role in our presentations of self. During that time we had learned a great deal about one another as well as about our host country. We parted ways with rich and complex appreciations that were neither significantly strengthened, nor diminished, by the intercultural evening. It was an evening when strangers met.

Internationalization of the curriculum and study abroad

But what does it mean when we say that strangers meet? The events surrounding the

international evening caused me to reflect on the nature of such meetings, specifically in terms of international education and mentoring.

The internationalization of the business curriculum has come about in recent years in part due to the recognition that we live in an increasingly international, not to say, global culture and economy. Curriculum internationalization also has been driven by the insistence of the accreditation requirements of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business-International (AACSB, 2009). Many strategies have been employed to create an educational environment sensitive to international contexts. Academically, faculty can be given “immersion experiences” abroad; encouraged to conduct international research; and incorporate global case studies in whatever courses they offer. Administratively, curriculum can be reworked to include international elements: offering specialized courses, requiring a second working language; and/or, encouraging students to participate in study-abroad programs (Wardrope, Orza, Guild, Karimipour and Minifie, 2009).

My own particular interest is in study-abroad programs. These programs require a student to leave the home-campus and spend a semester, or longer, in a foreign place of learning. The new place of learning can be an independent college or university within the host country; an in-country branch of the home campus; or a school that has a special academic relationship with the home campus or is a member of a collegiate consortium. Whatever particular form this takes, for the student, there is inevitably a spatial and cultural dislocation.

For many students at the Center for International Programs of Empire State College, this double dislocation also is a reality and an opportunity. For the Czech students in Prague, for example, the dislocation is cultural rather than spatial. Direct international experience is still not common among American students, even those studying business and considering it as a career. A recent review of 75 universities accredited by AACSB, showed that 24 (32 percent) offered study-abroad opportunities for business students although only one

school actually made it compulsory. It might be of interest to note that the majority of these study programs are located in Western Europe (62 percent) and Asia (21 percent). There were none in Central or Eastern Europe (Wardrobe, et al., 2009).

What do these students abroad encounter and experience? What sort of educational opportunities exist for them? How should their learning experiences be viewed? How might we, as educators, enhance the learning possibilities? What assumptions should be made about these students? What pedagogic strategies are considered appropriate? Which support interventions might be efficacious?

International student: The sojourning stranger

International students do not represent a single homogenous category. They often have specific goals: sometimes disclosed, sometimes unarticulated even to themselves. Some students will remain in their international context for a semester, some for a year, and others for longer. An early notion was that international students – like all cultural travelers – would experience a troublesome mismatch between their assumptions and expectations and the realities of the host culture.

In a longitudinal study of 200 Norwegian Fulbright scholars in America, Sverre Lysgaard (Church, 1982) showed that these students moved through a series of emotional phases – initial euphoria, disenchantment, anxiety and depression, recovery, and final adjustment. Subsequently termed “culture shock,” this perspective colored much of the early work on international adaptation. It is a rather bleak depiction of the intercultural traveler, grounded in adverse reactions and insipient pathology. More recently Ward, Okura, Kennedy and Kojima (1998), citing a long history of anomaly and a paucity of confirming research evidence, recommended that “despite its popular and intuitive appeal” (p. 290) the culture shock model should be abandoned. Still, culture shock models do exert an influence among those dealing with international students. In some cases, this model may provide a framework for the recognition of student problems and serve as a reason for institutional support.

What are considered “culture learning” models represent a more recent perspective on international student – or “sojourner” – adjustment. These models focus on intercultural experience and interactions, both of which are understood to promote learning and intercultural accommodation (Church, 1982; Coates, 2004). The newcomer begins to make sense of the new situation, comes to appreciate cultural assumptions and behavior, and starts to apply that new sociocultural understanding in a process of adaptation. Feedback is critical and can be used to modify behavior and shift perceptions.

The extent to which adaptation takes place is not simply a function of student understanding or willingness. Insufficient communication competency, both verbal and nonverbal, can limit adaptation as can nonacceptance by the local society (Scollon and Scollon, 1997; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping and Todman, 2008). Culture learning models have a positive and significant role in providing an educational framework to support the international student in the adjustment process. Currently, models focus on affective, behavioral and cognitive (ABC) domains, and can provide students with information and feedback on stress and coping, cultural learning and social identification (Zhou, et al., 2008).

International students are spatially and culturally displaced. These displacements provide a rich set of learning opportunities. By making transitions, students are potentially able to benefit from new perspectives on academic disciplines. They also are provided with the opportunity to gain sociocultural awareness and sensitivity and, perhaps, to learn something about themselves. Unfortunately, international students sometimes elect – or are presented with – cultural bubbles that preserve, or try to recreate, the very setting from which they have journeyed. All too often, academic studies can be presented in ways that duplicate, or mimic, educational experiences that they could have had in their home countries. This is particularly the case in study-abroad programs where the student enters an institution that is part of, or closely associated with, their home institution. Here the “international” aspect of their academic experience is negated: they

are offered only a spatial reorientation, not a true displacement. I feel strongly that for richer and truly international perspectives, faculty and curriculum should not rehash homegrown academic material but should endeavor to critically engage with the issues and concerns of the host country (Starr-Glass, 2009). At a minimum, students should have the opportunity to come to a deeper consideration of their host culture and community.

International students can gain an emotional and experiential understanding of new sociocultural environments because their displacements are cultural, not just spatial. This opportunity remains a potential. Regrettably, it is often circumscribed or diminished. To realize this possibility requires an introduction to the sociocultural framework and assumptions of the host country. It requires at some level the ability to communicate and to engage socially. It requires student introspection and reflection on his/her own cultural, social and national identities. Educationally, it also requires the avoidance of myopic ethnocentrism, the rejection of a relativism that precludes even the concept of intercultural excursions, and the elimination of a superficiality that “emphasizes folklore and the bizarre.” Pasternak (1998) reminded us, “... multiculturalism is clearly the pedagogic battleground between the so-called ‘sari, samosas and steel band’ approach and the narrow dogmas of ethnocentricity” (p. 260). As in all battlegrounds, there are always innocent victims: they are often international students.

*As in all battlegrounds,
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international students.*

International students are cultural travelers, coming from a place that they know to one that is unknown. They are strangers, who come to a new community and stay there within, but apart from, that community. They are categorized in much

of the international student literature as “sojourners,” a sociological descriptor used by Paul Siu (1952) to represent the stranger relationship between Chinese laundrymen in Chicago and their ambient community.

The sociological literature has had a significant impact on the understanding of international student dynamics. Donald Levine (1977) emphasizes the “depiction of strangerhood as a figure-ground phenomenon, in which the stranger status is always defined in relation to a host” (p. 27; italics in original). In his insightful systematic and typology of strangerhood, Levine (1977) also notes that stranger types are best understood by the motives of the incomer and the host group. The incomer might intend only a visit, or to take up residence, or to attain group membership. Host communities can either be “compulsively friendly” or antagonistic. Some of the early sociological studies in America painted as bleak a picture as those on culture shock because they focused on immigrants, focused more on the ground than the figure, and did not adequately recognize newcomer motives and goals. There is a sense that continuing strangerhood within the community confounds unarticulated expectations that privilege adaptation, integration and membership: “the sojourner” (Siu, 1952); “the marginal man” [sic] (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1937).

International students rarely seek integration or membership of their host communities. They reside within the group – the host community and other international students – but are apart from the group, not seeking membership, not aspiring to long-term residence, and remaining self-identified visitors. They are not immigrants. They are making voluntary incursions into new spatial configurations and new sociocultural territory. Perhaps they are best characterized as “strangers” in the sense used by Georg Simmel (1950), “... the person who comes today and stays to tomorrow. He is, so to speak, the potential wanderer; although he has not moved on, he has not quite overcome the freedom of coming and going” (p. 402; italics in original).

The Simmelian stranger

In 1908, as an explanatory note to a chapter in his work on sociology, Georg Simmel (1950) wrote a six-page essay, “The Stranger.” When eventually translated from the German, this concise essay was regarded as a seminal work in American sociology. Simmel notes that the stranger has a unique relationship with the community, and with individual members of that community, because he is simultaneously “... fixed within a particular spatial group ... [yet] ... has not belonged to it from the beginning” (p. 402). Stranger and community form a relationship in which the stranger possesses “... unity of nearness and remoteness.” The stranger is simultaneously recognized as being remote and close, within and yet without. Simmel notes: “The inhabitants of Sirius are not really strangers to us, at least not in any social logically sense – they do not exist for us at all; they are beyond far and near” (p. 402). Most significantly in our present context, when the stranger interacts with a group there is the possibility for exchange and the importation of qualities into the group “which do not and cannot stem from the group itself” (p. 402).

Simmel argues that, “... to be a stranger is naturally a very positive relation; it is a specific form of interaction” (p. 402). Further, although distanced from the group, the stranger is close to each of us as group members “... insofar as we feel between him and ourselves common features of a national, social, occupational, or generally human, nature” (p. 405). Simmel points out that historically the stranger appears as the visiting trader, constrained neither by local resources nor economic structures. Italian cities, when they had a difficult dispute to resolve, called in strangers – judges from outside the community – because they were neither connected to, nor constrained by, family, politics or local custom. In this complex combination of nearness and remoteness, Simmel sees an objectivity, which “also may be defined as freedom.” Compared with group members, the stranger “... is freer practically and theoretically; ... surveys conditions with less prejudice; his criteria ... are more general and more objective; ... is not tied down in his action by habit, piety and precedent” (p. 405).

The Simmelian stranger is the wanderer who comes today and who may rest until the morn, but equally may not. The stranger is not interested in sojourning permanently with the group; not interested in membership; and not interested in trying to lose strangerhood, even if that were a possibility. There is a robustness, even a celebratory ring, to strangerhood in Simmel’s work perhaps because while the figure-ground of incomer-community is ever present, there is a clearer focus placed on the stranger. Naturally, to negotiate entry into the community the stranger has to have an understanding of the community: its structure, mores and language. But these are “objective” understandings acquired to facilitate the coming, the going, and the period in between. The stranger is the visitor, the guest, the temporary sojourner, and often – as hopefully with international students – the explorer, who is, “... near and far at the same time, as is characteristic of relationships founded only on generally human commonness” (p. 407).

The international student has three sets of opportunities: (a) gaining new perspectives on academic discipline taught in different settings with different emphases; (b) exploring the sociocultural landscape of the host community; and (c) intensifying an appreciation of the very notion of strangerhood through encountering other strangers and host community. International education takes too narrow and too myopic, a view if it tries to negotiate cultural difference and to bring the stranger into the group. Adaptation

International education takes too narrow and it tries to negotiate cultural difference and to bring the stranger into the group.

(for example, of American students in Prague) may be considered useful, but the success should not be measured in terms of “amount of free time spent with other American students,” “number of host country friends,” or “changing attitudes to the U.S.” (as mentioned in Coates, 2004). Cultural adaptation, as a programmatic outcome, should no longer be considered “an achievement,” or certainly not the only achievement, in international education settings.

Mentoring as a meeting of strangers

As in the case of international education, mentoring, too, means different things to different people. In the management and corporate training literature, conceptual problems abound and a clear definition is elusive. Scanlon (2009) notes that within business settings, the mentor has been identified as “role model, champion, leader, guide, adviser, counselor, volunteer, coach, sponsor, protector and preceptor” (p. 71). The mentoring relationship usually involves an organizational newcomer (the protégé) and an older, more powerful organizational player who has an understanding of the organization’s culture, power and politics. While the dynamics of the relationship are ill-defined, outcomes generally center on protégé integration into the power and decision-making hierarchy of organization and career advancement. In sociological terms, the relationship is focused not simply on the incoming stranger’s adaptation but on complete integration with, and membership in, the organizational community. Organizational mentoring relationships have a marked degree of instrumentality: they deliberately set out to eliminate strangerhood and to bring the stranger in as a newcomer to the community.

Academic contexts have neither a more precise definition of mentoring nor a clearer understanding of the dynamics of the relationship. Unlike business contexts, however, mentoring is seen in broader terms. This is particularly the case with colleges and universities having a culture of mentoring, such as at Empire State College. In considering the basic principles of mentoring, Lee Herman and Alan Mandell

(2004) cite dimensions such as: “knowledge is provisional,” “diversity of curriculum,” “autonomy and collaboration,” “evaluation as reflective learning” and “honor and engage each student’s individual desire to know” (p. 26-35).

Here, there is considerably more conceptual richness and considerably less instrumentality and inevitable outcome. The newcomer (I avoid the term “mentee” partly because it infers a power hierarchy and partly because it always reminds me of a rather large marine mammal) is recognized as a wanderer, presently sojourning but never having lost that propensity for being Simmel’s “potential wanderer.” The outcome of the academic mentoring relationship is not to integrate the newcomer into the ambient culture. It is equally not designed to provide entrée to existing structures of power or policy. Mentoring within the academy provides entry and exploratory opportunities for the newcomer. However, and this is crucial, mentoring outcomes are not seen in terms of inevitable integration into the group or uncritical membership of the community unless, of course, that happens to be the goal of the other mentoring partner. In that sense, I would suggest that mentoring relationships within the academy seek to preserve – perhaps even enhance – strangerhood rather than extinguish it.

Students come to a mentoring relationship with preconceived expectations regarding status, power, the nature of knowledge, and educational outcomes that are nuanced by pre-experienced teaching paradigm. This is particularly the case with international students, who bring with them different models of the “good” teacher and the “good” student. Cortazzi and Jin (1997), considering Chinese students in Britain, point to deep-seated cultural differences regarding the role of student, teacher and educational outcomes, all of which cause mutual confusion and frustration. These difficulties can only be overcome by joint exploration and “cultural synergy” between host instructors and sojourning students. In my own experience, Central and Eastern European students usually bring with them their own experiences and expectations based on a rigid teacher-centered paradigm that does not encourage joint participation

or openness in the learning process. How much cultural synergism is required to make mentoring an effective educational experience for such students?

Recognizing this challenge, I enter international mentoring relationships knowing that we must address shifts in paradigms and expectations. There also are structural issues involved. My international mentoring takes place at a distance with limited face-to-face contact, supported by ongoing engagement via e-mail. This reduces the richness of communication and there is often, on my part at least, a sense of urgency in establishing and maintaining connections that are human and authentic. In many cases, the mentoring relationship is extended, moving beyond the formal limits set by the college. Students keep the mentoring connection alive by contacting me when they are considering graduate schools; when they are actually in graduate school; and, sometimes, when they are in the workplace and contemplating career moves. I also am a mentor with an M.B.A. program in Prague, where many of my former students study: inevitably they request me as mentor when they are undertaking the required consultancy project. Mentoring, for me, is thus seen as a continuing process and ongoing relationship.

Given the limits of time, spatial disconnection, distance of cultural educational perspectives, restricted communication, and perhaps the self-fulfilling prophesy that former students reappear at different times and in different places, it has seemed to me that a significant part of the mentoring process is the establishment and maintenance of connections. Mentoring assumes a personal, immediate and human dimension. This is not to say that all of those with whom I enter into a mentoring relationship are viewed as potential friends or acquaintances: they are not. There is, however, a sense of social connectedness – akin to the bridging, linking, and connection patterns associated with social capital formation. My former mentoring partners have contributed greatly to my own social capital, certainly in Central and Eastern Europe. Yet, there is the recognition that those who enter into mentoring relationships, certainly

within the academy, possess and preserve – purposefully so – a quality of strangerhood.

Strangers, in a Simmelian sense, have neither rejected nor become alienated from their homelands or culture, anymore than they seek integration or membership in their host country. They have chosen spatial and sociocultural dislocation – which is a present state, not a permanent one – rather than having it forced upon them. The stranger is not distant from interpersonal relations; rather strangerhood is part of that relationship complex. Mentors have membership in communities of learning and have collegiate affiliation, yet in engaging in mentoring, they can only incidentally be defined by those memberships. It is not community inclusion that they represent, but rather the willingness to enter into a journey with those that they mentor. In that sense, through engaging in mentoring, the mentor steps out of his or her academic and collegiate communities. Likewise, the mentoring partner has voluntarily left a known place and a known culture to journey into the unknown. In this sense, rather than strive to create a new closeness to facilitate the mentoring relationship, we might try to recover the commonality of strangerhood.

Strangers, that is, those not belonging to the other's group from the outset, may be in the best position to “import qualities ... which do not and cannot stem from the group” to which they originally began. Recognition of mutual strangerhood opens the way for exchange and new discovery that could not have taken place without the encounter. Novelty and new awareness is perhaps what the stranger sought; structurally, it is through spatial and prior-group dislocation that such importations can take place. Perhaps this is an unconsidered dimension of both international education and of mentoring.

Salient Present of Strangerhood: Boundaries of Selfhood

The stranger is capable of importing knowledge, insights and experiences that were not originally present, nor could be present. The stranger has a detachment, which is not a rejection that can be recognized as both freedom and objectivity.

Rather than represent farness, the stranger has the spatial equivalency of “eternally present” and a “perpetual possibility” in T.S. Eliot's temporal sense. The stranger is not excluded from, nor void of, what we might think of as a relational deep capacity. Simmel (1950) notes “strangeness is not due to different and un-understandable matters. It is rather caused by the fact that similarity, harmony and nearness are accompanied by the feeling that they are not really the unique property ... [providing] no inner and exclusive necessity” (p. 407). Inner and exclusive necessity is undoubtedly a poor place to begin, or to end, a mentoring relationship; harmony and nearness might, however, provide more fruitful opportunities.

Alfred Schutz (1944), another sociologist who took up the “stranger” topic, comments that the stranger “... may be willing and able to share the present and the future ... however, he [sic] remains excluded from such experiences of its past. Seen from

*Strangerhood is not to
be ripped away and
replaced by familiarity;
strangerhood remains as
a prism through which to
see and be seen.*

the point of view of the approached group, he is a man without a history” (p. 502). Strangers lack a past; given their potential transience they also lack a future. This has led some (for instance, Murphy-Lejeune, 2001) to see strangers (in this case international students) as having an “inflated present” (p. 18). There is more than a suggestion of the pathological in this term; instead, I prefer to call this a “salient present.” Strangers meet in a present that is filled with immediacy, importance and the possibility for new perspectives and mutual understandings. Could those who enter into mentoring relationships better appreciate and engage with the propinquity presented

by a salient present? Likewise, can those who engage with students in international settings find that there is more in the present than what is unfamiliar?

This reflection did not really begin with an intercultural evening in Podebrady; rather, it began when someone was prepared to consider the authenticity and implications of her inclusion within contemporary Russian society. Masha was not prepared to have me, a stranger, casually and unthinkingly encounter her culture. She recognized me as a stranger, willing and able to accept the salience of the present but incapable of embracing a past that I never experienced. Her disagreement with her peers was not about the quality of being Russian, but rather with the superficiality and unquestioned, and unquestionable, nature of its presentation. In sharing and caring for me as a person, inevitably distanced by strangerhood, she herself was brought into context with the limits of herself. Strangers are not displaced permanently; they await encounter.

Strangerhood is not to be ripped away and replaced by familiarity; strangerhood remains as a prism through which to see and be seen. Strangerhood cannot be reduced to difference, any more than it can be seen as separation. Edward Tiryakian (1973) suggests that the stranger, “brings us into contact with the limits of ourselves ... he [sic] makes us aware of ourselves by indication the boundaries of selfhood” (p. 57). By recognizing, encountering and celebrating the strangerhood of ourselves, those we mentor, and those we work with internationally we gain knowledge of the boundaries of our own selfhood.

Notes

- ¹ The title was suggested in personal communication with Masha a month after we left Podebrady. She recalled the statue of George (Jiri) of Podebrady (1420-1471), in the main square of the town. George, the town's most famous son, was king of the Lands of the Bohemian Crown during the Hussite wars and was a member of the faction that called themselves "Orphans" after the death of their leader Jan Zizka (1360-1424). At the base of the statue is the Orphan's motto: Veritas Dei vincet (Latin: God's truth will win). Without making claims as to what the "truth" might be, Masha's comments suggested that orphans, who have their own form of strangerhood, are all united by a common motto.
- ² Attendance at the Summer School for Slavonic Studies was funded, in part, by awards from the Empire State College Faculty Development and the UUP/IDA committees. I thank both committees for their work and acknowledge their support in this faculty development, which produced not only improved language skills but also reflections on broader collegiate concerns.
- ³ As always, I would like to express my thanks to Alan Mandell for his editorial suggestions, wise counsel and warm friendship.

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A Laboratory of Culture Shock: Delivering American Education in Siberia

Valeri Chukhlomin, Center for Distance Learning

Omsk

Omsk is a fairly big city in West Siberia with a population of about 1.5 million, which is located some 3,000 miles to the east of Moscow on the border of Russia and Kazakhstan. In the period of the Bolshevik Revolution and the Russian Civil War, Omsk was declared the capital of the country by the White Russian government of Admiral Kolchak. In the Soviet period, it evolved as a center of the rich petrochemical, industrial and agricultural region. In the darkness of post-Soviet privatization, the country's largest oil refinery plant located in Omsk was seized by Roman Abramovich, the same business tycoon who became world famous as the new owner of Chelsea, London's legendary soccer club. In Omsk, he sponsors Avangard, one of the leading ice hockey clubs in the country and the new home for Jaromir Jagr, a famous Czech, who joined Avangard after many glorious years with the New York Rangers. But Jaromir was not the first famous person from New York who came to visit Omsk. Tom Rocco from SUNY Empire State College had landed there 10 years before Jagr to sign a memorandum of understanding with Omsk State University.

Omsk State University (OmSU) was established in 1973 and currently has nearly 12,000 full-time students. This is a comprehensive multidisciplinary university with a large Ph.D. program. It has a strong national reputation in math, history and jurisprudence. Some of the professors and graduates are recognized nationally, including a member of the Supreme Court and the former general-prosecutor of the country. In the beginning of the '90s, the university started to develop its first ever international program. For a city that had been completely closed to the outer world for more than seven decades, this was an extraordinary and unprecedented initiative. As such, it had its both enthusiastic supporters and vigorous opponents. As the one who initiated the project, I was charged



Valeri Chukhlomin

with the responsibility to lead the effort. At the time, I held the rank of vice president for marketing, enrollment management and international programs; I was later elected to take over as founding dean of the newly created international business school of OmSU.

In 1993, the Faculty of International Business at OmSU was created as a small undergraduate department with only 30 students. The mission of the new school was to help create a new wave of globally competent business leaders and innovators. By 1997, a number of small-scale collaborative projects with universities from the U.S., U.K., Canada and Australia were under way. We felt that it was timely to launch a larger scale international program and were looking for a partnership with a U.S.-based university. Our goal was to effectively differentiate the school from the competition on the local market and to become a true leader in international education in the vast area of West Siberia and North Kazakhstan.

Why Empire State College?

In 1997, the American Consulate in Yekaterinburg invited me to visit a number of leading business schools in the

U.S. This was a unique chance to meet with presidents, deans, business faculty and students from Wharton, Stanford, Columbia, Stern, Kelley, Drexler, George Mason and many other schools across the country. In addition to the busy official schedule, I arranged a few private meetings with nonparticipating universities, including a meeting with Richard Bonnabeau from Empire State College. I found Empire State College on the Internet looking for colleges offering both "90 credits transfer" and "distance learning." In return, Empire State College's Center for International Programs indicated its interest in discussing these two options during my visit to the U.S.

Richard came to New York City to meet with me at a hotel near the Empire State Building. Our first conversation went well. I think that without this brief face-to-face meeting it wouldn't have been possible to develop a high degree of trust and mutual understanding that was needed to quickly develop a doable plan of action. To streamline the process, I soon returned to the U.S., this time accompanied by Dr. Yuri Dous, now dean of the Omsk School of International Business. In Saratoga Springs, we had a successful meeting with the then acting president of the college, Jane Altes, and the cabinet. Two months after the meeting, senior dean, Tom Rocco, arrived in Omsk. A memorandum of understanding between the two institutions was finally signed, with Leonid Polezhaev, with the governor of Omsk Oblast [region], as a witness.

According to the initial plan, every year, ten third-year students from the OmSU Faculty of International Business would be invited to begin their studies at Empire State College through international distance learning (IDL). To get a SUNY Bachelor of Science degree in Business, Management and Economics, they were supposed to transfer 96 credits taken in Omsk towards the degree. The remaining 32 advanced-

level credits were required to be taken from Empire State College through IDL. To administer the program, a Russian-American Program office was created in Omsk. By July 1998, the first cohort of Omsk students was preparing to begin their studies at Empire State College.

In the shadows of the 1998 default

In August 1998, just two weeks before the planned launch of the collaborative program, the Russian economy defaulted. In a few weeks, the ruble lost 80 percent of its value against the U.S. dollar. The local middle class was literally wiped out. For local students, practically overnight, the cost of participation in the program increased by 500 percent. We found ourselves with only two students who were able to pay \$240 per credit for IDL courses. In addition, we soon learned that SUNY introduced a major curricular reform implementing general education requirements. The double degree plan that had been carefully drafted and agreed upon suddenly became obsolete. The remaining participants were still ready to pay for business courses (such as Corporate Finance), but we couldn't convince them to take SUNY gen. ed. courses (such as American History). These two external shocks nearly killed the project from its start.

