


CURRENTS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

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EDITORIAL	Welcome to the Inaugural Issue of <i>Currents in Teaching and Learning!</i> Josna Rege	1
ESSAYS	Transparent Teaching P. Sven Arvidson and Therese A. Huston	4
	Mentoring First-Year Students in Composition: Tapping Role Construction to Teach Jim Henry, Holly Huff Bruland, and Ryan Omizo	17
	How Generational Theory Can Improve Teaching: Strategies for Working with the 'Millennials' Michael Wilson and Leslie E. Gerber	29
	Emotional Labor: The Pink-Collar Duties of Teaching Holly Ann Larson	45
TEACHING REPORTS	What a Writer Does: On-Line Learning and the Professional Writing Classroom Sandra M. Hordis	57
	YouTube Dilemmas: The Appropriation of User-Generated Videos in Teaching and Learning Viera Lorencova	62
CURRENT CLIPS & LINKS	Websites Related to Teaching and Learning	72
WORK IN PROGRESS	The Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education at Worcester State College Bonnie Orcutt	74
BOOK REVIEWS	From the Book Review Editors Catherine Wilcox-Titus and Matthew Johnsen	78
	Making the Case for Rubrics Dannelle D. Stevens and Antonia J. Levi's <i>Introduction to Rubrics: An Assessment Tool to Save Grading Time, Convey Effective Feedback and Promote Student Learning.</i> Catherine Wilcox-Titus	79
	Listening to the Experts Richard J. Light's <i>Making the Most of College: Students Speak their Minds</i> Matthew Johnsen	81
THE BACK PAGE	About Us, Subscriptions, Submissions, Inquiries	84

Welcome to the Inaugural Issue of *Currents in Teaching and Learning*!

Josna Rege

We are happy to be posting *Currents* Volume 1, Number 1, after six months of research and development, and another four months of editorial and production work that has been a true team effort.

Currents in Teaching and Learning, published twice-annually under the auspices of the Center for Teaching and Learning at Worcester State College, is a peer-reviewed electronic journal that fosters exchanges among reflective teacher-scholars across the disciplines. *Currents* seeks to improve teaching and learning in higher education with short reports on classroom practices as well as longer research, theoretical, or conceptual articles, and explorations of issues and challenges facing teachers today. Nonspecialist and jargon-free, *Currents* is intended for both faculty and graduate students in higher education, teaching in all academic disciplines.

In Spring 2008 we researched the field of teaching and learning journals, explored the issues, assessed the needs and formed an internal advisory board to draft the Mission Statement above and help to shape our identity and direction. In June we launched our website, and began to circulate our founding announcement and first call for submissions. As subscription requests, submissions, and letters of interest rolled in through the summer, we developed a list of people interested in serving on our external advisory board, and a long (and still-growing) list of referees with a variety of teaching-and-learning-related interests. As teacher-scholars from Worcester to Washington State began corresponding with us, *Currents* Volume 1, Number 1 began to take shape. This fall we hit the ground running, in order to meet our publication deadline of October 31st, and now, on Hallowe'en 2008, thanks to everyone's hard work and positive energy, we finally have lift-off!

We hope that this first issue will give you a taste of the quality, variety, and *currency* that you may expect from our new journal, which is designed to facilitate conversation with colleagues across disciplinary boundaries, on topics of shared interest and concern. You will see from our Mission Statement that we have taken a firm vow to speak in clear, "jargon-free" English, and to discuss topics, both philosophical and pragmatic, that matter to us as "reflective teacher-scholars."

While will strive for balance in every issue, we can only offer the best of the diversity we receive. In this issue, readers will note that although we

have contributions from Education, Psychology, English, Composition, Communication Media, and Interdisciplinary Studies, and all of them have wide applications beyond a single discipline, our offerings are heavily weighted toward the humanities. Please help us redress this disciplinary imbalance in future issues by submitting teaching reports and essays from the natural and social sciences. In addition, all our contributions this issue are from the United States, although several regions of the country are represented, as also a diversity of educational institutions in both rural and urban settings.

We are delighted that three of the four longer essays in this issue are collaborative efforts, since collaborations are the source of much interdisciplinary scholarship. P. Sven Arvidson and Therese Huston draw from both higher education and cognitive psychology in their discussion of “Transparent Teaching,” which they define as “a practice that is intentionally designed and executed to increase the openness between the instructor and student concerning some fundamental assumptions about the course structure, content, or instructor’s role.” Using specific exercises, they go on to demonstrate how this greater openness on the part of the teacher and a willingness to be more “honestly self-critical,” can promote learning by building greater trust in the classroom.

In introducing the concept of transparent teaching, Arvidson and Huston say that “it is not a new idea,” but “it is a good idea worth a new look.” We share these sentiments in identifying useful and timely material for *Currents*: good ideas are worth revisiting, and good practices don’t have to be newly minted to have currency.

Teaching is a collaboration between teacher and student, and fittingly, our second essay, “Mentoring First-Year Students in Composition,” is itself a faculty-student collaboration. Jim Henry, Holly Huff Bruland, and Ryan Omizo conducted a pilot project in which

MA students mentored first-year composition students throughout the semester. Analysis of their conference logs yielded fascinating data on the productive roles that the mentors played as intermediaries between student and teacher, and insights that are broadly applicable in a number of different pedagogical and disciplinary contexts.

In our third collaborative essay, “How Generational Theory Can Improve Teaching,” Michael Wilson and Leslie Gerber have not only reviewed the considerable literature (both popular and scholarly, celebratory and alarmist) that has been produced on the “Millennial Generation,” but they have tested its claims in their own classes and developed a number of strategies and practices that turn its insights to pedagogical advantage.

Like Wilson and Gerber, Viera Lorencova, author of “YouTube Dilemmas,” turns a potential problem into a teaching opportunity. Rather than becoming discouraged by the pitfalls of permitting students to incorporate YouTube videos into their research projects discourage her, she proceeded with the experiment, concluding that “carefully selected online sources, including user-generated videos available on YouTube, have the potential to become useful tools for teaching and learning and, perhaps, an inspiration for new interactive multimedia educational technologies.” Like “Generational Theory,” “YouTube Dilemmas” cites, but does not subscribe to, the doom and gloom of the wave of critics and commentators for whom the “Google Generation” represents the end of intelligence as we know it.

While *Currents* is an online journal of teaching and learning, it is not a journal of *online* teaching and learning. There are already plenty of publications devoted to online learning, and we did not feel the need to add yet another to their ranks. Nevertheless, it is important for teachers to engage with the new media that are transforming the way we work and network, and to explore ways to use new teaching technologies to our

students' best advantage. In her teaching report, "What a Writer Does," Sandra Hordis argues that the online professional writing class can familiarize students with practices that will translate directly into "their future work environments...resulting in confidence, preparedness, and understanding which might not be so easily developed in traditional settings."


While teachers of online classes work hard to build community in the virtual classroom, teachers have always worked hard to nurture their students both in and beyond the classroom. Holly Ann Larson's essay, "Emotional Labor" is an impassioned testimonial to working conditions that many of us recognize only too well, and a critique of the gender and class hierarchy of the higher education system, in which much of the work that teachers must do is not recognized, let alone compensated, as labor. In these difficult economic times, too many of our working-class and first-generation college students teeter precarious on the brink of crisis, and Dr. Larson argues that female teachers disproportionately bear the burden of keeping them in college. We welcome readers' responses to Dr. Larson's essay, and, indeed, to all the essays and reports in *Currents*. Please send your letters to our email address (currents@worchester.edu), and we will consider them for inclusion in the Spring 2009 issue, along with responses from the authors, as warranted.

We also welcome your contributions to Current Clips & Links, which we hope to make a regular feature of *Currents*. This section consists of ten short excerpts from websites that support teaching and learning, with live hyperlinks directly to the sites themselves. This issue we feature a variety of sites across the disciplines, and invite you to visit and enjoy them. For future issues we invite you to send in your candidates for Current Clips & Links, along with a URL and 3-4 sentences (as Maria Fung has done for this issue, in recommending the Teaching Timesavers from the Mathematical Society of America Online). We will compile our Top

Ten list, and seek permission to cite the material in *Currents*.

The Work in Progress section in this issue is a report by Bonnie Orcutt from our own institution, Worcester State College, as one of 49 participants in the ongoing Wabash Study of Liberal Arts Education which includes "community colleges, private and public four-year liberal arts colleges, and research and regional universities from across the nation." Dr. Orcutt describes the overarching goals of the study, discusses the interim data from its first year, and demonstrates how individual participating institutions can customize the study's data to further their own particular goals.

Catherine Wilcox-Titus and Matthew Johnsen, our Book Review Editors, have written two reviews to get the ball rolling, but they are actively seeking to build a list of reviewers for *Currents*. Please see their note in the Book Review section, and contact them directly with your interests and availability. In keeping with our belief that an idea does not have to be new to be a good idea worth revisiting, they have chosen to review one recent and one older title for the inaugural issue.

Many thanks to our indefatigable Editorial Advisory Board, our meticulous referees, Kathleen Lynch, our Graduate Assistant, and Andrea Bilics, Director of Worcester State's Center for Teaching and Learning, who has given us her full support with complete editorial independence. We hope you enjoy this first issue of *Currents in Teaching and Learning* and we invite you to participate in our new venture. 

Transparent Teaching

P. Sven Arvidson and Therese A. Huston

Abstract

Transparent teaching involves practices that reveal timely knowledge usually concealed or inadequately disclosed. It entails a willingness to be candid and adventurous in the classroom and the confidence to be honestly self-critical. This article describes examples of how transparent teaching can be practiced in a course, and it draws upon the research literature in higher education and cognitive psychology to illustrate why transparent teaching strategies can meet students' learning needs more successfully than traditional instructional strategies. Each example illustrates how transparent teaching builds trust so that teachers work smarter and students learn more.

Keywords

efficiency, trust, assignments, first day, course notes, courage

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Introduction

Transparent teaching, a sort of honesty and courage in the classroom, involves sharing more knowledge with students, and the result is that instructors and students work smarter. By *transparent teaching* we mean a practice that is intentionally designed and executed to increase the openness between the instructor and student concerning some fundamental assumptions about the course structure, content, or instructor's role. The phrase we are using—transparent teaching—does not regularly appear in education or related literature. One recent book (Amundsen, Saroyan, & Donald, 2004) attributes the concept to Hunkins (1987). Although Hunkins' (1987) brief paper never uses this exact phrase and is not concerned with higher education, his general approach of involving the students in curriculum design and metacognition about learning does reflect the practice of transparent teaching. In addition, some of the issues that surround and permeate transparent teaching are discussed in the higher education literature, such as conveying openness and trust (Bulach, 1993; Brookfield, 2006); demonstrating honest self-reflection (e.g., Wischart, 2004); and inviting students to think like an instructor by teaching psychological concepts (Hunkins, 1987; Gillespie, 2002), using role-playing (Dollarhide, Smith, & Lemberger, 2007), or sharing rationales for course decisions (Lang, 2007).

Transparent teaching is not a new idea: it is a good idea worth a new look. This first section of this article describes three main benefits of transparent teaching. Subsequent sections describe some specific practices of transparent teaching and connect these practices to the larger benefits.

Timely knowledge

Transparent teaching can include practices that reveal knowledge in a timely fashion for the student, knowledge which is normally concealed, inadequately disclosed, or presented at the wrong time. Presumably, every instructor has more knowledge than he or she will ever give to the students in a course. Many faculty experience this as a “coverage problem” and feel pressured to cover as much content as possible (e.g. Bligh, 2000; Weimer, 2002). The trick is to present the right amount of content, in the right way, at the right time, throughout the course (Davis, 1993); the Course Notebook described below is one example of a successful strategy. If coupled with ongoing assessment, using methods such as teaching logs, transparent teaching can make it easier for the instructor to pace the material appropriately because he or she has a more honest appraisal of what the students understand and what they need.

Increased trust

Transparent teaching involves a willingness to be more candid and adventurous in the classroom and to be honestly self-critical. The best teaching does not necessarily involve bringing the details of one’s personal life into the classroom: for example, “My sick dog kept me up all night.” But the best teaching does involve honesty, courage, and solid self-assessment, qualities that build trust between students and faculty (Brookfield, 2006; Curzon-Hobson, 2002). When students recognize these traits, they admire them, and their interest and course satisfaction increase (Allen, Witt, & Wheelless, 2006). In his research on the practices of award-winning teachers, Bain (2004) found that the best teachers were

successful in establishing a high level of trust with their students. Regardless of the instructor’s personality, a recurrent pattern among these faculty members was that they were often open with their students about their own career path and academic struggles. This openness created an atmosphere in the classroom where students were more comfortable assessing and critiquing their own ideas (Bain, 2004).

Improved faculty and student work

Transparent teaching can help teachers work smarter and students learn more. Almost every instructor we know describes his or her time as precious. The dilemma of balancing one’s workload is particularly stressful for new faculty, but it remains vexing for mid-career and senior faculty (Houston, Meyer, & Paewai, 2006; Neumann & Terosky, 2007; Smith, Anderson, & Lovritch, 1995). The practice of transparent teaching can help teachers better manage their time by providing better daily starting points in course preparation. It can also help keep instructors from repeating past mistakes. In addition to fostering smarter, more rewarding teaching, transparent teaching helps students learn more. From the first day of class, as we will describe, students start to own the course experience. Faculty are often discouraged by students who are extrinsically motivated by grades or the promise of a degree, rather than by their own intrinsic desire to learn (e.g. McGuire & Williams, 2002; Svinicki, 2004). Transparent teaching cultivates intrinsic motivation because students perceive that they have a greater amount of control when they know exactly what has to be done for class (Fraser & Treagust, 1986).

Three areas of possible transparent teaching practice, in order of increasing time commitment and complexity for the instructor, are presented here: (1) a first-day-of-class interactive activity, (2) practices that promote student ownership, and (3) a unique Course Notebook. These three practices can lead to better pacing, increased trust, and improved faculty and student work.

The First and Most Important Class Session

Years ago, experimental psychologists showed that what a person best remembers in a series of words or events is that which is first and last (e.g. Glanzer & Cunitz, 1966). Hence, the first day of class is worth planning carefully. In addition to the fact that it is likely to endure in the students' memory, the first day also sets the tone and eases (or potentially heightens) students' uncertainty (Davis, 1993; Nilson, 2007). Most instructors start with the syllabus, going over some or all of it to communicate their expectations. The psychosocial dynamics of the college classroom are established early, and the first day of class provides a prime opportunity to set a standard for productive interactions. A classroom with positive social dynamics where students interact peer-to-peer promotes critical thinking (Tiberius, 1986). Student cohesiveness, or "the extent to which students know, help, and are friendly towards each other" (Fraser & Treagust, 1986, p. 42), is significantly correlated with students' course satisfaction and their sense of ownership. In this first day transparent teaching activity, one of the goals is to foster opportunities for student cohesiveness.

The Activity

The instructor explains that he or she is going to ask several questions usually not asked the first day of class, and then proceeds to ask students to get together in groups of three to four people each. He or she asks them to be accommodating and friendly, and move chairs if need be, to face their group members. (In rooms with fixed chairs or other physical obstacles, the instructor can quickly assign certain students to turn around to speak to others, and so on.)

Once students are arranged, the instructor tells them to introduce themselves and learn a little about one another. The instructor may wish to provide a little additional direction, such as, "Find as many things as possible that you have in common in the next few minutes." The instructor withdraws from being the director;

the room, in almost all circumstances, will fill with chattering and laughter. After a few minutes, the instructor breaks in and writes on the board, "Why are you here today?" The instructor asks the students to continue to work in groups, and asks each group to generate written lists of reasons. The instructor may assign a scribe for the group.

The question "Why are you here today?" accomplishes two main goals. First, it continues the social revelation of each person in the group, and students tend to bring their personal history into contact with why they are taking the course (e.g., "because I want to be an expert in the field like my friend" or "because I failed it once before"). Students also name motivations that other students share, affirming their common concerns and needs (e.g., the course is required, so we're all in the same boat). Second, responding to this question gets students thinking out loud together about the course itself and its place in the curriculum, and this is where the instructor can begin shaping expectations, as explained below.

After sufficient time, the instructor asks each group to pick the two reasons that best represent the group. After a few minutes, the instructor then polls several groups. Depending on the type of course, typical student responses include "it's required," "I want to graduate," "I want to get a job," and the philosophically inclined "because my parents got together and had a baby." The instructor can pursue any of these (except, perhaps, the last one) and relate them back to the purpose of the course. She may also volunteer her own answer to the question. When this is complete, the instructor moves to the second question.

The second question is, "What do you expect from this course?" The method remains the same as for the first question, except that students are instructed to build a list of their top two reasons. The instructor polls several groups not polled earlier. Typical responses vary depending on the type of course, but may include "lots

of reading,” “to be more professionally prepared,” and “to get a good grade.” An instructor can use students’ responses to explain some of the course design decisions and make the instructor’s reasoning more transparent. For example, in answer to “lots of reading,” the instructor may explain that the reading load is sometimes heavy but at other times strategically lighter or that the reading load has been successfully tested with students in past courses. In general, this question lets the instructor correct erroneous assumptions and respond both to correct expectations by affirming them and to fears by offering encouragement.