To keep the project afloat, we decided to move slowly. In 1999 - 2003, the Russian-American Program office (RAO) was offering assistance to those Omsk students who were interested in taking a few IDL courses without formal matriculation. Sometimes there were only one or two students, sometimes seven or eight per term. During that period, we identified many organizational barriers to international distance learning. Students were regularly experiencing problems with registration, making payments, getting textbooks, and dealing with the local customs office. We found that the instructions provided by Empire State College for international distance learners were oftentimes not applicable to those who lived in Siberia. For example, students were advised to use credit cards for paying tuition and other fees to the college. But many local families used only debit cards that were not valid for international payments. Even if a

student (or her parents) had a locally issued credit card, the issuing bank often couldn't process payments to the U.S. To make a wire transfer, many local banks requested additional and hard-to-get documentation, such as an individual agreement between Empire State College and each student. Also, we found that unexpected additional costs could be very high. For example, in order to get a \$150 textbook, students had to pay another \$100 for shipment and yet another \$100 for custom clearance. For a Siberian family, paying \$350 for a single textbook was a huge expense that exceeded, for example, the average monthly salary earned by a local public worker. To make things even more complicated, some print-based IDL courses required a faxed communication between students and instructors. At the time, international fax transmission was very expensive and in many cases faxes simply didn't get through. When received, handwritten notes of some Empire State College instructors were not comprehensible even by local English language department professors.

The responsibility of our local program office was to help students deal with organizational problems and to coordinate marketing efforts. The office was directly funded by the Omsk School of International Business with an expectation that its running costs would eventually be covered by the program fees paid by the students. It was a very small office occupying one tiny room with a New York state souvenir license plate attached to the door. To inform the students, RAO prepared and printed a set of explanatory materials written in Russian. To promote the program, it printed and distributed brochures and posters, and also developed a program website. On behalf of the students, it dealt with local banks, customs office and the Empire State College Center for International Programs. On several occasions, RAO conducted phone conferences with Empire State College colleagues, but with 11 hours of time difference, this initiative was not easy to sustain. Ultimately, our office also acquired the responsibility for some academic issues, including supervision of the English as a Second Language program, the Institutional TOEFL program, coordination of the work of visiting and expatriate English-speaking

faculty, organization of study trips abroad, and communications with American universities and the U.S. Consulate in Yekaterinburg. Very often, parents of current and prospective students visited the office to talk about international programs in general. After Sept. 11, many locals came to the office to express their solidarity with the American people. Clearly, we were not only the Russian-American Program office. In an important way, we also served as an American cultural corner in Siberia.

During the early years of the Omsk project, the Empire State College Center for International Programs very patiently and consistently offered much needed support and advice usually delivered via e-mail. In addition, to better understand how the college worked with international students and to resolve the most problematic issues, on several occasions I visited Saratoga Springs. Ken Abrams, Richard Bonnabeau, Pat Lefor, Evelyn Ting, Betty Lawrence, Bidhan Chandra, Paul Trela and many Empire State College colleagues readily shared their knowledge and experience with me. In July 2002, Yuri Dous and I attended a conference in Saratoga Springs where we met with the college's partners from Lebanon and Greece. We found many similarities in our approaches. Subsequent visits to Athens and Prague helped us redesign the Omsk project to make it more successful.

In search of a better design

After the first four years of the project, only one student from Omsk was able to complete all required courses and to graduate from Empire State College through IDL. Several dozen students took only a few IDL courses and then left the program. To find out the root causes and to learn more about their learning experiences, we were constantly interviewing all of our students. Many of them reported that print-based courses were not engaging; it was hard to study without personal contact with the teacher; students were not familiar with many concepts used in advanced level IDL courses; and the costs associated with IDL were considered to be very high. From American instructors who taught IDL courses we heard that some students were lacking critically important skills, including

academic writing, communication and time management. Clearly, students faced significant cross-cultural barriers, but there were also gaps in the Omsk curriculum that prevented students from taking full advantage of the model. We also found that the initial program design didn't serve the needs of all categories of students very well and we were trying to find out what needed to be changed. In particular, we learned that those students who had participated in various study-abroad projects were usually more satisfied with their learning experiences than were international distance learners. We also learned that having previous face-to-face experience with Empire State College instructors could help students to get organized for subsequent IDL courses. (For example, one student who attended the 2001 International Business Residency in Saratoga Springs was overwhelmingly satisfied and eventually opted to complete his Empire State College studies through IDL.)

To better prepare Omsk students for the American college experience, we chose to significantly redesign the entire curriculum of the school and launched a new concentration in World Economy. As part of their Russian degree studies and prior to taking advanced-level studies at Empire State College, students were required to develop a set of necessary "global" skills including English academic writing, communication, teamwork, information literacy and time management. This innovation was perhaps the most important result of the collaboration between the OmSU Faculty of International Business and Empire State College because not only a relatively small group of the project participants, but the whole student population of the school was able to benefit from the change. We also implemented other organizational changes:

- All introductory business courses were revised to incorporate the concepts and terminology commonly used in the U.S. These updated courses became an integral part of the school curriculum. In addition to classroom lectures and workshops conducted in Russian, students were provided with access to videotaped lectures in English that were purchased from Thomas Edison College.

- Several new elective courses were developed and added to the Omsk curriculum. These courses included American Financial Accounting, American History, Academic Writing (in English), Business Research Methods, Business Communications, and TOEFL preparation. These courses were taught in English, face-to-face, mainly by native speakers, and usually by expatriate teachers, who were brought to Omsk thanks to the Civic Education Project initiative. (There were wonderful and dedicated teachers like Betty Sweet, Michael Deaver and Marec Johec, just to name a few.)
- To fully satisfy SUNY general education requirements, several new electives were developed and included in the Omsk curriculum, including courses in Natural Sciences, Western and Other World Civilizations, and The Arts. These courses were taught in Russian.
- Instead of offering SUNY courses in a fully distance mode, we decided to switch to a blended learning model.
- Instead of offering a single Bachelor of Science degree, a two-step approach was introduced. Omsk students were required to initially obtain a SUNY associate degree, and only after that were they provided with a pathway to a SUNY bachelor's degree.
- An optional one-year study-abroad component was added, as well as a number of short-term study trips to the Empire State College units in Prague and Athens.

Empire State College's Center for International Programs helped us find a SUNY community college that was interested in delivering an associate degree program in Siberia in a blended format at a reasonable cost. I met with the representatives of several community colleges and negotiated an agreement with Broome Community College (BCC). As a result, BCC has joined the project and eventually took over the IDL component. To earn a SUNY Associate of Science degree, BCC required Omsk students to take five lower-level courses with them; tuition fees were only \$113 per credit;

courses were Web-based (WebCT) and supported by annual BCC faculty visits to Omsk. To complete a SUNY bachelor's degree, graduates of this new program were required to go to the Empire State College's Prague unit for one year. The new program design proved to be much more appropriate for the local conditions. Fortunately, by the end of 2004, the overall macroeconomic situation in Russia had significantly improved and more local families could afford to pay for international programs. With more potential participants, a significantly modified project was ready to relaunch.

Success, finally

In 2004, the first two students successfully completed the updated program in Omsk, which included the one required year with the Empire State College unit in Prague. Soon, they found very good employment with the Moscow office of Proctor and Gamble and with a leading French bank. Empire State College's Prague unit did an excellent job of preparing them for a successful career. In particular, in their conversation with me, the students spoke highly of their significantly improved academic writing and communication skills and the invaluable experience gained at job fairs organized by Empire State College in Prague. This was a much needed success story for those Omsk parents who wanted their children to relocate to Moscow for a professional career. Since then, the program has been rapidly growing.

As much as I am aware, by 2009 more than 50 students from Omsk have obtained SUNY degrees. In addition, there is another large group of SUNY graduates in a nearby city of Novosibirsk. During this time, the OmSU Faculty of International Business grew from 100 to almost 500 full-time students. In 2008, it started its first master's level program. Some of the graduates of the undergraduate program have recently earned M.B.A. degrees from the University of Chicago Business School, Columbia University, Carnegie Mellon, DePaul, the University of Sydney and other leading international business schools. As a result of on-going cooperation with Empire State College, this innovative program developed in Omsk helped the school

become an undisputed leader in the field of international education in the vast area of West Siberia and North Kazakhstan.

After the initial trial-and-error period, the Omsk model was carefully studied by other Siberian universities. In June 2004, two vice presidents of major public universities located in Novosibirsk and Tomsk joined me to attend an Empire State College graduation ceremony in Prague. As a result, they elected to launch similar projects. I provided both institutions with advice. It took only two years for Novosibirsk

State University of Economics and Finance to launch its own international business program – a replica of Omsk. Currently, both programs (Omsk and Novosibirsk) continue working closely with SUNY BCC and Empire State College through its Center for International Programs.

Since my transition to Empire State College as a full-time mentor, I have been trying to revitalize the initial design of a double degree program based upon international distance learning without the study-abroad component. With significantly

improved online technologies, including video, synchronous and asynchronous communications, and academic skills development systems, this goal seems to be more realistic now than in the 90s. Thus, for example, under an agreement with the Center for Distance Learning at Tomsk State University of Radioelectronics and Control Systems (TUSUR), 25 students have taken IDL courses in 2007 - 2009. For those students, a new bilingual bridging course, International eLearning Skills, has been developed. It is expected that the first SUNY bachelor's degree will be awarded this year.

From *Possible Lives: The Promise of Public Education in America* (1995, 421):

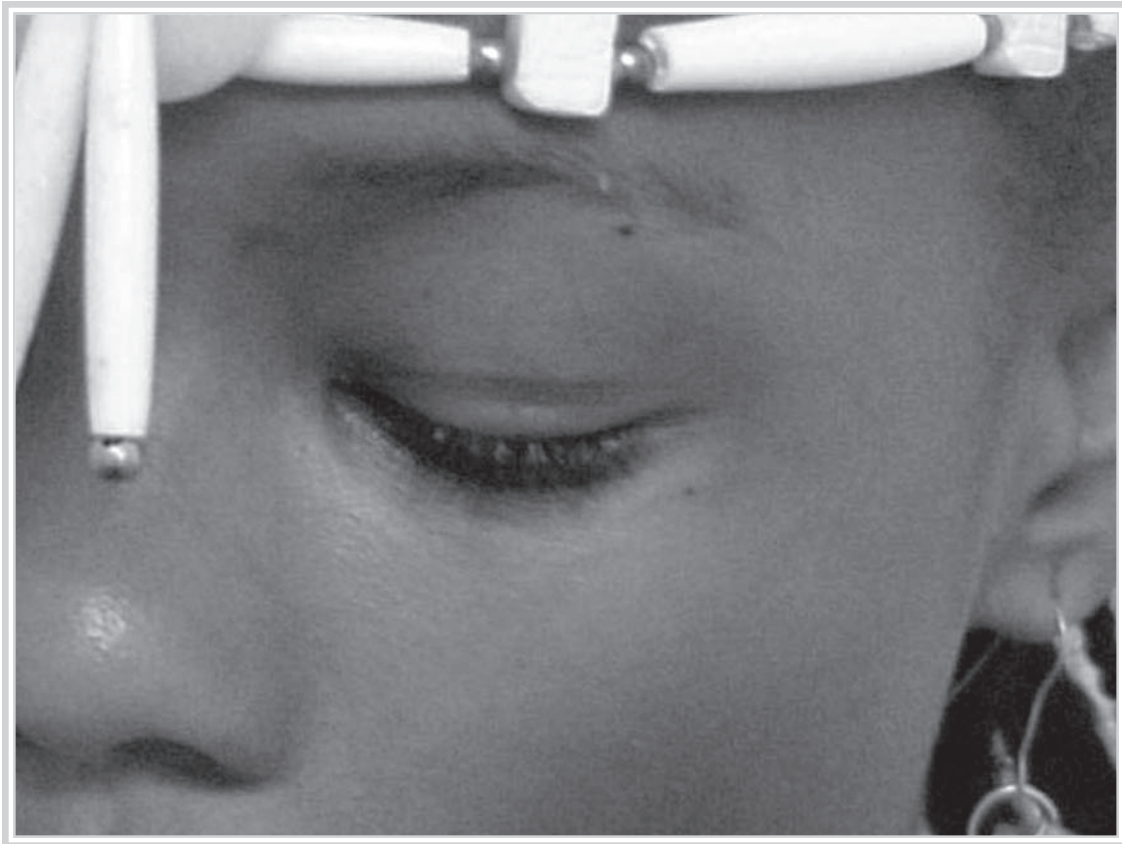
Teachers experimented with ways to create a common space where meaningful work could be done. The quality of reflective experimentation, of trying new things, of tinkering and adjusting, sometimes with uneven results, sometimes failing, was part of the history of many of the classrooms [we visited].

Through the Eyes of Grenada Munro:

The Past Informs the Present ... and ... The Present Informs the Future

Photography by Sheila Marie Aird, Center for Distance Learning

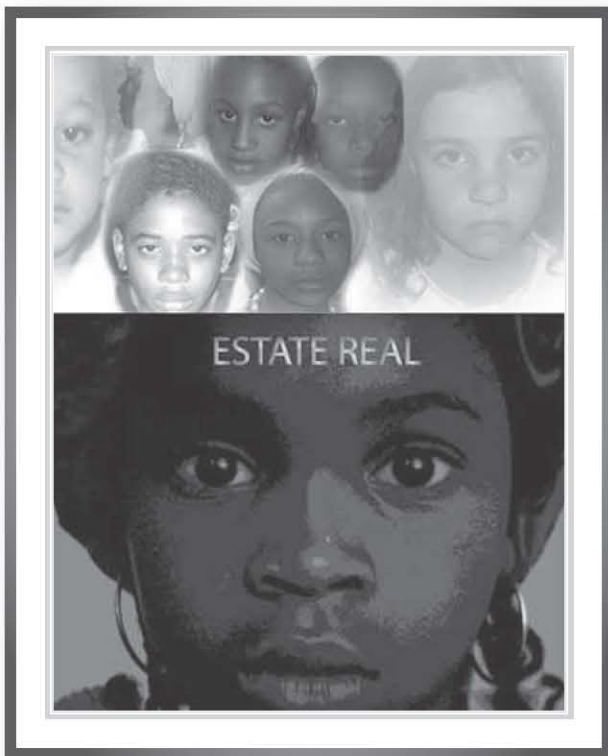
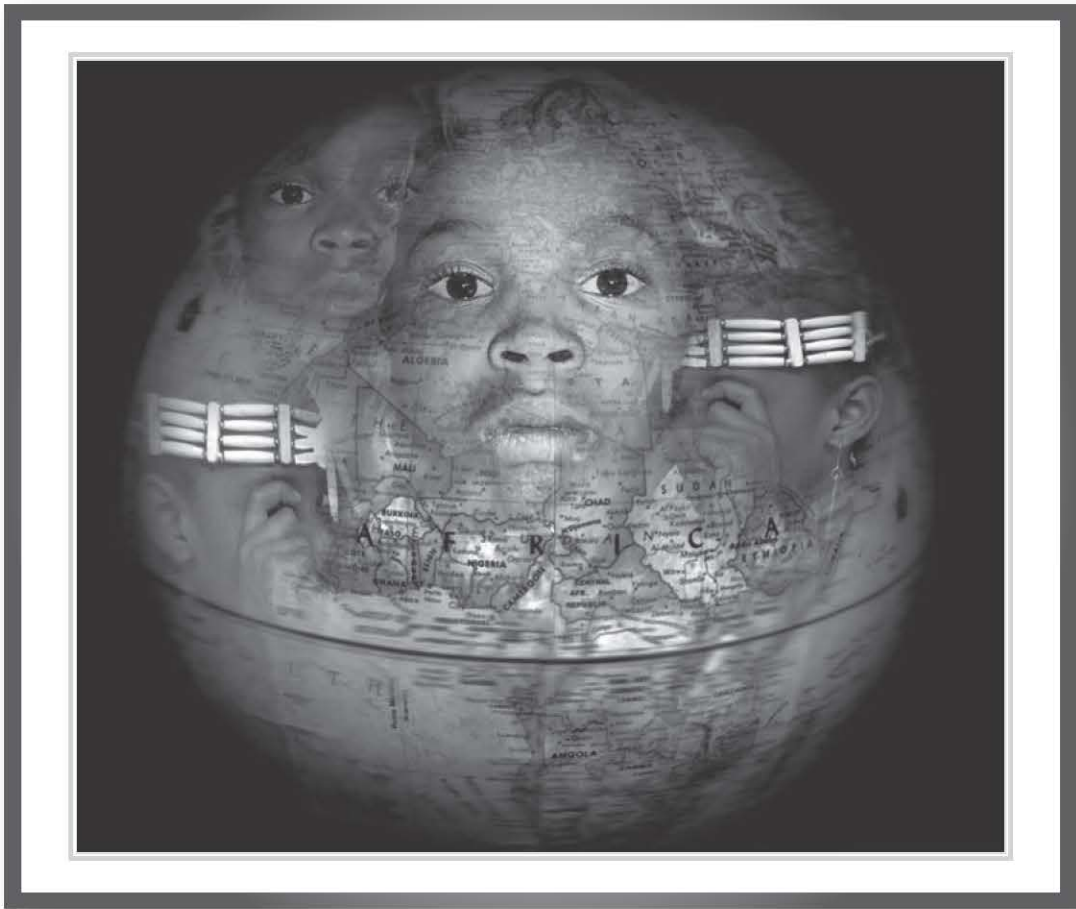


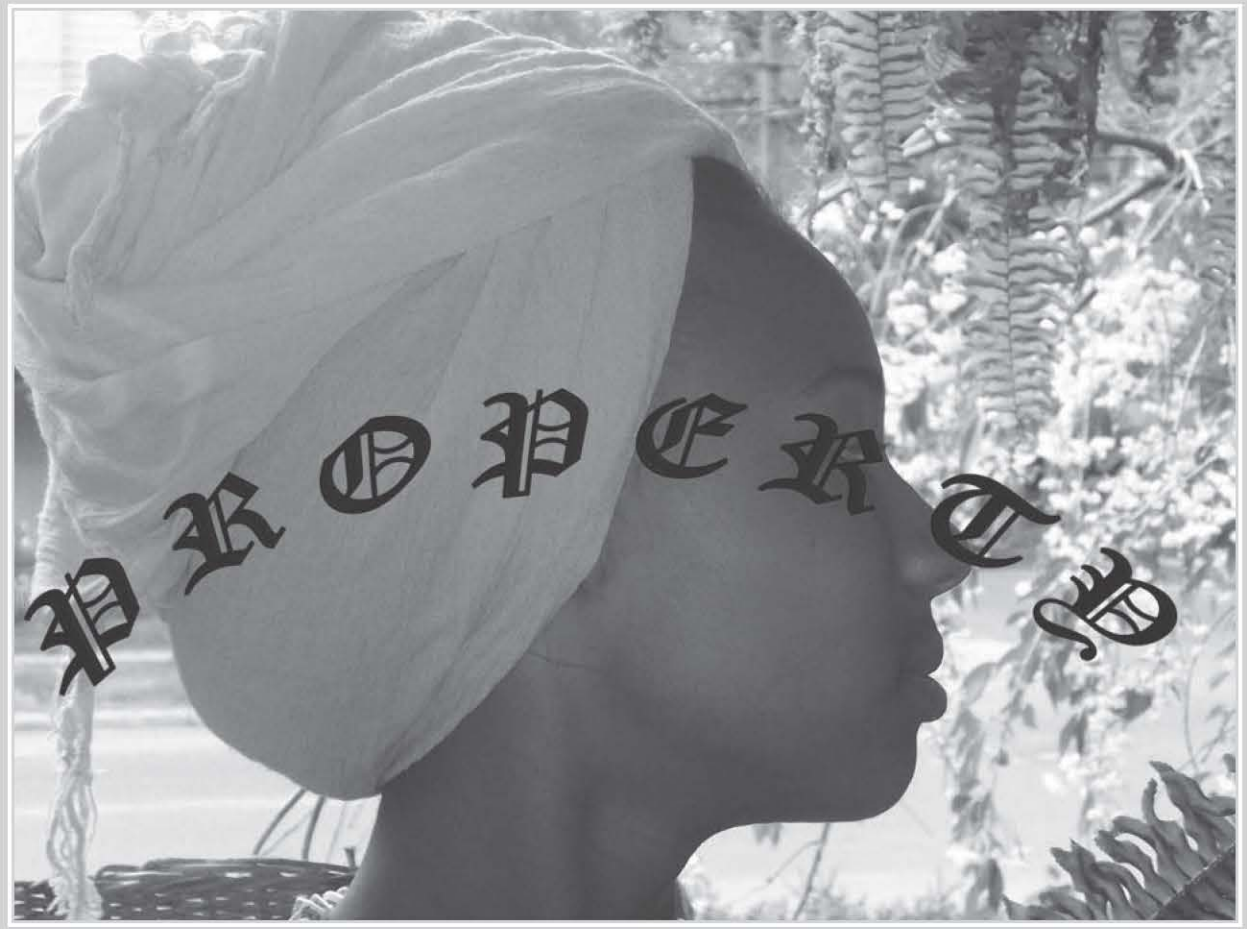


From the inception of the trade in human cargo, children were captured, transported and purchased. Later, they were born into the institution of slavery. Consequently, it was both the enslaved children and the adult population who were central to the emergence, development and expansion of the Caribbean plantation and urban systems of enslavement. Their status as “estate real” did not allow for any modicum of human rights we associate with citizenship. They were property and not viewed or treated in any other light; and, as property, in the eyes of their owners and according to the letter of the law, they were relegated to a lifetime beneath what was considered human.

“Through the Eyes of Grenada Munro” is a visual conversation with the past. These photographs are intended as a progression through moments in time and meant for you to experience with your own eyes. The subject matter represents a natural evolution of my passion for educating and of my desire to make history come alive.

Sheila Marie Aird aka Grenada Munro





Teaching, Mentoring and Reflective Practice: Increasing Engagement for Non-Native Speakers of English

Lisa M. Snyder, Center for Distance Learning and
Christopher A. Whann, Center for International Programs

Introduction

The teaching-as-mentoring model includes a student-centered, collaborative and reflective approach to educating students. Not only does this model move students out of being the passive receptors of information, it asks teachers to rethink the traditional role of the instructor as a deliverer of information and challenges them to incorporate more active, collaborative and dynamic teaching strategies into their work. For many experienced faculty members, this can be a daunting task as very few are trained in teaching pedagogy.

The following essay describes the initial journey of an international business faculty member, Chris Whann (CW for this publication) as he made the commitment to reflect upon and change his teaching practice and the educator, Lisa Snyder (LS for this publication) who mentored him through this process. A somewhat unlikely collaboration, the authors took on the roles of reflective practitioners and incorporated an action research design to investigate the implementation of literacy strategies designed to increase engagement and comprehension of complex content material.

This particular collaboration began when both authors were new to Empire State College, no more than a few months into their positions. They had barely been introduced but happened to be participating in a collegewide conference planning group. While waiting for a meeting to start, they began discussing their backgrounds and interests. As a faculty member teaching international business courses in the Center for International Programs, CW works exclusively with students outside the U.S. who do not speak English as a first language but who are pursuing an English-language

business degree through our college. CW has been teaching at the college-level for 25 years. LS came to the college with a Doctorate in Instructional Leadership and expertise in literacy studies, assessment, and training students and teachers whose English-language skills are inadequate for successful elementary and secondary school work.



Christopher Whann and Lisa Snyder

Program history

International Programs at Empire State College has a long history. In fact, the very first international program dates from 1971, the year the college was founded (Bonnabeau, 1996). International programs have adhered to the college's foundational principles: student centered learning and meeting the students where they are. The role of the teacher/mentor is to respect

the student's experience while ensuring a rigorous education that builds on that knowledge. Whether or not the student receives credit for prior knowledge, faculty members are aware of and attentive to that knowledge. As the core values of the college notes, we value goals "that respond to the academic, professional and personal needs of each student" and "identify and build upon students' existing knowledge and skills ..."

CW understood that the international students he teaches come to their learning with diverse backgrounds and much experience. Nonetheless, CW expressed concerns about working with international students who appeared to be knowledgeable about and prepared in some areas of business, but who were being introduced to sophisticated new concepts in global business in a language that is not their own. CW had to identify approaches to serving these non-native speakers of English (NNSs). As the Core Values state, "We value learning-mentoring modes that ... respond to a wide array of student styles, levels, interests and circumstances ..."

(See page 95 of this issue of *All About Mentoring*.)

LS noted that within the field of literacy education, there exists a collection of strategies that has been proven useful for helping English language learners (ELL) comprehend difficult content material, even though we could not identify places in the academic literature where they had been applied to the business content area. CW and LS decided that these tools could address many of CW's concerns while encouraging students to engage with the content in a deeper and more sophisticated way.

The two courses CW started teaching first were Global Business, a standard, advanced-level international business course, and Business Enterprise in American History, an interdisciplinary course meant to help these international students meet a U.S. history general education requirement while taking advantage of their background skills in business subjects. Global Business was offered in Panama in the summer 2009. Business Enterprise was offered in Panama and the Dominican Republic, both in the summer 2009.

Program structure

The Center for International Programs has partnerships in Albania (Tirana), Czech Republic (Prague), Dominican Republic (Santo Domingo), Greece (Athens and Thessaloniki), Lebanon (the greater Beirut area) and Panama (Panama City). In 2007-08, there were 878 students enrolled in the different partnerships.