The third and final question brings the discussion back around to the social dimension, especially as it relates to student needs. With “What do you expect from the instructor?” students are encouraged to think honestly about what the instructor can provide to support their learning, to be more comfortable in the classroom, and so on. The instructor also gets a chance to distinguish him- or herself from other instructors or to justify a particular pedagogical approach. Some common responses include “not to be boring,” “to be fair,” “to be available for questions,” “not to talk down to us,” and “to be clear in explaining assignments.” Each of these provides a golden opportunity for the instructor to explain briefly his or her expectations of students and pedagogical style. For example, “I can explain assignments better if you are willing to ask good questions about the assignments and start working on them in a timely way.”

Benefits

The general advantage of starting the first day of class this way and then handing out the syllabus is that it addresses the social experiences (such as meeting new peers and getting to know the instructor) that would otherwise color anything the instructor would do anyway. The instructor needs some courage and sense of adventure to start a course this way, but students recognize the risk, appreciate it, and are generally very

cooperative. Courage is needed because the comments are unpredictable. Once a comment is made public—for example, “all instructors here tend to talk down to us,”—students expect and deserve an appropriate response.

There are also a number of specific benefits to creating this unique first class day experience, some of which have been mentioned above. As the instructor responds to discussion results, students get the sense that the instructor wants to hear their views. Putting a value on what students have to say this early in the relationship can set the tone for the whole course (Nilson, 2007). The instructor learns some names and gets an initial feel for personalities. Course expectations are affirmed or erroneous ones redefined. For some courses, the “this course is required” phenomenon or the “I have to be here” phenomenon is addressed right away. For example, the class can consider who requires it. It turns out that a full answer to this question includes the student as one who requires it of him- or herself.

If this activity is not commonplace at one’s institution, it has the potential to yield even greater benefits. If the situation on the first day of class is familiar and routine, then students rely on well-established scripts or schemas for what is likely to happen, and once these scripts are activated, students slip easily into automatic pilot mode (Bargh, 1997; Langer, 1997). If, however, students are faced initially with the unexpected and unusual, they are more likely to be actively engaged and attentive (Langer, 1997).

The syllabus, introduced last by the instructor, gets a prominent place in activities. By introducing the syllabus last, the instructor still gets the last word on what will happen in the course, the policies, the content, and ways of communicating with the instructor. But by leading with this “What do you expect?” activity, the instructor has demonstrated that she wishes to understand and respect students’ perspectives. As Bain (2004) and others (e.g., Feldman, 1988) have noted, the best

instructors are not necessarily the most active in the classroom, the loudest, the most charismatic, or the best scholars. The best instructors are those who genuinely connect with students. This first day practice promotes connection.

Giving Students Partial Ownership of the Course

The shift from instructor-centered teaching to student-centered teaching that began in the 1990s has manifested itself in a number of ways in higher education classrooms (see Barr & Tagg, 1995). One implication of student-centered teaching is that good instructors look for ways to increase student ownership over the material and the course experience (Weimer, 2002). Mary Huber and Pat Hutchings of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching argue that we need to be training students to become “pedagogical thinkers” so that they are “able to construct for themselves (and sometimes for others) activities that allow learning, growth, and change” (Huber & Hutchings, 2005, p. 188). Several authors have written about the challenges of learner-centered teaching and the problems that faculty sometimes face when students take a more directive role in their learning (Felder & Brent, 1996; Robertson, 2003; Weimer, 2002), but these authors consistently conclude that the benefits outweigh the obstacles. There are many possibilities, but we will focus on two techniques that accord with transparent teaching: one concerned with interdisciplinary texts and another with construction of a major assignment.

Interdisciplinary Texts

The first transparent teaching technique that increases student ownership involves drawing connections around interdisciplinary texts. Students assume that economics books are read in economics courses, biology books in biology courses, sociology books in sociology courses, and so on. Many instructors, perhaps implicitly, also assume that this intra-disciplinary cohesion applies in their own course. There is the potential to

deepen learning by showing interdisciplinary cohesion using texts outside the discipline: for example, a novel in a biology course, a psychology article in an English course, or a philosophy book in a communications course. When the biologist reads a novel, as in the first example, he or she may see the wonderful connection with a fundamental puzzle in contemporary biology. But the instructor may wonder how to bring this book into the course, given prevailing assumptions. How does one break through these assumptions?

The best justification for why such a text is used in a course does not necessarily have to come from the instructor. In fact, a number of researchers are calling for pedagogical approaches that invite students to draw more of the connections themselves (Huber & Hutchings, 2005; Schneider & Schoenberg, 1999). If the text truly relates to the current course material, students will see it and provide a justification, supplemented later by the instructor. As long as students have read some of the text prior to the class session, the first question to ask is, “Why are we reading this?” Or more exactly, “Why would someone in a course such as this read this text?” Students can respond in open class session, or better, in small groups. Students are increasingly eager to participate in group discussions that make connections between the text they are reading in one course and the concepts they are learning in other courses (NSSE, 2007; Dowds, 1998).

Because of the prevailing assumptions mentioned above, and the possibility that students may take this as an opportunity to question the structure of the course or competency of the instructor, this transparency takes a certain amount of courage on the part of the instructor. The instructor must be ready for some responses such as, “I don’t see what this has to do with our subject” and “This text belongs in another type of course, not ours.” The instructor may respond with, “When we are finished, you may still believe that, but let’s see what some other students have to say.” After students have weighed

in, the instructor now has themes to develop regarding the reading, many of which, no doubt, were already anticipated by the instructor. If important themes have been missed or left undeveloped, the instructor can query students about them or simply deliver them.

One result of this practice is that the instructor feels more equipped to use interdisciplinary texts as part of the learning experience. The instructor places him- or herself in the position of co-explorer with the students, willing to learn from them about the significance of the book. A main aspect of transparency here is that students are being asked to do more than just respond to the text: they are being asked to question the legitimacy of the instructor's selection, a text they were required to buy and will be assessed on. Typically, these judgments are not open for general discussion. In addition to a certain amount of bravery, this transparency invites playfulness in teaching and learning. If a discipline is truly important in human experience or affairs, then it relates to most other disciplines outside of its core domain. Allowing students to arrive at this relevancy themselves can lead to an exciting and potentially profound learning experience.

Constructing an Assignment

A second way to give students more ownership over their learning experience is to ask them to help shape a major assignment, such as a paper, oral presentation, or poster. Researchers have begun to study the benefits of involving students in the assessment of their own work, and there are potential gains for both students and faculty: students learn to make more objective judgments and generally show greater learning and better performance in their coursework (Orsmond, Merry, & Reiling, 2002; Rust, Price, & O'Donovan, 2003), and faculty can learn to make tacit knowledge that is usually difficult to express more explicit, through the discussion and negotiation of grading standards with students (Rust, et al., 2003).

Here is a possible scenario: Students have just completed a series of reading assignments, and the instructor has conducted learning activities related to this module. The instructor then asks the group to contribute to the assignment design: "You know you have to write a four page paper, and that it has to feature this book we read by Smith, but beyond that, what other requirements should the paper have, or what shape should the assignment take?" An instructor should not be surprised to see some stunned and confused looks when students first hear this kind of question. Depending on the type of course, bringing students into the formation of some assignments is proper, because they are the ones who are doing the work, and they generally take pride in what they produce. Some students might catch on very quickly and start to announce credible requirements, topics, and so on. If not, the instructor must be prepared to lead the students through thinking about the assignment. For example, questions like, "We didn't spend as much time on the reading by Jones. Do you think we should require Jones in the paper as well?" and "It seems like Krill's concept of 'X' was important. Don't you think that should be included in any paper?" could give them some initial direction. The instructor who is prepared to be flexible still retains the power to say no to certain requests. For example, if a student responds with "We should get to do joint papers with partners if we want," the instructor may or may not agree and can respond that he or she will think about it. No decisions need to be made on the spot; however, the instructor can draw some lines immediately. For example, if a student responds, "I would like us to be able to do an oral report instead of a paper," and this is outside of the instructor's goals in this course, the instructor can say, "No, sorry, that's not going to be an option," perhaps adding, "because one of our main goals in the course is improving writing in this subject area." Usually, students end up constructing the kind of paper that is reasonable and makes sense given their previous work in the course and

their perception of the expectations of the instructor. Because they helped design it, they are likely to be more invested in the assignment.

What we are describing here is more than a discussion of an assignment's criteria: it could involve building an entire major assignment and might open up to general discussion the evaluation process that leads to students' final course grades. In the case of the interdisciplinary text, it is possible that the instructor's rationale for including the text may undergo severe student critique. Even so, these transparent teaching practices do not equate to ceding final intellectual and managerial authority for the structure of the course to the students. These practices do mean allowing students to feel like they have more ownership in their own learning process.

Giving Students the Notes

A third practice that embodies transparent teaching concerns the disclosure of one's lecture notes. Before the course begins, the instructor makes arrangements to provide a set of notes that covers the key elements, concepts, diagrams, etc. to be covered throughout the course. Most instructors have notes for themselves, and it is appropriate that some of this information remains in their sole possession. But many instructors in lecture classes use notes in the classroom and expect students to transcribe and reorganize this aural information into good notes comparable to the original. Felder and Brent (1996) describe this process rather bluntly:

Much of what happens in most classes is a waste of everyone's time. It is neither teaching nor learning. It is stenography. Instructors recite their course notes and transcribe them onto the board, the students do their best to transcribe as much as they can into their notebooks, and the information flowing from one set of notes to the other does not pass through anyone's brain. (Felder & Brent, 1996, p. 44)

Undergraduate note-taking abilities are typically poor: on average, students record only about 30% of the ideas described in a lecture (e.g. Kierwa & Benton, 1988) and first-year students capture an abysmal 11% of the key ideas (Kiewra, 1985). The challenge to transcribe rapidly spoken ideas is even greater for non-native English speakers, and these students occupy a growing number of seats in many classrooms. If it is important for the students to write down definitions, processes, and conceptual relations, and students' grades on exams are largely determined by how well students know the instructor's notes, then the instructor should guarantee that there are fewer misunderstandings by providing a structure that clarifies which definitions, processes, diagrams, and so on, are priorities.

Before we explain this last transparent teaching practice, we should clarify that we are well aware of the literature on the importance of active construction of knowledge (e.g. Bean, 2001; Bligh, 2000; National Research Council, 2000) and well versed in the research on how note-taking affects retention and transfer of information (e.g. Barnett, 2003; Kobayashi, 2006). We are not proposing that faculty provide all information so that students can simply sit passively in class (or worse yet, not attend class at all). Rather, we look to the note-literature to identify how different types of study-aids support different types of student learning. Research indicates if students are simply going to be tested on their recall and recognition of basic facts from a class, then students perform better when they have a full set of instructors' notes to review than if they have no instructor notes and have to rely on notes they have taken themselves (Kierwa, 1985). If, however, students are going to be tested on their ability to synthesize or analyze the concepts presented in class, both skills which require higher-order thinking, then students are best served by having a partial skeleton of the notes with key headings (Potts, 1993) and ample room for students to write down the key examples. In addition to

better performance on exams, students also remain more attentive in class and are better at applying concepts to practical situations when they have skeletal notes from the instructor (Russell, Caris, Harris, & Hendricson, 1983).

Course Notebook

In light of this research, the transparent teaching practice that we endorse is to provide students with basic notes outlining the skeletal information that the instructor would have offered on the board. (For additional guidelines on providing skeletal notes, see Kiewra, 1985; Kobayashi, 2006; Russell et al., 1983). Specifically, we recommend creating a Course Notebook prior to the start of the course. (For skills-oriented classes, it can be a Course Workbook.) Students would bring this soft-bound book to class just like any other textbook needed that day. It would contain a syllabus, including course schedule, policies, justifications for the policies (if needed), printed in-class displays such as overhead transparencies, PowerPoint, typical formulations that the instructor expects to write on the board, and assignments.

The Benefits

There are several advantages for students. First, there is less frantic note-taking, and more genuine listening, including eye contact with the instructor. Second, students have a ready-made, very handy “notebook” on which to take additional, more specific notes. These additional notes are not like regular notes that fill a usually disjointed student notebook. The student can insert additional thoughts into the instructor-prepared notes exactly where they are most relevant. This means that later, when studying the notes, students have a firmer context for their own thoughts recorded while they were listening. Their written notes are anchored on the backbone of the instructor’s previously formulated, correctly outlined notes. Third, because students already have the notes and can be encouraged to look

at them as they prepare for class that day, there are more advanced student discussions and better student questions. Even if the notes are not the kind that students could read and understand ahead of time, there is still better opportunity for more advanced discussion in class since students are not frantically writing large swaths of notes; simply put, there is more time for such discussion. Fourth, important points are sure to be in students’ hands exactly as the instructor wants them to be. Definitions, explanations of processes or cycles, statistics, and exegeses of difficult texts are all formulated exactly as the instructor wants them to be, which means that the student can have confidence in the information.

Distributing appropriate notes also holds distinct advantages for the instructor. In addition to the obvious benefit of better learning on the part of students, creating a Course Notebook or otherwise organizing and making available in class most of the instructor’s own notes results in more efficient class management. First, the instructor’s own files become more organized. The instructor must make distinctions among the crucial, merely important, and peripheral and appropriately group these resources for the student. There will generally be two kinds of unused material: The instructors’ own personal working notes (to be used in class) and left-over, peripheral material. This classification of student-held notes, instructor-held notes, and unused notes is likely to ease instructor stress about organization, but it is also beneficial because it is more efficient, as the next point shows.

The second advantage to giving away most of the instructor’s notes in an organized fashion is that updating or refining course content is much easier. For example, a Course Notebook is prepared once and then simply modified in future terms. This saves time, minimizes errors of omission in course content, and allows a higher-level starting point for course improvement. A Course Notebook or similar instrument lets

the instructor work from a structured approach to the material either to develop the structure, deepening its utility for students, or to completely reject the current arrangement and content of material for a course. This pedagogical reflection and action is much less efficient if the instructor is starting from scratch each time or is working from disorganized notes or files.

Third, the course appears more organized to students. This is obviously an advantage to students, but it is also an advantage to the instructor. The perception and, one would suppose, the reality of a better organized course translates into more student independence since there is less remedial explanation, which frees instructor time. Also, the perception of a better organized course is likely to raise student satisfaction, which is professionally beneficial for the instructor. That is, students will rate or evaluate the course as “more organized,” and this is often one of the assessments administrators use to determine good teaching.

Fourth, in a Course Notebook the instructor can include special elaborations on policy without weighing down the syllabus. These might include general directions and expectations for term papers, justification for attendance policies, and examples of plagiarism. The instructor could also include additional information about resources such as writing or counseling centers, supplemental texts, biographies, history time-lines, and pertinent quotes.

Practical Considerations and Conclusions

This article has identified three teaching practices in light of the higher education literature and has underlined how these practices improve the timeliness of the material, the trust between students and instructors, and the quality of the learning and teaching that occurs. These three types of transparent teaching practices – the first-day-of-class activity that clarifies student expectations, the instructional practices that promote student ownership, and the Course Notebook

that organizes essential materials – can be stand-alone practices. In other words, instructors can integrate one or two of these practices into their teaching without the others, based on their own time and interests. The first-day-of-class activity, for example, requires the least amount of preparation time for the instructor, so it may be attractive as a starting point, whereas the Course Notebook probably takes the greatest amount of preparation time, but can also yield the greatest time-management benefits in the course.

There are other practices that could be classified as transparent teaching. In Small Group Instructional Diagnosis, a midcourse evaluation technique, the instructor invites a teaching center professional into class to interview students while the instructor is not present, in order to assess a specific area of concern. This professional serves as a window between the instructor and the students so they can see each other more clearly while the course is continuing (Clark & Redmond, 1982). In another activity, in order to make discussion dynamics transparent, an instructor can guide students through a four-corners activity by asking students how they typically contribute to the class discussion (Huston, in press). The instructor assigns a label to each corner of the room: 1) “talks a lot,” 2) “mostly listens,” 3) “waits until I have something important to say,” or 4) “tends to challenge what’s being said.” Students pick their typical contribution style and stand in that corner, and then a productive discussion can occur around why some people typically “talk a lot” and others “tend to challenge.” In another practice, an instructor reveals disciplinary assumptions by inviting another instructor into class for an unscripted, one-on-one debate – an instructor from a rival domain within the discipline or from another discipline (Satterfield & Abramson, 1998). For example, a gestalt psychologist invites a cognitive scientist, or a criminal justice instructor invites a social work instructor. In dealing with problem students, straight talk, laying bare the job of the instructor

and the welfare of the class, can also be transparent teaching (Arvidson, 2008).

In all three of the practices described in this paper, the instructor and the course open up for the student in a way that deepens learning and makes teaching more rewarding. Yet transparent teaching does not mean that one exposes all or opens up too much socially. For example, the instructor is the final voice on course expectations on the first day of class and withholds some appropriate amount of detail from the notes delivered to students. Applying the concept of transparent teaching in the use of interdisciplinary texts and assignment construction has certain calculated risks, but the payoff in refreshing a course for the students or a career for the instructor can be large. Transparent teaching can challenge the instructor to change what actually happens in the classroom day to day. For example, the practice of giving students most of the notes means that the instructor must be mentally prepared for more advanced discussion and less lecture. The instructor must become practiced at interspersing lecture with meaningful small group discussions (dyads, triads, etc.) and with leading open class discussions on creative or challenging questions or problems. Because the students have already been delivered the notes, they are ready for the next level of education in which they critically own these concepts, principles, or processes. This could mean applying these concepts or processes in hypothetical scenarios developed in small-group work, deepening their understanding of these ideas by trying to contextualize them or challenge them, recreating the problem for themselves that these principles or processes were meant to address, and so on.