The model negotiated with each partner school is the blended learning model. Most of the course materials are offered in an online setting, but each program has one or two residencies per course, usually four or five days long. Faculty members (like CW) usually go to the partner-school countries to meet students face-to-face near the beginning and the end of the course to make sure students are on track with their studies and to engage through in-person group activities. Residency meetings are typically offered in the evening after the students leave work.

Although each particular “articulation agreement” differs in some specifics, students entering from the partner schools have relatively standard curricula, and (to date) have done their initial university studies in an English language medium. Students are expected to pursue 32 to 48 credits as part of the degree requirements. For students who are balancing jobs and higher education, this model allows them to pay a reasonable rate of tuition, keep their jobs at home, and still pursue a U.S.-style education and earn a SUNY Empire State College degree. Moreover, students enroll in something akin to a cohort model, so they get to know each other well through their studies and can provide each other with a local academic support network.

Students have a felt need for these sorts of programs. Blended or online models are the most cost-effective ways for international students to acquire a degree from a United States college or university. We would contend that, if students and collegiate partners demand these opportunities, we have an obligation to provide them in one way or another if we can do so in a cost-effective and sustainable way. So far, we have been able to balance the economic imperatives of a cost-effective model with a program that is academically and intellectually rich, and professionally relevant.

Action research

We chose action research as a model for this project. In its simplest form, action research can be described as a systematic, critical and self-reflective process used to examine a participants own practices. Action research is sometimes used synonymously with “practitioner research” because it is the practitioner who identifies the problem(s), collects the data, and is at the center of the rigorous reflection that is an important part of the data analysis (McCutcheon and Jung, 1990). Creswell (2008) identifies six key characteristics of action research. These characteristics are:

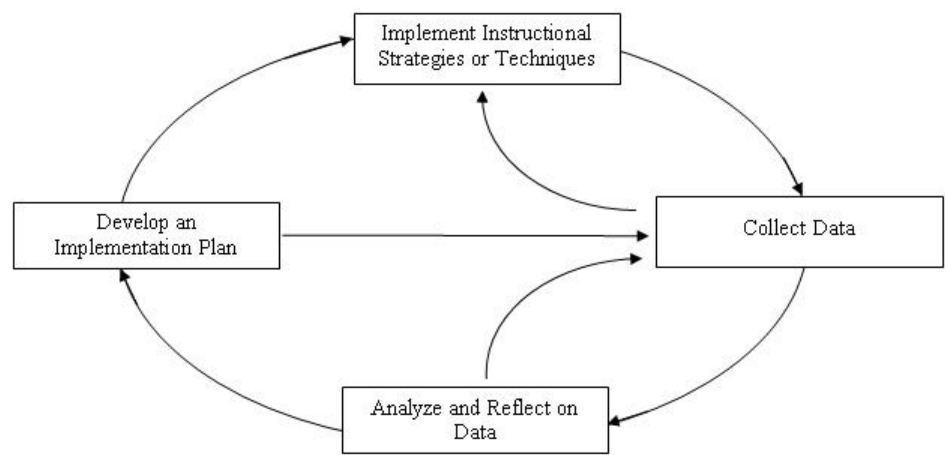
- a practical focus
- the educator-researcher’s own practices
- collaboration
- a dynamic process
- a plan of action
- sharing research

(Creswell, 2008, p. 605)

Practical action research, a form of action research illustrated by the study discussed in this paper, engages the reflective practitioner in an investigation of a problem or challenge with a goal towards improving his or her own practice. Mills (2000) illustrates the process of practical action research with the dialectic action research spiral. This model, which is often used as a guide for practitioners studying themselves and their teaching environments, includes an ongoing and fluid cycle of planning, acting, observing and collecting data, and reflecting (see Figure 1).

It is not unusual for an action research project to start with a feeling, a concern or an inkling that something could be done differently. Often times this feeling is born out of past experience and a desire for a different outcome. Holly, Arhar and Kasten (2009) describe the process in this way,

Figure 1: Action Research Spiral



Adapted from Mills, G.E. (2000). *Action research: A guide for the Teacher Researcher*. Prentice-Hall, Inc.

In an interactive and simultaneous way, we reflect on our values and how we hope to carry them on in our teaching. These reflections guide the plans we make to improve our practice. We act our values with our students in our classrooms and schools. We observe the consequences of our actions through the systematic creation of “data,” continuously interpreting these data in light of our collective pursuit of a more just and democratic life. The cycle continues as we consider new ways to bring teaching more closely in line with our values. At the same time, we develop professionally into more complex ways of thinking; greater moral, ethical and social responsibility; and psychological and emotional maturity.

(Holly, Arhar and Kasten, 2009, p. 41)

This cycle of reflective practice, which is at the heart of action research, serves not only to generate knowledge about teaching practices but also to educate both the student and the practitioner. The importance of reflection in the teaching process has long been known. Dewey (1933) laid the groundwork for the teacher or practitioner as researcher principle when he claimed that, “similar to scientific inquiry, the process of teaching and learning are grounded in elements of quantification and observation to constantly scrutinize what we know and do (Dewey, 1933 as cited in Carlo, Hinkhouse, Isbell, 2010, p. 60).

Rationale

CW tried to respond to several conditions and concerns in his courses. As a seasoned teacher, he was aware that international students usually are not familiar with American educational practices and methods, and they often struggle with reading texts in complex subject areas. Past experience, then, shaped his efforts to devise a teaching strategy to maximize learning and excitement about learning while reducing the likelihood that the course reading would be a barrier instead of an asset to the students. CW was fully aware that his past teaching practices would not work as well in his new global environment. This scrutiny led him to rethink his teaching methods.

First, students have a substantial amount of transfer credits before they arrive in the program. While the faculty members at CW’s institution closely evaluate this transfer work for content and quality, the students have not been exposed to Empire State College studies until they have reached their junior year or beyond. While business curricula are often fairly standard through the core, CW could not be certain if all the students had equally good preparation for the courses he was teaching. Therefore, CW had to gauge the level of the students’ preparation at the onset of the first face-to-face residency.

Second, CW had every reason to believe that students had a solid command of English, at least sufficient for daily conversation. This was certainly borne out in the initial meetings. However, as became quite clear, conversational proficiency in English is not the same as a command of technical vocabulary in the business field. CW was unsure if the students had the content matter language and prior knowledge necessary to be successful in their advanced level studies.

Third, CW knew from other instructors that many students know more about certain aspects of content in the business fields and are less knowledgeable in others. Many international students CW teaches are working adults, even though they are not necessarily much older than typical American students. CW also knew that international students are much less familiar with basics of American history, politics and economics than American students of the same education level would be. While some of the students had been to the U.S. or had even lived in the U.S. for stretches of time, they often did not have a very well developed context for U.S.-derived examples regularly offered in the course matter or textbooks.

Based on these realities and concerns, CW and LS agreed in advance on goals for the residencies. Because CW did not know his students’ level of preparedness (how much they had read, what they retained from prior coursework, etc.) the first goal was to identify students’ background knowledge concerning key concepts. Prior knowledge is important; it is often considered the number one determinant of comprehension (Daniels

and Zemelman, 2004). Both CW and LS were aware from previous experience that a traditional lecture format would not be effective with students who are NNSEs. CW talks too fast, for one thing, and the technical vocabulary and introduction to the theoretical material would be harder for him (or we presumed for any other instructor) to convey in a lecture mode. The second goal was to identify methods of teaching new, complex content material to NNSEs in a way that would facilitate a high level of interaction among students and between students and mentors and comprehension of the material. This would be done by incorporating the use of literacy strategies into the face-to-face (and eventually the online component) teaching of content material.

Theoretical support

What is called “strategic teaching” is an approach to teaching complex content material that aims to increase conceptual learning and promote the use of effective processes of learning (Bulgren and Scanlon, 1998, Vacca and Vacca, 2008). As noted above, strategic teaching is a technical term from the field of education and is not to be confused with the teaching of strategy in business departments or schools. For many years, the predominant methodology of language teaching and learning has been learner-centered with much attention being paid to the learner’s process while engaged in a learning activity (Fotovatian and Shokrpour, 2007). Strategic teaching makes use of literacy strategies, or techniques designed to help students with the process of building understandings. The use of these strategies has been found to be a critical piece in ELLs’ success at every level of education (Poole, 2005).

One challenge in the Empire State College international program is that the students are doing the most difficult part of their program without faculty members physically present full time. Academic texts, like the standard texts in international business, are packed with technical vocabulary that is even difficult for native speakers of English, let alone students who are struggling with reading, vocabulary and comprehension challenges. Reading complex textbooks is considered one of the most cognitively

challenging tasks an ELL can be asked to do (Vacca and Vacca, 2008). For most non-native speakers, conversational speech is the first to develop. The academic language found in textbooks tends to be more complex and often includes difficult and unfamiliar vocabulary. This can lead to increasing frustration and a decreasing level of comprehension, including a lack of understanding of new concepts. By organizing instruction around student's prior knowledge and actively engaging them in the learning process by utilizing research-based literacy strategies, students are better able to understand difficult content materials.

When literacy strategies are woven into the teaching of content material, an approach known as "strategy integration," the instructor shifts from being a transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator of learning (Bulgren and Scanlon, 1998). The choice of literacy strategies, as well as the process for integrating them into an instructor's teaching methodology, depends on several factors including the goals and objectives for the lesson, as well as the nature of the content to be covered. LS and CW took both of these into consideration when choosing the literacy strategies to be incorporated into CW's courses. They agreed on two: the List-Group-Label strategy (Taba, 1967) and the Venn diagram. At the core of both of these strategies is the activation of the students' prior knowledge.

Activating background knowledge

The cognitive view of the reading process tells us that active readers construct meaning through the integration of new and existing (prior) knowledge (Alvermann and Phelps, 2005). Cognitive psychologists refer to the word schema to describe how people organize everyday experiences into meaningful patterns. Schema can be seen as, "a collection of organized and interrelated idea or concepts" (Alvermann and Phelps, 2005, p. 19). Schemata (plural of schema) receive, classify and hold on to information about our experiences with events and objects, thus creating our world view. In essence, schemata provide the script or road map through which we navigate our experiences (Ruddell, 2005). By activating a student's schema, we provide them with a metaphorical "hook" on which they

can hang new information. This also has benefits for the instructor; the information alerts the instructor not only to what students know, but also to inaccuracies and gaps in their knowledge. In effect, when we activate students' prior knowledge, we alert them to what they know, thus potentially empowering the student and generating motivation and curiosity for the topic at hand. A number of teaching strategies exist for both activating and building prior knowledge, including the two that were used in this study. These strategies are designed to bridge the gap between what the reader already knows and what the reader needs to know to understand the new content material (Ausubel, 1968). They also help to create an environment where deep learning can occur. The key here is not only to activate knowledge based on a student's prior experience, but also to use that knowledge as a starting point for new learning to occur.

List-group-label

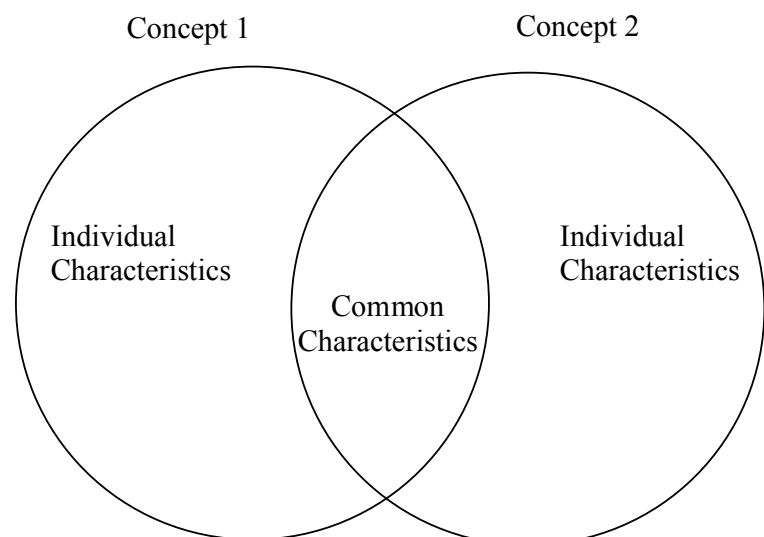
The List-Group-Label strategy (Taba, 1967) represents a strategic approach to teaching content by focusing on the relationship between concepts and promoting critical thinking skills. Students begin by brainstorming what they know about a given topic. Brainstorming in itself is an effective strategy for activating and identifying prior knowledge (Vacca and Vacca, 2008). Students work individually

or in small groups to list what they know about a given topic. Once the lists are created, students work collaboratively in their groups to cluster the items in their list by related terms or concepts. Often times a word will fit into more than one grouping and students must collectively decide where the term should belong. The final part of the strategy asks students to label or title each cluster of terms. This label should be indicative of the group's rationale for the cluster. After the activity, the instructor facilitates a discussion with the class by asking students to share their process as well as their final product. As the discussion progresses, the instructor guides students in the elaboration of their work and connection to new concepts.

Venn diagram

Graphic organizers are strategic tools that are useful for helping NNSEs identify concepts they already know and to visualize how they are related to each other (Vacca and Vacca, 2008). A Venn diagram is one example of a graphic organizer that is created by drawing two or three intersecting circles. The instructor begins the lesson by providing content-related concepts for each circle in the diagram (see Figure 2). Working in small groups, students create their own Venn diagrams and work collaboratively to brainstorm individual characteristics for each of the concepts. The final step is the identification of common characteristics.

Figure 2: Venn Diagram



These are written in the intersecting portion of the diagram. While the students are working in their groups, it is important for the instructor to circulate around the room to ask questions, offer feedback, and keep students on task. When each group finished, the students compared their findings with, and contrasted them to, the findings of other groups.

As with the List-Group-Label (L-G-L) strategy, the instructor follows the Venn diagram activity with a discussion. Each group is given the opportunity to present its diagram and explain the thought process that went into its creation. The instructor then guides students as they elaborate on their own work as well as the work of their colleagues and facilitates the connection to new concepts. In a recent study of 31 Iranian university students studying EFL, such “elaboration” was shown to be the most important strategy for aiding in comprehension of new content material (Fotovatian and Shokrpour, 2007).

Both the List-Group-Label and Venn Diagram strategies actively engage students in the learning process. An increased level of active student engagement has been associated with higher levels of achievement, as well as an increased level of student motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2000). The use of these strategies allowed CW and LS to meet their goals for the lesson by providing students with an opportunity to articulate what they knew about the given topics. This provided CW with important information regarding the students’ level of preparedness, as well as insight into any gaps or errors in understanding. These strategies also offered CW a way to present new, complex content material to his NNSE students that would facilitate a high level of interaction and comprehension.

Preliminary results

Since June 2009, CW has taught or facilitated seven courses: two in Panama, two in the Dominican Republic, and three in Lebanon. From CW’s and LS’s perspectives, CW is using reflective practice in a way that is improving his teaching practice and improving his students’ learning experience. Below are some examples.

The first time CW taught a residency, Global Business in Panama, he defaulted to using the lecture mode due to time pressure. While teaching the second residency, Business Enterprise in Panama, under the same time pressure, CW defaulted to more interactive strategies. The Venn diagram and L-G-L were the interactive strategies he incorporated. Once students knew that the residencies were designed to be interactive, and they were comfortable with CW and this teaching style, they demonstrated greater openness to an interactive teaching style. In January 2010, during the first residency for another upper-level business course, International Cross-Cultural Management, a student asked the instructor, “When are we going to use the circles [i.e., the Venn Diagram]?” What this suggests is that this student has to come to expect that CW’s class was going to be a different kind of class – a more interactive class.

This experience also helped when CW was responsible for facilitating classes for another instructor during a residency in Lebanon in fall 2009. The course, Organizational Teamwork, was not CW’s, but the course instructor (who was not at the residency) had given him some interactive projects to try with her students. When CW met with the students, it was clear that they were not prepared to do the exercises the original instructor had set. Rather than default back to a lecture format, CW implemented the L-G-L strategy along with some other more interactive approaches. In this way, it was possible for him to ensure students had covered the required material. In addition, the students used the L-G-L approach to begin categorizing the material in ways that (it turned out) fell out along lines of classical management theories and human relations theories that the primary instructor had originally planned to cover. CW did not know that the L-G-L strategy would be effective with this particular group of students; however, based on his prior experiments, he clearly felt confident enough to move forward with this strategy. This type of critical on-the-spot reflection, or reflection-in-action, is a central tenant to the theory of reflective practice (Schön, 1983; Kinsella, 2009). The more instructors engage in the plan, act, observe, reflect

cycle, the more skillful they can become in understanding and expanding their own teaching practice.

CW observed that in all cases where the interactive strategies were implemented, both the quantity of conversation and the quality of discussion was superior to cases where he used primarily lecture format. During lecture, CW’s students have been passive. Since CW began to use interactive strategies, students are visibly more engaged. A visiting instructor who sat in on one of CW’s courses likened it to a graduate seminar because of the level of engagement. CW always saw himself as a lecturer by temperament, and he was surprised by his own transition from lecturing to a more interactive style of teaching.

Directions for future research

The teacher-as-mentor model encourages reflective practice for students. Therefore, it would stand to reason that practitioners also would examine their own assumptions and teaching practices and “use artistry in exploring problems of practice” (H, A, K, 2009, p. 38). The small study described in this article started with a feeling, a feeling of concern over how best to teach our international students to comprehend complex content material, and a need for action. This led the researchers to inquire and look across disciplines to identify teaching strategies that might help them meet their goal. CW’s experience suggested to him that with his current group of students, his “old” lecture style of teaching was not going to work. It is not that he lacked confidence in his teaching ability; he was actively looking for a way to improve the way he taught. What was fortuitous about the meeting and the collaboration with LS is that while CW was interested in exploring a new way of thinking about teaching, he didn’t know where to begin. LS had the expertise and imagination to guide him in this process. This study required a true collaboration to move forward.

LS and CW are currently exploring the next steps in this project. LS will continue to provide CW with new tools for him to implement and reflect upon as well as study CW’s transformation as an instructor. LS and CW have already begun to extend the

use these tools to other willing practitioners. The researchers also are looking for more effective ways to measure what they believe to be true: that increased levels of engagement will result in increased levels of comprehension.

Note

- ¹ In this paper, we use the term non-native speaker of English (NNSE) deliberately. The literature uses several terms interchangeably. The most common terms in the field refer to English as Second Language (ESL) learners, English Language Learner (ELL), and English as a Foreign Language learners. We choose NNSE because we believe that the students are motivated to use English because (a) they already consider themselves competent speakers of English, and (b) they need it as the medium of instruction for learning the content matter in business. Nonetheless, we will use ESL, ELL and EFL if the literature on which we draw uses them.

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Raison d'Être

Mary Klinger, Genesee Valley Center

Why wouldn't Tom behave in class? Why was Joe the class clown? Why was Lucy's nail polish the only thing that she ever seemed to care about? In my years before coming to Empire State College, I taught in junior high and high school classrooms. I tried to work with many students like these. School was "seat time" to them – nothing more.

When I was able to get some of them to talk to me about school and learning, I would get different answers that were still, in some ways, the same.

"I am not smart – no one in my family is smart."

"The school tells me that I don't need good grades because I am not college material."

"Why are you bugging me? Just let me look out the window and think about last night's party."

"I have to work on my nails. If I don't look good, Shawn will dump me for someone prettier."

"How is this stuff going to help me in my life? I joke around because it is the one thing I am good at."

Different answers? Yes. The same? In my experience, yes.

What happened to that excitement that they all must have felt at age 5 or 6, when they couldn't wait to get to school every morning? We can call it a need (maybe a hunger) for learning, a strong curiosity about the world – chances to experiment with life. Where did it go?

Some experts will answer that this disappearance is the result of learning disabilities or a wide range of other dysfunctions (home, friends, lack of basic needs, etc.). These certainly are contributing factors. But whatever the reason, schools

often produce students who have diplomas, but have lost the love of learning.

I called it learning differences. Back then I didn't know people learned differently or understood the various ways that people can learn. The education textbooks I used in college barely gave it a mention. In the classroom, though, I did learn many things from just watching and experimenting. I learned that varying the way I did things would help students learn. I found that movement would help some students remember. Pictures instead of words sometimes worked. Replicating a battlefield using classroom desks and chairs was my personal favorite attempt to help, although the school principal wasn't thrilled with that one! Both the students and I enjoyed the less than traditional techniques.

What I could tell was that different learning experiences worked better for different students. They all learned differently. When I came home on a day when I knew that I had reached *one* student and showed her that maybe she could think, learn and strive for something that was unimaginable to her before, I knew that was a good day.

Time was always the issue. How could you lesson plan so that all differences were being addressed? How could you create enough varied activities that would trigger a spark in every child? There was just no time – not enough time to plan and not enough class time to make it work. I think of those years of teaching as times of my greatest joys professionally, but also times of some of my greatest frustrations.

A decade or more later, I found Empire State College. My public school work with adolescents was behind me. I had found this place that allowed and even encouraged individuality in learning. I could really think about learning differences and help students to creatively address them. Wow, it was even in the mission statement!

In my first years with the college I would relish the time with my new student, Joe, who came to me and said; "I am not college material – my high school told me so – but my boss says that I need a degree to keep my job." I looked into Joe's face. I knew this face. I'd seen it before. I recognized Joe in all those high school students. And now I'd have another chance to try to "turn him on" to learning.

Over the years as a mentor with Empire State College, I like to think that I helped some of these students see the positives of education that they might not have gained in high school. I know with the extra work needed by student and mentor (suggesting alternate resources, individualizing learning activities, searching for ways to respond to those differences, etc.), some students found or, in fact, reconnected with that motivation to learn and that enjoyment of learning. It always took that extra time. That ingredient, that necessity, never changed, but that was fine. That is why Empire State College existed.

Last week a student arrived in my office for our initial new student meeting. Tim hesitantly sat down with me and said, "My boss says that I have to get a degree. I know I can't do it. I am not a college kind of guy." I looked at him and groaned inside. Right at that moment, I knew the time it will take to encourage him and to try to gently nudge his mindset to new ideas about learning, and, of course, to new ways to think about himself. We chatted for awhile about his needs and expectations. Tim and I finished up, planned our next meeting, and said goodbye.

Driving home, I realized what I had done that day: I had actually groaned at the thought of helping one of those students, exactly one of those students who had given me such pleasure to work with not so many years before. I was ashamed.

Why are we mentors? I am sure that each of us could answer this in a different way. That

night, still thinking about Tim, I recognized that through my years at the college, my professional life had slowly strayed from the mindset of the educator I want to be. In the midst of meetings, due dates, outcomes and enrollment numbers, I had forgotten

my joy, what makes me excited, what brings purpose to my professional life, and what I know both my students and I require. I had forgotten – and need to remember – my reason to be.

My next step is to figure out (and I want to figure it out) how to balance the realities of what is for me a new institution with new routines and new expectations and my commitment to mentoring. I just don't want to lose all of those Joe's and Tim's in our lives.

From *The Mind at Work: Valuing the Intelligence of the American Worker* (2004, 165-166)

It is this kind of nuance that tends to get leveled out in the binary oppositions that have been my concerns:

brain-hand
 abstract-concrete
 intellectual-practical
 academic-vocational
 pure-applied
 reflective-technical
 new knowledge work-old industrial work
 neck up-neck down

These each have their own lineage, but play off one another. They are commonplace in educational and occupational discourse, in policy talk, in opinion pieces and editorials. They can be useful as shorthand, quick conceptualizations that enable us to follow a line of thought, make distinctions, wrap our minds around things. But they can also compartmentalize thought. For it is interaction, interweaving, ambiguity, fuzzy borders, that more characterizes human activity – and surely where mind and work are concerned. The binaries make us think we understand multifaceted historical, social and psychological phenomena better than we do, and – my concern here – they limit our ability to see, and to honor, the considerable play of mind and physical work.

Knowledge Reconceived: The Quest for Wisdom in an Age of Crisis and Opportunity

Kathleen Kesson, Long Island University

Kathleen Kesson was our guest at the 2009 June Academic Conference, the theme of which was “Empire State College in a Wider World of Knowledge: Contextualizing our Areas of Study.” She was introduced by the director of Empire State College’s Center for Mentoring and Learning, Katherine Jelly, as follows:

It is my privilege to introduce Kathleen Kesson, professor of teaching and learning at Long Island University. I had the good fortune to serve on the faculty with Kathleen for several years at Goddard College, where I came to respect her not just for her intellect, incredibly hard work, and abiding commitment to positive social change, but also her integrity. Navigating the complexities and challenges of the field of education, whether higher ed or K through 12, in or out of formal schooling, she has not wavered in her efforts to advocate for and contribute to education that supports democracy, critical awareness and social justice – education for the public good.

At the Brooklyn Campus of Long Island University, Kathleen teaches courses in the foundations of education and teacher research. She is co-author, with James Henderson, of *Curriculum Wisdom: Educational Decisions in Democratic Societies* (2004) and *Understanding Democratic Curriculum Leadership* (1999), and editor, with Wayne Ross, of *Defending Public Schools: Teaching for a Democratic Society* (2004). She also is the author of numerous book chapters, book reviews and academic articles. Her interests include the areas of democracy and education, critical pedagogy, aesthetics and education, curriculum theory, and teacher inquiry and reflection.