Some faculty may be concerned about the balance of power in transparent teaching: if students help craft the requirements for an assignment, will they have a false sense that the class is an egalitarian community? There are actually two concerns hidden in this question. One concern is that when students have more

input, they will assume more power than granted them and challenge the instructor's authority in other areas of the course. Empirical research, however, shows that students are less likely to challenge an instructor's authority when the instructor shows respect for students and more likely to challenge a disrespectful instructor (Boice, 1996). Inviting students to help craft an assignment is a strong demonstration of the instructor's trust and respect and is unlikely, by itself, to invite disruptive behavior. The second implicit concern is about managing students' expectations. Good teaching involves encouraging students to have high but realistic expectations of themselves, of the instructor, and of the course (Huston, 2009). For instance, if seeking students' input on the design of only one assignment, the instructor should be clear that he or she is trying something different for this part of the course so students know what to expect. Communicating clear expectations is an essential part of effective transparent teaching.

Transparent teaching is risky, adventurous, and exciting. It may not be appropriate for every instructor or type of class; but we would argue that it genuinely deepens student learning, increases instructor efficiency, and enhances job satisfaction. It is therefore worthwhile to incorporate into one's teaching some level of the practice of transparency. ■■

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Mentoring First-Year Students in Composition: Tapping Role Construction to Teach

Jim Henry, Holly Huff Bruland, and Ryan Omizo

Abstract

MA students in English mentored first-year composition students by attending all classes with them and then meeting with them throughout the semester in individual conferences, which they documented on standardized logs. Exhaustive analysis of the logs revealed a dozen different roles that mentors played, whether building rapport or tracking students' development or coaching students on appropriate college classroom behavior. Selected roles are discussed as they clearly influenced classroom practices, and the authors reflect on these roles and their influence on teaching from three institutional vantage points: mentor, instructor, program director. Ideas for tapping such role construction in mentored and non-mentored classrooms alike are offered for teachers in other institutional contexts and other disciplines.

Keywords

mentoring, classroom role construction, first-year students, composition, individual conference documentation

Brief Introduction to Mentoring

The practice of mentoring enjoys increasing popularity on college campuses, whether its aim is to recruit and maintain students for certain disciplines (Quinn, Muldoon, & Hollingworth, 2002); support "at-risk" students (Campbell & Campbell, 2007; Sorrentino, 2007), economically disadvantaged students (Lee, 1999), "non-traditional" students (Langer, 2001) or demographically under-represented students (Redmond, 1990; Schwitzer & Thomas, 1998); increase struggling learners' senses of self-efficacy (Margolis, 2005; Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001); bolster student retention (Drew, 1990; Sydow, & Sandel, 1998); or design programs for novice teachers and graduate teaching assistants (Kajs, 2002; Fletcher & Barrett, 2004; Atkinson & Colby, 2006). Andy Roberts (2000) has reviewed the literature across such disparate applications to derive essential attributes of mentoring: a process; a supportive relationship; a helping process; a teaching-learning process; a reflective process; a career development process; a formalized process; and a role constructed by or for a mentor (p. 145). Teachers in all disciplines, whether they are embarking on

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a formal mentoring initiative or just seeking to tap the power of mentoring in their own teaching, can benefit from pondering the *roles* constructed by or for a mentor. At the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, we piloted four sections of mentored first-year composition in preparation for a full-blown initiative, and our documentation of these pilots revealed at least a dozen recurrent roles constructed for and by mentors. These roles show mentors to be positioned vis-à-vis incoming students, the instructors of record, and the institution in such a way as to be able to facilitate learning experiences and institutional insights that might not happen otherwise in a first-year course. Our analysis of these pilots for trends and patterns is presented below, followed by reflections on this analysis as it has informed our understandings and practices of teaching from three viewpoints: mentor, instructor, and program director. We offer the analysis and reflections to spark ideas about teaching that leverage a student-centeredness prevalent in the literature on mentoring.

Our Institutional Context

The field of Composition has recently witnessed the rise of “on-location tutoring” (Spigelman & Grobman, 2005) to assist first-year composition students in English 100. Our local practice emerged in tandem with eliminating a placement exam that identified students in need of extra tutoring and mainstreamed five such students per section of twenty into English 100. The placement had proven uneven in identifying those students most in need of extra help, whose challenges often did not show up on this one-shot exam yet whose performances were sub-par in the classroom. And even those students whose performances were satisfactory, we reasoned, might benefit from extra individual coaching out of class, above and beyond any required conferences with an instructor. Our review of the on-location tutoring literature had alerted us to the possibilities for enhanced instruction offered by placing an

advanced student in the classroom to mentor first-year students, and in spring 2007 our English Department Chair supported four pilot sections in which MA students were to provide such instruction.

Our first-year composition course resembles that of other research universities in many ways (we offer around 100 sections per year, each with a cap of 20 students), yet in other ways resembles that of small colleges (all full-time English faculty teach the course at least once every fourth semester, and adjunct labor is kept to a minimum). We have no standardized syllabus and no required textbooks, but we do have established “hallmarks” for English 100, which at UHM refer to agreed-upon features of every General Education course. As determined by our campus General Education Committee, each section is expected to furnish composition experiences demonstrating that students are meeting these hallmarks—whether the instructor hails from creative writing, literary studies, cultural studies, or rhetoric and composition, our areas of study at the graduate level.

Our student population is remarkably diverse, as revealed by the following ethnic breakdown: 27% Caucasian, 47% Asian (including Japanese, Filipino, Chinese, Mixed Asian, Korean, Other Asian, Vietnamese, Indian subcontinental, Thai, and Laotian, in descending order), 12% Pacific Islander (predominantly Hawaiian/part Hawaiian, yet including Samoan, Other Pacific Islander, Mixed Pacific Islander, Guam/Cham, Micronesian, and Tongan), 10% Mixed, 3% Hispanic, and 1% African American (University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 2006). These percentages, however, fail to capture what has become vernacularly known as “local culture” or the status of “being local,” i.e. born and/or raised in Hawai'i, and traditionally positioned *contra* “continental” or U. S. “mainland” culture. These counter-positionings could derive from perceived language differences (Hawai'i Creole English versus Standard English), cultural difference (the largely

Asian-Pacific Islander-influenced culture versus white, African-American, or Hispanic cultures), and national geography (the periphery of the Pacific Rim versus the center of the U. S. mainland). Instructors at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa have long observed that these cultural dynamics and tensions often get played out in the context of the classrooms, reverberating in both productive and problematic ways; as mentors were even closer to the ground, so to speak, than instructors, they often became more quickly and acutely aware of such classroom dynamics, sometimes communicating their detailed observations to instructors as a means of brainstorming pedagogical strategies. As it turns out, two of our mentors were themselves "local" and two were not (one was from the continental U. S., while another was European), and they had varying experiences with these cultural dynamics: in some cases, particularly when a paper assignment asked students to address issues pertaining specifically to Hawai'i, mentors assisted students who were new to Hawai'i in educating themselves about the complexities of Hawaiian history and contemporary culture; in other cases, students were able to teach mentors about the nuances of Hawaiian culture, resulting in a kind of mentoring that involves a genuine two-way exchange.

Our Mentored Classrooms and Roles That Emerged

At the outset of our pilot program, we had several goals. Foremost was to gauge the effectiveness of the mentoring in improving student writing and classroom performance and to discern whether our pilot program might merit a more robust implementation in future semesters. We wanted to document what went on in the mentoring sessions to get a fuller sense of the specific kinds of challenges that students were facing in their composition classrooms, the better to plan workshops for instructors and orientations for those instructors new to our program. We sought above all to enhance first-year students' composition experiences in order to

provide them with a solid foundation for their future writing at the university. Our secondary goal was to provide our MA students, many of whom envisioned academic futures, with this novel kind of classroom experience. We reasoned that these graduate students could benefit enormously themselves by witnessing first-hand an instructor's approach to course design, writing assignments, and classroom activities and by studying students' performances within those classrooms.

Four instructors readily volunteered to try out the mentoring configuration, and we met as a group prior to the start of the semester to discuss our general objectives and to lay out some ground rules: the mentors were not to grade, since we wanted to position them staunchly as coaches rather than judges, nor were they to do anything in the classroom or in conferences that might undermine an instructor's authority. We anticipated moments when a graduate student's teaching philosophy might run counter to that of an instructor, yet we urged the mentors simply to note such moments in their own personal files and ponder them however they might as they continued to enhance their own understanding of composition. Similarly, we anticipated moments when students might try to position mentors—allies as they were—as allied *against* an instructor over a grade or classroom practice. Our caution to mentors when they sensed such maneuvering from students was to help students approach and address the instructor on their own, the better to learn an important skill of being a student that could possibly serve them well in the future.

Four graduate students also readily volunteered to try out the mentoring, accepting offers of 1/4- teaching assistantships that required ten hours of work per week. We counted class attendance as part of this work and otherwise envisioned the graduate students spending 6-8 hours per week in individual conferences with students. We matched instructors and mentors in pairs according to schedule availability and any

preferences grounded in prior work together or an expressed desire to collaborate. All four mentors had previous training and experience in writing center tutoring, and, as might be expected, each mentor enacted her or his role in ways that were often comparable, at times quite different. We set up a standard log for mentors to fill in after each of the student meetings, which we anticipated would be similar in duration to the conferences in our writing center: thirty minutes. As it turned out, many of these conferences lasted much longer, enriched as they were by the rapport that mentors developed with students during the year. Some were shorter, too, because of this rapport and because of the continuity provided by this configuration: a student could sometimes “check in” very quickly with a mentor before or after class, to make sure that he or she was on the right track in following up on a conference.

As might be expected, classroom activities varied greatly across the four sections, as did the individual conferences supplementing these activities. Consider the log completed by Ryan Omizo (see Figure 1, below).

As can be seen, the log format captures information, such as genre called for in the assignment, moment in the semester, stage in a paper’s development, and motivation for the conference, details that in the aggregate already reveal trends of *when* and *how* mentors are called upon to exercise various roles with students. The details included in the prose commentary reveal quite a bit more in the construction of roles for mentor and mentee: how the student judges the paper, how a mentor responds to a student’s self-analysis, how a mentor reminds the student of the “process” pedagogy that prompts revision, how a mentor makes suggestions, how a mentor explains for himself and for others just exactly what a “classical argument” should look like, and so on. In terms of students’ often invisible learning about our institutions and our disciplines, this log captures how a non-English major taps a peer’s approach to writing

in the discipline of English to chart his own revision plans. The mentor is then cast in the role of engaging the student to probe this approach to writing, all the while pondering the very field of English in his own right, as he helps a student interpret a suggestion from a creative writing enthusiast and reconsider it within the realm of argument. Perhaps as importantly, from the perspective of a mentor’s professional development, the log captures the mentor’s own second-guessing as to when and how “dialectical” conferencing should be supplemented by “lecturing.” In the realm of affect, the log conveys a rapport that has developed between mentor and student, as “Alex” makes the gesture of shaking Ryan’s hand after the session.

In short, the logs offered us glimpses into the roles played by mentors as they conducted conferences with different students. Intrigued by these glimpses, we sought to identify recurrent roles across our whole data set. We assembled all 197 of the session logs and proceeded to code them for those kinds of roles identified by mentors in their own logs. This coding produced numerous categories of mentor roles, some of which we later broke down for finer distinctions or merged with other categories for simpler representation. Our composite table, shown in Table 1 (see below), reveals a dozen recurrent roles.

Establishing a mentor-student relationship was perhaps the most important role of all, as determined by the frequency of references to this role in mentors’ logs, many of which documented specific moments in rapport-building, and by comments in an end-of-semester focus-group meeting of mentors. Without this rapport, mentors observed, it was more difficult to coach one on one. One mentor drew on previous professional experience to conduct intake interviews with students, a practice we have incorporated into formal mentor training to signal to students that mentors will be grounding their collaboration in students’ concerns rather than imposing mentors’ own agendas. Alongside

Mentor Form: Data Collection Instrument for Individual Sessions
UH at Mānoa Department of English
Mentoring Initiative, Spring 2007

Mentor: Ryan

Student: Alex

Date: 3/15/2007

Genre of the Assignment, if applicable

(E.g., first person narrative, analysis, research ...)

Classical Argument

How did this session come about?

Required by Instructor (x)Suggested by Instructor Requested by Student Suggested by You

When did this session come about, with respect to the writing assignment?

At the Beginning

In the Middle

(x)Near the End

After Completed

Topic(s) Addressed:

I gave Alex back his paper. He received a B. I told him that he needed to work on his topic sentences and transitions between paragraphs. Alex conceded that he was unhappy with what he turned in, feeling that it was “hashed,” “unorganized.” I reminded him that he could revise and resubmit the essay before the end of the term.

Alex did not have a draft. He did have an outline. I told him to tell me about his topic. Alex said that he had discussed the topic of abortion with Professor Smith, but decided to change to the legalization of performance enhancing drugs such as steroids, human growth hormones, and other derivatives. Alex understood the difficult case he was making. He also said that he had discussed the topic with a friend who was an English major and recommended that he write to “be heard” rather than write for persuasion. This bemused me so I asked Alex to explain. Alex said that because his argument was going to be an impossible, uphill battle, he was striving to simply capture the audience’s attention with his claim. I told him that this was an interesting tactic which could work in select cases—perhaps in a satiric and ironic essay like Swift’s A Modest Proposal. However, in a classical argument he should still strive to be deliberate, judicial in his use of counter-arguments, and call for some type of action, even if it was a call for awareness and reassessment. In other words, I instructed him to conform to the rigor of the assignment.

Alex specific case: the right to use steroids should be open to all who wish to improve their body’s performance or image. Body building and weight lifting organization can then police themselves.

--I asked Alex to recall the stasis exercise and think about jurisdiction; specifically, if the case for the legalization of steroids should be confined to issues of body building and strength competitions. I suggested that the issue had much higher stakes. He need only look at recent congressional hearings on steroids in sports.

--I then told Alex that he would need to widen his purview because it would be difficult to argue for the legalization of steroids for aesthetic reasons alone. What he needed to do was shift the ground of the argument and question why steroids were regulated in the first place. Alex said that the proscription intended to protect the public from bodily harm. I asked him to examine the facts—how many people have died directly from steroid use? He said there were

continued

no proven cases, but many diseases and health problems were linked to steroid use. I then asked him to think about the gravity of the problem. Is the government really trying to protect the country from the ills of steroid use? If protecting the public from harming itself was really the government's *raison d'être*, then the government would have banned cigarettes and alcohol a long time ago. The real complaint against steroids is that it fosters cheating. I asked Alex to consider if it's the government's job to protect the public from athletes cheating in sports?

Brief Reflections on the Session:

Did the session seem successful to you? Why or why not?

As was the case in our last session, Alex thanked me and shook my hand. I realize, however, that I lectured quite a bit during our session. It progressed to the point that I lost track of Alex in the room; I was instead pursuing my own arguments, my own train of thought, my own voice. All the while, Alex took notes. I have reservations about this trend, although I do feel that it is my responsibility to talk. And there are many times when straight lecturing seems more successful than a dialectical exchange.

Any ideas for following up with this student? Any ideas for help this student needs that is beyond your ability (or responsibility)?

None at this time. Alex seems to be progressing fine in the class.

Figure 1. Standardized Documentation Form for Mentors

building rapport, mentors consciously attempted to build students' self-confidence by reassuring them about progress and helping them to interpret copious commentary on a draft as a *good* thing. Such work in the affective realm enabled them to occupy collaborative positions more easily; it would seem, based on the numbers of ways in which mentors documented work that clearly showed a give-and-take between mentor and student. In a similar vein, taking the time to track a student's progress—whether to note current performance as superior to earlier performance or to take stock of that performance as a foundation for future work—constituted a kind of “meta” discourse on classroom work that might very well stoke students' capacity for self-appraisal.

Mentors were very good at analyzing a paper's shortcomings—experienced as they were in this kind of analysis—yet in their roles as teachers in this one-on-one context they often documented drawing on their

experiences as students in more personal and even idiosyncratic ways, passing along mnemonics, for example, or using personal anecdotes about being a student. In Ryan Omizo's case, he found himself on more than one occasion recommending a “best course of action” to a student based on his own more experienced and more informed interpretation of the syllabus and its implications. Teaching of this kind possibly opened the door for more general teaching about how to “be a student” at the college level—a skill perhaps more effectively conveyed by a peer than by an authority figure. Alongside such teaching about college “culture” and its negotiation, mentors were also positioned to be able to identify not only students' individual challenges but also trends across the class, which in some cases enabled them to alert the course instructor to a need to review an assignment or expectations during class time. Coupled with the many instances in which mentors “wondered” about student performances (or their own) in their logs, such

Mentors' Roles

- establishing a mentor-student relationship, building rapport
- teaching (mnemonics, techniques, approaches, rhetorical concepts such as audience)—includes performing a particular kind of audience for students and self-consciously applying disciplinary thought
- analyzing a paper's perceived weaknesses or students' gaps in knowledge
- supplying information (on missed classes, on the English department, on the campus and services)
- building students' confidence (by placing successive completed assignments side by side)
- allying themselves with students (to "get points" or raise a grade through revision; to request an extension)
- collaborating with students (identifying questions and developing them, not imposing their own ideas, helping students understand a fundamental principle about writing [not "getting the right answer"], bouncing ideas, talking it through, prompting, encouraging, helping organize thoughts, enriching [the mentor's] appreciation of course material)
- tracking students' developments & progress (to note improvement; to "build," to prepare for the future)
- interpreting certain behavior as deleterious
- noting inadequate preparation for the conference (coming with no agenda or no writing)
- noting trends & patterns across the class (e.g., students still not understanding the nature of the conferences, students not quite understanding the assignment)
- wondering how to adapt/change sessions (by "getting feedback," by determining what a student needs; to overcome recalcitrance, to boost level of student reasoning, to meet students' expectations, to help students whose writing/reasoning is already strong)

Table 1. Roles Played by Mentors in Conferences, Based on Mentors' Logs

a pro-active stance helped bolster classroom climates that were themselves already pro-active. Our reflections below, from our respective institutional positions at the time (Ryan Omizo, having completed his MA, is now pursuing a PhD at another institution) seek to extend such a pro-active orientation.

Reflections from a Mentor

Ryan Omizo's log on his conference with Alex suggests several of the coded categories of mentor roles: rapport- building, analyzing strengths and weakness of a paper or idea, bolstering student confidence,

and clarifying the assignment, all of which could be understood under the more general operation of inducting a student into the discourse of academia without sacrificing the student's individual interests in the execution of the admittedly-staid "classical argument" paper. I note that Alex initially broached the topic of abortion, a topic which Ken Macrorie (1985) would term "Engfish," because it was in all likelihood selected as a readily-available "argument," rather than one about which the student really cared. Instead, encouraged by a peer and then by me, Alex gained the confidence to pursue a topic closer to his experiences in competitive

weight-lifting while maintaining the rigor of the assignment. My consultations with Alex allowed him to shed a misplaced comfort in the generic topic of the pro/con paper by validating his urge to write about a topic comfortable to him in his life outside academia but uncomfortable within the precincts of the English 100 classroom. It also helped that I was familiar with his topic and his avocation; indeed, we spent the conclusion of the session chatting about weight-lifting techniques and supplement regimens. While one should take such commonalities between mentors and students as the exception rather than the rule, the proximity in age, culture, and academic experience between mentors and students in this program certainly provide a space in which such connections can flourish, thereby easing student transition into university life.

At the institution where I am completing my PhD, graduate students teach the majority of the first-year writing sections. Such a structure admittedly limits the possibility or viability of a first-year mentoring initiative; however, PhD students are required to complete a “teacher shadowing” course, in which a faculty member mentors new PhD students. The demands of this prerequisite are open-ended, and could include simple classroom observations, lesson-planning, or spot-lecturing. In my case, I was heavily involved in teaching entire sessions, planning lessons, and responding to student drafts. Because mine was a senior-level English class, I functioned less as a midwife to university life than when I was a mentor, but many of the “essential attributes” of mentoring (Roberts, 2000) surfaced nonetheless. I provided another perspective for student work, thereby increasing teaching opportunities; I provided an alternative pedagogical perspective when called to teach; and I filled in gaps in the lesson plans—for example, by providing workshops in Photoshop, of which the professor had little experience. A crucial factor determining my expanded classroom role was my formal role within classroom activities themselves, so that I was not

seen as an outside observer or support staff.

Reflections from an Instructor

After serving as a mentor in the Fall 2006 pre-pilot section (Bruland, 2007) and an assistant administrator for the Spring 2007 pilot sections, I went on to serve as one of the fifteen instructors of record during the first full-fledged version of the mentoring program in Fall 2007. Prior to the new semester, my assigned mentor and I met to review the findings from the pilot study and to plan for our course. As we examined the roles reported by mentors in the pilot study, we wondered to what degree the mentors’ observations of students’ inadequate preparation for and confusion about conferences was an unavoidable result of the mentor’s unfamiliar and frequently-shifting institutional position. We considered to what degree such confusion could be resolved through clear explanations of course materials and follow-up class discussion. Furthermore, as my assigned mentor and I were very close in age, we believed that it would be particularly important to deliberately plan the initial performances of our roles, so that we were sending students consistent visual and textual messages, thereby helping students to approach us with greater confidence and to experience the benefits of working with two individuals who occupy distinct institutional positions. In order to address the gaps in student understanding revealed by the pilot study and to support the range of mentor roles we found in the pilot sections, I adjusted my teaching practices in (at least) three ways: (1) featuring the mentor throughout the syllabus and course website; (2) specifying guidelines for how students should prepare for mentor conferences; and (3) requiring some mentor conferences but also working to create a culture of initiative whereby students would seek the mentor’s help voluntarily.

1. *Featuring the mentor throughout the syllabus and course website.* The mentor and I worked together to modify my course syllabus and website

from a previously non-mentored section of First-Year Composition so that the official course materials would present the mentor as an integral member of the course and out-of-class conferences as an integral dimension of student learning. This revision process began by adding the mentor's name and email address directly below mine in the syllabus headings, as follows:

Instructor's Name: First Last	Instructor's email: name@institution.edu
Mentor's Name: First Last	Mentor's email: name@institution.edu

As students are well-attuned to visual clues, we hoped that this first simple gesture would signal to students that the mentor and instructor work collaboratively but also hierarchically: we wanted to present the mentor as a professional and as a representative of the institution but to also send the message that the mentor is significantly closer to the students' perspective and does not share grading authority with the instructor, a point I explained in the syllabus and re-iterated before every paper assignment. In all, the word "mentor" appeared 14 times in the syllabus, ranging from a description of the mentoring program to explanations of various course policies. I also included a "Mentor Page" on the course website and updated it weekly: this page listed conference policies, the mentor's contact info, and the mentor's available conference slots for the week.

2. Specifying guidelines for how students should prepare for mentor conferences. The mentors in the pilot study observed that many students, even after a semester of college experience, had never attended a professor's office hours. Based upon these findings, the mentor and I realized that many students need to be taught how to prepare for and conduct an academic conference. We came up with a list of written guidelines for attending conferences, including copying conferences dates into a planner, notifying the mentor as soon as possible of

any cancellations with a professionally-written email, bringing all relevant course materials to the conference, writing up a conference agenda with specific questions for the mentor, and leaving the conference with a list of clear action items. In order to reinforce these conference guidelines, students were required to submit a log for each of their four required conferences with the agenda they brought to the conference and the follow-up steps they took after it; to reinforce the logs' importance, they were integrated into the course assessment protocols to count for a small percentage of students' overall grades.

3. Requiring some mentor conferences but also working to create a culture of initiative whereby students would seek the mentor's help voluntarily. To guarantee that all students would receive coaching from the mentor, I required a total of four conferences over the sixteen-week semester. In the pilot study, we learned that all four mentors experienced cycles of conference drought followed by inundations at paper deadlines: to make the mentor's hours more regular and to avail students of the mentor's help during various stages of the writing process, I required that students meet with the mentor for one conference during each of our four major assignments (which roughly translated to one conference per month) and that students schedule these conferences, whenever possible, during different phases of the paper. However, the mentor and I also worked to create a culture of initiative, encouraging students to attend additional conferences through a paper revision policy that allowed them to submit papers for a re-grade if they met with the mentor. In addition, students were presented the opportunity of receiving a half-letter boost to their overall grade for presenting a substantial log of Action Items: these Action Items could be any steps the student took on her own initiative to improve as a writer, including attending additional conferences. Overall, 25% of the students (or 5 out of 20) voluntarily attended additional mentor conferences, with one student attending 8 total conferences.

Reflections From a Program Director

As a program director, I tapped the insights gained from pondering mentors' recurrent roles to take three steps: (1) designing a website to provide mentors and instructors alike with resources to help them in classroom practices; (2) emphasizing in workshops with instructors some practices that could help them become student allies, even as they were tasked with grading; and (3) planning mentor roundtables for the following fall with "wondering" about student performance as a theme.

1. *Designing a campus-specific website with links to recurrently-referenced sites.* Because mentors had documented their frequent need to supply students with more information—not only about the specific class or writing assignment but also about the university and about writing more generally—I realized how much time and energy could be saved for both instructors and mentors if we established a central clearinghouse with links to pertinent information. Our Writing Mentors website has links to resources for instructors and mentors that help first-year composition students get acclimated to the campus culture in ways that support their writing performances, and it can be adapted by teachers at other institutions who are interested in developing similar place-specific sites.

2. *Positioning instructors as student allies.* Though mentors' roles as allies were premised on the fact that they did not grade, we reflected on the exercise of "ally roles" by instructors in specific classroom contexts. In classrooms that use criterion-referenced rubrics for grading papers, for example, instructors can easily position the criteria (rather than themselves) as judges to be convinced and then work with students to help them meet these criteria in a process-based approach to revision. In the realm of editing and proofreading, instructors can enhance students' self-reliance by requiring them to compose their own personalized editing checklists, based on errors pointed out by others. The

instructor becomes an ally in helping the student build and apply such checklists, shifting out of the role of copyeditor whose marks are often misunderstood or not internalized by students. In workshops with faculty, we have stressed the value of these two practices. We have also drawn on the aggregate data on stages when a conference was solicited, to alert faculty to the fact that students often do not recognize the need or value of conferences for goals other than "editing" and to stress to faculty the power of integrating individual conferences—even if brief—at the beginning of a new assignment and during drafting, too.

3. *Positioning mentors to wonder about student performances.* The number of times that our mentors introduced observations about students' performances with some version of "*I wonder if...*" prompted me to include this orienting principle in conceptualizing roundtables for the following fall during which I could review some tenets of Composition Studies and mentors could share challenges and successes. In fact, I even included the requirement to "wonder" about students' performances in mentors' job descriptions. This orientation captures a basic tenet of "student-centeredness" from the field of Composition as I understand it and from the mentoring literature, and it prompts graduate students, regardless of their own areas of concentration, to approach students as complex individuals whose perceived shortcomings in performance may derive from any of a number of factors, many of which are invisible to us as instructors. Delaying a rush to judgment through such wondering can help us in all of our instructional capacities take extra steps to find out *in collaboration with* students how best to help them progress.

Mentoring Across the Curriculum

Though our mentoring took place in the context of a Composition course, our lessons learned can be tapped by instructors across the curriculum, even if they are not aided by a mentor and even when teaching in

classrooms with a student/teacher ratio greater than 20:1. As more and more instructors use online syllabi in place of paper, links such as we have included on our website can provide students with virtual support to supplement the face-to-face, thus tapping mentoring's attribute of "a supportive relationship." Specific details on classroom protocol such as included above by Holly Bruland, moreover, enable visual learners or those who process discourse more slowly than others to ponder the pedagogy underpinning such protocol at their own pace, perhaps to connect with it more effectively and to understand that at some basic level, we teachers *do* seek to ally ourselves with students in the educational venture. Whether or not we have instituted mentoring as a *formalized process*—to return to Roberts' essential attributes—we can tap other attributes such as "a helping process" and "a reflective process" to realize another of mentoring's attributes: "a teaching-learning process." The demands of staying current in our fields and mustering adequate coverage can sometimes cause us to neglect this important element of classroom practice, yet seeking to mentor even as we teach obliges us to learn about our students, and such learning is certain to fuel ideas for enhanced teaching. ■■■

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How Generational Theory Can Improve Teaching: Strategies for Working with the “Millennials”

Michael Wilson & Leslie E. Gerber

Abstract

This article applies recent writing on the “Millennial Generation” to a range of pedagogical issues. Born between 1982 and 2003 and also known as Generation Y, the Millennials have been hailed as a new “Great Generation.” According to William Strauss and Neil Howe, they display ambition, confidence, optimism, and a capacity for high-level cooperative work. At the same time, they measure high on scales of stress, conventionality, and over-reliance on parents. This internally complex set of traits calls for a variety of nuanced pedagogies, including balancing students’ need for overall clarity with their sense of competence in co-designing key aspects of their educational experience. Incorporating a wide range of generational studies, including the latest (2008) publications in this area, the authors offer a variety of teaching strategies, some arising out of their own primary research.

Keywords

teaching, pedagogy, online, Millennials, Generation Y

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Introduction

We have been studying and teaching generational theory, both as an end in itself and as a source of new insights on teaching. Like many readers of this journal, we serve mostly “traditional” college students between 18 and 24. In generational terms, our classes brim with late-arriving Millennials—part of a birth cohort that started life between 1982 and 2003.¹ As we work to advance our skills as instructors—in traditional, on-line, and hybrid contexts—our findings about this generation have become strikingly salient. In what follows, we offer a set of teaching strategies derived from the interaction of this theoretical literature and our various classroom experiences. Briefly and generally characterized, we recommend four pedagogical “adaptations” to the Millennial “personality”: enhanced clarity of both course structure and assignments; student participation in course design; pre-planned measures to reduce stress; and rigorous attention to the ethics of learning.

The Seven “Distinguishing Traits” of the Millennial Generation

The most widely accepted recent source in this area is the work of William Strauss and Neil Howe (1992), whose *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069* launched a series of books and a major consultancy firm.² Driven both by the logic of their generational scheme and by observations of youth culture in the late 1990s, Strauss and Howe (2000) argued that post-Generation X children are an “heroic generation” similar to their celebrated “GI Generation” forebears.³ Because Strauss and Howe see American history as a complex repetition of four generational types—Idealist, Reactive, Civic, and Adaptive—they tend to accentuate generational differences. Thus, the Millennials are “a direct reversal from the trends associated with Boomers” and “represent a sharp break from the traits that are associated with Generation X” (pp. 44-45). Idealists-in-the-making, Millennials are powerfully shaped by parental reaction to the perceived laxness of the Sixties and Seventies. Put another way, the rise of cultural and political conservatism in the U.S. is the most formative context of their upbringing.

In their now-canonical *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (Strauss & Howe, 2000), the authors identified seven key traits. We use these traits as both a framework and point of departure, making frequent references to the authors' influential later writings on the Millennials in the classroom.⁴ While we obviously admire the Strauss and Howe's portrait of Gen Y, we find it wanting in a number of respects, and this will become evident as we share some of our own research as well as the perspectives of other theorists. One crucial shortcoming warrants comment at this juncture, however. We believe that Strauss and Howe's failure to deal adequately with the demographics and social reality of race, ethnicity and class in American society limits the usefulness of their work. Thus, colleague-readers who work in pluralistic (urban,

multi-racial, ethnically diverse) settings will occasionally find our analysis deficient. At the same time, some of the apparently-inapplicable traits we examine “drift” and “morph” interestingly when expressed in “minority” cultural contexts.⁵

Special

Unlike the Gen-Xers, a smaller group born during a period of relative social indifference to children, Millennials are a huge demographic, and one that was eagerly anticipated by their parents.⁶ They are “the largest, healthiest, and most cared-for generation in American history” (Strauss & Howe, 2000, p.76). While having children seemed problematic—or even irresponsible—for many couples in the 1970's, a surprising cultural change-of-mind occurred thereafter, resulting in “a newfound love of children” (p. 80). This seismic shift was signaled in part by the last-chance efforts of highly-educated Boomer couples to conceive, with birthrates for women over forty skyrocketing between 1981 and 1997 (p. 79). Quite naturally, after all this work, parents were ready to celebrate their kids and sacrifice heavily for them. In turn, children have responded appreciatively. For example, a 2007 AP/MTV poll of 1,280 Millennials found that “spending time with family” was the top answer to the question, “What makes you happy?” (Noveck & Tompson, 2007).⁷

Sheltered

Since current media expose youth to pretty much *everything*, it is tempting to think of them as hardened veterans of the world. In fact, they have been more protected from harm than any generation in American history, as a dense structure of new regulations now guards children and adolescents. Strauss and Howe (2000) detail these regulations, noting that Millennials have been “buckled, watched, fussed over, and fenced in by wall-to-wall rules and chaperones” (p. 119). So thoroughgoing is this sheltering effort that a backlash seems underway. Thus, the ultra-popular *Parenting Teens*

with Love & Logic (2006) warns fathers and mothers against “helicopter” strategies when “braving the challenges of the Millennial Generation” (p.37). The title of Hara Marano’s recent *A Nation of Wimps: The High Cost of Invasive Parenting* (2008) pungently captures the mood.

Confident

Young adults in the U.S. are a happy lot—or so polls indicate. According to Jocelyn Noveck and Trevor Tompson, a recent survey found that “72 percent of [Millennial] whites say they’re happy with life in general...” (2007, n.p.a.).⁸ They also are optimistic about their future prospects, particularly their economic standing, and Millennials tend to equate good news for themselves with good news for their country. “In Canada,” write Strauss and Howe, “Millennials have been dubbed the ‘Sunshine Generation’” (2000, p. 178). However, given 9/11, the second Iraq War, and interlocking economic and financial crises, such optimism may be fading. The New Politics Institute (2008) distinguishes among teen, transitional, and cusp Millennials, and we find this a helpful division. In terms of overall political and economic prospects, Teen Millennials (currently 15-19 years old) are the least optimistic subgroup, although they remain persistently optimistic about their own individual futures. In any case, most first-year college students arrive not as inwardly tormented Holden Caulfields but as self-assured go-getters.

Team-oriented

Millennials have long worked in task groups and are skilled in collaborative effort. “From Barney and soccer to school uniforms and a new classroom emphasis on group learning, Millennials are developing strong team instincts and tighter peer bonds,” write Strauss and Howe (2000, p. 44). They see this trend as an outcome of the widespread rejection of tracking (whether for gifted or disabled students) in the name of bringing everyone into the mainstream. Such egalitarianism disposes

teachers to replace independent study with collaborative learning and peer review of performance (Twenge, pp. 180-211). Strauss and Howe link this striking facility for group work to the ever-increasing importance of the peer group in the lives of teens, emblemized by what these authors characterize as the extraordinary similarity in Millennial dress and appearance.