Having recently completed her first novel for young adults, Kathleen is currently working on a memoir about “unschooling” her four children. She and James Henderson also are

working on a professional development text for classroom teachers on the development of wisdom-based problem solving. It’s a pleasure to welcome her today to help us engage the important questions before us.

* * *

Knowledge reconceived: The quest for wisdom in an age of crisis and opportunity

In a 1982 book called *The Turning Point*, Fritjof Capra, in outlining the vast social, ecological and cultural changes on our horizon, noted the Chinese term for the word “crisis,” is composed of the character “wei” meaning danger and “ji” for opportunity, or crucial point. It’s easy to see that we are in the midst of a multifaceted crisis and face many dangers; it can be difficult, however, to see our way through to the opportunities for positive evolution and creative transformation that this crisis presents.

When I first started writing about what many people call the “crisis of democracy” (Henderson and Kesson, 2004), I was writing during the Republican reign about an administration that warned us that we would be at war for the foreseeable future and that we would not hesitate to use deadly nuclear weapons to protect “our way of life,” an administration that promoted torture as an acceptable interrogation practice, that refused to acknowledge the scientific evidence pointing to global warming, and that urged us to continue shopping in the face of terrorism and to keep driving in the face of dwindling fossil fuels. I am at least somewhat hopeful that we are now governed by more rational leaders and that people worldwide have awakened to the nature of the multidimensional crises we face. But my concerns have not been alleviated; if anything, they have only intensified with the disasters in the global financial sector

and the resultant economic crisis. I wish it were possible to retreat to our hypothetical ivory tower, a term used to connote a “metaphysical space of solitude and sanctity disconnected from daily realities,” to discuss big ideas. But the times call all of us to an active engagement with a world in trouble. The times call us, as progressive educators, to respond to complex, multifaceted problems that are global in scope with new ideas, creativity, disciplined intelligence and unwavering ethical commitments.

I am by academic training a curriculum theorist. What that means is that I have grappled with a number of questions related to knowledge as we conceive and teach it for my entire professional life.

- Where does knowledge come from?
- How do we know what we know?
- What is worth knowing and who decides?
- What should be taught?

The more I study these questions, the less certain I feel. So I join you today, not with answers, but as a fellow seeker, a seeker not just of knowledge, but of wisdom. Information and knowledge alone are insufficient to address the multifaceted crises; we and our students must become seekers of wisdom if we are to respond effectively to the problems of our times.

But first, a very brief history of how our understanding of knowledge has changed and evolved.

Where does knowledge come from?

For most of our collective human history (and remember that modernity is but a blip on this historical screen), we have lived in isolated villages, camps and small cities. Knowledge was practical, oriented to survival and idiosyncratic – that is connected to place, need and local circumstances. Inuit people had a very different knowledge base

from folks living in the deserts of central Africa. Knowledge was gained largely through trial and error. We figured out through suffering the consequences of our mistakes which berries we could eat and which should be left to the birds, how to help breech babies into the world, what time of year the ice floes might melt and leave us stranded in an icy sea, which parts of the large animal were tasty and which parts gave us a stomach ache. John Dewey would call this “learning from experience.”

But we also learned in more subtle ways, through what the philosopher Whitehead called “prehension.” Prehension is the way that knowing seeps up through our unconscious mind – our preconceptual, preverbal modes of perception. Prehending signifies the complex processes of autonomic imaging, imagination and metaphoric connections which sometimes burst into conscious awareness. Prehending is the world of dreams and visions and intuition, with which our forebears were more familiar than we.

So, early on we have these two worlds of outer experience and inner experience combining to provide humans with information about survival. Over time, folks gravitated to one or another form of knowledge and perfected the related skills. Certain people, more adept with weapons, became hunters. Others, perhaps with sharper micro perception gathered nuts and berries and seed grasses. Gendered tasks such as reproduction fostered a division of labor. Some people were skilled in decoration, some in healing, others in the interpretation of dreams and visions. Specialization was born.

How do we know what we know?

At some point, people figured out that they didn't have to keep making the same painful, sometimes deadly mistakes. They realized that they could pass on the information gained through trial and error. So they told stories, stories about where food could be found, where dangers lurked, what to do when lightning struck, and how to appease the gods. Thus began the transmission of knowledge.

Such local knowledge became systematized over time, encapsulated in rituals used

to teach subsequent generations the accumulated knowledge of the past. Such storied rituals still live on in the songlines of the Indigenous Australians, a series of song cycles that identify landmarks and aid in navigation of a vast and to the initiated, hostile and mysterious land. Complex systems of survival, enacted through song, story and ritual enabled people, such as the Hopi of the southwest United States, to live in even the harshest of environments. Over time, story and ritual were transformed through complex processes of mythologizing into more regular bodies of knowledge. Knowledge became not just the story, but what the story means. Systems of thought were birthed, such as those found in the historical scriptures, dogmas and philosophies that have survived through time. Interpretation was born.

One thing we know from both ancient philosophy and modern cognitive science: Knowledge does not exist without a knower. There is no knowledge “out there” to be discovered. There are only objects (both

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material and abstract), selective perceptions of objects, neural processing of these perceptions, interpretations of perceptions, and personal meaning making.

Searching for regularities in human experience, first Aristotle, in the Western world, and later, Renaissance scholars, applied mathematics to perception. With this move, people began to develop abstract theories about how the world worked. General laws and principles were formulated, experiments were devised and replicated, and the scientific method – the marriage of reason and logic with empiricism – was born. Knowledge soon became equated with this method of study. Other forms of knowing – dreams, visions,

intuition, and even everyday experience – were relegated to secondary status and science was invoked to study phenomena from quarks to human emotions.

Through such experimentation we humans have generated an impressive store of facts, and at no time in human history has so much information been available to so many people through technological advancements in information storage, retrieval and distribution. With the proliferation of information has come the accelerated division and subdivision of knowledge into disciplines, sub-disciplines, and branches of sub-disciplines, as well as the fusion of disciplines into interdisciplinary and area studies. We have come a long way from the first European universities, where the seven liberal arts were taught: arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music theory, grammar, logic, and rhetoric. There is cause to celebrate the proliferation of information, knowledge, and the multitude of practical applications that have brought at least a portion of humanity greater abundance, comfort, leisure and longevity. But it also is useful to question the ways in which the extreme fragmentation of knowledge may not have served us well. One thing is certain: the question of What is worth knowing and who decides? has become an extremely complicated one to answer.

What is worth knowing and who decides?

Thanks to a generation of critical scholarship, such as that of Michel Foucault (1980), we now have a keen sense of how knowledge and power are intricately related through complex systems of political organization, think tanks, policy institutes, legislation, academic gatekeeping, learning standards, socialization processes, propaganda, and religious indoctrination. And that's just the short list.

Certain forms of knowing and certain forms of knowledge are legitimated by what Antonio Gramsci called “hegemonic power.” The quick definition of hegemony is when a culturally dominant group exerts ideological control over society through an interlocking system of major institutions such as schools, media and religious organizations. Such power is often invisible, and is exercised

through the manipulation and control of language, knowledge, thinking, and desire rather than through force. Think about the ways that omnipresent advertising shapes human desires to conform to the needs of those who own the means of production or the ways that human behavior is controlled through fear of divine retribution. This is hegemony.

Of course, this is not a monolithic or totalizing endeavor, for we are a democracy and not a totalitarian state. Numerous sources of conflicting information are available to the avid, open-minded seeker. Thus, the question What is worth knowing and who decides? has led in our own historical memory to raging battles within and without the academy over what counts as knowledge. Think about the recent wars over the literary canon, characterized by conflicts between the traditionalists who aimed to preserve Western culture and the feminists and multiculturalists who sought the inclusion of women and minorities in the canon. Think about debates over whether graphic novels and visual artifacts count as “texts.” Recall the fierce arguments between those who believe that students need direct instruction in the ideas of the Founding Fathers and the ideals of duty, discipline, loyalty, obedience and patriotism, and those who argue for the inclusion of diverse perspectives and a more honest and critical appraisal of our history.

The debates highlight not only what counts as knowledge and who decides, they require us to think about how our conventional knowledge categories have been conceptualized and who benefits from this. Some questions: do areas of study such as Women’s Studies, African-American History or Queer Theory gain influence or legitimacy by remaining distinct from the “parent disciplines” of history and sociology? Or does categorization as sub-disciplines assure their continued marginalization?

In the social sciences we have arguments about postmodernism and post structuralism and the relativism these are thought to foster, about quantitative versus qualitative research, traditional anthropology versus critical postcolonialism, and over whether the novel should count as a dissertation in

the field of education. One result is that the major debates in the academic disciplines are now primarily about theory and method; another is that people highly educated in the disciplines are mostly qualified to perpetuate the disciplines.

One popular adage, variously attributed to Henry Kissinger or Woodrow Wilson, suggests that academic disputes are bitter precisely because the stakes are so small. But this is not altogether true. Knowledge from the knowledge production sector of society does trickle down to society at large, and whether or not people have had exposure to the novels of Toni Morrison and the historical perspectives of Howard Zinn affects the way they see the world and what they believe is possible.

Given the subtle ways that power operates and circulates, some questions for educators with liberatory inclinations become How can we help people cut through the layers of conditioning that constitute the social construction of knowledge? How can we help people gain control of their discourses and social practices in ways that lead towards greater freedom of thought and action? These questions require educators to carefully consider how knowledge is constructed and categorized. Who does decide what counts as knowledge? Who is served by our traditional forms of organizing knowledge? Who is not?

What should be taught?

Such questions inevitably lead educators to my fourth perennial question: What should be taught? All of the knowledge questions are contextual questions – they cannot be addressed without attention to the specifics of time, place and circumstances. Here’s my analysis of the present moment in education. Contemporary “hegemonic” discourse on teaching and learning is currently characterized by the language of numbers, derived from what my colleague Peter Taubman calls “audit culture” (2009). Audit culture is a transplant to education from finance and accounting, and if recent developments in the finance sector have not made us suspicious of its discourses and practices, then we have been asleep for the past year. Audit culture refers to systems of organizational and social regulation

that prioritize the logic of standardized management over quality. The language of audit culture is the language of efficiency and control. Phrases like standards, accountability, operationalizing learning goals, outcomes assessment and rubrics all reduce the complex act of learning to formulae. They orient the profoundly human interaction between teachers and learners to means of manipulating students towards predetermined and precisely defined outcomes. Knowledge, in this paradigm, becomes a commodity, students become consumers, and teachers become managers and purveyors within a hegemonic educational market.

Even those of us who critique this discourse find ourselves forced to operate within its confines as we seek accreditation for our institutions, act in concert with the state as licensers and certifiers for the professions, or frame student achievement in terms that the post academic world will recognize as legitimate. So what are we to do – those of us who have lived some or all of our educational lives within a tradition – albeit a tradition that resists being labeled a tradition – of progressive education? I suspect that many of you share with me a sort of schizophrenic condition. I use the term schizophrenic not in its clinical psychological sense, but in its more general sense of holding to contradictory or antagonistic qualities or attitudes. The contradictions I experience have to do with conflicts over my deeply held values and my ethical stance towards teaching and learning and the desire to see my students succeed in the world they will encounter upon graduation. For example, I truly believe that learning happens in accordance with an inner timetable that varies from person to person. Yet I am bound by the constraints of the semester to “cover the curriculum.” I believe that people themselves know best what they need to know, yet at the beginning of every semester I am faced with the task of creating a syllabus that will serve as a contract between me and my students. I face a contradiction over educating students for the “real world” vs. for a world that we hope to bring into being. I struggle with my complicity in a complex system of sifting and sorting people according to ability, of having to “grade” people according to

standards that have been set by others, and in the case of teacher education, being in fundamental disagreement with the direction of the profession that I am educating students to enter. Perhaps you share these, or have other dilemmas that you face in your life as an educator, and I encourage you to bring those forward in the conversations we will have.

I'll make no assumptions that the values I hold are necessarily shared widely, but let me take a stab at articulating what I feel are some of the commitments embodied by those of us who consider ourselves progressive educators. Perhaps putting some of these values out on the table might move forward our conversation about what is to be done, how and what to teach in an "age of crisis and opportunity."

- Progressive educators hold the person as central to educational experience, as opposed to the test score, or the performance outcomes.
- Progressive educators see learning as a complex integrated process that draws upon sensory experience and emotional responses as well as logic, reason and engagement with the ideas of "expert others."
- Progressive educators value what Eliot Eisner calls "productive idiosyncrasy." Productive idiosyncrasy argues that there is absolutely no need to turn people out of a common educational mold, even if it does make comparisons of them easier.
- Progressive educators believe that social progress is intertwined with human development. We cannot create the good society without attention to the human needs for autonomy and the freedom to define one's educational journey in one's own terms.
- But we also know that exclusive attention to the individual can breed narcissism, consumerism and alienation. Progressive education is a social activity; one in which it is necessary to actively cultivate relationships with those who have been "Other" to us, in the interest of coming to appreciate the ways that diverse others can extend our intelligence and our compassion.

Progressive education cultivates a stance that requires us to consider the effects of our actions on diverse others, and to be responsive to the needs and desires of others.

- Progressive educators believe that democracy holds the promise, as yet unrealized, for the full flowering of human potential. However, with Dewey, we understand democracy as more than a governmental structure; it is a way of life "that is extensively varied, communicative and participatory." Judith Green calls this "deep democracy."
- Deep democracy is the cultural dimension of formal democracy. Educating for deep democracy will equip people to expect, to understand, and to value diversity and change; to preserve and project democratically humane cultural values; to nurture sustainable environmental values; and to connect with others in respectful and satisfying ways.
- Deep democracy requires citizens who are self-reflective, interpersonally engaged, caring, imaginative, inquiring, and communicative. These qualities embody the moral dimension of democracy.
- Progressive educators know that in order to embody the commitments above, all learning needs to integrate rich subject matter, self-knowledge and social learning. Learning standards, if we are bound to have them, need to be reconceptualized to integrate these facets of learning.

What kind of citizens might develop in the context of an education grounded in the above values? I believe that these values support the development of people capable of independent, critical, ecological and holistic thinking. People with the capacity to embody an ethical stance in their actions. An ethical stance along the lines of what the French philosopher Alain Badiou (2001) calls a "for all" orientation, as opposed to narrow self-interest. People who have cut through their social conditioning, whose creativity has been set free, and who are not limited by the strictures of habitual thinking.

I believe that a society characterized by such progressive values would be a caring society; it would be a society in which 'eros' or love, was a dominant force. Contrasting democracy with fascism, Kerry Burch, author of *Eros as the Educational Principle of Democracy*, notes, "if the major emotional sources of fascism are fear and destructiveness, eros may be seen to represent the emotional currents of love that a democratic culture obviously requires" (2000, p. 182).

Talking about values is important as a grounding of a progressive pedagogy. But it still begs the question of what forms learning might take and how to think about the role of academic disciplines in alternative forms of learning. And this seems to be a key issue in the reconceptualizing of knowledge and its forms. So, I am going to spend the remainder of my time exploring how we might update the classic "problem-focused" curriculum of a progressive education, so that we might more effectively respond to one of its common criticisms: that an experiential education lacks academic rigor.

The problem-focused curriculum

Unlike more traditional societies, which are governed by custom and authoritative knowledge, modern democracies place a premium on invention and experimentation. In a modern, experimental, participatory democracy, the ability to identify and work towards the solution of problems is an on-going task of democratic citizens. Whether community members are involved in cleaning up a toxic waste dump, or figuring out how to meet the needs of the homeless in their midst, or how to provide themselves affordable health care, it is necessary to continuously work toward the solution of problems. Working together to solve problems is a social act; it also is a creative act. It is for these reasons that I suggest a democratic, progressive education need be at its core, "problem focused." There are solid pedagogical and neuroscientific, as well as philosophical reasons for this. Here are a few of them:

- First, research on the brain suggests that we learn best when information is embedded in a context. Problems, É

whether in the social world, the world of numbers, or in the arts provide a rich context for acquiring information.

- We have a natural memory system – a spatial/autobiographical memory system – that is always engaged, activated and responsive to novelty. We easily retain memories of embodied experiences, as opposed to the difficulty of recalling meaningless or decontextualized bits of information (what brain researchers call taxonomic information).
- It appears that knowledge is best absorbed when people have a chance to apply it to new situations. A compelling critique of conventional education is that we are expected to absorb vast amounts of information that is not used.
- The brain is a social organism – learning is profoundly influenced by the relationships in which one is involved. Real world problem solving is an inherently social activity.
- People learn best when they find \hat{E} personal meaning in a topic. This is \hat{E} commonsensical and easily verified \hat{E} through personal experience. \hat{E}
- We know that a key condition for learning is self-driven motivation, a sense of ownership. Doing real work in the real world, solving problems and collaborating with others, establishes the conditions for engagement and motivation.

The kind of learning offered by Empire State College – an education that is personally tailored for independent study, and that values the experiences of adult learners – is particularly well suited to a problem-focused curriculum. But the historic problem-focused pragmatism of Dewey, Kilpatrick, Jane Adams, and others, needs to be updated to incorporate new thinking about complexity, diversity, spirituality, cognition, systems thinking, ecology, and information technology among other postmodern developments. Our new pedagogies must be up to the challenges presented by emerging problems, which are complex, multifaceted, and global in nature. Old ways of thinking,

worn out ways of “packaging” knowledge, and exhausted worldviews won’t do.

The shift from knowledge to wisdom

What I want to provoke now is a discussion of the urgent necessity to shift our focus from pragmatic problem solving to wisdom problem solving. Wisdom may seem like a lofty term, a state only attainable by sages and prophets and others disconnected from the rigors of daily life. But hear the definition of wisdom offered by the Oxford English Dictionary: Wisdom is “the capacity of judging rightly in matters relating to life and conduct; soundness of judgment in the choice of means and ends; sound sense, especially in practical affairs.” In other words, nothing is more practical than the quest for wisdom. We certainly do not suffer a lack of information, and there is no shortage of knowledge accumulated in the academic disciplines. However, given the scope of the challenges that face humanity, the need to reconceptualize our most fundamental assumptions about how we live and what we value, and the call to evolve to a more conscious, ecologically aware state of being, it is wisdom we need to cultivate.

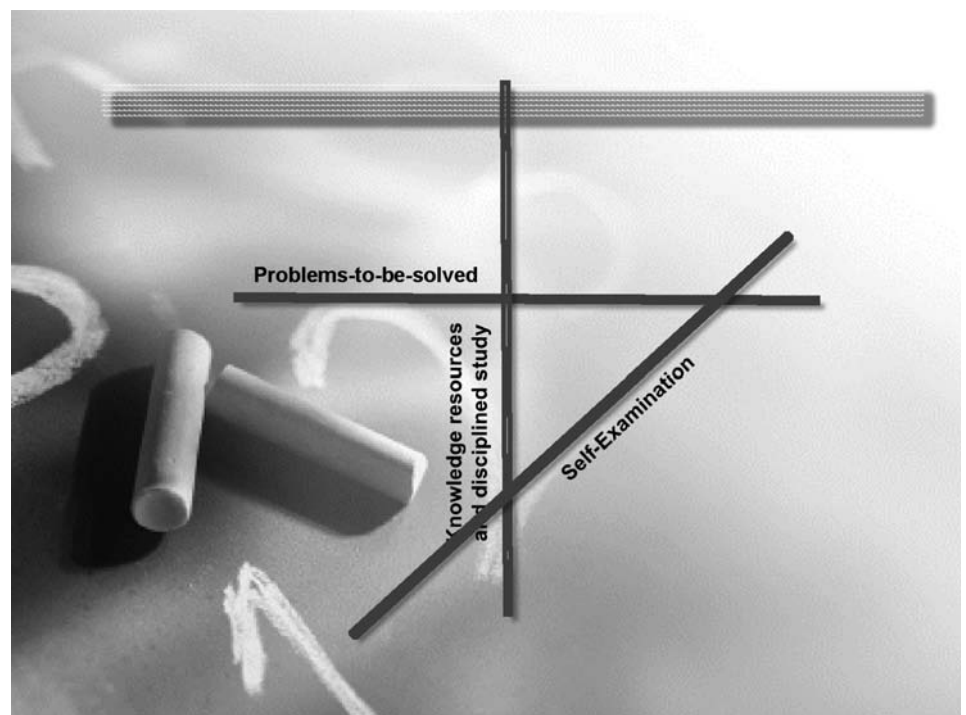
In our book *Curriculum Wisdom* (2004), James Henderson and I describe educational

wisdom as denoting a “soulful and holistic practical artistry directed towards the personal and social good.” It is important to note that wisdom is not an end state, something that can actually be attained. Rather, it is a state of mind that is open, inquiring, visionary, critical, imaginative, and compassionate. Wisdom incorporates logic, analysis and reason on the one hand, and the emotional and the intuitive on the other. It signifies an intelligence directed towards deep democracy as a moral way of living.

There are many ways of thinking about learning that might support the quest for wisdom. I’ll present one here that we have been working with, and perhaps you will generate others in the deliberations that follow. Mindful of the truth that any model is but a poor map for a complex and mysterious terrain, I present here, for the sake of a conceptual shortcut, a geometric curriculum map consisting of three intersecting axes.

Problems-to-be-solved

Situated along the horizontal axis are the potential array of problems to be solved and the habits, skills and dispositions necessary to work towards their solution. Some of these include: the accurate description of a



problem situation, the careful analysis of the multidimensional and systematic nature of the problem situation, the apt formulation of inquiry questions to guide investigation into the problem, the disposition to collaborate in its solution, and skills in deliberation, negotiation and interpretation.

Knowledge resources and disciplined study

Situated along the vertical axis are the intellectual resources necessary to develop a deep understanding of the nature of the problem, to inhabit, or try on, multiple perspectives on a problem, and to open up novel possibilities for solutions. In other words, the accumulated knowledge from the academic disciplines. Any problem worth solving has many dimensions – historical, scientific, philosophical, aesthetic and ethical dimensions – which can only be fully understood through disciplined study. I use the term “disciplined” here in a doubled sense: as a signifier for organized knowledge and as a habit of mind both focused and intense. Complex problems require trans-disciplinary solutions, in the sense that true invention and innovation must necessarily transcend conventional boundaries of thinking and analysis. However, this does not discount the need to employ rigorous methods of inquiry and interpretation that have been developed in the academic disciplines.

Self-examination

The practice of wisdom requires a soul-searching honesty. Situated along the diagonal axis is the autobiographical journey of understanding, deep reflection on one’s personal relationship to the problem situation, an understanding of the biases and preconceptions we bring to the problem, an articulation of one’s social vision, and the cultivation of a personal ethical stance oriented towards deep democracy. Again, Badiou calls this a “for all” orientation, and this is a key point in the development of wise problem solving as well as the ethical fidelity needed to sustain us through the challenges and trials of visionary social change.

Productive idiosyncrasy and wise problem solving

Learning, for the self-directed individual who is responsible for the co-creation and design of their own educational journey, will intersect at varied, self-identified points along this three dimensional plane. Thus, every learner’s journey will be idiosyncratic, though each journey shares the components of deliberative problem solving, disciplined study and self-examination. The full and deep interplay of these three aspects of learning supports a gestalt, a fourth dimension that is greater than the sum of its parts, an existential state of being that we might call the “Tao” of deep democracy. I truly believe that for a deep democracy to flourish, we need the original insights and creative problem solving of people educated in this way – people who are strongly committed to a positive future that serves all of us well, who are respectful of the incredible variety of human perspectives, and who have the ethical fidelity to sustain themselves through the inevitable challenges that will emerge. The key thing to remember is that all learning, if it is to embody wise problem solving, must be at once practical, rigorously intellectual, and both personally and socially transformative.

Assessment

Assessment is a key issue in an approach to learning that is idiosyncratic, nonstandardized and personalized because we do need to frame student and institutional accomplishments in terms that the wider world can understand. But how do we avoid the language and categories of audit culture as we and our students engage in honest appraisal of the effectiveness of learning? The role of the educator is a nuanced one here, not just that of a gatekeeper who decides whether or not someone passes or fails externally set objectives. I believe in the usefulness of self-assessment, especially in an approach to learning that embraces the autobiographical journey. The faculty in this regard functions as a “witness” to the student’s journey, a significant Other who offers a different perspective on one’s growth and development. Faculty also must develop and pose key questions that enable self-directed learners to assess their evolving capacities

in each dimension. There is a hierarchy of development as a person encounters new knowledge or learns new skills, though as in currently accepted development theory, this cycle is neither invariant, nor is it linear. In the cultivation of wise problem solving, we have found these indicators useful: emergent, engaged and generative.

- Is this capacity, skill or disposition emergent?
- Is the student authentically engaged in learning through experience?
- Is the work generative of new solutions and original thinking?

In the domain of problem solving, assessment questions along this continuum (emergent, engaged, generative) might include things like:

- Has the student analyzed the systemic and ecological nature of the problem?
- Does he or she understand the impact of the situation on all who are involved in it?
- Is she open to the ideas of diverse others?

In the domain of disciplined study, sample assessment questions might include:

- Has the student sought out resources that offer multiple, even conflicting perspectives on the problem-situation?
- Does he understand the history, the philosophy, the politics, the aesthetics of the problem?
- Is he willing to suspend habitual thinking, and open himself to new ideas and ways of knowing?