Achieving

Contemporary young adults have big plans, particularly about their careers. Boomers were also ambitious, but according to Strauss and Howe (2000), they embraced accomplishment in the arts and humanities in a way Millennials have not; further, Boomers were more internally driven—operating with an “inner compass.” Strauss and Howe argue that Millennials respond best to external motivators and are highly rationalistic, making long-range plans and thinking carefully about “college financing, degrees, salaries, employment trends, and the like” (2000, pp. 182-183). While they are willing to put in the work, school for them is not something from which they expect enlightenment or personal transformation. “Work hard, play hard” is an important maxim for them.⁹

Pressured

Raised by workaholic parents in an economy designed for highly skilled labor, Millennials have internalized the message that they must build strong resumes—and fast. The same MTV/AP poll cited earlier also showed that young people “had a 10 percent higher stress rate than adults did in a 2006 AP-Ipsos poll. For ages 13 to 17, school is the greatest source of stress. For those in the 18-24 range, it’s jobs and financial matters” (Noveck & Tompson, 2007, n.p.a.). Oddly, few students openly protest their tense situation. Competition with others makes the world better, they are convinced, and success is the natural outcome of effort. But the stakes are now higher. In the words of Strauss and Howe, they “feel stressed in ways that many of their parents never

felt at the same age. Pressure is what keeps them constantly in motion—moving, busy, purposeful, without nearly enough hours in the day to get it all done” (2000, p.184). College life is undoubtedly fun, but hanging over everything is the necessity of getting good grades. Not surprisingly, anxiety is the major health issue for our students (ADAA, 2007).

Conventional

“Family” is a keyword for the Millennials, as “alienation” was for the 1960’s Boomers. Born in a divorce culture and aware of the fragility of the American family, these students tend to embrace measures that promise to strengthen or support it. As noted, recent surveys consistently show teens to be strongly attached to parents and siblings, especially their mothers. “Millennials are willing to accept their parents’ values as stated—but they are starting to think they can apply them, and someday run the show, a whole lot better,” wrote Strauss and Howe (2000, pp. 185-186). Tim Clydesdale (2007) agrees with this portrait, maintaining that first-year college students, rather than resisting convention, now simply “default” to the familiar American cultural standards embraced by their parents. These young people put their core identities in “lockboxes” which even the most values-challenging intellectual experiences cannot penetrate. Because many students team up with their parents to finance college education, family unity gains additional force, notes Clydesdale (p. 4).

Teaching the Millennial Student: Appropriate Strategies

Without taking Strauss and Howe to be the final word on a generational cohort consisting of over 75 million people (Deloitte, 2008), we think these seven characteristics provide an excellent point of departure for anyone seeking to fashion pedagogical schemes that have a chance of avoiding significant pitfalls. As indicated earlier, we have grouped our recommendations under four headings, which structure the next

part of this paper. We advocate that instructors 1) strive for greater clarity in course structure, assignments, and grading expectations; 2) provide significant opportunities for student initiative, participation and choice; 3) incorporate stress-reduction mechanisms; and 4) engage students in a significant, course-long conversation on the ethical dimensions of taking a college class.

Clarify the Essentials when Preparing Syllabi, Assignments and Evaluation Instruments

Like many other teachers, our experience is that today’s college students do not function well in courses with loosely organized, schematic syllabi. We suggest that instructors deliberately *over-estimate* the desire of students for clarity—and resist the temptation to regard those students as somehow deficient in character for the fervency of such a desire. Two of Strauss and Howe’s (2000) key traits come vigorously into play here. That Millennial youth have been *sheltered* does not just mean that they have been kept safe through more protective parental practices and attitudes.¹⁰ The business end of this cultural trend is a colossal new regime of “rules and devices” (2000, p. 43). One obviously relevant example here is the requirement that public high school teachers submit course syllabi and pacing guides at the beginning of each semester. Thus, with considerable justification, students expect the same predictable structure from college instructors. Important factors here are the objectives-driven learning environments they have experienced in high schools through the tightening of state curricula and the ubiquity of end-of-course testing (EOCs). The Millennials’ emphasis on *achievement* bolsters this quest for order and clarity. Their extensive use of daily planners is indicative of this tendency, as well as their expectation that parents will remind them of deadlines. Like it or not, our students cannot afford to engage in lots of educational exploration, improvisation or open-ended spontaneity. The heyday of the brilliant, if diffuse, lecturer whose wisdom might just “change lives” is over.

*Build in Significant Possibilities for Student Initiative
and Creativity*

While the Collaborative Learning movement has shortcomings—e.g., inadequate instructor training, excessive time spent in process activities, pressures to inflate grades—it does respond admirably to many of the generational characteristics so far described (Smith & MacGregor, 2008). Collaborative Learning capitalizes on the energizing *confidence* displayed by Millennials, seeing them as accomplished, self-starting, and creative. Put another way, all the lessons, camps, field trips, internships, and foreign travel provided/demanded by doting parents actually pay off in collaborative settings. Again, traditional “fountain-and-sponge” pedagogies (teacher: fountain, student: sponge) are rarely appropriate when one is dealing with “the Next Great Generation” (Strauss & Howe, 2000). We suggest letting their collaborative skills surface by inviting student input into the design of assignment types, grading systems or rubrics, and teamwork activities.

Millennials and Choice

Richard Sweeney has argued that “Millennials expect a much greater array of product and service selectivity. They have grown up with a huge array of choices and they believe that such abundance is their birthright” (2006, n.p.a.). Although this applies to all forms of teaching, certainly the online version of education that has grown up alongside the Millennials has followed this inclination. Thus, in *Lessons from the Cyberspace Classroom: The Realities of Online Teaching*, Rena M. Palloff and Keith Pratt (2001) encourage online teachers to “establish guidelines for the class and participation that provide enough structure for the learners but allow for flexibility and negotiation” (p. 36).

In our own classes we have followed this injunction by allowing students to substitute a semester’s worth of guided-question postings for one or more papers, do team presentations in lieu of individual ones, and work on real-time collaborative documents created

via Google or other applications.¹¹ A colleague of ours is even trying out a collaborative on-line newspaper—including traditional layout, photographs, cartoons, and editorials—with regular deadlines for the “staff,” and the encouragement that if students choose this activity, they are freed from selected assignments.

Should students have a hand in fashioning such key class parameters as learning objectives, syllabus, and assignments? Where this can be accomplished efficiently and with the clarity whose importance we have already emphasized, we strongly advocate such a shift, building on the robust tradition of student-centered learning. Although like many teachers trained in the older “sage on stage” tradition of lectureship and faced with an overload of students, we still find ourselves moving in this direction. The suggestion is attractive because it simultaneously addresses multiple traits of Millennials—their sense of being special, their confidence, and their general distaste for doing “busy work” that shows no relevance to personal goals. Cooperative design allows Millennial students to invest their own meaning into a class. It also acknowledges the fact that they come to the class with “strong resumes”—i.e., their high-achieving ways have resulted in the possession of unique strengths and talents from which the class can benefit.¹²

Millennials and Teamwork

The preference of Millennials for working in teams and their concomitant inclination towards social networking offers numerous advantages for college teachers. As numerous books with titles like *The Trophy Kids Grow Up: How the Millennial Generation Is Shaking Up the Workplace* (2008), *Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in Your Workplace* (2000), and *When Generations Collide: Who They Are. Why They Clash. How to Solve the Generational Puzzle at Work* (2008) have now noted, young people are so skilled at and accustomed to teaming up that they are beginning to transform the post-college workplace.

In fact, Eve Tahmincioglu reports that some companies “are hiring groups of friends because they believe Gen Yers need to stay tight with their social network” (2007, n.p.a.). In college, team efforts now extend far beyond task groups and collaborative term papers. In a recent course on the Iraq War taught by a colleague of ours, students conceptualized and completed a documentary film about their progressively deeper engagement with this subject.¹³ But one must proceed with caution. Our own survey of 71 Millennial students indicates that they do indeed strongly favor working in teams to working alone (51 preferred either small or large teams). However, smaller teams of two or three were viewed as optimal, largely to avoid logistical problems and the “free rider” phenomenon of non-contributing team members. (Only 11 opted for teams of five people, versus 40 for teams of two or three.)

Using teams as a significant part of a college course can be a far more challenging strategy than it is often made out to be. There are, for example, important ethical dimensions to the exercise, as Edmund J. Hansen and James A. Stephens note in their 2000, “The Ethics of Learner-Centered Education: Dynamics that Impede the Process,” singling out “low tolerance for challenges” and “social loafing” as two problems that particularly impact team-based activities (p. 43). Quite apart from the mechanics of team operation, the norms that grow out of the practices of well-functioning teams—respect for fellow team members, deference to team leaders, and unswerving task-orientation—deserve attention and commentary. Also, to the extent possible, instructors must protect conscientious students both from free-loaders and enthusiastic but simply incompetent team members—unless learning to manage such issues is a primary part of the actual lesson plan.

From the Start, Help Students Understand and Manage Stress

Doesn't generational greatness include poise in the face of danger or stress, as it did so famously for the

GIs? When it comes to academic stress, aren't a group of achievement-oriented, test-inured veterans of highly competitive secondary-education regimes prepared for the rigors of college? Few teaching professionals we know would answer these questions completely in the affirmative, for they understand that a significant percentage of our students are ill-prepared for their demands—especially in the areas of analytical reading, quantitative reasoning, application of prior knowledge, and scientific literacy. Recall that one of Strauss and Howe's traits was *pressured*. How they speak of this is significant: “Pushed to study hard, avoid personal risks, and take full advantage of the collective opportunities adults are offering them, Millennials feel a ‘trophy kid’ pressure to excel” (2000, p. 44). The unexamined assumption here is that admission to college confirms that one is actually equal to the college task. This is far from true, and many students secretly realize it.¹⁴ More importantly, the cognitive demands of mathematics, the natural sciences, English, foreign languages and certain social sciences have greatly increased in the last quarter-century (Vásquez, 2006). The confidence and optimism that are so marked in this generation have a way of deserting students around the time of final exams.

The result of these trends is the college stress epidemic. So pronounced is this development that psychologist Jean M. Twenge speaks of “Generation Stressed” (2006, p. 104). Focusing on Harvard students, Richard D. Kadison and Theresa Foy DiGeronimo (2004) document the condition in their aptly-titled *College of the Overwhelmed: The Campus Mental Health Crisis and What to Do About It*. How bad is this situation? An Edison Media Research poll conducted of 2,253 college students aged 18-24 found that four in ten students felt stress “often,” and nearly one in five say they feel stressed “all or most of the time,” with seven in ten students attributing their stress to “school work and grades” (MSNBC.com, 2008, n.p.a.). In *The Overachievers*, Alexandra Robbins (2006) echoes Strauss

and Howe's emphasis on Millennial pressure: "Anxiety is the most common cause of childhood psychological distress in North America," she writes. "Among teens, studies have shown a strong link between stress and depression, often based on the pressure to succeed" (p. 358).

How, then, can instructors helpfully address the burgeoning problem of academic stress? We offer here three "good-practice" suggestions.

Decrease the Amount of Content in General Education Courses

"Teach less" is a controversial maxim, but also one with a long history in pedagogical theory and practice.¹⁵ Because many undergraduate curricula formerly aimed at providing sequential mastery of "basic knowledge" in order to make upper-level courses truly advanced, decreasing content was pretty much unthinkable. However, the diminishing centrality of both "the canon" and the ideal of the generally educated citizen has served to make most classes *sui generis* (Bauerlein, pp. 219-223). It is thus possible to abbreviate content and not disadvantage one's colleagues. Moreover, confronted by students both empowered and befuddled by the "digital tsunami," many instructors feel that content-mastery is less crucial than thoughtful processing and critical analysis. Finally, because traditional literacy is declining in the U.S., teachers cannot assume that their reading assignments have been completed—or if completed, then comprehended. A recent study found that "more than 75 percent of students at 2-year colleges and more than 50 percent of students at 4-year colleges do not score at the proficient level of literacy" (American Institutes for Research, 2006, n.p.a.).

In view of these developments, we suggest that in subject areas where it can be done in a professionally ethical yet intellectually rigorous fashion, teachers should truncate both reading content and "coverage" expectations in favor of deeper exploration of materials. We have done so in some of our own classes—including our team-taught "Post-Modern Futures"—and found

that smaller packages of material, especially when parsed in break-out sessions, make for more engaged students and deeper discussion. Many of our colleagues are trading-off in this way and finding it has a "de-stressing" effect on their Millennial students. Close reading, especially when demonstrated in advance via digests, *précis*, key-sentence extractions, or critical summaries, can provide spurs to disciplined reading in doable units. Offering students plentiful examples of such good summary work communicates not only the exacting nature of the activity but also the kind of expectations they will confront throughout the semester.

Use Modules, Flexible Deadlines, Pre-planned Workload Reductions and Grade-checking Mechanisms

Many courses are ideally suited for the presentation of material in modular formats. In an African Culture class, we have built an introductory geography module, making use of Google Earth and online interactive map exercises. The unit culminates in a test which registers a *provisional* grade that students can either "lock-in" or improve at the time of the final. Modules like these have the effect of breaking a course into manageable units; the resulting sacrifice in continuity and cumulative impact is, we believe, worth the "peace-of-mind dividend" for Millennial students that comes with such structuring.

Modularized courses also address a Millennial characteristic not highlighted by Strauss and Howe—their distractability. A 2003 study noted that 7.8% of all U.S. children aged 4-17 had received an ADHD diagnosis (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2005). Whether *accurately diagnosed* attention-deficient students are coming to college in greater numbers is a matter of debate. Numerous commentators have linked this condition to the media-saturated world of the Millennial student.¹⁶ Unquestionably, however, many of our students self-identify as having attention problems and are taking ADHD medications. Modular approaches—which shorten and neatly frame educational experiences—offer real help to such students. The

danger, of course, is that modules will not be re-integrated into an effectively continuous learning experience, one that can be solidified through a comprehensive final or project. One good way to handle this problem is to “front-load” a course heavily with modularized material and then end the class two or three weeks early to allow for extensive *but relaxed* pre-exam review.

Teachers might also consider a *pre-planned* mid-semester reduction in class workload. Although many faculty are rightfully skeptical about the amount of work actually being done by a generation of students who seem to have abandoned all but compulsory reading, we think it important to at least *appear* to address Millennial perceptions of being overworked. In any case, teachers may find it useful to revisit an old pedagogical tactic and offer some version of a load-reduction as a morale booster. Here, of course, a balance must be struck between the “sudden” elimination of long-announced assignments and the general Millennial preference for structure and stability. Further, some students feel that their best work is done in extended projects with significant writing. Once again, it may be wise to allow for a choice in the way the semester’s work will be concluded.

Their high-achieving attitudes make Millennials intensely interested in their grades. “Kids are fearful of grades and fearful of failing—because the stakes seem higher than before,” write Strauss and Howe (2000, p. 161). They report that “Four times as many high school students worry about getting good grades than about pressures to have sex or take drugs . . .” (Strauss, Howe, & Markiewicz, 2006, p. 199). Millennial students want to know how their grades stand throughout the semester and are accustomed to this sort of frequent feedback in most of the other aspects of their lives. Just as ATM receipts help students avoid overdrafts, any system that can provide them with ongoing grade information is cherished. We have found that Millennial students are very interested in—indeed, insistent on—having a

transparent grade-checking system that is continually updated. This is probably best done with some sort of online grading system that is available to students both easily and privately.

Develop Course Elements that Either Mimic the Structure of Video Games or Include Actual Gaming Exercises

In *Millennials and the Pop Culture: Strategies for a New Generation of Consumers in Music, Movies, Television, the Internet, and Video Games*, Strauss, Howe, and Markiewicz (2006) argue that among the major forms of pop culture, video games are “the most [statistically] dominated by Millennial consumers” (p. 113). Huge numbers of students use video-games as a form of relaxation. That games can also be a significant *low-stress* means of providing serious education is one of the signal discoveries of our time.¹⁷ What makes video games, which at their best efface the distinction between *recreation* and *creation*, so promising?

In *Everything Bad is Good for You: How Today’s Popular Culture Is Actually Making Us Smarter* (2005), Steven Johnson claims that pop media culture is not degrading our intellectual abilities but rather training upcoming generations to think in more cognitively complex ways. Regarding games, Johnson argues that by forcing gamers to manage long-, mid-, and short-term objectives, gaming instructs users in how to construct proper hierarchies of tasks and move through them in the correct sequence—discerning relationships and determining priorities. In video games, accomplishing tasks usually results in perceptible rewards. Video gaming, in Johnson’s view, “tap[s] into the brain’s natural reward circuitry, the dopamine system that drives the brain’s ‘seeking’ circuitry and propels us to seek out new avenues for reward in our environment” (p. 34). Millennial gamers have been “trained” to prefer quick feedback and reward and in fact are “eager to soak up information when it is delivered to them in game form” (pp. 32–62). In terms of cognitive complexity, Johnson argues, it is not “*what* you’re thinking about when you’re

playing a game [i.e. content], it's *the way* you're thinking that matters [i.e. process]" (p. 40).¹⁸

An argument can be made, then, that utilizing various forms of this feedback-reward system in a similar cognitive process may be pedagogically useful. Johnson's work allows us to imagine educational experiences which combine pleasure/relaxation with intense learning—something that "literary" reading once did for a larger percentage of the American population—without at the same time reducing the central role of reading in the educational process.¹⁹

While the challenge of implementing this idea effectively is obvious, it does in fact coincide with the ideas of other teaching theorists, both on and offline, who recommend giving students continuing rather than infrequent feedback. "As the instructor, be a model of good participation by logging on frequently and contributing to the discussion," advise Paloff and Pratt (2001, p. 30). Like computer and video games themselves, online classes have a technological advantage here, since "Computer-mediated communication provides considerable avenues for prompt and reflective feedback" (Van Keuren, 2006, p. 5).

Foreground and Background Ethics

A note on (almost everyone's) moral confusion. In his fiercely-admired and debated *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (1981, 1984), Alasdair Macintyre claimed that at present "the language of morality" is in a "state of grave disorder" such that what we have are "simulacra of morality," whose sources and import we simply don't understand (p. 2). While Macintyre's Aristotelian emphasis on the recovery of the classical virtues may not have won the day, few disagree that something like the problem he identified is a real feature of the present age. Interestingly, the controversy aroused by Macintyre's work coincided exactly with the arrival of the Millennials. Their significant ethical struggles—especially poignant as they confront the question of abortion—bear out the validity of his diagnosis. In

recognizing that they inherit moral confusion from the wider culture, one is less tempted to engage in inter-generational blaming.

Given this surrounding cultural reality, ethical reflection must be a prominent feature of classes. But where does one begin? In general terms, it seems clear that being special, confident, and ambitious are qualities that can easily move towards excessive competitiveness, self-absorption and even narcissism. Strauss, Howe, and Markiewicz's language is revealing: "Far more than Gen Xers, and differently than Boomers at the same age, Millennials have a high regard for themselves, not just as individuals, but also *as a group*. Wherever they are—college, high school, sports team, theater group, student government, clubs—they are more inclined to think of anything done by their youth peers as competent, effective, and promising" (2006, p. 123). This inward, present-oriented, "tribal" focus can diminish regard for received canons of behavior and weaken restraints in a variety of ethical domains. As Patricia Hersch (1998) chillingly shows in *A Tribe Apart: A Journey into the Heart of American Adolescence*, this inward, present-oriented, youth-centric focus can diminish regard for received canons of behavior and weaken restraints in a variety of ethical domains. When coupled with the cultural relativism and egocentrism that are the birthright of young students everywhere, such self- and group- esteem can powerfully separate our pupils from their consciences. We believe that these issues should be raised and discussed frequently in classes (here online contexts may even be better places to do this well since they can offer a less confrontational means of debate).

Effort versus excellence: The grading issue. Our foremost concerns are "work-ethics," the battle against cheating, and basic civility. The first of these turns out to be the problem of "entitlement," the negative face of "specialness." The movement in American education toward excellence through measurable results has been

a prominent feature of our students' upbringing. As Strauss and Howe put it glowingly, "With accountability and higher school standards rising to the very top of America's political agenda, Millennials are on track to become the best-educated and best-behaved adults in the nation's history" (2000, p. 44). One might therefore conclude that—with their better-honed sense of what an outstanding educational product looks like—our students would be tough judges of their work, eager to receive criticism, and modest in their expectations of reward. However, a sizable (and vocal) percentage of our students exhibit attitudes that run entirely in the opposite direction. Too often, they overestimate the value of their efforts and clamor for grades that should go only to the very best. Their generation's achievement orientation thus appears to have trumped other, better traits—such as self-knowledge and intellectual modesty.

The practical meaning of this loss of perspective is that is that teachers must use their powerful resources to exhibit *actual excellence*. This might be something as simple as a discussion of several model papers along with interpolated instructor comments and plaudits. Certainly an early and careful class discussion about "work" must take place, one that centers on the fact that hard work by itself, in the absence of skill and ability, does not always guarantee high grades. It will also make the critical distinction between "self-worth" (in Kantian terms, an inherent property of all persons) and "self-esteem," to which only those who have accomplished difficult things are entitled.

Although it is also a topic which students may resist, the related issue of grade inflation can be incorporated into any classroom discussion, especially as it is so closely connected to the idea of Millennial notions of self-esteem. We recommend that this ethical issue be regularly discussed with the students themselves, rather than simply being covered by a note in the syllabus. One might begin with a look at Princeton University's

attempt to control grade inflation by imposing a quota on the number of A's given in any class. If time allows, one might ask a class to research grade inflation at their own institution to illustrate the pervasiveness of the issue. In the end, the problem of grade inflation is the creation of entire departments, colleges, and universities, rather than individual instructors. Students, we hold, have a right to understand the pressures that look-the-other-way policies exert on (especially) untenured professors and teaching assistants. Only then will they grasp what it means to expect top grades in all their classes.

Counteracting the cheating culture. In an informal experiment to gauge the amount of cheating in our classroom, we offered a single version of the mid-term exam in a traditional class, but then, when finals arrived, offered multiple versions of the final exam. Interestingly, we discovered that for a number of students, scores mysteriously dropped by 30 or more points. Although Howe and Strauss (2000) argue that Millennials are strongly inclined to follow conventional authority and rules, we have seen that countervailing pressures and trends move them in a more Darwinian direction. Referring the Millennials as "Generation Me," Jean Twenge observes that "in an increasingly competitive world, the temptation to cheat will be ever stronger" for teens and young adults, who are now "resigned to cheating among their peers" (2006, 27-28).

More dramatically, David Callahan argues that dishonesty has become endemic in our culture. In his 2004 *The Cheating Culture: Why More Americans are Doing Wrong to Get Ahead*, Callahan cites large-scale national surveys which indicate that "the number of students admitting that they cheated on an exam at least once in the previous year jumped from 61 percent in 1992 to 74 percent in 2002" (p. 203). Nearly 40 percent of 12,000 college students surveyed in 2002 "admitted that they were willing to lie or cheat to get into college" (pp. 203-4).

In a hybrid on-and-offline course, we have addressed the problem of cheating by giving randomized exams in a face-to-face setting. We have also performed pre-assignment “topic checks,” doing Internet searches for canned papers in given subjects and thereby ruling out in advance frequently plagiarized subjects. A non-exam-based pedagogy or a larger set of randomized exam questions and a precise time slot for the exam may offer the best methods of discouraging student cheating or undesired collaboration. While the range of anti-cheating strategies is wide, in the end it is the conversation about cheating that counts. Here we recommend the general approach taken by Macintyre and his followers: drawing attention to the nature of the practice in question. Plagiarism, for example, isn’t primarily a problem of rule-breaking; rather, falsification of authorship and the failure to do one’s own research undermine the academic enterprise itself.

The wider meaning of “netiquette.” A singular benefit of online instruction is the now-decades long evolution of norms that allow the Internet to perform its work well. Because this medium, despite its democratizing potential, offers so many possibilities for doing damage to others, an ethic has developed spontaneously to guide users in their online behavior. While “netiquette” has not yet been widely adopted, its existence is powerfully significant, especially for a generation that has come of age in an era of text-messaging, email, and Facebook friends and enemies.

We are particularly attracted to those aspects of netiquette that delineate an ethos of civility, both online and in face-to-face educational settings. Self-restrictions in the areas of profanity, “flaming,” and privacy protection strike us as particularly important. In our online class experiences, more than one student has balked at posting in a small-group forum where they felt they were being unfairly critiqued by other group posters. Bringing such cases (anonymously) to the attention of the whole class and allowing students to discuss them

engages them in a crucial debate that promises important behavioral changes. This is doing-ethics-without-mentioning-it—a vital activity for a generation often cynical about the sort of virtue-of-the-week character-education programs frequently offered in the public schools.²⁰

Conclusion

In closing, we recognize that other generational models are available. Twenge’s work *Generation Me: Why Today’s Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—And More Miserable Than Ever Before* (2006) dissents from Strauss and Howe (2000) and enjoys a wide following. As her title indicates, she is as pessimistic as they are cheerful. Twenge’s forthcoming book will focus on the phenomenon of generational narcissism. Other recent works reflect Twenge’s pessimistic mood. Besides Bauerlein’s *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes our Future*, there is Nicholas Carr’s *The Big Switch: Rewiring the World, from Edison to Google* (2008). Maggie Jackson’s *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age* (2008) adds to this stream, as does Susan Jacoby’s trenchant *The Age of American Unreason* (2008). A range of different insights and strategies would doubtlessly arise from these different interpretations of generational trends. In this study, we have combined Strauss and Howe’s (2000) dominant paradigm with our own classroom observations, while including some elements from these other works as they apply to practical pedagogy. We do not want to imply that Millennial preferences or traits should be the only, or even the primary, driving engine behind pedagogical strategies. But we are suggesting that readers *consider* accounts of those who have been studying the Millennial generation *as* a generation, contemplate our own suggestions for teaching strategies, and evaluate both in terms of their own experiences with Millennial students.

Beyond the realm of everyday practice, there may

be an additional value in studying these generation-based analyses. A 2006 *EdTech* article by John O'Brien notes, "within the next four years, the oldest Millennials will turn 30," and this at a time when "the median age of those receiving a doctorate is 33" (n.p.a.). Thus, today's Millennial students—whether possessed of greatness, distracted, narcissistic, or none-of-the-above—will shortly be tomorrow's colleagues in the teaching profession itself. ■■■

Notes

1 For those who sought higher education, the first edge of the Millennial wave has now either left or completed college or entered graduate school.

2 Theories about generational patterns of succession within national cultures are not new. Like most scholars in this field, Strauss and Howe acknowledge their debt to Karl Mannheim; the latter's essay "The Problem of Generations" (1928) may be said to have launched generational studies. Older scholars will recall Lewis S. Feuer's controversial 1969 generational study which interpreted the upheavals in the university as an explosion of anger between sons and fathers, a view which seemed to many commentators to diminish the significance of the Student Left. Significantly, Mannheim and Feuer began as Marxists, inclining them to look for large evolutionary patterns in social history. See Feuer's *The Conflict Of Generations: The Character and Significance Of Student Movements* (NY, Basic Books 1969). (Especially helpful here is Jane Pilcher, "Mannheim's Sociology of Generations: An Undervalued Legacy," *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 45, No. 3 [September, 1994], pp. 481-495.)

3 In our view, the idealization of the GI Generation is a trend whose depth and persistence betrays not only nostalgia but a hard-to-describe cultural unease about the present. Tom Brokaw's still- popular *The Greatest*

Generation (NY: Random House, 1998) has been followed by the Stephen Ambrose-inspired mini-series "Band of Brothers" (2001) and Ken Burns and Lynn Novack's (2007) PBS series "The War." Clint Eastwood's "Flags of Our Fathers" and "Letters from Iwo Jima" (2006) swell this tide. Commercial motives aside, these productions seem curiously ill-timed, as if oblivious to the on-going wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

4 In later works by these authors, Neil Howe's name appears before that of William Strauss. For clarity's sake we will use "Strauss and Howe" throughout this article. Note: William Strauss died unexpectedly in December of 2007.

5 Generational studies, despite their current popularity, may in fact be ill-suited to the immigrant/native/racially-diverse hybrid societies of the New World. Much as they try, Strauss and Howe cannot really incorporate the outlooks of ex-slaves, immigrants, sequestered religious societies, or the poor into their multi-generational analysis. Until quite recently, these groups exhibited *their own patterns of generational succession*, patterns that were far stronger than the "larger" national ones. For example, Strauss and Howe consider Americans born between 1925 and 1942 as members of the same "Silent Generation" that so concerned William H. Whyte in the *The Organizational Man* (1956). Yet in terms of African American history, the late 1950's and early 60's were the heroic time of the Civil Rights Movement.

Interestingly, a key Millennial trait may be that of an embracing of group-diversity that goes far beyond "tolerance." Strauss and Howe note that "demographically, this is America's most racially and ethnically diverse, and least-Caucasian, generation," with non-whites accounting for "nearly 36% of the 18-or-under population" in 1999. They argue that their generational scheme also applies to this group because "nonwhite Millennials are. . . in some ways *the most important contributors*" to the Millennial personality (2000, pp. 15-16).

6 Current statistics vary, in part according to the cut-off date chosen for the Millennial generation, but almost all agree that there are at least 75 million Americans in this generational category.

7 “Next was spending time with friends, followed by time with a significant other. . . . [A]lost no one said ‘money’ when asked what makes them happy.” They also find that, overwhelmingly, “young people think marriage would make them happy and want to be married some day” (Noveck & Tompson, 2007).

8 Significant racial and ethnic differences turned up in this study: only 56% of black people responded positively to the question, while 51% of Hispanics were “happy with life in general.” (Noveck & Tompson, 2007) Such an enormous disparity underscores the dissatisfaction with Strauss and Howe expressed earlier in this article.

9 Here sociologist Tim Clydesdale echoes the views of Strauss and Howe. Most college freshmen are simply not interested in intellectual liberation or the widening of cultural horizons. They view post-high school education “instrumentally—as a pathway to a better job and economic security—with most teens accepting their educational hazing and orienting their attention to more immediate matters.” *The First Year Out: Understanding American Teens After High School* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press), p. 3.

10 Out of our survey of 74 Millennial-age students, 19 felt that “the emphasis on youth safety” during their lives had been “too over-emphasized,” 49 felt that it had been “about the right amount,” and 6 “not emphasized enough.”

11 A useful address for Google Documents is http://www.google.com/educators/p_docs.html

12 Australian academics Len and Heather Sparrow and Paul Swan offer (in addition to a marvelous collaborative name) a useful reference in their article

“Student-Centred Learning: Is It Possible?” (2000).

13 Joseph J. Gonzalez, “How Good Scholarship Makes Good Citizens,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (September 19, 2008).

14 Both an admirer and strong critic of Strauss and Howe, Mark Bauerlein has recently argued that their headlong involvement in the new digital culture—often lauded by educators and parents—leaves college-bound young adults wholly unprepared for what is to come. “The founts of knowledge are everywhere, but the rising generation is camped in the desert, passing stories, pictures, tunes, and texts back and forth, living off the thrill of peer attention,” he writes. “Meanwhile, their intellects refuse the cultural and civic inheritance that has made us what we are up to now.” Mark Bauerlein, *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future* (NY: Penguin, 2008), p. 10.

15 Both the Harvard Red Book (1946) and the St. John’s Great Books system represented a tremendous commitment to content mastery of a large number of classic texts, even though the former curricular philosophy was shaped by the perceived new challenges of mass education and the Cold War. The abandonment of the Red Book at Harvard has produced one of the most important intramural debates about specific content mastery in recent American educational history. Indispensable here for historical backgrounds is Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989). See, especially pp. 167-173.

16 Here we strongly recommend Mark Bauerlein’s third chapter, “Screen Time.” Bauerlein’s account extends a line of criticism that began with Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman. Sven Birkerts’ *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (NY: Fawcett Columbine, 1994) finds much confirmation in the very

recent studies Bauerlein relies on.

17 The 2008 UNC Teaching and Learning with Technology Conference in Raleigh, NC, at which we presented a previous version of this article, also included two presentations specifically about adapting videogame concepts to education.

18 As might be expected, Mark Bauerlein includes a lengthy critique of Steven Johnson's work in *The Dumbest Generation*. See pp. 87-91.

19 According to *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*, in 1982, the percentage of 18-24 year old Americans reading literature was 59.8%; by 2002, that percentage had dropped to 42.8% (Washington: National Endowment for the Arts, 2004).

20 In our home state of North Carolina, "in the fall of 2001, the Student Citizen Act of 2001 (SL 2001-363) was passed into law by the North Carolina State Legislature. This Act requires every local board of education to develop and implement character education instruction with input from the local community." Retrieved September 6, 2008 from: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/charactereducation/>

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Emotional Labor

The Pink-Collar Duties of Teaching

Holly Ann Larson

Abstract

Community college instructors play a critical role in educating economically and educationally disadvantaged students. Two-year institutions have an open-door policy giving any individual who desires an education an opportunity for post-secondary learning. Yet, I argue, this mission of leveling the “educational” playing field is made possible by the emotional labor that predominantly female community college professors perform. That is, female teachers spend more time nurturing and caring for their students by listening empathetically to their problems, providing social service information, and spending countless hours working closely with them, among numerous other “caring” tasks that sustain these students and keep them in the college system. Emotional labor is critical to the well-being of the student and to the institution. Unfortunately, it is overlooked and dismissed as a maternal (feminine) act of kindness. As a result, emotional labor is not seen as work and female instructors are not compensated for their valuable labor.