In the domain of self-examination, assessment questions might include:

- What are my deeply held values and beliefs?
- Do I understand how these have been shaped by my culture, my experiences, my “surround?”
- Have I articulated a vision of the world I want to live in?
- Are my ideals truly “for all” or do they benefit certain people – even certain species, if we want to move to deep

ecology as well as deep democracy
– over others?

You can see that this deeply integrated, transdisciplinary approach to learning and assessment reflects a demanding set of “standards” that go above and beyond the usual “quality indicators” common to audit culture. It is no easy task to foster the interplay, in a genuine and meaningful way, of self-development, social consciousness, and rich subject matter, nor is it a simple thing to bring rigorous academic study to bear on practical problem solving. It requires breaking through what Dewey called “habitual thinking” to cultivate genuine intelligence. At the root of this curriculum paradigm is the urgency of aligning our day-to-day problem solving and our intellectual pursuits with a broader big picture, and the bigger picture with our visions for a better world.

Crisis and opportunity

Returning to where we began, with Fritjof Capra’s reminder that crisis brings opportunities. I believe that this is a liminal moment, one in which people’s habitual thinking and taken-for-granted realities are being shaken to their core. At such times, ways of thinking and ways of knowing are open to revision and renegotiation. The times call us and our students to articulate new visions for a better world, to engage in wise problem solving and to sustain our ethical fidelity to a more deeply democratic, sustainable world and to do this over the long haul. I see no other way than to struggle forward. There is, simply, too much at stake. Will we become a society of people on automatic pilot, submissive to the imperatives of the audit culture and frightened of forces seemingly beyond our control? Or will we birth a society of creativity, ingenuity, deep democracy, sustainability, justice, and a peaceful existence “for all?”

Educators have a unique responsibility to help bring this vision about, but we must be seekers of wisdom, and encourage our students to be seekers of wisdom, in order to accomplish this. You have a great head start on this process, in contrast to more tradition-bound institutions of higher learning. But I imagine that we would not

be meeting in this colloquium if we weren’t feeling that there are large social and cultural changes afoot that demand some radical shifting of our priorities, our ways of thinking and our worldviews. A key aspect of this task is to question the fundamentals, and for educators, those fundamentals are still embodied in the perennial knowledge questions.

- Where does knowledge come from?
- How do we know what we know?
- What is worth knowing and who decides?
- What should be taught?

I’ll close with a few questions that might aid our thinking about how knowledge might be better configured to support the growth of ourselves and our students towards wisdom. I’ll do this by drawing on some of the key questions from the literature on futures studies:

- Does the fragmentation of knowledge into disciplines lead to fragmented, unbalanced thinking? If so, what ways of organizing knowledge might lead us toward wholeness, connectedness and wisdom?
- If over-reliance on rationality has led to anti-ecological attitudes, what other ways of knowing need to be embraced? Is there a place for prehension, intuition, ritual and story in postmodern times? How do these relate to scientific knowledge? What might this look like in the arena of practical problem solving? Can we transcend and integrate earlier ways of knowing, including reason, into higher forms of awareness?
- What academic paradigm might support the “essential interrelatedness and interdependence of all phenomena?” Can we replace our fractured worldview with one that is more holistic and relational? What is gained and what is lost in this move? What are the implications for the design of learning experiences?
- How might we harness the proliferation of opportunities for social networking

(YouTube, flickr, etc.), in the creation of new learning communities?

- How might formal learning environments – be they actual or virtual – become responsive to learners who have by-passed old forms of “authorized” knowledge and authority (i.e., Wikipedia vs. Britannica)?
- How/Can we reconcile the tensions between the superficial glitz of high-speed exchanges of virtual information and our commitment to disciplined study?
- How can we better prepare students for the adaptations and adjustments of what is likely to be an unstable future?

In an age of crisis and opportunity, a time of uncertainty and rapid social transformation, how can we exercise wisdom in our deliberations about what can be discarded and what is worth holding onto? What is worth knowing? What should be taught? What are we to do?

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Sabbatical Report: Timisoara Diary

A. Tom Grunfeld, Metropolitan Center

It all happened quite by accident.

A year before my sabbatical was due, I began searching for various ways to supplement the 50 percent of my salary that I was about to lose. My field has very little money for individual research but I found a couple of vague possibilities and immediately applied to them, without much hope I would actually succeed.

Then, one day, for reasons I can no longer recall, I pulled up the Fulbright Web site. I had considered and looked into applying for a Fulbright in the past but there always seemed insurmountable obstacles. The research I do on the modern history of Tibet and China – and want to do – cannot be done in China because most the documents I need remain classified. I can, and have done much work here in the U.S. in that regard, but then that would rule out a Fulbright (which is all about going out of the country). Moreover, a teaching Fulbright seemed unattainable as they don't send people out to teach Asian Studies.

Nevertheless I looked and, lo and behold, there was a notice from a university in Timisoara, Romania looking for a professor who could teach U.S. history and politics in their M.A. program in American Studies.

Until that moment, I didn't even know that Timisoara had a university; in fact it has two public institutions and a handful of small private ones. Coincidentally, I had visited Timisoara – twice in fact – for very short periods of time (24 and 48 hours respectively) because that is where my mother was born and raised. I also spent two years there with her when I was an infant.

The idea of living in my mother's hometown, getting a sense of the place where she grew up and, hopefully, meeting some of her contemporaries, appealed to me greatly. And, U.S. history and politics is something I can teach, since I've done some of that at Empire State College for many years.

So I applied even though I didn't think I would get it since I am not an Americanist. But the enlightened folks at Fulbright in Washington thought otherwise and I was awarded the grant. Perhaps not many Americans were willing to live in the wilds of Transylvania.

Despite having been there, I went with some misgivings. I speak no Romanian. I worried about the logistics of finding an apartment. How difficult would it be to acclimatize myself to the university? The papers I received from the Fulbright office in Washington, D.C. included some tips from former Fulbrighters in Romania, and while they wrote fervently in praise of their experiences, they warned of dysfunctional universities and difficulties in everyday living.

I first had to go to the capital, Bucharest, some 600 kms to the east of Timisoara for an orientation. Bucharest is a large grey charmless city much of whose old architectural treasures were destroyed by

the communist leader Nicolae Ceausescu, only to be replaced by what can only be called Stalinesque monstrosities. The city's allure also is not improved any by the presence of thousands of stray dogs. One also does not get a sense of security when buildings, parking lots and many stores are all guarded by security personnel, some of whom were armed. Our briefing by the security personnel of the U.S. Embassy made the country sound even grimmer: don't go out on the streets without pepper spray (for the dogs), don't drive on the highways, look out for corruption,



Piața Unirii (Union Square), Timisoara, Romania

etc. Even taking into account their need to be extra cautious, Romania began to sound grimmer every moment.

Indeed the entire discourse about Romania, especially from Romanians, is that the country is dysfunctional to the point of semi-paralysis and it's hopelessly corrupt. Corruption there certainly is, as all my Romanian friends continuously assured me, but it is largely limited to the judicial, medical and government administrative sectors – groups with which I had no contact.

In my entire six months in Romania, I did not encounter a single instance of corruption nor any dysfunctionality that couldn't be easily worked around.

But I wasn't deterred. I had driven across the entire country twice before and had visited several times going to my father's ancestral village in the north of Transylvania where I was born and lived until I was two years old.

Besides, I discovered that Timisoara was almost in a different country. The city lies in Romania's southwest corner less than 100 km from the Serbian border and only a little more than that from the Hungarian border. This positioning meant it has historically always been in contact with people throughout the region. Before the 1950s, Timisoara was predominately Hungarian, German, Serbian and Jewish rather than Romanian. Indeed the region around Timisoara (Banat) was one of the few places in Europe from which Jews were neither deported nor ghettoized during the Second World War. It also was a Hapsburg city, ("little Vienna" to some) which means it has castles and parks (and parks and parks), and a wealth of grand Hapsburg buildings interspersed with flower-bedecked squares. No other urban center in Romania has this superb mix and the resulting charm it inspires.

In six months, I saw fewer than 10 stray dogs and only a few security personnel, with the exception of the Timisoara Penitentiary that was around the corner from where I lived. And, despite its proximity, it did not cause me the slightest moment of anxiety.

While in Bucharest, whenever I mentioned to a Romanian that I was en route to

Timisoara their invariable answer was to tell me how "cosmopolitan" the city was. Being a Hapsburg city also meant culture and even today, the city has a burgeoning art scene, a permanent opera, symphony, three national theatres (Romanian, Hungarian and German), along with jazz and rock clubs and concerts, and much more. Not bad for a Transylvanian city of some 400,000 souls.

Timisoara also was the place where the anti-communist "revolution" (as they refer to it) broke out in December 1989. A dissident Hungarian priest had refused an assignment to be transferred to a rural village and his parishioners surrounded his church to protect him. The next day thousands of others joined the demonstration, which led to the military's murderous retaliation and, astonishingly, within days, the demise of the Ceausescu regime and communist rule. Historians in Timisoara assured me that only in a city with such a mix of different people would this have occurred. They are convinced that in other Romanian cities, which are far less heterogeneous, the demonstrators would have been limited to only the church's parishioners, who would have easily been dispersed by the state authorities.

So living in the city was easy and pleasant. Almost everything I needed was within a 25 - 30 minute walking distance of my apartment. And it got more so in the spring when the outdoor cafes (mostly with free WiFi) and ice cream vendors sprouted everywhere.

I discovered that almost everyone speaks English – not only students and faculty at the university, but cab drivers and shop clerks and restaurant workers. One major reason is that Romania does not dub its TV shows and movies; everything comes in the original language with subtitles. As far as I can tell this is done because it is cheaper than dubbing. Although I came across movies in Chinese, French, German, Hindi, Russian and a dozen other languages on the local TV stations, the vast majority of non-Romanian programming was in English, as were the movies in the local cinemas. This situation allows Romanians to constantly hear native speakers, with Romanian translations conveniently on the screen. When I discussed this with my students

they heartily agreed and, indeed, two told me they had learned Spanish by watching films imported from Latin America. When I traveled to the predominately Hungarian speaking parts of Transylvania, I found far fewer English speakers. One certain reason is that they tend to watch Hungarian television which dubs all their programming.

The transition to living there, it turned out, was wholly effortless. Two junior faculty members were in charge of the Fulbrighters (there was an additional professor from Nashville teaching American literature) and they introduced us to the city and the places we needed such as banks, restaurants and supermarkets. They took me to a real estate agent who showed me nine apartments the very next day, all within the range of what the Fulbright award was willing to pay and all recently refurbished, and, of course, complete with Internet access.

I chose the best one and within 72 hours of arriving in Timisoara, I moved into a luxury two bedroom apartment with two balconies and unobstructed views on three sides on the ninth floor of a 10-story building that was built in the early 1970s for the exclusive use of the Securitate, the communist-era secret police. My Romanian friends were convinced that the long-time residents (I met several neighbors who had lived there since it was built) had to have been connected to the police in order to be able to live in the building. It was a 15 - 25 minute walk to the university depending on whether I took the quick or the scenic route. It was 100m from the old Baroque Hapsburg square with its palace now beautifully refurbished as an art museum.

My integration into the university was equally smooth and easy. The American Studies program, both graduate and undergraduate, is taught entirely in English. I occasionally met older faculty and administrators who didn't speak fluent English. Of course they all tended to speak several other languages (this is Europe after all) and Russian would have been useful in these circumstances as they all grew up learning this in school. But as I don't speak Russian my rusty French and Hungarian often came in handy.

I taught only graduate students who are working towards an M.A. in American

Studies. Many want to be teachers. I taught three classes a week (each once for two hours); two for the first-year students, with about 20 students each, and one second-year class with 12 students. The majority were enthusiastic and extremely grateful to have foreign teachers. Their language skills were astonishing; their papers, on the whole, were better than a similar-sized group at Empire State College. Their language is colloquial and they are far more knowledgeable about U.S. pop culture than I am. Some of the more satisfying moments for me came when they would make a connection between the pop culture with which they were familiar and the historical context of that culture with which they were not.

Of course not everything was so rosy. The most frustrating aspect of my experience was the casual administration of the university. To students, attendance in classes is more a suggestion than a requirement (except in mine since I took attendance to considerable grumbling at the time and considerable gratitude afterwards). Classrooms can be taken over by higher authorities at whim: no notice. The first time I arrived to find someone else in my classroom, the students, who were quite used to it, were prepared; they had gone on their own and found an empty classroom that we could use. One day in the middle of April they said to me, "probably no one has told you that May 1 is a holiday and there will be no class," which was an accurate statement (if there was a printed semester schedule I never saw one). "Never mind," they continued, "we'll figure out a good time for a make-up class among ourselves and we'll let you know."

Despite repeated requests, I could not get an exam schedule until a week before the June exams. I didn't exactly get a schedule but I was informed that I needed to negotiate the date of the final exam within an allotted time frame with my students and then they needed to fill out the proper forms and submit them. Oh, and by the way, students can re-take exams up to three additional times if they don't show up, fail or simply don't like their grade. No reason is required to be given. The first three examination attempts are free but a fourth try requires some additional fees – no, not paid to me,

although I was the one writing four exams for each course.

By asking friends who teach around Europe, I discovered this wasn't so uncommon. Some Ph.D. students at the University of Vienna, who I encountered when I went to lecture there, told me that they take so many classes a semester they cannot possibly be prepared to write a final exam for all of them if there were only a single seating for each.

I was assigned to the Faculty of Letters, History and Theology in the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of the West in Timisoara. Faculty members do not have their own offices; administrators and heads of departments do. Each department has a "departmental office" about as big as a medium-sized bedroom in New York City. In our department we had two computers and printers (which almost never worked), some lockers, a small fridge, a conference table and some chairs. About 20 - 25 of us shared this office. Not surprisingly, faculty did not linger there; people came in and out between classes, occasionally staying long enough to quickly eat something.

Since faculty do not spend a lot of time at the university apart from their classes and meetings, there is much less interaction among faculty colleagues. This situation is further exacerbated by the habit of keeping all doors closed at all times. It was not uncommon for me to come onto the floor where there were 10 - 15 offices and not see a single person in the middle of a weekday. Only if someone opened a door to come out did I realize that there were plenty of people around, just not visible. I felt this practice discouraged fraternization and I found it quite disconcerting since there was no faculty lounge or any other place to fraternize with my colleagues. A couple of times, I tried leaving the department door open and passersby did peer in curiously but as soon as a colleague arrived, they would invariably close the door even when I appealed to them to leave it open.

There are no copying facilities for students or faculty. In fact there is not much of anything; no toilet paper or soap in the bathrooms, for example. No office supplies.

One of my goals was to try to understand how the university functioned. I learned that almost all of the faculty make the final exams 75 percent - 100 percent of the grade, affirming what the students had told me that they could get a passing grade by simply showing up for at least one of the exams for each class. This may be one of the reasons why they are permitted to retake each exam up to four times. It also explains my students' complaints about my tough attendance policy. I told them they could not pass my classes without attending regularly. Early on in my time there, several of my departmental colleagues gently let me know that my students were "worried," and "afraid" of my demands of them. One day, I got an e-mail from one of my colleagues alerting me that university policy was that graduate students cannot be made to come more than 60 percent of the time. I continually acknowledged my students' concerns in class, reassured them that attendance was for their own benefit and did not change my requirements.

Since becoming a member of the European Union, university faculty and, to a lesser degree, graduate students, have been able to take advantage of exchange programs with other universities on the continent. The younger members of these groups have jumped at this opportunity rushing off (if they could get the funding) to Britain, France, Germany and Spain. This has led to the younger faculty having a range of experiences their older colleagues could never even have dreamt of. But at the same time, it has made these younger people acutely aware of the deficiencies of their universities, not to mention their country, and anxious to change them. Sadly they have no power yet; that still remains in the hands of the older apparatchiks who seemed impervious to change. Hopefully, time will straighten out this situation.

Most of the students I encountered (my graduate students, a group of Ph.D. history students who I met with informally throughout my time in Timisoara, as well as some from the other public university) are enthusiastic about learning, grateful for the opportunity to be studying in a university, and aware of the shortcomings in their system. They desperately want help (resources, teachers, more student life in the

university) and I found it frustrating to not be able to help them more than I could.

Romania is a poor country that only joined the European Union (EU) in January 2007. At the university the monthly salaries range from 800Lei (U.S. \$270) for a beginning faculty member with a Ph.D. to 4000Lei (U.S. \$1355) for a full professor. Full professors, however, have the opportunity to increase their salaries by sitting on select committees, doing some administrative work, etc. I was told that if they are not doing research and do enough of this extra work, they could double their salaries to about U.S. \$2,700 a month or U.S. \$32,400 a year. Doctors, nurses and most professionals make equally low salaries so it is not much of a surprise that bribery exists.

A fiancé of one of my students had just completed dental school and she told me that 70 - 75 percent of her fellow students bribe the teachers for passing grades with the going rates in the range of EU300-450 (U.S. \$420-630) for each exam. Imagine several exams with some 40 - 50 students each. Imagine seeing a dentist who had to bribe her way through medical school!

I asked the students about bribery at our university. It was the single question to which they expressed hesitation in answering. Several admitted to having "heard" of it but none confessed to having been engaged in it or having witnessed it firsthand. I believe the fact that I was a foreigner played a role here. They certainly seemed embarrassed. But also, I recalled that a nurse who I had befriended assured me that if I ever had to be hospitalized no one would ask me for a bribe because they would be embarrassed to do so from a foreigner. Romanians, she said, had to pay bribes for everything in the state's hospitals.

The average monthly income in the country is 1266Lei (U.S. \$429; U.S. \$5,150 a year). Typical monthly salaries are: nurse U.S. \$258, dentist U.S. \$251, physician U.S. \$430, engineer U.S. \$365, salesperson U.S. \$135.

Admission to the EU has not only meant more foreign investment and easier travel for Romanians, it has generated an enormous

psychological change. I recall in earlier pre and post-communist visits how Romanians felt "trapped" because travel was so difficult and expensive for them. Now they are "liberated," able to travel without restrictions and even if they cannot afford it, the possibility alone has done much to lift their spirits. Friends of mine went to lunch in Hungary (two hours away) just because they could do it.

This opening to the rest of Europe also has meant modernization of course. There is the very modern mall, the chic cafes, the (relatively) expensive KFC, Pizza Huts and McDonald's, the Apple, Nike and Boise stores, the Hollywood movies in the Cineplex, the stores with the latest fashions, etc. Then there was the newest commercial addition, opened to much fanfare while I was there: a store devoted to Cuban cigars. No kidding, cigars which cost more than an average week's salary along with lighters that are U.S. \$2,000 (no typo, that's three zeros) apiece, as well as U.S. \$2,500 espresso machines.

At the same time there also are reminders of the past. There are plenty of communist-era buildings that look exactly as they did then; very poor lighting, broken handrails, peeling and dissolving concrete walls, etc. And there are the businesses which, while they may look modern, still operate in the old sclerotic way.

My ultimate communist-era experience was going into the offices of TAROM, the national airline, to buy tickets.

It was a huge office, as large as some of the ubiquitous pharmacies that are popping up all over New York City; far larger than the company ever needed, a space only a government agency could possibly afford to maintain. And since only a single employee worked there, the space, full of very heavy dark wood furniture, fixtures from the early 20th century, fading posters of very poor quality (even when they were new), all covered in dust, was so long unused it had the feel of the rooms in Miss Havisham's mansion. The single employee sat in a roughly built ceiling-to-floor cubicle (even though there were plenty of desks and chairs around). The cubicle had a counter in it, so

tall that if you looked straight ahead you wouldn't see the employee sitting down. There were no lights in the entire space save for the one directly above the cubicle. Fortunately the woman had a computer and spoke some English. The entire scene was Monty Pythonesque.

I made my arrangements and pulled out my credit card to pay. The woman in the cubicle began to shake her head; "our machines are broken," she informed me, "and will be broken for a long time, we take only cash!" The perfect denouement to the experience.

Romanians are kind and exceedingly friendly. In my six months there, I made a host of friends from a wide variety of groups with whom I continue to be in contact. In fact, I returned for a week in January 2010 and found that was insufficient time to see everyone I wanted to.

I cannot say enough positive things about the Fulbright program. Teaching in another country, under a different system was a remarkable experience. Being given the opportunity to be able to help people who are anxious to be helped (not only with my teaching and advising students and consulting on curriculum and scholarship but also with the educational materials I was able to bring over as part of the Fulbright program) was as much of a gift to me as it was to my Romanian friends.

Romania is going through a difficult and painful transition, made worse by the current financial crisis, and exacerbated by historical events. Romania was the only communist country to end that era with violence. Moreover, there were no viable alternative leaders in 1990 so many of the former communist officials continued in office, espousing a different credo but ruling pretty much the same as they always had. This means that change is coming slower than it has for such neighbors as Hungary and Poland. The city of Timisoara may be further along than the rest of Romania in many ways, but it was painful to see such slow progress when the desire for change is so strong.

Two or Three Thoughts on Concentrations

Bernard Smith, Center for Distance Learning

The origins of this essay came out of some thoughts I had after participating in the Academic Conference planned by the Center for Mentoring and Learning and others in June 2009 and from discussions at the All Area of Study conference in October the same year. Many of the ideas I express below were developed in conversations with mentors at the Center for Distance Learning (CDL) but the responsibility for these thoughts is mine.

What do we understand when we talk about concentrations? What are some of the issues that inform and infuse our thinking?

I want to touch lightly on three interconnected issues/questions:

- A) ÊDivergent and convergent (Anderson, 2006) approaches to degree planning;
- B) Ê Faculty as experts;¹
- C) ÊIs the concentration in the degree or is it the degree itself?

Our thoughts on all three areas have some considerable bearing on how we in fact approach concentrations. My goal is to try to open up, deconstruct if you will, the construction of a concentration as a socially shared activity, albeit shared in different ways, amongst students, mentors and assessment committees.

Majors and concentrations

In October of 2009, shortly after the All Area of Study Conference at which we continued our conversation on the significance and value of the Areas of Study, I informally surveyed CDL mentors and asked, among other questions, what they understood to be the key differences between a “major” and a “concentration.” I was particularly curious about how our mentors thought about concentrations. I was curious because I would argue that how they think about concentrations has significant implications for how they work with their



Bernard Smith

mentees in helping them develop and shape their plans of studies. I am not suggesting that the survey itself was scientific; indeed it was small. About 39 mentors, part-time, full-time and adjunct mentors responded. Not all 39 responded to my question about concentrations, but the responses I did get have helped me clarify some of the ideas that I would like to share with you here.

What follows is, by way of a “turn” in a conversation (Sacks, et. al, 1974) - with all that the term “conversation” implies - about concentrations and mentoring and degree program planning. This is not intended to be a statement or a “position.” It’s a thought to which I am giving voice in an ongoing conversation. It’s an attempt to treat seriously, that is to say, to try to understand emically (from the insider’s or speaker’s point of view) how various constituencies (mentors, students and assessment committees) make sense of degree program planning and not challenge, discount, or offer contrary explanations. My goal is to try to make sense of mentors’ work as they see it. Mentors offered me three different responses:

One response was to suggest that concentrations were essentially the same as majors and that to view them as essentially

different was to engage in a semantic argument and not one of substance. Our own Student Degree Planning Guide would seem to support this position:

Your concentration, often called a major at other institutions, is designed to fit one of the Empire State College registered areas of study mentioned and consists of a series of integrated studies in your primary field of study. (p. 10)

All bachelor’s degree programs at Empire State College (B.A., B.S., B.P.S.) require at least 45 credits of advanced-level study with at least 24 of those in the concentration or major. (p. 12)

A second response was that the mentor admitted to not knowing the differences between a major and a concentration. A third group argued that concentrations were more “flexible” than majors, and that concentrations could be appropriately designed by students whereas majors are typically faculty created and directed.

I want to focus on the second set of responses where the mentors suggested that they did not know the differences between a concentration and a major. What strikes me as significant here is the sense that, unlike the first group that claims to know that there is no difference, this second group formulates their response in terms of the idea that indeed there is a likely or a certain set of differences but they do not know what those differences are. There is a further sense, and that is that although they do not know what the differences are, one could know what they are; it is simply that these mentors invoke their lack of knowledge.

The third group is very different. They seem to be arguing that there are clear differences between concentrations and majors and they can identify these differences. They are confident in their ability to make sense of a world that differentiates between majors and concentrations. For them, at the heart

of the difference is a notion of the degree plan as an authentic exercise in the degree planning that is a social construction. In other words, Empire State College is not simply a consumer of what other colleges within the academy agree counts as a legitimate degree. Empire State College contributes to what counts by providing for a “bottom up” approach to degrees where students, monitored, guided, and approved by faculty, design their own degrees based upon their needs and their goals. For Empire State College, this approach is at least as sound as the top-down degree designed by faculty where students are taught to think of themselves as a means to the ends of others – as cogs in the academic-economic machine.

Certainly, however, the degrees that students design cannot be cut from whole cloth but must meet the needs and goals as understood by the student. A student seeking entry into a master’s program in mathematics at Cornell or hoping to work for the Office of Mental Health in Albany would need to know what kinds of candidates/employees those institutions are seeking. Construction of individual concentrations would have to remain attentive to just these kinds of matters.