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Keywords

emotional labor, invisible work, deep acting, nurturing, working-class

Prologue

My 9:00 a.m. composition class is about to begin. I look over the lesson plan one last time, as if willing myself to cover all the points I have jotted down. Just as I am lifting myself out of my seat, a student knocks on the door looking tired and distressed. I have worked closely with this particular student, and have come to know her quite well. She has been with me for three semesters, two semesters of developmental English, and now my college composition course. Feeling comfortable with me, she has shared many stories about her twin boys and about being twenty-six and a single parent. Numerous times she has expressed gratitude for my gentleness and compassion. I am flattered when she tells me that I give her courage and inspiration to finish her degree, despite her constant fatigue from raising two toddlers and the insecurities of believing that she is not smart enough. So this morning I brace myself, knowing that this student has yet another personal obstacle facing her, preventing

her from finishing her paper that was due over a week ago. As I open the door to greet her, I am full of anxiety because she will ask for yet another extension that I cannot give her. I try my best to hide this anxiety in order to listen to her empathetically as she explains how she was up all night attending to her very ill son and as a result could not finish her essay. When she hears that she will not be granted another extension and will receive a poor grade for her unfinished paper, she says quietly, "I understand"; tears well up in her eyes, and she leaves abruptly for the restroom. I stand in my office feeling guilty and frustrated. Instead of thinking about today's lesson plan, I am wondering if I am being unfair and whether I should go to the restroom to calm her. I decide against following her and go directly to class, but throughout the session I am somewhere else, replaying the office scene in my mind, analyzing how I could have handled it differently.

Teaching Challenges at a Two-Year Institution

I begin with this narrative because it captures the emotional yet invisible work in teaching. I am an English instructor at a community college in Central Florida. My institution reflects the demographics of many community colleges in this region: the average age of students attending this college is twenty-four; half of them are the first generation to attend college; seventy-seven percent of the student body is white; the average family income is working class to lower middle class; and approximately sixty percent of the students take at least one developmental course to prepare them for college-level material. Every semester, roughly ten to fifteen percent of my students are labeled as nontraditional students, returning after several years' hiatus. Many of them are single parents, full-time workers, and the struggling poor.

Although the community college in South Florida where I taught previously was much more ethnically and racially diverse and the students overall were a bit

more cosmopolitan, the pedagogical strategies required to engage diverse learners and the amount of energy and caring invested into teaching were no different. Overall I find the students at a community college very needy and lacking a strong educational foundation, due to the open-door policy that accommodates below-college-level students. This does not mean that these students are less capable and talented than their peers at a four-year institution. Every semester I am amazed by the diverse talents found in one classroom: semi-professional dancers and singers, nationally competing surfers, local musicians, and computer-whiz entrepreneurs. But the reality is that many of these students are academically weak. I always have a group of students who are educationally prepared to handle more challenges and endlessly curious to sustain their enthusiasm through demanding work, but these students are the minority. Many need to learn basic skills such as how to manage time, study, take notes, and write complete sentences and coherent paragraphs, while learning the more advanced academic skills necessary for their college degrees. This makes teaching both rewarding and challenging: I have to teach college-level skills while at the same time trying to fill educational gaps so that my students can handle the material they are learning. This can be daunting and exhausting for the students and for me. I find that I need to take on various roles in order for my students to obtain both basic and college-level skills: mentor, advisor, teacher, and entertainer; and to play the roles successfully, I need lots of energy.

I do not resent taking on these extra roles. In fact, I delight and take pride in them. I enjoy teaching immensely, and particularly enjoy the contact I have with the students, both inside and outside the classroom. I also feel an obligation to advocate for students and assist them in any way possible, especially the nontraditional students such as the young woman I mentioned earlier. I identify with them: I, too, come from a working-class family and was the first generation to attend college.

In general, I find my female colleagues who also come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are the ones willing to mentor and nurture their students. This does not mean that my middle-class counterparts are not advising and counseling their students. Rather, it is the working-class identification that makes working-class teachers hyperaware of their students' struggle to fit into academia while dealing with the economic chaos in their lives. In addition, the gender socialization of womanhood reinforces the ethos of caring that influences female teachers to nurture their students. Women learn and are expected to be caretakers from a very early age, from the toys they are given, such as dolls and kitchen sets, to the television programs they watch that identify girlhood with caring for friends and maintaining social networks. Thus, at the intersection of class and gender, working-class female academics bring a certain sensibility to their classroom and to their teaching that seeks to connect on both a professional and a personal level with their students. Working-class professor Laura Weaver (1993) states, "I have a natural empathy for students with working-class backgrounds" (p. 118), and she expresses this empathy by spending large amounts of time mentoring them indefatigably. This does not mean, however, that I nurture and advise my students solely because of my working-class background. Perhaps I do it more willingly and eagerly than some of my colleagues; yet to a certain degree, we are all expected to comfort and nurture our students. This is particularly true for female instructors because of the social expectations of women as caregivers, regardless of whether we fulfill these responsibilities with compassion or resentment. Because many of our students are so academically needy, we have to invest more into nurturing and guiding them if they are to be successful.

Teaching: Ethos of Caring

In my sixth year of teaching at a community college, I can unhesitatingly say that my primary

role as an instructor is to nurture: that is, to perform emotional labor. The term "emotional labor" was first coined by sociologist Arlie Hochschild in her pivotal book, *Managed Hearts* (1981; 2003), where she explores how certain jobs, mainly those in the service sector and those predominantly held by women, demand that their workers "induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (p. 7). Building upon Hochschild's definition, feminist scholar Amy Wharton (1999) writes that "emotional labor refers to the effort involved in displaying organizationally sanctioned emotions by those whose jobs require interaction with clients or customers and for whom these interactions are an important component of their work" (p. 160). Further exploring the social ramifications of this term, professor of sociology Ronnie Steinberg and professor of economics Deborah Figart (1999) argue, "Emotional labor emphasizes the relational rather than task-based aspect but not exclusively in the service economy. It is labor-intensive work; it is skilled, effort-intensive, and productive labor. It creates values, affects productivity, and generates profit" (para. 2). It may be sound curricula and polished scholarly work that provide institutions of higher education their credibility and prestige, but it is emotional labor that brings in and retains the students. Simply put, emotional labor keeps institutions of higher education accessible to everyone, particularly the educationally and economically disadvantaged; it invests in poorly prepared students and students who have not yet discovered their place in academia and sustains them through difficult and demanding course work; and it builds a connection between instructor and student, creating a relationship that is mutually rewarding and fulfilling. In "Emotional Labour in the Classroom" (2001), Heather Price underlines the importance of emotional labor, claiming that "teachers have to be emotionally alive and present in the relationships they have with their pupils in order for creative learning to

take place” (p. 162).

I am not claiming that content knowledge and pedagogy play a secondary role to emotional labor. Rather, I contend that emotional labor is an integral part of teaching and course content, particularly at a community college. For example, many of my students would feel intimidated, overwhelmed, and put off by the material I teach, if I did not present it as a game or as an entertaining fact connected to popular culture. There is nothing inherently frightening about, say, thesis statements or dangling modifiers, but a sizeable and growing percentage of community college students lack foundational skills, and, hence, a two-year institution becomes a three-year-plus program to get the students ready for college and then deliver college material to them. And within this time frame, many community college students’ lives are jam-packed with work and family obligations. For some of my adult students, the time they sit in class may be their only time all day off their feet. Needless to say, they are tired—bone tired. Learning about paragraph formation while fighting fatigue and worrying about incoming bills is indeed a Herculean challenge. Kathleen Sheerin-Devore, an English instructor at Minneapolis Community and Technical College, intimately understands the daily struggles community college students are encountering. She writes, “While middle-class and upper-class students work within the safety net of financial security, most students in the two-year-college system work without a net, as they precariously balance on the razor’s edge of economic instability” (2007, p. B34). And, unfortunately, economic instability creates emotional crisis: the inability to pay the rent leads to fear of eviction, homelessness, vulnerability, and shame. So it is not realistic to think that students leave their emotional baggage at the door when they enter the classroom. As much as a nagging headache can distract one’s attention, so can a gaping heartache and an empty pocket.

Cognizant of how the struggles of life spill

over into the classroom, Bellas (1999) articulates the ever-expanding role of the instructor to meet his/her students’ growing emotional and academic needs, stating, “As at other levels, postsecondary teaching involves far more than simply imparting knowledge. Professors help students mature intellectually and emotionally; to motivate and stimulate student interest. In short, professors *nurture* young minds” (p. 98). One of the five components Bellas (1999) cites as engaging students is entertainment: “in other words, put on a show. Being knowledgeable about one’s subject matter is not enough; professors must convey that knowledge” (p. 98). This type of entertainment takes energy—lots of energy—and creativity, both aspects of emotional labor.

The academic challenges that community college students bring to the class require that their instructors be pedagogically creative and dynamic in order to engage them in conversation and make the material they are teaching relevant to their day-to-day realities. Many community college students have polished other forms of knowledge, whether they be dancing, painting, or navigating the welfare system. Several of my students, particularly the non-traditional students, are street- and life-savvy. The fact that they are in school proves this: they have survived years of poverty, bad marriages, bounced checks, and unreliable cars. Unfortunately, their forms of knowledge are not valued as much as the traditional cognitive knowledge of reading and writing. These are the authorized ways of knowing in academia. This is why several of my students are anxious and unsure of themselves. My role is to reassure them that indeed there is a space for them in academia, while providing them the critical skills to be successful so that they can remain in college. This is not an easy feat, nor did I expect it to be. But what I did not expect was that I was going to spend 60% of my time nurturing and cajoling and reassuring. As I mentioned earlier, I do this eagerly. There are days when I feel completely connected to my students, as if we are

sharing an invincible force carrying us throughout the day. But I would be dishonest if I did not admit that there are days when I do not have the time or energy to comfort and nurture my students. I am depleted; I have just enough energy to make it through the end of the day. I merely want to teach subject-pronoun agreements or omniscient narration. Period. That is it. But student A just lost her grandmother to breast cancer, student B is working two jobs to keep his family above poverty level, and student C broke up with her boyfriend. I am not teaching automatons but real people who feel.

Community college students present unique challenges to the instructors. Their lives are complicated and some are just one step ahead of an economic or psychological crisis. Although I have a growing population of younger students who come from stable, middle-class families, I still have a sizeable number of students whose lives are a constant struggle. Community colleges are unique in this sense because these institutions, unlike universities where the tuition is much higher and the environment is much more competitive, are among the only remaining places where these educationally and economically disadvantaged students can go for a higher education.

In the past three semesters, I have had: one student whose abusive boyfriend was on campus looking for her; another student who came to my office after class and cried hysterically for an hour, pleading that I help her find a shelter for the night, because she had been kicked out of her house and had nowhere to go; and, just last week, a woman in my developmental English class who came into my office to explain to me why she was behind in her work and told me that she could barely keep her family out of poverty and that her car—her only means to get to work and school—was about to be repossessed because she was five months behind with her car payments. In the first case, I had to lock the student in my office and call the police. In the second, I called the women's program at my

institution and obtained a directory of social charities and organizations that I now keep posted next to my computer screen in my office. (So far I have used this list five times.) I was able to find her a temporary place, and somehow she managed to stay in school for the remaining semester. And in the third case, I called my mother, a former social worker, to see what organizations were available to her for assistance. These are only three incidents, but I can list numerous others; and although these were not typical encounters for me, they were not atypical, either. The reality is that many students at a community college are under tremendous emotional and economic pressure, and it is impossible as an instructor to not be affected by the challenges that face them.

Women and Emotional Labor

This emotionally complex and exhausting job called teaching is predominantly being handled by women. Since the 19th Century in the United States, teaching has been a pink-collar job: that is, it has been seen as a woman's job. Nancy Folbre, author of *The Invisible Heart* (2001) notes that by 1888, 63% of American teachers at the primary and secondary level were women and schools had shifted their focus from discipline and independence to the "ethos of nurturance" (p. 34). Teachers at community colleges and technical schools, which are seen as extensions of secondary school, are also viewed as pink-collar workers. Universities, however, are held to a higher standard, where scholarship, as opposed to teaching, is the primary focus. And since the professor at a four-year institution spends less time in the classroom managing students than in his or her personal office focusing on scholarly writing and publishing, the job is not perceived as pink-collar, but as prestigious and respected work.

This historical division between primary and secondary teaching and college professorship explains the gender gap: "Teaching at the college and university level has traditionally been a male-dominated field"

(Kemp, 1994, p. 223), while teaching at lower levels has traditionally been a female-dominated field. In the past two decades, this has changed, though only at the college and university level. Since 1991, women have made great strides in academia, comprising close to 50% of the faculty in certain institutions (p. 223). “However,” as Kemp (1994) reminds us in *Women’s Work: Degraded and Devalued*, “women are concentrated in the lower paid, less prestigious disciplines, at the lower academic ranks, and in the lower status, state institutions” (p. 223-4). This means that female professors and instructors teach more courses, deal with more students, and have less time to invest in scholarly work. In many ways, they are seen as teachers first, then scholars, which means they are expected to do the emotional labor—that is, to nurture and engage students—while their male colleagues have more time away from students and from dealing with the complexities of their lives to think and write. And in institutions where individuals are rewarded for their publications, and not for the number of students whom they successfully mentor, these low-ranked female professors are denied recognition and value. They are merely cogs in the wheel that carries and moves academia. Hence, they are penalized: fewer promotions, less personal time, and less money.

Moreover, the emotional labor involved in teaching is not viewed as true labor, but as instinctual. Thus, teaching as labor is stripped down to its barest form: passing on content knowledge and then evaluating the content through exercises and tests. The components of emotional labor—the nurturing, caring, reassuring, and entertaining aspects of teaching that make it possible for students to actually hear and absorb what we are saying—are perceived as personal attributes and personality traits that come from the heart.

Of course, male professors at elite research universities may (and I am sure some do) perform emotional labor. One could argue that they are more popular with the students if they are good entertainers and show

interest in their pupils. Yet their student interaction is viewed as a bonus, if you will, to their must-have qualities as thinkers, researchers, and writers. The bottom line is, they are scholars. Emotional labor is not a part of their unwritten job description, and they will not lose their jobs if they refuse to perform it. Simply put, they choose when and how to nurture, assure, and entertain their students.

In contrast, low-ranked professors and instructors, predominantly women, as mentioned earlier, are required to perform emotional labor if they want tenure or a renewed teaching contract. In this sense, they have little control over their emotional labor. They must put on a smile, soften their voices, and silence their anger when dealing with difficult and tiresome students, to appear inviting and nonthreatening. If they do not, there may be serious consequences.

Low Ranking of Emotional (“Invisible”) Labor

Although I am in a community college where pedagogy is the primary focus, so that there is no penalty for not publishing, I still find the teaching vs. scholarship duality disturbing. First, it positions teaching as if it were a mere distraction from the real intellectual work—writing and publishing. And second, it perpetuates a hierarchical power structure where those at the top teach less and publish more and those at the bottom teach more and publish less. The top is prestigious in title, time, and money; the bottom is the contrast. It models the bourgeois professorship vs. the proletariat instructorship: the bourgeois professors “own the means of production,” in that they claim ownership of ideas delivered at conferences and published in scholarly journals, while the proletariat instructors “own only their ability to work,” teaching behind closed doors in relative anonymity where they are evaluated by students and department chairs (Kemp 1994, p. 93). This hierarchy continues to be heavily gendered. The higher up one goes, the more males one sees ensconced in tenured professorial positions. Equally, the lower one goes, the

more females populate untenured, year-to-year contract teaching positions, teaching five and more courses a semester. Forty-nine percent of faculty at community colleges nationwide are female, compared to only twenty-four percent of faculty at universities (Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Twmbly, 2007; Banerji, 2006). There are more female instructors teaching at community colleges and as part-time employees at universities. Hence, gender plays a critical role when one is talking about community college teachers.

Furthermore, as an English instructor, I am aware of the gendered hierarchical structure that places the field of humanities at the bottom. Tokarczyk and Fay (1993) contend that teaching in the field of humanities is “a service-oriented profession” (p. 15). Referring to colleges as “patriarchal families” where administrators function as the father, natural science as the eldest son, humanities as the mother, and students as the children, Dominick La Capra (1993) states, “The role of the humanists is to stay at home and take care of the kids, usually in and through a teaching schedule that is significantly heavier than that of the natural, or even the social scientists . . .” (as cited in Tokarczyk & Fay, p. 15). My department reflects this: out of twelve full-time professors, only one is male. We are the only department in our college, outside of the nursing program, that is predominantly female, and I would argue that we are one of the most labor-intensive departments on campus: for a normal load of five courses with twenty-two students in each, we read over the semester the required amount of six thousand words per student. This means that every semester we are expected to read and comment on 660,000 words written by 110 students.

This vertical power structure that locates emotional labor at the very bottom and a complete removal from caring and nurturing at the very top is a problematic one. Let us imagine another power structure, one that is horizontal, where teaching is not seen as a dreaded feminine task that keeps one from indulging fully in

scholarship, but is rather seen as a craft that requires creativity, talent, and knowledge and receives respect and recognition for the important responsibility of preparing the next generation for an ever-changing world. It is a horizontal power structure that recognizes the time and energy required to teach a class full of eager and not-so-eager minds, and so ensures that everyone is given a course load that does provide ample time for ongoing interactions with students. And this power structure, in contrast to a competitive vertical one, allows instructors time to think creatively, so that they remain not only abreast of their fields, but also alive intellectually and psychically, fresh for their students. Unfortunately, this horizontal power structure does not exist: well, not entirely. Community colleges certainly come closer to this paradigm than any other institution of public, higher education that I am aware of. Yet even community colleges fail to uphold this ideal, since their teachers are loaded down with too many courses and too many service commitments, such as committee meetings and student advising. Because their emotional labor is seen as a labor of love, one that women do instinctually, their time spent with students or dealing with their problems is not looked upon as rigorous, demanding, and valuable work.