I will come back to this point a little later, but first I want to suggest that the mentors who say that they do not know what the difference is between a concentration and a major and those who say that they do know (and who believe this difference is one of flexibility because the concentration is student-centered) alerts us to a central tension found at this college. No doubt, this tension is found throughout the academy, but here it plays an enormous role and has significant impact precisely because the institution itself acknowledges the tension in some ways but not in all ways.

Understanding the tension: The convergent and the divergent (Torrence and Pryor, 1988)

The tension exists because we move between two alternative views of reality: one which says that reality is “out there” and we always need to accommodate ourselves to that reality. Let’s call this view the Samuel Johnson refutation of the Bishop Berkeley

view of reality (Patey, 1986). Reality is like a rock; you kick it, it stubs your toe. You need to address it and deal with it. That view of reality provides for the sense of mentors saying that under some circumstances (where they believe their expertise stops), they need to plead ignorance, and the claim of ignorance is a wise plea and one that any reasonable and competent person would make. There is an answer. Someone knows the answer. But I don’t know the answer.

The other approach we might call the Harold Garfinkel view of reality (Garfinkel, 1967). Reality is a social accomplishment. It is not “out there” but is created moment-by-moment as we interact with others. Rocks might exist in the physical world, but the social world is constituted by and with meanings and understandings; it is the members of society – the interactors who make, share, challenge, and dismiss meaning. There is no “out there” independent of the actors themselves. Yet the fact that the social world is constructed does not mean that its construction is not recalcitrant. It is not subjective but inter-subjective and shared. It is not filled with the recalcitrance of rocks, but with the recalcitrance of social facts.

These two models – the Johnson and the Garfinkel models are very similar to the two models or modes of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA): one, convergent and the other, divergent. In PLA, the convergent model begins and ends with what others say you need to know about any topic whether it is U.S. History I or Advanced Spanish or Accounting II or Social Psychology. In the convergent model, one assesses whether and how well the student has mastered this externally pre-determined knowledge. Convergent approaches assume that to know something (for college credit) you need to know certain things, and the things you need to know are determined by the academy and its experts. That’s the Samuel Johnson model of rocks. Rocks are “out there,” and they are of known shape and hardness.

The divergent model begins not with what others say the student needs to know but with what the student in fact does know. The expert voice comes in at the end; that is, in the assessment of whether what the

student knows is appropriate, meaningful – is college level.

This divergent model allows for enormous variance in the quiddities (the “whatness”) of the knowledge that can be recognized in a way that say, the topic “U.S. History II” or “Accounting I” may not. What the divergent approach may demand is sensitivity to how we name the learning. Topics such as U.S. History II or “Crisis Intervention” or “Introduction to Computer Science” may have an understanding of content that is shared by those within those fields. Unlike Humpty Dumpty, even with a constructivist model of reality, you cannot simply say the world is the way you would prefer it to be.² What the student knows may then not sit comfortably with what is understood in the academy by U.S. History II, but that does not mean that what the student knows is not appropriate, meaningful and college level. Swans don’t quack, walk, or fly like ducks. You can’t call a swan a duck and expect experts in ducks to agree with your designation. But a swan is, nevertheless, a swan

These two very different and contradictory approaches – the convergent and the divergent – routinely inform the way that mentors help students develop concentrations. Indeed, discussion over how mentors or fellow committee members view “guidelines” for the different Areas of Study or “guidelines” for published concentrations is almost ubiquitous at assessment committee meetings. Are fellow committee members or mentors reading “guidelines” as “requirements?” What does the term “guideline” mean given the expectations of the professional and academic world – expectations that are routinely invoked as self-evidently known, despite the fact that such committees are not viewed by the college as committees constituted by mentors who are themselves experts in the programs under discussion.³

My point here is a simple one: the faculty at this college take divergent and convergent approaches to degree planning and that as a college we need to find better ways to acknowledge this tension.

Faculty expertise and the role of disciplines

What perhaps is equally fraught, but is even less obvious, is a question of faculty expertise. Faculty frequently invoke their expertise in knowing what current professional and academic expectations apply to any student given the student's stated goals and needs and interests. The point here is not about questioning anyone's expertise. Quite simply, we do not know nor indeed do we have the means to know what expertise faculty may have. This is not to say that members of the college community will not have their own personal, partial and provisional views about the expertise of other members, but the college as an institution has chosen to assess faculty by means other than tests of their expertise. We have, to date, chosen to adopt a more generalist approach to such assessment rather than one that comes from the other members of one's discipline.

Part of the mythos that infuses this college is that in order to treat the student – and not the faculty – as at the very heart of his or her learning, and in order to shape the college around the needs of each student and in order to view each and every student as the world around which the college orbits, we eschewed traditional disciplines. Of course there is a history about how the various areas of study were determined; my point is only that the creation of the various areas of study resulted in a significant reduction in the power and authority of departments. That reality, and a focus on learning centers and smaller units, further devolved power away from a discipline-centered approach to education.

One of the outcomes of a focus on centers has meant that to be hired as a member of faculty required far less a successful demonstration of one's subject matter expertise to one's peers than it required an ability to present oneself, at least potentially, as someone who understood what it was to mentor. Clearly subject matter expertise was a necessary condition, but at least in my experience, members of the search committee rarely if ever focused on the breadth and depth of the candidates' scholarship because they were not, themselves, in any position to truly judge it.

Unlike at more traditional colleges where faculty seeking a position in sociology or mathematics might be selected by a search committee comprised of faculty within those disciplines, at least until now, searches for new faculty at Empire State College have involved search committees comprised of a cross-section of teaching and non-teaching faculty from within a center. As such, while the candidate academic bona fides were checked and assured, it is not clear how faculty from the Business, Management and Economics or Human Development Areas of Study could adequately determine the quality of the scholarship or potential scholarship of a candidate whose scholarship was in Political Science or U.S. History or French.

Hiring and areas of study

Let's take this approach to hiring seriously: One very important outcome is that the focus of hiring orbits less around subject expertise than it does around faculty being (at least potentially) good, reasonable or even expert mentors. From the flip side, this would also mean that once hired, faculty who would associate with one or other areas of study and who would then help constitute the membership of those areas of study may or may not have a great deal to say about the area of study in its role as establishing and determining guidelines for degrees.

In other words, faculty come from traditional disciplines. Empire State College areas of study are conventions that exist and are used for all intents and purposes only within this institution. They are not recognized as academically meaningful beyond the college and they are not meant to be. In addition, an outcome of the development of areas of study meant that the college was able to inhibit traditional departmental squabbles and conflicts from obscuring faculty's agreement to serve the student. Homage was always to students and their needs, interests, and goals and not to the understanding that the departmental Chair of Economics or American Literature might have about what every student must study and master before he or she will be awarded a degree in Economics or American Literature.

Clearly, areas of study are multi-disciplinary if not cross-disciplinary in focus. This suggests that faculty who see themselves drawn to a particular area of study are likely to be working with colleagues within an area of study who come from many other and different disciplines. And that fact would suggest that statements made by members of the areas of study about the professional and academic expectations found in different fields and disciplines may be more personal, partial and provisional than they may appear in any published "guidelines." The Guidelines, after all,

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are multi-disciplinary
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appear as the utterance of the college – unbiased and authoritative. In other words, that members of an area of study have agreed to make a statement about certain Guidelines does not in and of itself suggest the uncontested nature of that statement. (For example, that our guidelines for concentrations in Psychology focus on a scientific as opposed to a more humanistic version of the field says as much about those creating those guidelines as it does about the power of the APA in defining Psychology.) In addition, our guidelines are not always frequently updated. What may have been useful and true five or ten years ago may be less useful or true today.

Mentors, degree design, our certitude and Fears

The upshot of this point is that we need to question the view that mentors are subject experts for the purposes of degree design. I am not here questioning the fact that our mentors are subject experts. I am suggesting that because of the way we hire mentors, and because of the very existence and structures of the areas of study, and because faculty come from traditional disciplines, mentors who invoke their role as subject experts when it comes to degree planning

are invoking their expertise to a community that cannot in fact agree or disagree with their claims.

Certainly, mentors can offer advice. Certainly they can help students ask best or effective questions as they research the kinds of studies they need to acquire and master in order to meet their goals and needs. What the mentor cannot do is say with much legitimacy that they know what the student needs to master. Any certitude faculty possess is tied to their own experience and point of view. There is no population of scholars working in similar fields that they can consult with and who can legitimate their knowledge claims as they might do at more traditional colleges. Indeed, whereas faculty at other institutions define what will constitute the degrees to be offered, at Empire State College we would argue that it is the student who defines what will constitute his or her degree based not on homage to some notion of the discipline or homage to some notion of the academic department and its members' views but on the needs and goals of the students themselves.

For many, this situation is scary. I don't mean it is scary to give adult learners the intellectual space to design their own plans of study, although that may be scary to some. I mean what is scary and uncomfortable is the idea that faculty at Empire State College may face "moral work" and "sanctions" and may lose face and reputation amongst their colleagues within the broader academy if others think that this college confers degrees that fail to include what those others claim that students must know before they be allowed to graduate (Goffman, 1974).

This is a complex point. If we require that every student works with a primary mentor to understand what knowledge, skills, competencies, and "domains of thought" they need to meet their goals and needs, and if certain areas of thought are apparently not covered and someone believes they "ought to be," what are we saying about the planning research that was undertaken? And, further, if the research undertaken was solid enough and the research failed to uncover the apparent need to include this or that skill or domain of thought, what does

that say about the claim being made about the supposed need?

Back to divergent and convergent approaches

Let's return to the notion of divergent and convergent approaches to degrees and let me ask whether students (and mentors, too) view the degree the student is earning to be in the concentration or in the area of study.

Anecdotally, the degree rationales I see suggest that students write that they are obtaining a degree in their chosen concentration, and I suspect that mentors view degrees in much the same way. The college, however, appears to confer degrees in the area of study. (Thus, for example, there is no mention of concentration in the diploma.) In other words, Empire State College does not confer a degree in Psychology; it confers a degree in Human Development. It does not confer a degree in Political Science; it confers a degree in Social Structure, Social Theory and Change.

For many, this situation is scary.

If, in fact, the college confers degrees in the areas of study, and if the areas of study are unique conventions created by Empire State College, then it seems to me that we have the opportunity to allow students to design their own plans of study grounded in their needs and goals. It seems to me that we have the opportunity to allow students to design what may be very divergent rather than convergent programs based on their needs and goals. (See Empire State College Degree Planning Guidelines)

That said, needs based on goals require the student to develop an appropriate understanding of needs that are, to paraphrase Marx, not simply of his or her own choosing. But those needs are not always, perhaps are never, adequately known in advance of the research one does into them. This is the basic goal of academic planning.

So there is an ongoing tension between two views: one that degrees are conferred in the area of study; the second that the degree the student is developing is in the concentration. What does the area of study mean to our students? As noted above, it was a convention created by the college to solve problems with the Department of Education; it was a convention created to avoid traditional hierarchies that typically develop within college departments. Do either of these issues have relevance to the adult learner seeking a degree from this college?

If, on the one hand, the degree the student is developing is in the concentration, one or two questions emerge. The concentrations discussed in The Student Degree Planning Guide are typically named after majors found within traditional departments. As with PLA, one of the most significant issues is in "naming the learning." So while we apparently offer students the possibility of creating a plan of study that embraces a divergent approach, our implicit if not explicit message to the student is that they should not think too far outside of the titles used by traditional departments with their discipline-focused degrees. If, on the other hand, the degree is in the Area of Study, then should we not disabuse students so that they know their degree is not in fact in the concentration however, robust their concentration might be?

What then is the status and standing of the area of study guidelines themselves? The fact that faculty have agreed that certain guidelines exist for their area of study obscures the fact that the areas of study are artifacts created by faculty and are not in any way understandable as knowledge claims. If, for example, part of our faculty has agreed that Business, Management and Economics should have certain guidelines where, if anywhere, should those guidelines stand as informing the student's plan of study? How authoritative are those guidelines? What in fact is the basis of their authority? Insofar as they help the student think about his or her educational needs they are useful as guidelines for the student's use. Insofar as they are a set of stipulations to address the needs of Department of Education, then it is unclear how a student can effectively use them. It certainly seems

even harder for me to understand why assessment committees routinely invoke such guidelines as if they were inherently meaningful and pointed to something about the nature of the world.

Having taken this walk

I have taken three ideas for a walk. The first is the notion of convergent versus divergent approaches to knowledge. We embrace both approaches when it comes to prior learning assessment. However, there is a tension as to whether we are always as routinely willing to embrace both approaches when it comes to degree plans. We say we are comfortable with student-centered degree plans but we tend to impose views that indicate we know better than the student does what his or her needs are, even after the student has been given the opportunity to explore those needs in the planning process.

The second idea was the notion that faculty at Empire State College can invoke their subject expertise in the design of degrees. Yet, at the college, mentors are held to be experts as mentors whose expertise in their traditional disciplines needs to be viewed through the filter of an institution defined by areas of study. Given the fact that faculty embrace divergent understandings of knowledge rather than impose convergent models as defined and determined by traditional departments means that views offered by faculty may be personal, partial and only provisional.

The third idea I played with was whether the college's and a student's understanding of the degree earned are in fact well aligned. I suggest that the college seems to award degrees in the area of study, but that when students submit the degree rationale explaining their study choices, they focus (and are typically asked to focus) on the concentration. Here I want to point out that there is some irony in naming concentrations with the titles of degrees found in traditional college majors, and that a divergent approach to study plans ought perhaps to treat naming the concentration with more significance.

Notes

- ¹ I am not here questioning the concept of the expert or expertise. I am simply looking at how, for all practical matters, we invoke and use the idea of the expertise of the mentor in the degree planning process.
- ² "I don't know what you mean by 'glory,'" Alice said. Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't – till I tell you. I meant, 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'" "But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument,'" Alice objected. "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less." "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things." "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master – that's all." (1955, p 219)
- ³ As Director of Academic Review for the Center for Distance Learning, my goal in assembling assessment committees is to make certain that I have less seasoned mentors teamed with the more seasoned members and to have no more than one member from an area of study. My goal is not to align members of committees with the programs they will be reviewing. Indeed, the programs are randomly assigned to predetermined committee members.
- ⁴ And this would apply, I think even if you were to argue that in fact the answer to whether the college awards degrees in the concentration or the area of study is not an either/or but an "and." College degrees are awarded for "concentrations within a particular "area of study."

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Breakfast with Father

Robert Congemi, Northeast Center

Hearing about her father's 70th birthday party from her sister Meg, Laurie flew from Los Angeles to New York as quickly as she could, which surprised her, for she had never gotten along very well with her father. Not one to sleep in the same house overnight with him, she stayed at Meg's, but visited him the morning after she arrived. She hoped she could contain her perpetual anger at him and not fight.

As luck would have it, she found him alone in the condo a few miles outside of Albany her parents now rented, in a little room he apparently used as a study for reading or to do any professional work he still might have. He was a tall, handsome man, his long hair gray now, his long limbs still impressive.

These tall Brits, she thought. I certainly know where the lost Vikings went.

Seeing her, he put his book down and smiled, genuinely enough, and put out his hand for her to take it, which she did, ending up kissing him on his cheek, like a nervous girl.

"Always reading, huh?" she said to him.

"Apparently, lass."

She wondered if she trembled or if her heart fluttered.

"Have you had something to eat?" he asked her.

"No, Daddy, I came right over. I thought I'd have some breakfast with you."

"Good idea." He rose from his chair, towering over her.

"Your mother's gone to one of her things. So the two of us can fend for ourselves."

"All right."

Smiling despite herself, she followed him to the kitchenette, a table at one end, where they'd eat. Dutifully, he made her coffee, and then tea for himself.

"So, Laurie," he said, sitting down across from her. "You're looking well."

She knew he lied. A beauty contest winner when she was younger, she'd win no contests now, and he'd had a hand in that, though she could still attract most men she wanted.

"Don't kid me, Daddy." She blushed.

He sipped his tea, and leaned back, and looked at her, a man, but still her father.

"How has it been?"

She wouldn't lie. "All right, I suppose. It could be better."

"It could always be better, dearie. I know something about that. Are your children well?"

She sighed and looked around. The duplex was the most recent of a long line of rented homes that her parents had occupied. "One of them sneaks out her bedroom window at night, so she can go with men. The other does the best he can. He has trouble learning, I think."

"I see. And your own man?"

Laurie shrugged. "Nothing has changed there." She watched her father put his large hands together and rub them, perhaps nervously.

"And you, Daddy?"

He looked in her eyes. "They told you I'll retire?"

"Yes. It's been a long time coming. I thought it'd never come, the way you go on."

"I wish it would never come. I don't take easily to growing old. It's a hellish business. The strength's not there. The tired, old man in the mirror, with the fleshy neck, is me. And it'll never get better. That's the surprise, and the terror. Each day's passing, it just gets worse."

For a moment, she thought she felt a tiny bit sorry for him, for the first time in a long while.

"We are all condemned to death, huh, as the philosopher says?" he observed.

She lit a cigarette, and leaned back a bit herself, studying him. He was too much.

"Though you've had your good times, Daddy, haven't you?" She exhaled. "You've gotten off better than most."

"What do you mean?" She wondered if he thought he should go on his guard.

"You've done just what you've damned well pleased, you know. You can't deny it. Remember when we all had to leave Boston because you wanted to show your solidarity with the other workers? We had a nice home there, and I never went to a better school."

He wanted to protest, but the incident was a long time ago, and he'd heard about it often enough before. "I'm a man, Laurie. I'm not a boy, like so many. You couldn't have expected me to go on as if nothing had happened."

"Daddy, we had lives, too. You don't seem ever to understand that." She sipped her coffee, and then lit another cigarette. "And what about mother?"

He said nothing.

"What has it always been for her?"

"I don't know what you mean, lass."

This morning, on the eve of his 70th birthday, she simply couldn't feel like letting him off the hook, of doing what they always did in the end. It was late September outside, only a few stalwart, red leaves left on the trees, a time of endings. But it was also a time of beginnings.

"Don't you?" she insisted.

“My, but we’re getting down to the essentials this day. Will you never forget? These things were a long time ago.”

“Not so long ago. For all I know they may still be going on.”

He looked down. “You needn’t worry about that.”

“I don’t know how Mother ever endured.”

“She has her activities, Laurie. She always had her activities, and they always had nothing to do with me. Absolutely nothing. She still has them now.”

“Oh, Daddy. You are impossible. For such a big man, for the man all the women swoon over, you’re such a child.”

He stood up, wanting to do something else.

“I’m glad my 70th birthday only comes once in a lifetime, lass. I thought it would be different. Party hats and presents. You know?”

She took a last puff on her cigarette, and put it out in an ashtray, roughly. “You reap what you sow. Doesn’t the philosopher say that, too, Daddy?”

He stared at her, as if he were looking at a woman, not his daughter, then chuckled. “Could I interest you in a walk? It’s not a poetic walk in the woods. Only around the housing development. But it’s something to keep the blood up and the muscles from total atrophy.”

When they were outside walking the streets of the condos, Laurie began to feel depressed. The condos were not distinguished in any way, but quite common, multiplied block after block, and several years old. The few trees, young, and planted along the sidewalks only in the past few years, looked puny and wretched – saplings completely bare and hardly taller than her father and even she. The sky was gray and cloudy, and the wind was strong enough to annoy her. She now wished she had brought an overcoat with her from California. It was cold, and it would only get colder.

So this could very well be the end of the road for my parents, she thought. That it should come to this – a neighborhood of aging condos, for young people just starting out and for old people more or less poor,

which is pretty much how it is for my mother and father.

“We’ll pick up the morning newspaper at the store,” he said to her. “It’s only a few blocks. Down the hill.”

“Sure,” Laurie said. “Looking for part-time work?” she asked him, only half kidding.

“No. I still do some work for the company.” Her father had spent the last several years of his career, such as it was, as a branch manager of a small airline at the local airport.

Out walking like this, Laurie noticed that her father walked slowly, even shuffling a little, bent over ever so slightly, the gait of an older man, she realized to her surprise.

“Do you have any plans? Something dramatic?”

He put his hands in his pockets, like a boy, unthinking. “Well, nothing particularly dramatic, I don’t suppose.”

“Why not?” she asked him. “God knows, you’ve had some drama in your life before.”

“It won’t be drama. That is, unless it comes from a doctor’s office.”

Her heart skipped a beat.

“What do you mean? Is anything the matter?”

He kept walking, head down, doing that just-perceptible shuffling. They were on their way downhill now, and she wondered if she should take him by the arm.

He was not going to make anything out of it. “Ah, you know, there’s always these worries. Aches and pains. Bumps and lumps. It drives old folks to distraction.”

“Are you taking any tests?”

“A few. All part of the yearly routine. I assure you.”

At one corner, a plump, middle-aged woman was on the stoop of her house – if that’s what the three steps to the front door of a condo were called. Despite the early time of day, the woman had already dressed up, in floral dress, high heels and makeup. She waved cheerily to Laurie’s father, and her big bosom jiggled and heaved.

“What, does she wait for you?” Laurie asked her father, noticing that he at first was not going to respond to her question, but then apparently changed his mind.

“Hardly.”

“But haven’t they always? Waited for you, the women?”

He ignored her. “She’s a married woman, dear. And besides her husband is a big shot in a bank.”

“Did that ever matter?”

He was still ignoring this kind of remark from her, they walked farther, more and more downhill. Then they came to a flat stretch of sidewalk, approaching a set of stores, a small shopping center.

“Perhaps it was a generational thing,” he said suddenly. “Did you ever think of that? I have. Recently. You know, taking stock and all that. Perhaps men of my time just did not get that close, that mixed up in the family’s day-to-day business.”

Laurie put her hand on her father’s arm, but not to support him, but to underline her disagreement. “Oh, no, mon pere, you won’t get away with that. Forget it. Uh-uh.”

“But it was. In a lot of families.”

“No, no, no, no.” She wanted to make sure she explained it to him very clearly, maybe once and for all. “I, for one, Daddy – ” She nearly bit off the word. “So much wanted you to be there for me. You have no idea. I wanted your attention so badly, I would have died for it. Just a thoughtful word from you. Just a smiling look, a hug, God knows, and I would have melted in delight. Did you know that?”

He didn’t say anything, but as they reached the corner where the little shopping center began, he put his hand out to protect her from traffic before they crossed, though there was only one car in sight, some ways from them.

“Did you know that, Daddy?” Laurie repeated, as they crossed.

“I suppose I did. Now that you make me think about it.”

They passed several stores – a delicatessen, a bootery, a Chinese restaurant, a supermarket

– until they came to a newspaper shop. Her father stepped aside, to let her pass inside before him.

“Mr. Donovan,” a young man behind the counter called out, obviously happy to see her father. “Good morning. The papers just came in. Hot off the press.”

Her father smiled, and started to make his way to the far side of the store, where the papers were stacked on the floor.

And then, suddenly, as he bent over, stiffly, to pick up one of the newspapers, someone else called out his name. Laurie would never forget the tone of voice.

“Donovan!”

It was another man, even bigger than her father, older, commanding-looking, a man apparently used to giving orders and being obeyed.

“Donovan? That you?”

Laurie watched her father straighten up, to locate where the man was, a few feet away, standing above him. “Mr. Bork,” he said, seeing who the man was.

“Donovan, what are you doing here?” The man himself had bought a newspaper and was eyeing the shelves of magazines behind him.

Laurie’s father answered slowly. “Why, I live nearby, sir. In one of the condos, up the hill.”

The man made no movement to step forward and shake her father’s hand, but kept his distance. He was wearing an expensive, gray overcoat, and had a suit and tie on underneath it.

“Well, I’ll be. Have you retired yet? You’re old enough, man, aren’t you?”

“No. I haven’t, Mr. Bork.” Her father spoke, Laurie realized, as if mesmerized. “Soon, though. Very soon.”

Now the man started to move, to pay for his newspaper and exit the store.

“Well, good. Good. That’s what I like to see. I always like a working man who knows when to retire.”

As he passed them both, the gentleman glanced at Laurie, but made no attempt to acknowledge her. Then he left the store.

When he was gone, her father paid for his paper, too, and also made to leave the store.

“Who was that man, Daddy?” she asked him.

He looked at her, and sighed. Energy, or something else very important, seemed to have drained from him. In a shot. “Oh. That was Mr. Bork, Laurie. My supervisor at the company. For years. For many years. We never liked him, much.”

“My God,” she said.

On their way back to the condos, Laurie watched her father. They continued to walk, again a bit slowly, perhaps dominated by his slight shuffle, perhaps not. He did not speak a word, and when they began to ascend the hill they had come down, she again resisted the impulse to reach out and take him by the arm. Once or twice she thought he steeled himself against their task, furiously masculine and proud. When, finally, they reached home, she followed him into the condo, where he sat down again in the chair in the kitchenette.

“Father, I have to go back outside,” she told him, suddenly. “To my car. I’ll be right back.”

He looked up at her curiously.

Her voice was soft, and she did reach out this time, to touch him on the shoulder. “I’ll be right back.”

Outside, she hurried to her car, opened it, and leaned forward to the back seat. She took two packages, one quite small, off the seat, put them against her chest, backed up, and closed the car door. Then she nearly ran back into the condo.

Her father was still sitting at the table, doing nothing. Seeing her, he shifted his weight and looked around, pretending to be thinking of something.

“Father,” Laurie began. “I have these two presents for you. I was going to give them to you at the party later. With everyone else. But just now I decided I want to give them to you now. Is that all right?”

He seemed confused, but smiled and nodded his head, taking her presents.

“Of course.”

She sat down next to him. “They’re nothing much.” She found herself chattering on. “I was only going to give you the one present, the larger package. It’s a standard kind of thing ...” He started to unwrap the book. “The kind of thing, I guess, you get all the time. It’s a history of the ancient kings of Britain. Silly, isn’t it? I don’t know why I thought you’d like it. I just figured you might.” He had it opened and was now holding the book in his hand, glancing at the cover. “Do you like it, Father? What do you think?”

He turned the book over and scanned the quotations on the back of the jacket.

“A book, huh?” he said. “I like it. Of course I like it.”

She went on. “The second present I didn’t think I’d give you. I wasn’t sure. I’ve been going back and forth in my mind, all week. You know – Monday, yes, Tuesday, uh-uh.” He started to open the small package. Laurie swallowed. “Finally, I decided I’d go with it. The other day. No, really just now. I don’t know why. I just felt like it.” He had the bow and the wrapping nearly off her gift. “It’s a little more personal than the other. About a month ago I found it among my things. I was cleaning. Funny, don’t you think – to find it after all these years?”

Now he held her gift in his hands. She thought she could see clearly that he wasn’t sure what to do about it, what to say about it.

She rushed to his rescue, her rescue. “It’s a little picture of me, Father. My first communion picture. I was about five then, right? Don’t I look funny in that communion dress, all white and fluffy? Don’t I look like an angel? God, look at that expression! I don’t believe it.”

She was shaking a little. “Do you like it? Was it a stupid thing to do? I mean, for a birthday gift, to give you my own picture, when I was a little kid? Wasn’t it stupid? Maybe I should take it back?”

She thought he spoke with a bit of energy now, as if something had come back to him, finally.

“I don’t think it was stupid, lass. And I won’t give it back to you. I love it ... very much.”

Her heart starting to beat rapidly, she looked around her, for a mantle over a fireplace perhaps, any place he might put it, for it to be in his sight and consciousness, not in a drawer.

“Can we find a place to put it?” She wondered if she were starting to cry.

He nodded in agreement, and slowly handed her gift back to her, for her to do the job. Then he looked up at her, and thought for a moment, and leaned back in his chair.

“Laurie,” he said to her. “I want to tell you a little story. Okay?”

She was uncertain. “Sure.”

He proceeded very deliberately. “ ... The night you were born, your Uncle Matthew and I, we went to the hospital together. Before he moved away ... ” Her father clasped his big hands in front of him, resting them on the table top. “ ... After a while, the nurse finally let us into the place where they kept all the babies that were just born – they were really tough about visitors in those days.” He smiled to himself. “Finally, we were able to see you ... ”

Laurie listened, as if entering a dream. Her father seemed to be growing even more animated, more infused with energy as he went on.

“ ... There must have been 20, 30 babies in that room, behind some glass windows. Your Uncle Matthew didn’t know which one you were, and there was no one around to tell us.”

Her father cleared his throat.

“ ... I told Matthew that it didn’t matter. I said to him, ‘I know which one she is, Matt. I’d know her anywhere. Do you see the one in the back, in the back but in the middle of the row? Over there, behind all the funny-looking kids? Do you see her there? The little one, with the golden hair. The beautiful one. There. In the back, with the golden hair, I tell you. That’s my Laurie. That’s my darling baby. That’s my love ... ’”

At his words, she thought she would go wild. Her heart grew pounding in her ears, and she thought to catch her breath. She marveled at the overwhelming power of tenderness, of his tenderness, so late, so desperately hungered for, something secret, even to herself.

A Tale of Negotiated Agency

Menoukha Case, Center for Distance Learning

“Both students and teachers are to be held accountable to their ideas and beliefs.”
(Weiner 2003: 58)

Introduction: Where I come from

In this article, I will explore issues at the interstices of screen invisibility and learning expectations that arise in students in response to the words “food” and “culture” in conjunction with one another, and contextualize these in the changing pedagogical projects I undertook. My original project arose from my experiences as a pre-online Empire State College graduate and later, a face-to-face college instructor. In 2004, I was a Ph.D. candidate with an undergraduate degree in Cultural Studies, a master’s in English, and a master’s in Women’s Studies. I had been teaching for five years in the classrooms of several universities and colleges when I was hired as an adjunct instructor by Eric Ball at the Center for Distance Learning (CDL), where the course, Food and Drink in Cultural Context was my first online teaching experience. Generally, I wanted to sustain the Empire State College core value of student-centered education that I had learned how to bring into classrooms, and to foster what is generally called “rigorous” academic performance, negotiating between the two via my goal of promoting student agency. Then, in fall of 2009, I was hired as a CDL area coordinator, and I, like Eric, became responsible for revising and designing online classes. As my role shifted, I began to experience a change from solely negotiating learning in (and thus thinking about) online courses as they existed, to actively working on ways to structure such learning environments.

Part of what I considered in the adjunct instructor phase of these experiences were the particular ways that “student centering” becomes “multi-centering” in an online learning environment. And while aspects

of these concerns can be glossed over as “form” (e.g., the online classroom; student centering) versus “content” (e.g., academic materials), I found that the ways they work together belie the dichotomy. As I wet my feet in the still new second phase of my experience as an Empire State College mentor, I’m moving from negotiating one-to-one with each student in a given course to more serious consideration of how to use my increasing agency to build opportunities for student agency right into course structures. Since I was an adjunct for five years and have been an area coordinator for mere months, I have more to say about the first than the second. Eric’s previous article on Food and Drink in Cultural Context in All about Mentoring #36 and his essay included in this issue have been part of my deliberations.

Moving from classroom to screen

In classrooms, I had worked towards dialogical learning, towards fostering an environment that allows a more or less equal sense of agency for each person present. Physical classroom methods that encourage self-generated authority among students include rotating discussion chairs, as well as sitting in a circle to functionally and visually de-center the professor. I was looking forward to discovering how this kind of pedagogy would translate on the screen. Several factors worked towards this goal. First, the familiarity most students have with online exchanges via e-mail and chat seemed to put everyone at ease. Second, (though it would be disingenuous to assume too much from this) the professor’s name is included in the roster in alphabetical order, and posts from everyone alike appear identified by first and last name. Although commentary or questions designed to stimulate discussion do appear in a box at the top of the page, posts in the discussion itself appear chronologically, so while there is no circle, neither is there a “head of the classroom” in



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terms of how discourse unfolds. Finally, the screen provides relative visual equality because many socially constructed indices, and their concomitant, if often unconscious biases, are not necessarily triggered since a student’s presence in the online “classroom” can be disembodied or invisible.

Learning expectations: Seeking cultural tours and finding cultural constructs

There is a somewhat fraught line that a professor who is committed to liberatory pedagogy walks as he or she works to de-center herself in order to foster course experiences that multi-center around students’ self-identified interests. As a professor, I want to meet each student where she is and support her in going where she wants to go. At the same time, I must meet the responsibilities of institutional employment; that is, to award credit in accord with the generally recognized academic standards that will garner students’ recognition in the larger world. In that light, the term “students’ interests,” too, is fraught, since in some cases it is the degree itself as much as learning that enhances student employability. Colleges also are in the business of facilitating a student’s access

to a degree, and student evaluations of their professors carry the weight of students' rights as consumers.

Food as a topic has a vastly diverse yet universal appeal – it is intrinsic to everyone's embodied experience, with powerful personal and cultural implications – and it certainly worked to draw enrollment, much as Eric intended. My teaching experiences so far had taught me that though, as individuals, we may have liberatory goals, institutionally speaking, we are hired as “academic gatekeepers.” When teaching a course like *Food and Drink in Cultural Context*, this means that if we want students to think about cultural issues and learn to articulate their thoughts as cultural criticism, we have a responsibility to move students' concept of “cultural context” beyond “cultural tourism” of “exotic foods,” even if the latter may very well be what some wanted when they laid their money down. This led me to wonder about two questions: how far does student centeredness go? And what is its relationship to academic requirements, both scholarly and fiscal? The power of any course is that the student herself changes in some way by taking it (for example by acquiring information, skills, insights or tools) – that the new learning can be used to further transform her life. So we aren't being asked to fully center around the student-as-is, but the student as she desires to be – and we assume some level of desire does exist, or she would not be registered in a class. Yet, too, the terms of that desire may differ from our educational goals. Eric cites Seitz, who believes that “most students do not see cultural criticism as a positive end in itself” (506) and continues:

“Indeed, even when the most well-intentioned educator teaches cultural criticism in order to equip marginalized students (e.g., marginalized in terms of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, geography) with knowledge and perspectives intended to help them make the world less oppressive, such students will reject (or even misconstrue) the educator's intentions because their own immediate concern is to achieve individual professional success within the world as it is given – the only option they see truly available

to them for improving their lives or reducing their oppression.”

Eric therefore worked to design a course that created “a cultural studies pedagogy [that] provide[s] an under-determined theoretical and methodological framework so that students can think creatively in the face of newly emerging cultural realities on the one hand and hegemonic social forces on the other.” I think his methodological framework was effective in Version 1.0; (VI) and I also think that this is partly because, while most students may not be seeking to become cultural critics, they are nevertheless seeking what cultural criticism intends to provide. That is, they are seeking to “reduce their oppression” – or positively put, they are seeking, if not freedom to, at least freedom from, in the form of more and better options.

Still, in a situation where some appear already more free (or privileged) than others, desire for freedom is in tension with an array of hegemonic social forces that constrain and constrict. In academia, this expresses itself as tension between institutional fiscal needs, scholarly learning standards, and personal learning goals, although in some cases these may align. In fact, the potential for alignment is always present, and Eric undertook to construct a venue in which students could self-determine and be personally invested in, the terms of this alignment. That is, they could learn according to their personal interests and style, and get their money's worth (become satisfied customers) who would demonstrate learning in the world that would reflect well on them and their alma mater, while providing them with a better life and the tools to better the lives of others (applied cultural criticism). Through freedom of form, then, they had the opportunity for experiential comprehension of the content.

The initial assignment in *Food and Drink V1* encourages individualized learning goals, proactively positioning the student as consumer of a self-designed product that she is buying to improve her life. The vehicle for this design is students' initial reflections on their interests in a course on food and drink, and their learning desires and expectations. The choice of food was, I believe, strategic because everyone experiences a relationship

to it daily. Personal experiences that were inroads to these interests among the first group of students with whom I worked included organic farming, food service work, a taste for culinary tourism, and quests for an ethnic heritage. Most students, however, entered with the assumption that they would learn about their own eating habits, and/or ‘other’ cultures and the foods ‘those people’ ate:

“This course will help me better understand the impact food has on our personal lives” (“C”).

“I want to learn how others engage people in the celebration of food. I moved to embrace diversity and my goal is to experience it through this course” (“J”).

“I would like to understand how certain foods can contribute to our behaviors ... Many cultures have certain foods that are delicacies which other cultures do not understand. We are lucky in America where there is such a diversity of people that we are able to see and taste the unique foods that have been brought here from various cultures” (“T”).

(From various Entry Learning Goals)

Initial articles that lend themselves to exoticism or discussed heritage, for example, those on the Pineys of New Jersey and the history of pasties in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, therefore met many students' expectations and kept interest high while they began the process of looking at the forces that construct cultural identities. This helped students transition from, and question or add to, their originally stated goals:

“As I began reading some discussions left by my peers, I thought about my cultural background and wondered where do I come from, how do we differ from other cultures and are we separated by our heritage, our race or our personalities” (“T”'s post after three weeks).

The two “learning goals” assignments, one at the start and one at the end of the term, together made it clear to both students and instructors not only how much was learned, but what was learned. Whether

or not students were always able to fully realize challenges they undertook in their projects, they were often able to utilize this opportunity to summarize concepts that had driven these projects and to consider new ways they would apply them in future.

The interim learning goals module for each project served in a similar way. If students were not always prepared to understand these goals at first, they became occasions for “ah-ha!” hindsight as the course progressed. For example, “T,” who started with the intention of understanding ‘others’ “delicacies,” was able to integrate previously elusive concepts in a photo essay documenting the making of her grandmother’s pumpkin bread in her final project. At the course’s end, she wrote: “I could have produced more in-depth projects as well as deeper involvement in discussions” (“T,” Final Learning Goals). However, she utilized the final learning goals assignment to reflect on her Native American heritage and articulate what she felt she had omitted:

“Throughout this semester, I have learned many things about how we grow from our culture and what it truly means to not allow ... industry to eliminate those traditions that have been passed from our ancestors. It is important that we seek the satisfaction we deserve by preserving as much of our heritage as possible. Growing up I knew what it meant to be a part of a poverty stricken family. We canned all of our own food – preserving the home grown taste without all of the chemicals used today. As industry grew and we became more of an average-income family we started to buy ... foods instead of taking the time to grow and can as my grandmother did. The products of nature and agriculture have been made, to all appearances, the products of industry (Berry). Although my grandmother still buys little from the store and cans, we do not, and I have since lost the taste [for] fresh canned food and crave ... store bought. We have all changed as much as the industry has grown” (“T,” Final Learning Goals).

The learning goals assignments were useful in several ways. The entry assignment helped guide me in my interactions because it identified opportunities for personalized approaches, as in Eric’s earlier mention of a student of literature:

“Knowledge that I [gain] about other cultures will make me more tolerant of differing cultures that will be represented in my classroom. I also would like to convey this knowledge to my students in order for them to be able to more vividly use their imagination when writing literary pieces” (“L,” Entry Learning Goals).

This student concluded in her final goals assignment that:

“At the onset of the course, I basically thought we would be discussing different cultures and discussing the role food and drink played in them. What I have uncovered though are a set of concepts that can be used for many facets of identifying different cultural norms and practices. I will be able to use this information in my future classroom as part of curriculum and as a personal learning tool for my students. I was able to use the concepts from this class to deconstruct and reconstruct cultural concerns in other classes” (“L,” Final Learning Goals).

“L” highlights how the learning goals served better as a measure of changed perspectives vis-à-vis cultural studies and cultural criticism, than as an initial expression of what students actually wanted to learn. To me this was not problematic; rather, combined with end-of-semester revisiting, it allowed students to perceive and articulate that they had exceeded their original goals in ways they could not have previously imagined, certainly one of the more pertinent rewards of learning. Thus, while “L” may have wanted to learn tolerance for her future students and introduce vivid spice into her writing classes, she went away aware that she had developed much more versatile and powerful critical “tools.”

Thus, final learning goals assignments often showed a shift to a more academic and nuanced conception of culture that allowed the development and application of cultural

critiques. And while my working with “L” with her original goals in mind may have helped facilitate the shift, “T” and others note how “discussions left by my peers” stimulated them. A multi-centered approach can thus help lead to the “not previously imagined.” This implies inherent risk: will students meet the stated course learning goals if these goals allow for open-ended possibilities? Will students be satisfied that what they learned promotes their academic or professional improvement? And these are not the only risks.

Multi-centering opportunities: Screen presence and cultural identity

I return to the situation which unfolds in every phase of the process, which is that some students seem to be already more free (or privileged) than others, and that when people are invisible, it both shields them and increases their risks. In an online classroom, whiteness, blackness and other social markers are invisible. Students may choose to post thumbnail images, but many do not. For those who do, choosing images gives them a sense of some control over how others may see them. Among 30 students who posted in two classes in one week in fall 2008, 10 men and eight women posted no image; six women posted images of nature or art; only three men and three women posted images of themselves. The men posted naturalistic, full body shots in their homes or beside their cars. One woman posted a waist-up image of herself, largely obscured by the infant she was holding; one used a professional “glamour head shot;” only one woman used a naturalistic image of her face. While other classes may reveal more student icons, within this small sample it is relevant that only 20 percent revealed themselves, and in ways that beg for analysis. For now, I’d like to note that the low number of personal images could indicate that students may value the opportunity to be invisible. In this important way, the screen provides what a classroom does not: the strong possibility of cultural neutrality via occlusion of hierarchical markers. How Menoukha dresses, how old Michelle is, whether Lee is or “acts” male or female, if Pat is in a wheelchair – all this is unknowable unless a student decides otherwise.

On the other hand, there is the possibility that subtly or overtly biased posts, encouraged by the invisibility of actual persons, will sometimes lead students to face the discomfiting decision of whether or not to culturally “out” themselves. But if cultural neutrality offers multi-centering opportunities, it also has inherent problems. For example, white normativity conditions some students to assume other students are “white like me,” so that, as Eric noted, “peer-to-peer discussion was capable of reinforcing socio-cultural common sense and hegemony at every turn.” Adrian Piper explains in “Passing for White, Passing for Black” that “there are risks that accompany unguarded camaraderie among whites who believe they are among themselves ... [such as] verbal racism” (Piper in *Talking Visions*, 106). And race is not the only issue; in one *Images of Women in Western Civilization* class that I taught, participants assumed there were no males present because the males who were present were named Lee and Robin. Seemingly innocuous posts can “other” students. Subtly or overtly biased comments, encouraged by screen invisibility, can either force self-disclosure of identity or discourage the participation of “othered” students.

While I have encountered overt racism while teaching, in the Food and Drink course what I encountered were seemingly innocuous posts with a subtext of privilege that could lead to potential discomfort. For example, one reading was Psyche Williams-Forsion’s article on African Americans and fried chicken. In summary,

“Williams-Forsion shows how something ‘neutral’ (the simple act of eating fried chicken) or ‘positive’ (the history of chicken’s role in surviving oppression) can be turned into something ‘negative’ (“chicken thieving darky”), and how something ‘negative’ can be reclaimed as, or become, ‘positive’ (“Black women have manipulated fried chicken to serve as a weapon of resistance in repudiating ... negative connotations”) (Case, post citing Williams-Forsion, 174, 188).

A white parent responded to the article by stating that she teaches her kids “children with brown skin are ‘just like me’” (Student

post). A nice sentiment, but having in mind Lorraine Hansberry’s assertion (“it is pointless to pretend that [race] doesn’t exist – merely because it is a lie!” – *The Collected Last Plays*, 92) and Audre Lorde’s comparison (“You fear your children will grow up to join the patriarchy and testify against you, we fear our children will be dragged from a car and shot down in the street, and you will turn your backs on the reasons they are dying” – *Sister Outsider*, 119), I felt called upon to point out that “that is a luxury that a brown-skinned child’s parents may not be able to afford: the hard truth is children must be prepared to survive and negotiate the social reality of prejudice.”

I raise this to point out that a multi-centered environment may begin with professorial de-centering, but de-centering always requires more than, or other than, absencing oneself from centrality. It requires constituting a matrix for group discussion, structured around course learning goals, that helps each student center in her own experience and in which no one’s experience obliterates another’s. In the face of screen invisibility, this raises particular challenges. On the surface, the student post didn’t directly engage Williams-Forsion, and one pedagogical option would be to direct her “back to the text.” Yet the course concepts for the module were “identity,” “cultural identity,” “the constructed nature of identities,” and “the ‘other;’” her comment was founded on an invisibilized ‘other’, and some students might have perceived themselves as such upon reading her post. It was an opportunity to ground course theory in multi-centered participatory practice. I wrote:

“When you make a post, think about what experiences underlie your choice of words. My concerns in raising this are twofold. First, sometimes posts have seemed what I will call ‘white normative,’ that is, they can sound like the writer assumes a common ground for all readers based on white experience of prejudice, as if there were no African Americans (or folks of other ethnicities called ‘people of color’) in our discussion who might experience this differently. This is not to suggest that those who made such comments

are at fault. Rather, they are offering sensible responses to their experience. I want to suggest, though, that each person think about what she is taking for granted in her comments.

This practice of examining one’s own cultural schemata leads to my second concern. It makes sense to start with the idea of celebrating cultural diversity through food. At the same time, I want to focus attention on the second part of the title: ‘In Cultural Context.’ This begs the questions: what is culture? Its relation to identity? How is cultural identity constructed? What role does the ‘other’ play in this construction? Why construct an ‘other’? I feel that every post in this section has helped us make good progress towards considering these questions” (Case, etc).

I cite my post at length not to be didactic about teaching, but to point out that both the advantages and problems of screen invisibility play integrally into both the student-centered and academic aspects of our pedagogical project. In this and in other ways, form and content could never be entirely separate, and their interstices require risk-taking on all our parts.

Learning to be cultural critics: Risk-taking, form and content

Since this incident took place on screen, the student who made the post I critiqued was free to berate me “out loud” if embarrassed, and if she so desired. Privacy and time lapses inherent in the structure of the online environment allow cultural identity be broached by each person at her or his own pace and in her or his own way. That students can write, edit, and eventually post considered replies opens space in which students mutually generate solutions when such problems arise and work together to shift to more inclusive conversation. But we cannot rely on this alone. Designers can build in content-driven opportunities for reflexivity, and instructors can proactively add posts that elicit self-reflection. It also is crucial that instructors respond to potentially “othering” posts with careful, caring questions and statements that lead to self-examination by the authors of such posts. This reaches all members of the

discussion, encouraging the sense of agency that comes from appearing in accordance with one's fullest sense of self.

Traditionally (inasmuch as online teaching is now old enough to have traditions!) when we discuss pedagogical form we think about the ways modules and assignments are structured to develop skills and to teach content, which we generally consider to be the readings and concepts the course is built to convey. In this food and culture course, for the most part the open assignment structure seemed to me to work very well. Since everyone eats, and everyone is allowed to approach assignments in his or her own way, the personal/political connection is chosen and individually pertinent. This goes far towards remedying the problem Seitz posed, and indeed, students produced richly varied projects in which they had personal investment. These were a pleasure to read; they kept me engaged as a learner.

A challenge did occur, though, when students took on projects based on concepts we hadn't yet covered, tied to readings we hadn't yet done. Sometimes colloquial use of terms would hold sway since students had not yet digested a cultural studies vocabulary. Colloquial usage doesn't necessarily lend itself to cultural criticism. For example, one student, having selected "interest" as the course concept with which she would examine the film "Mostly Martha," used the term to refer to Martha's romantic attraction to Mario, and made it the sole basis of her initial analysis. This problem was exacerbated for upper level students in that more complex assignments asked them to demonstrate reflexivity, and if they took these on early, sometimes they hadn't yet developed the sense of cultural construction needed to meet this learning goal. I addressed this situation through continued dialogue and the understanding that rewrites of any project would be welcome at any time. Some students made good use of this opportunity. For example, the student who wrote about "Mostly Martha" redefined "interest" in accord with its more technical usage, that is, as it relates to and generates "issues." In her final draft, she tied Martha's initial conflict with Mario to her interest in "total control of the hiring of kitchen staff," generated by her response to "complaints about her cooking" ("C").

She contrasts Martha's vested interests to those of her employer:

"Paying customers are the bread and butter to business owners; without them there would be no business. However, whenever Martha heard someone complaining ... she always insisted that she was in the right and the customer was always wrong. It seemed that Martha believed that she was more valuable to the restaurant than any customer" ("C").

The student proceeded to analyze several other issues successfully, including the subtleties of Martha's cooking for her analyst.

This change was stimulated by a series of questions and occurred over several drafts. However, life responsibilities prohibited others from such extended efforts. In that case, the final learning goals assignment was invaluable, as like "L" and "T," students were able to express discernment that they hadn't been able to demonstrate at the time of submitting a project.

Students endure (and/or enjoy) the riskiness of different cultural backgrounds, different starting points, different learning paces, different learning goals, different readings and projects, and unanticipated learning results, but these risks are present whether permitted space for articulation or not. The openness of the assignment structure is more than a necessary risk that allows students to make course content their own, on their own terms, rather than being fed according to a predetermined agenda. It is a valuable methodology for broaching the unknown and allowing this void to become a locus of diverse knowing. Again, the "ah-ha!" hindsight this approach can produce shows how permitting traffic in the unfamiliar, rather than step-by-step guidance, can be a fruitful learning approach.

As individuals within the group take (often radically) different approaches and progress at what appears to be an "uneven" pace, we find ourselves in conversation, able to practice what Valerie Lee describes as a kind of multiple location theory generation (Lee, *Granny Midwives and Black Women Writers: Double-Dutched Readings*). In Lee's sense, this methodology is, in fact,

transbinary; instead of students being on or off "the same page," a web of learning arises between the varied "pages" of their lives and learning curves. Multi-centering is the result of de-centering, or, it takes up the absence created by de-centering. Multi-centered space allows articulation of, and student-generated remedies to, pedagogical problems that are always already present by virtue of the existence of discrete individuals in cultural context; it helps visibilize and spurs critique of that context.

The challenges of online learning, then, offer unique opportunities for liberatory pedagogy that are inherent in its very form. Students enter the visible space of a multi-centered web by the screen process that allows them to be invisible participants. Bias can be as complex and historically fraught as naive racial bias; the bias can be as simple as privileging word use familiar from the romantic model of heterosexual love. When it appears on the screen, a kind of free-fall can occur, complete with fear, danger and fumbling at life lines. Each person is utterly alone, yet utterly connected: the writer of a biased post is unaware of the reader whose life is subject to that bias; each is "other" to the "other;" but everybody reads it. At such "teachable moments," the language to analyze culture removes bias from the realm of individual (t)error and emphasizes connectivity through time and space. When cultural constructs are introduced at the gut level of food and drink, two things can simultaneously occur: liberation from personal guilt, and agency aligned with collective conscience. Thus, while we are learning the vocabulary of cultural criticism, we are practicing it. Bridging the differences between individuals, between the seen and the unseen, between the past and the future, our very activity remedies the Manichean paradigm at the core of what we critique.

"Now for my next trick" ... Version 2.0

I've been asserting how effective Food and Drink in Cultural Context, Version 1.0, was, but Eric was not satisfied with it. Like me, he had experienced that "peer to peer discussion was capable of reinforcing socio-cultural common sense and hegemony ... [and was] not something to be celebrated or condemned wholesale"

(Ball, 44). He had originally thought of “the predetermined content of the course primarily as a matter of exposure and potential motivation and inspiration” that in and of itself could move students beyond socio-cultural common sense (Ball, 43). But while clearly, certain socio-cultural senses are hegemonic, that does not mean everyone holds them in common, as demonstrated in our fried chicken experience. Also, student-centeredness became a query rather than a goal when student interests countered the stated course goals because what they wanted was cultural tourism (see goals, Ball, 45). He found that even with an excellent range of readings, “students may not happen upon theory,” and he wanted to counter this pitfall from a deeper level than discourse, that is, in the very structure of the course (Ball, 48).

In “A Tale of Freedom and Temptation, Part 2 of 2,” (page 4 in this issue of *All About Mentoring*) Eric explores the decisions he made in the service of balancing between centering the student-as-is and stretching students’ ranges of interests/inquiries/critical skills. I would like to consider how, in my brief experience of teaching Food and Drink in Cultural Context, Version 2.0 for two semesters at the introductory level, it has and has not worked for me and the students in these classes, and what moves I made to remedy problems as I encountered them. I would like to muse a bit, theoretically, about the how and why of the challenges and opportunities we encountered.

I encountered two major challenges in Version 2.0. At one end of the spectrum, there were a few students who interpreted open-endedness and self-grading to mean that there were no standards, let alone rigorous academic standards. At that extreme was a student who cobbled together a completely plagiarized paper about agricultural regulatory changes and submitted it on the very last day of the term. The plagiarism became a developmental opportunity, but that aside, in response to my comments on the lack of cultural analysis or criticism he argued that because the regulations he historicized were made by we (the citizens of the United States) as a “people, or as a “culture,” the paper was a priori cultural. The student had felt free to ignore large parts of the learning

contract as well as the many discussion posts in which students and I had shared analyses of the idea of culture. So, the first challenge had to do with definitions of freedom: for some students it meant a total lack of accountability. I worked to convey the context in which freedom occurs, to encourage negotiated agency rather than the tempting freedom of unconditional boundlessness.

In this example, the challenge of freedom intersected with the second and biggest challenge I encountered. This circulated less around the problem Eric identifies, that is, what is a critical inquiry (most students were fairly quick to get into a questioning mode) and more around the question “what is culture?”, the very same question that challenged us in Version 1.0. But unlike the original version, this course has no defined path from cultural tour to cultural construct.

Instead, as Eric also discovered, while in 1.0 students were tempted by cultural tours, in 2.0 they were drawn to scientific inquiry.

In Part 2 of his article, Eric describes his struggle with this second challenge. Two things helped me work through this with students. For one thing, assisting them in forming groups helped them locate beliefs and values underlying the differences and commonalities among the related inquiries of their group members. This was a case in which the familiar (the commonalities that drew them into the same group) facilitated curiosity about the unfamiliar as their comparative critical inquiry yielded more reflexive consideration of their individual inquiries. More obviously, I did post mini-lectures designed to help students shift from scientific to cultural inquiry mode; here is an example:

Figure 1

WHAT IS CULTURE AND WHY DO WE WANT TO UNDERSTAND IT?:

As you proceed to study your issues, one of the biggest challenges you’re facing is finding the cultural hook on which to hang your inquiry.

Briefly: many of your inquiries involve sciences – nutrition, genetic engineering, food safety, and so on. Behind these specific applications, there is an underlying ‘faith’ in science and some of its core beliefs. For example, independence, accumulation and competition are qualities that popular understanding of science posit as expressions of “natural truths” like the ‘survival instinct.’ That is, we believe this is the natural way to survive. But Earth has a rich history of cultures that transmit core values such as interdependence, sharing and cooperation instead (and some cutting edge quantum physics and ecological studies have begun to support this set of values). One could argue that humanity would no longer exist if these had not been practiced for millennium.

Almost all of you have identified issues as problems that need solutions. So, when you look for cultural hooks that can hold open the doors to solutions, consider ideas such as 1] how culture creates or frames the issues you’re studying 2] what beliefs and values underlie that framing 3] what beliefs and values, available for study, could reframe or remedy the issues 4] how to culturally transmit these beliefs and values.

A quote for today that distinguishes between “culture” and “nature”:

“There is a difference between ecological boundaries and socially constructed boundaries. The difference between herbivores and carnivores is an ecological boundary. [1] It needs to be respected for the sake of both cows and humans. The difference between the value of human life in the North and the South is a politically constructed boundary. [2] It needs to be broken for the sake of human dignity” (Vandana Shiva, *Stolen Harvest*, 65).

The very idea of human dignity is a social construction. That is, it differs from culture to culture.

This specific example was intended to help them see the distinction more concretely:

Figure 2
THE CULTURAL COW

Here are snippets from *Recovering the Sacred* (Winona LaDuke) and *Stolen Harvest*. They highlight how culture = a system of beliefs/values and the practices that express them.

Conflicting values lead to issues that represent conflicting interests. When we deal with cultural issues around food we're at an interesting intersection that really helps us get what culture is, because no matter what culture we're in we have to eat. This can lead to issues either within a culture – as in *Gendering Eating or Fast Food Quick Fixes* – or between cultures – as in *Culture of Agriculture or Culture Nature Power*.

The conflicting interests represented below are between the role of the cow in Navajo and Indian cultures and the attempts by Western cultures to impose their roles for cows.

"The Dine, or Navajo, first learned to adapt to the Nakai, the Mexicans who had come to dominate the Southwest. From Spanish culture, the Navajo adopted livestock raising and rug making, an economy and way of life that fit the landscape of the high desert, and the gardens and orchards that the Navajo had traditionally raised. ... [In] the early 1930s ... on the premise that drought had substantially diminished rangeland, [the U.S. government] ordered a massive "livestock reduction" ... "Medicine men pointed out that the best answer to the drought on our land would be some rain – that decreasing the stock was not the answer ... [and] would only put us in a position of starvation."

The spiritual and ecological connections between the animals, the land, and the drought were clear to the Navajos but not to the U.S. government ...

[The Navajo] believed that livestock was a gift from the Holy People. The Holy People watched with pleasure and bestowed their blessings – rain and vegetation – upon the increasing flocks of animals. They were glad to see the Navajos care for these gifts and to see the livestock multiply. Reduction in itself, and particularly when combined with the cruel and inhumane slaughter of these sacred gifts, repelled and shocked all Navajos. To them, stock reduction resulted in the Holy People holding back the rain and moisture. This caused lack of vegetation, which, in turn, resulted in the erosion of the land and the formation of gullies" (LaDuke, 196-197).

Culture also is about the way we convey our beliefs and values. Cutting edge science in Western culture has finally come around to recognizing the very idea of ecology and the way even apparently tiny decisions affect the weather. But the core Navajo value of gratitude (expressed in the idea Holy or Sacred) is not part of scientific or other dominant Western cultural discourses. Similarly, art is separated out from science, so the relationship of ecological reality to the storytelling way of holding and transmitting knowledge is invisible through the Western cultural lens.

India has an interesting relationship to cows, too. "A cow is not simply a milk machine or a meat machine ... sacred cows are the symbols and constructions of a culture that sees the entire cosmos in a cow ... mad cows are symbols of a worldview that perceives no difference between machines and living beings" (Shiva, 73).

Indian cows eat the stalks of grain plants and other plants humans can't eat and convert these to milk and/or to fertilizer for plants humans do eat. They also serve as draft animals to cultivate these plants. When they are old, they are slaughtered. Every part of the cow is used and the leather goods made in small villages have traditionally supported families.

Conversely, the Western economic model pushed on India by the World Bank, IMF, and U.S. corporations, favor production of animals grown purely for slaughter. They're raised as fast as possible (by feeding them foods humans would have eaten, and even their own kin). And rather than using all the parts of the cow, many parts become waste and pollution.

These conflicting practices arise from conflicting beliefs and values. They led to a lawsuit, and following is the judgment handed down by the Indian Court according to the Indian Constitution.

"[The] fundamental duty in the Constitution to have compassion for all living creatures determines the legal relations between Indian citizens and animals on Indian soil, whether small ones or large ones ... their place in the Constitutional law of the land is thus a fountainhead of total rule of law for the protection of animals and provides not only against their ill treatment, but from it springs the right to life in harmony with human beings.

If this enforceable obligation of the state is understood, certain results will follow. First, the Indian state cannot export live animals for killing; and second, cannot become a party to killing of animals by sanctioning exports in the casings and cans stuffed with dead animals after slaughter. Avoidance of this is preserving the Indian cultural heritage ... India can only export a message of compassion towards all living creatures of the world, as a beacon to preserve ecology, which is the true and common Dharma for all civilizations" (Shiva, 69).

Did these attempts work? Yes and no; experience so far suggests that while Version 2.0 may lead to more internal growth in the long run, Version 1.0 was more effective in the short term. Granted, I have interpreted the standards of success and failure at play here, so it may point more towards my as yet developing ability to utilize the model Eric conceived than it does to anything about the model itself; the jury's still out. And too, with only two sections under my belt, the sample is small. Nevertheless, my sense is that students' struggle to understand where their agency begins and ends in this environment may be a learning experience in and of itself, and that for some students, this lesson may displace the cultural theory lessons that comprise the learning goals of the course. On the positive side, there were also outstanding successes that fulfilled Eric's hopes for this new structure.

Conclusion: Where we might go and why

Between the two terms of Version 2.0, the first was more "successful" than the second. A key difference in pedagogy had to do with involvement in assisting students in forming groups and in suggesting shared readings for each group. I had used groups in the way described above in many classrooms and loved their effectiveness, and in the first term I slipped seamlessly into the mode of facilitating that kind of experience. During the second term, I held back. My reasoning was that although I am definitely fairly skillful at doing this in a supportive rather than top-down manner, it does nevertheless represent my idea of how to progress, and is therefore not a truly student-generated mode.

The groups students formed during the first term were called Fast Food and Quick Fixes, Culture of Agriculture, Gendering Eating, and Power, Culture and Nature. For an example of the role of shared readings in groups, I strongly suggested students in the Culture of Agriculture divide up reading of Vandana Shiva's *Stolen Harvest* and Winona LaDuke's *Recovering the Sacred* (posted in the mini-lecture included above). Their reports to each other on key points in the chapters they had read helped them organize their individual research into a paper they called "Corn,

Cows, Communities, and Communism." Excellent, creative work was generated by both teams and individuals. Fast Food and Quick Fixes accompanied their paper with a counter-media production, complete with music. Gendering Eating utilized a range of research approaches, including a chef producing dishes for people he interviewed. Power, Culture and Nature began as a group, but only one member didn't withdraw from the class. This individual student continued to work in the team space and invited others to join him. His project included both extensive research about and paintings that expressed how the colonizers' changes to Native American diet effected not only health, but also culture. One individual project titled "World Hunger: A Cultural Belief?" explored the way people and organizations think about hunger as "an unalterable part of the human condition" (Falco, Adele). This original research was of publishable quality.

During the second term, I was less proactive about the formation of groups. For example, in the first term the group names were arrived at after discussion in which I was fairly deeply engaged; in the second term, I posted umbrella titles only so they could change them as they explored the relationships between their projects but they never did. And while I did offer reading resources to these groups, I did nothing in particular to promote these as shared readings. Only one group, Food and Class, survived and produced solid work. Students in Food and Religions, and Food and Feelings each ended up going their own way. Two students produced outstanding work: one explored if and how food taboos contributed to U.S. Muslims' feeling like cultural others; another explored the loss of opportunities for meal sharing in elders living at home, and the loss of food choices for those living in assisted living, degraded cultural agency, impacted health, and eroded human rights.

As I look forward to teaching Version 2.0 again next term, I give thought to differences not only between the two versions, but between the two different terms of Version 2.0. I ponder how to produce the foundational shifts that Eric seeks, and also more positive short-term outcomes for students. Ideas that

have occurred to me: clarify the learning contract; beef up (pun intended) the page on "Making Sure Your Question Is Cultural," perhaps including something like the mini-lecture and example above that positions science itself as a culture based on beliefs and values; strongly encourage early and consistent sharing of work in progress. Since we are an asynchronous community, why not take advantage of that and enlarge each class's temporal scope through a portfolio of descriptions of student research projects from previous terms? And/or perhaps include a few additional "sample readings" such as were in the course packet for Version 1.0. One of the remarkably effective aspects of those readings was the wide range of disciplines they expressed. I felt that this radically diverse array of theoretical trajectories demonstrated the constructed nature of theory itself and inspired students to theorize on their own terms; it's a tactic I've used very successfully in teaching literary theory. At this point, this approach is used mostly in the advanced-level version of Version 2.0 in which students are expected to "be better prepared to frame their very questions not only in the terms of broader public discourse, but also (to some extent) in terms that showed an emerging grasp of some of the language, questions and concerns of academic scholars of food and culture;" they were to accomplish by

"read[ing] strictly academic work providing a fair sample of the range of questions and methods that scholars have used over the years to address various questions related to food and culture. Then, when students were asked to articulate their "working questions," they were also required to do so in ways that made a conscious effort to acknowledge, use, and address the academic world of food studies – that is, to begin demonstrating an emerging understanding of how their own questions might connect with the more strictly academic initiatives and discourse that they had been exposed to so far" (Ball, Part 2, 22).

The illumination of theory as construct does not require deep or broad readings in academic discourse; in fact, it could/ should happen in the introductory level Version 2.0 when students read each others'

research, which also is diverse, and that bulb does tend to light up more readily when they form groups. Perhaps I could be more pointed about these possibilities and concepts in responsive posts, or in film or textual suggestions.

And what of students who feel supported or freed by structure? As Eric noted, he “sought to strike a balance between just sending them out to the ‘infinity’ of available resources, and ‘overly’ supporting them with a restrictive list of optional tracks. (It was not at all clear to me where such a balance lies, so this was really just a matter of trying something out)” (Ball Part 2, 26). In addressing students’ response to the course structure, Eric asks how to “distinguish those instances where students were genuinely looking for help from those where students were apparently only looking for an ‘easy way out’ of taking greater responsibility for their education” (Ball, Part 2 27). But if we as instructors cannot decide what an “easy route” consists of for any given student, since only the students themselves, as individuals, are fully cognizant of the role this particular course plays in their own attempts at “improving their lives or reducing their oppression,” then our range of considerations about how to structure a course, and then how to teach it, raises other questions, such as, what mix of the unfamiliar and the familiar best rouses curiosity? Where does support enhance, and where does it limit freedom? I look forward to the continuing conversation as we, like and with the students, continue to negotiate agency.

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Found Things: The Learning Contract

The following text comes from the college's first Student Handbook dated spring 1974. This 30-page, 8.5 x 5.5 inch, stapled pamphlet provided "a partial collection of documents that will help students become acquainted with the policies and procedures of Empire State College." The largest section of the handbook focuses on "academic process" and opens with this description of the learning contract.

The learning contract

As an Empire State Student, your Learning Contract is comparable to what students at more conventional institutions call their "course registration." Instead of being registered for "x" number of different courses that run for a predetermined number of weeks, you will have one learning contract at a time, and the length of that contract may be set flexibly to accommodate the learning activities that you and your Mentor have decided to include in it.

At Empire State College you will be expected to accept substantial responsibility for planning your studies, carrying them out, and judging their educational value. Empire State's primary objective is to help you clarify your purposes and learn how to acquire the competence, knowledge, and awareness necessary to pursue those purposes effectively. The processes, programs, and diverse array of learning activities encouraged by the college aim to foster that basic kind of development. The learning Contract and the procedures by which it is developed, implemented, and evaluated are the heart of that effort. The college and its faculty members accept responsibility for identifying and evaluating appropriate resources, for helping students learn, and to learn how to learn, and for rigorously evaluating students' work.

You pursue your education through a series of Learning Contracts. Each Contract has its own specific purposes which are related to

larger general purposes or plans which are formulated as explicitly as possible. During the early stages your general purposes may be devoted to exploration and self-testing, and you may design several Contracts through which you range across a diverse array of experiences, readings, Mentors, self-study materials, and outside resource persons. Before too long, however, you should begin to identify a major area of emphasis or concentration which you want to pursue in some depth and complexity. The frame of reference for that "major" may be your vocational or professional plans, an interest in an academic discipline which prepares you for graduate study, a social problem you would like to become better equipped to deal with, a straightforward intellectual or aesthetic interest which you want to pursue for its own intrinsic rewards and satisfactions. When this area of major interest has been identified a Program of Study is developed for approval by the Learning Center faculty, which spells out the major areas of study to be undertaken. Once this Program has been approved, further Contracts are planned with this general framework clearly in mind and should be considered with it. (See section on "Program of Study.")

Each Contract is developed in consultation with a Mentor and includes four major elements: (a) a description of the general purposes which underlie your work at the time the Contract is developed, (b) the specific purposes which the Contract aims to serve, (c) the learning activities to be undertaken and the general schedule to be followed, and (d) the ways in which the various aspects of your work will be evaluated. The learning activities may include readings and writings; work experiences, volunteer activities, field trips, travel, apprentice relationships; courses at other institutions; tutoring in special areas outside the competence of the Learning Center faculty; Empire State

College Learning Modules, programmed learning materials, correspondence courses, televised instruction; other activities judged educationally valuable. The Contract can be either full time or half time and can run for whatever period is most appropriate for the learning to be undertaken. A full-time Contract assumes an investment of 36-40 hours each week in the pursuit of studies approved by the faculty, a half-time Contract assumes 18-20 hours each week.

Developing the learning contract

Each Contract you develop should connect as clearly as possible with purposes or interests that are important to you and should include activities that are pertinent to and valuable for those purposes or interests. In some Contracts your purposes may be largely exploratory; you may want to work in some areas to find out more about them, what they are really like, and whether you want to pursue them further. These exploratory purposes are valid and should be made explicit. A college education properly includes a broad range of activities and the college encourages such exploration and self-testing. In other case you may pursue a clear professional objective or follow a prepared self-study program.

There are three stages in the development of each Contract: preplanning, conferring with the Mentor, writing the final plan.

Preplanning: Preplanning begins by identifying your major interests or your long range plans and aspirations. With these in mind, you can begin to clarify the particular studies and learning activities required and can think through the combinations and sequences that make most sense. You also can begin to make some judgments about how your progress can be evaluated.

During this preplanning you will find it helpful to discuss your ideas with others – friends, relatives, employers, former teachers

or guidance counselors often give you helpful suggestions. Mentors at the Learning Center obviously can be major resource persons at this point.

As your ideas take shape, set down in writing a tentative draft which includes the major elements of a Contract mentioned above. Trying to set your plan down in writing quickly reveals those areas you are clear about and those which require more thought and planning.

Conferring with the Mentor: Bring the draft of your Learning Contract to your conference with the Mentor, or send it to him in advance if at all possible. In this conference the Mentor will ask you to describe in more detail your long range plans or interests and more immediate purposes. He will usually suggest additional learning activities or resources. Other

major areas of study may be called for, or a different schedule may be required.

The initial conversation may suggest that additional readings be examined, that certain field experiences or work situations be explored, that a tutor may be identified. Under these conditions a second conference may be necessary before a final statement is produced.

Writing the Learning Contract: The final step is to prepare the Learning Contract in writing. As much as possible, you should assume responsibility for preparing this statement. Most students will find this difficult to do for their first Contract or two, and it may be necessary for the Mentor to prepare a statement, but with experience each student should be able to assume increasing responsibility for this task. When this document meets the Mentor's

requirements, you both sign it and it goes to the Associate Dean for review and approval. When approved this Contract becomes a basic part of your Learning Center record and provides the framework for evaluation at the end of the Contract period.

Amending the contract

As you carry out your plan of study, you may well discover topics that need more thorough examination or interests you wish to pursue further. Some parts of your work may develop into larger elements than anticipated, or certain elements which appeared appropriate at the outset no longer seem so. If these discoveries suggest major changes in emphasis or in schedule, and if your Mentor approves, then your Contract should be amended and that amendment should be added to the Learning Center file.

A Map for the Mentored: Lois J. Zachary's *The Mentee's Guide* (Jossey-Bass, 2009)

Reviewed by Wayne Willis, Genesee Valley Center

At Empire State College mentoring refers to the particular faculty/student relationship that has been central to our educational work since the college's founding in 1971. As mentors we are paid to help students design programs of study that are suited to their intellectual, career or life goals, and to guide their learning in specific academic subjects. Our version of mentoring is, in some respects, similar to what Lois Zachary is writing about in *The Mentee's Guide*, but in other ways it is quite different.

Zachary is the president of Leadership Development Services, a consulting firm that offers educational and training services to corporations and nonprofit organizations. Her previous books include *Creating a Mentoring Culture* and *The Mentor's Guide*. Her new book shifts the focus from mentors to their mentees. Although Zachary's concept of mentoring as a "learning relationship" is a broad one that extends beyond the work world, *The Mentee's Guide* seeks mainly to help people advance in their careers by finding appropriate mentors in their occupational fields and using them effectively. Zachary takes her reader through a sensible, if very elaborate, process that requires the prospective mentee to think carefully about long-range goals and realistic steps toward them, choosing the right mentor, building and maintaining a good working relationship with the mentor, and bringing the relationship to mutually satisfactory closure. There is a final chapter on "Making the Transition from Mentee to Mentor" that initiates a new phase of self-analysis as the former mentee examines the

personal characteristics that might (or might not) make her a successful mentor to others.

Zachary certainly does not shy away from the complexities of "making mentoring work for you." She is very aware that mentoring, probably more often than not, occurs informally and in a hit-or-miss fashion. Wishing to make her guide a concrete and practical tool, she includes lots of detailed worksheets to be completed by the mentee, beginning with a "personal reflection exercise" and "visioning checklist" and going on to a "mentee skill inventory," a "confidentiality checklist," an exercise for setting relationship "boundaries," a "mentoring work plan," a "mentoring partnership accountability checklist," and many more. Zachary realizes that this may all seem a bit too much, appearing "awkward" and "artificial" to some. She assures us that "a number of people" have told her that her approach has given them "a solid structure" that "made a dramatic difference in the outcomes of the mentoring," enabling them to "derive more satisfaction and learning from their relationships." No doubt this is true, but faced with Zachary's rather daunting apparatus of exercises, inventories, checklists and work plans, some might well wonder whether being a mentee is itself a full-time job. It would be interesting to know how many of Zachary's readers actually use this guide in the meticulous manner that she intends.

Zachary emphasizes that the best mentoring relationships involve active, self-directed learning on the part of the mentee, working in a collaborative partnership with the

mentor to pursue the mentee's own goals. Transformational learning may take place, not through the power of the mentor but as a result of mentees' efforts to "transform themselves." All of this is consistent with the rhetoric and long held values of Empire State College, and a good deal of what Zachary has to say about forming good mentoring relationships based on trust and "mutually defined goals" is applicable to our work with our students. However, college students' relationships to their faculty mentors differ from the mentor/mentee relationships that Zachary is describing, which do not involve payment for services, do not lead to the acquisition of a valuable credential (a degree), and do not place the mentor in the position of needing to certify to an institution whether the mentee has achieved the particular skills and bodies of knowledge for which the institution grants the credential. A faculty mentor is, perforce, a gatekeeper as well as a guide, and has obligations to the academy as well as to the learner that do not parallel the relationships discussed by Zachary. This somewhat limits the value of her book for our direct work with students.

On the other hand, for an Empire State College employee or student who is interested in finding what we might call an "extracurricular mentor" for professional or personal growth of any kind, *The Mentee's Guide* is quite relevant. Empire State College could do a great deal more to foster a "mentoring culture" within and beyond our college, and Zachary has much to teach about the benefits of such a culture for mentees, mentors, their organizations and society as a whole.

Core Values of Empire State College (2005)

The core values of SUNY 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;
- provide opportunities for ongoing questioning and revising;
- 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.

Submissions to *All About Mentoring*

If you have a scholarly paper-in-progress or a talk that you have presented, *All About Mentoring* would welcome it. If you developed materials for your students that may be of good use to others, or have a comment on any part of this issue, or on topics/concerns relevant to our mentoring community, please send them along.

If you have a short story, poem, drawings, or photographs, or have reports on your reassignments and sabbaticals, *All About Mentoring* would like to include them in an upcoming issue.

Send submissions to Alan Mandell (SUNY Empire State College, Metropolitan Center, 325 Hudson St., New York, NY 10013-1005) or via e-mail at Alan.Mandell@esc.edu.

Submissions to *All About Mentoring* can be of varied length and take many forms. (Typically, materials are no longer than 7,500 words.) It is easiest if materials are sent via e-mail to Mandell as WORD attachments. In terms of references and style, *All About Mentoring* uses APA rules (please see Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association or <http://library.albany.edu/users/style/ap2.html>).

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