Developmental Course Operating on Emotional Labor

There is plenty of literature on the gendered work of teaching. My colleagues and I are familiar with this literature and we know that we are not fully compensated for our work, but we continue to care and nurture because we choose to. Even if I were paid an extra \$5,000 dollars a semester, I would not care more. But in order to get monetarily compensated, we must first be recognized for performing real and important **labor**. In particular, we deserve recognition for our emotional labor, since we are enabling at-risk students not only to obtain associates' degrees but to progress to four-year institutions. We ensure that the doors of academia are kept wide open to students of all socio-economic levels.

It is we, community college professors, who level the playing field of higher education. We do so because we have solid content knowledge and effective pedagogical tools, but mostly, because we spend hours upon hours caring and nurturing.

Bellas (1999) contends that emotional labor in itself is not negative or negatively experienced. I find it extremely rewarding. I treasure the exchanges I have with my students. I also enjoy the diverse personalities in my classroom. I see myself as the maestro trying to bring a cacophony of different backgrounds and ideologies into a harmony of class discussions and activities. But this is no small feat. There are times when I have to monitor my own body language closely so as not to appear frustrated or disappointed.

This is especially true for the developmental courses I teach that requires an excessive amount of emotional labor. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, it is untenured female instructors who teach these courses. Developmental courses are extremely challenging for various reasons: the students' immaturity, their diagnosed and undiagnosed learning disabilities, and the huge gaps in their education. My current English developmental course this semester is a perfect example. I have twenty-one students whom I meet twice a week for an hour and fifty minutes, teaching basic grammar and writing. Close to three-quarters of them have Attention Deficit Disorder. A couple of the older students, who have come back to school after raising a family, need a refresher in grammar. The majority, however, were poor students in high school who somehow got lost in the system and did not get the academic attention they needed. So here I am, with all twenty-one of them in a class that I am expected to run smoothly, teaching a subject that, as one student told me clearly on day one, "sucks." Oh boy! And I somehow have to deliver engaging lesson plans on grammar to a large and poorly skilled classroom of students for close to two hours. I jokingly describe my role as a mother who has to serve broccoli with lots of

cheese over it to hide this green vegetable so that her children will eat it. So I "hide" grammar behind games: concentration, jeopardy, matching, and poker. I also find that I have to be the endearing mother who cheers on her children to create enthusiasm for these learning games: I cheer, laugh, jump, and cajole. By the end of the class, I am not merely tired, I am completely worn out. I have to engage in all these histrionics just to teach parallelism and relative phrases. In my developmental courses, I spend most of my energy on emotional labor. I would even say that their success depends on it. If I simply taught parallelism and then quizzed the students on it, half the students would flunk.

I do not want to walk away from teaching, but I do need the time to "regroup" for another challenging encounter; unfortunately, with 150 students and six courses, I do not always have time to do so. I am often so tired at the end of the week that I can barely do anything over the weekend but stay very still and read.

Consequences of Emotional Labor: Burnout

What if I do not handle arrogant and difficult students with what they might perceive as maternal care, and do not make my developmental courses exciting and entertaining? What happens is that I get penalized at teacher evaluation time. Bellas (1999) contends that "students expect female professors to be nicer than male professors and judge them more harshly when they are not" (p. 99). Moreover, in "The Feminine Critique," Lisa Belkin (2007) captures the conundrum female professionals find themselves in, listing the unwritten rules women are expected to follow: "Don't get angry. But do take charge. Be nice. But not too nice. Speak up. But don't seem like you talk too much" (p. G1). These socially scripted gender roles are ingrained in our students. I know that those students who are coming to my office talking about abusive boyfriends, difficult job schedules, crappy old cars, and unpaid bills are not going to their male professors to share their vulnerabilities. Although I am barely old

enough to be their parent, so that I am not yet seen as their away-from-home mother, I am and I do play the older, caring sister. Being a woman, I naturally assume this role; that is, their expectation of me to nurture and care is projected upon me, and I have been socialized to take on this role. Feminist scholar Ivy Kennelly (2007) reminds us, “women and men operate with different moral orientations, with men focused on separation and women focused on connectedness” (para. 8). Men are expected to fill the role of authority, whereas women are expected to fill the role of nurturer. There are penalties for both groups if they fail to carry out these roles.

I do have a choice to nurture, though. I consciously choose to do so because I genuinely care about my students as full human beings. Not only have I been socialized to take on this role, but I have also been shaped by my working-class background, as I mentioned at the beginning of this paper. Like Sheerin-Devore (2007), “when the challenges of poverty interrupt students’ work, I see it as my job to help them complete their assignments amid the chaos of their lives” (p. B34). However, although nurturing is a choice, it is also a task that I am expected to perform, so that if I do not perform it, or if my students feel that I am not caring enough, I am penalized by poor teacher evaluations. The fact that these evaluations are in my permanent teaching file does play a role in whether I get another year’s contract to teach, means that the choice to nurture is not really a choice. To put it bluntly: I must perform emotional labor if I am to remain gainfully employed.

While I may gain some sense of security by performing emotional labor, it comes at a personal price: burnout. There is a plethora of literature exploring the causes and effects of teacher burnout. In a study entitled, “Beyond Demand–Control: Emotional Labour and Symptoms of Burnout in Teachers” (2006), Gerard Naring, Mariette Briet, and Andre Brouwers contend that surface and deep acting lead to teacher burnout. They write, “Teaching is a profession that requires

almost constant interaction with students. . . . In order to perform these tasks [teaching, grading, disciplining, praising] adequately, teachers have to show or exaggerate some emotions” (p. 303). Expressing emotions that one does not genuinely feel or concealing emotions that one feels strongly is exhausting, they argue, and, if this is done repetitively, without ample time to recuperate and replenish oneself, it can begin to take a physical and psychological toll on one’s well-being. This is a serious issue. Burnout among teachers can lead them not only to appear mechanical, as if always on autopilot, but also to become completely disconnected from their environment, unaware of how their students are absorbing and understanding the material being taught. A burned-out teacher is one who is in danger of becoming apathetic, unable to handle any complications outside of class that can have a direct impact on the student’s performance in class.

One solution to this problem of burnout is to teach and enforce self-advocacy skills. Professor of Early Childhood Education Jennifer Sumsion (2000) contends that teachers who listen to and absorb their students’ pain and heartaches and then counsel them how best to address these problems are doing a disservice to the very ones they think they are helping. First, she argues, “assumptions that caring requires disclosure and emotional intimacy ignore the power imbalance between students and university teachers” (p. 172). Teachers are ultimately the authority figures; they must set clear guidelines and evaluate students accordingly. In order to do this ethically and fairly, instructors have to assert their authority; that is, they must provide a stable foundation for their students wherein rules, criteria, class etiquette, and teacher-student relationship are rooted. Ignoring these formalities can create confusion for the students who may not be aware of what is expected from them and what is appropriate behavior.

Furthermore, students who are encouraged or allowed to “dump” their problems onto their teachers

may not be learning to advocate and take responsibility for themselves. An instructor who searches for answers to help address or alleviate the student's problem or who grants permission for extensions and revisions with few and lax guidelines is not adequately preparing the student for a market, whether in school or in the workforce, that demands accountability and productivity. A student who repeatedly misses class because of, say, a sick child and is excused every time, is being set up up to expect her future employers to do the same. She may not have a realistic understanding of her role in the competitive job market. Moreover, she may not fully understand how formal relationships operate between those who supervise and evaluate and those who follow rules and meet deadlines. This does not mean that instructors should follow rigid rules, but Sumsion argues that they must find a balance between flexibility and authority.

This balance, however, is sometimes quite difficult to achieve. Sumsion (2000) acknowledges this, stating, "I struggle to enact my belief in the importance of caring, without being drawn into the abyss of endless and ultimately disempowering emotional labour that caring can enact" (p. 172). Committed to helping her students while not exhausting herself, Sumsion (2000) envisions "caring [that] revitalises rather than depletes," where it is "not a one-way enterprise, but as a process of mutual empowerment and growth that takes place within the context of relationships that are '*mutually* engaging and rewarding'" (p. 174, her emphasis). This "collaborative caring" reminds teachers that their students must meet them halfway; that is, the teacher provides the tools but leaves it up to the student to use these tools to do their share of the work, whether that be meeting an extended deadline, finding a babysitter in order to attend classes, or making an appointment with a counselor to deal with painful personal issues.

Sumsion (2000) asserts, "I acknowledge the importance of students' well-being," but not at the expense of

myself, disputing the "implicit assumptions that their [students'] needs must always take precedence over my needs" (p. 172). This means that in a caring profession where I am expected to nurture and comfort, I have to remain vigilant about how much I am investing in my classes and in my students and to establish boundaries, even if it means saying no to a student or telling a student that she/he needs to confide in a counselor and not in me. Not only do I have a responsibility to encourage and promote self-advocacy skills for my students, but I also have an obligation to them and to myself to remain an intellectually fresh and vibrant instructor. This means that I must be in control of my emotional labor. Therefore, I have to be the one to speak up for myself and say, "I cannot help you now," despite feeling that I am failing my students. I have to live with this uncomfortable and conflicting emotion.

Epilogue

A few months ago, discussing with a colleague how needy some of my students were, I mentioned the student who came to my office requesting another extension and left in tears when she was not granted one. I shared with her how I cared for this student but was beginning to feel used, as if she was expecting me to make exceptions to fit her lifestyle. When I asked her how she would have handled this, she responded, "I want to nurture my students." Feeling guilty, as if by admitting fatigue I was a "bad," uncaring teacher, I immediately replied, "I do, too." End of conversation. But it is not the end of the conversation. I do want to nurture my students, but not every day. On some days I am emotionally capable of it, on others, I am not. Equally, there are times when I can be flexible and grant an extension or alter an assignment, and other times when I cannot.

Regardless of whether I want to nurture or not, nurturing is **labor**: work, energy, and time—lots of time; and I believe that I should be compensated for it. I deserve this, like every other teacher who does the

same. It is female work that needs to be recognized by more than a pat on the back and a “Wow, you are great with your students.” It is real work, and real work requires tangible rewards: more time and more money. Expecting compensation for my emotional labor does not make me more of a caring teacher. I am acutely aware of the myriad tasks of teaching and of the time and space I need to perform them successfully. I am also aware that until my work is valued and compensated as real labor, I am solely responsible for setting clear boundaries for my students and developing a “collaborative caring” relationship that “encourages students to become responsible and self-supporting” (Sumsion, 2000, p. 174). Still, time-starved and penny-short, I continue to connect with my students, knowing that at the end of the day indeed I have every right to feel bone-tired: emotional labor is hard work. ■■■

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What a Writer Does: Online Learning and the Professional Writing Classroom

Sandra M. Hordis

Abstract

With the expansion and incorporation of varied communications technologies in workplace environments, the necessity of teaching professional writing classes using such technology has increased. Building students' professional identities in such an environment, however, can be daunting and difficult for an online instructor. This paper addresses both the issues surrounding the justifications for teaching professional writing in digital environments (online and hybrid) and the difficulties of constructing such courses for the varied student populations which traditionally enroll in them. In the end, such online pedagogies should prepare students for the dynamic digital environments which nearly all careers now embrace by creating pedagogically flexible environments for the students to explore.

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Keywords

online, hybrid, writing, writing pedagogy, professionalism

Introduction

It would at first appear that applying technology to professional writing pedagogies is an obvious leap: much of today's workplace writing is based on and transmitted through computer technology. Indeed, if we pay attention to those commercials interrupting our favorite television programs, we notice more and more products created to ease the burdens of print communications in corporate environments and to digitize the communication processes which make companies function properly. The obvious and mounting technological link between workplace writing and its professional environments therefore becomes an excellent location for professional writing teachers not only to explore new ways of guiding students through the information and techniques of business and technical writing, but also to expose students to the dynamic and varied work environments which they will encounter in their careers. When we consider the placement of technology in the work world and in our own classes, what becomes clear is that we do a disservice to our students if we do not include pedagogies which get them online and thinking in terms of the communicative flexibilities which are possible in digital environments.

I believe Stuart Selber (2004) is correct in suggesting that by leaving the writing students' computer experience to other classes and venues, "we lose an important opportunity to inform such instruction with humanistic perspectives" which influence, and in some ways determine, rhetorical choices and adaptations in a complex workplace (p. 461).

Certainly, it would *at first appear* that such a pedagogical philosophy is obvious – introducing our students to workplace environments and philosophies is, and should be, a consistent goal of all professional writing classes. But the movement to transfer traditional teaching strategies and assignments to online environments is a daunting one, even for a technologically savvy writing professor. With so much information; so many online examples and templates; and so many good choices for conferencing, drafting, and assessing, a new online teacher can be in many ways overwhelmed with the overabundance of riches which online and hybrid environments offer. To address these potential anxieties, I would like to present several ideas about how online and hybrid professional writing classes might work and to explain how such cyber-methodologies help students to become better writing professionals (and even professionals who write): more flexible, more dynamic, and ultimately more marketable in the corporate world.

History/Context

Louise Rehling (2005) has suggested that many professional writing teachers have rather recently come to understand that "simply teaching the genres or rhetorical principles of workplace writing is not sufficient to prepare students for the transition to workplace expectations" (p. 100). In response to such assessments, professional writing teachers have come to incorporate various creative and practical pedagogies using hands-on projects, real-world writing, and even the creation of hypothetical business environments in

their writing classrooms. Computer activities are commonly incorporated into this innovative environment, with technology serving as a tool of classroom pedagogies and as a way to speed the process of researching information which might otherwise have been found in alternate, traditional locations such as newspapers and libraries (Anderson, Busiel, Benjamin, & Paredes-Holt, 1998). Such practices and objectives all encourage students to think differently about writing and communication than they have done in their other, traditional classes by encouraging new, *professional* relationships between students, promoting observations of existing documentation in context, and developing a sense of the immediacy of writing in any workplace. Interestingly, such pedagogical objectives of these innovative practices closely parallel the communicative outcomes of computer-based systems and networks in the workplace: Lee Sproull and Sarah Keilser (1991) observe that in online environments, "people . . . pay attention to different things, have contact with different people, and depend on one another differently" (p. 4) from in traditional settings. This objective—to foster an understanding of communication and relational practices in professional settings—might be more easily explored in such online environments where dynamic landscapes and architecture clearly express the flexibility of complex work environments.

In teaching and incorporating online environments into classroom practices, the objectives of technology can shift and expand to more accurately reflect the modern workplace. Technology becomes an environment instead of a tool, a way of thinking about the dimensions and interconnectedness of information and its presentation instead of merely an instrument of convenience. The online classroom becomes a rhetoric of itself, able to be shaped and determined by those same stylistic strategies we teach about workplace writing in technical and business writing classes. This objective of technology in the online professional writing classroom

works on two levels: as a model, complex rhetoric for students to strive toward in their own professional writing practices, as well as an initial, safe exploration into the digitized working world.

Such professional objectives naturally echo practical pedagogies: What would such a course look like? In what ways might students connect to the work-world in cogent ways? And, of course, what are the pitfalls of online and hybrid learning in the professional writing classroom?

Many instructors perceive online education as quite static, somewhat reminiscent of old correspondence courses or even Orwell's *1984*—students read course texts; answer questions; and attempt to apply concepts to their own assignments; and a nameless, faceless professor grades the writing without any contact with the student. In this scenario, student and teacher are not really student and teacher; their roles are truncated to *user and evaluator*. But the technical environment offers much more dynamic flexibility and many more methods of contact than this Orwellian metaphor suggests. Professional speakers from across the country (or across the world) might log on to discuss industry-specific or international issues with the students; teacher-monitored collaboration might occur between students who share example links, experiences, and frustrations concerning stylistic development; discussions might happen in real-time settings between groups for projects; students might return to recorded lectures or conferences to develop further and deeper understanding of rhetorical workplace practices. The possibilities of communications software mirror traditional classroom practices, but they also allow for innovative connections through which students might discover the rhetorical and relational differences between academic and work environments.

Issues of Application

Indeed, we have the technological potential to

document, record, and present course information in many ways to help students encounter professional writing dynamically, in dynamic environments. But we should also acknowledge that there are several difficulties in online professional writing courses which we should keep clearly in mind as such courses are constructed. These difficulties generally fall into three categories: Information, Pace Control, and Evaluation (Tallent-Runnels, Cooper, Lan, Thomas, & Busby, 2005).

Information

Information, as the saying goes, can be a dangerous thing, especially in online classrooms when there is not enough or, perhaps worse, too much. Certainly we want our students to explore the information and hypertext landscape which an online course in professional writing might offer, but we also want students to gain an independent research sense in digital environments which they will then be able to transfer to workplace practices in their careers. The question then becomes *How much is too much information and media, and how much is too little?* This question has no easy answer, just as the answer is as equally elusive in traditional classrooms. We might turn to Schnackenberg and Sullivan (2000), whose research into user control in computer-assisted instructional programs suggests that student satisfaction increased proportionally with the control of information in an online instructional program (p. 33). Students who were given effective prompts, but not directive study guides and specific research plans, found greater satisfaction and gratification in the information which they encountered. In such situations, the control of exposure to class information then becomes focal to questions over “too much” and “not enough” (Cuthrell & Lyon, 2007).

Pacing

This question of control brings us to the next hazard of online writing pedagogy: pacing. In online

classrooms, especially advanced classes in technical and professional writing, student populations vary according to computer experience, writing experience, and even professional experience. On the one hand, we may find some students completely comfortable with navigating the architecture of an online class; on the other, we may discover that others struggle with navigation but are enthusiastic about exploring writing assignments. Such mixed populations, while they need some “modest amount of computer-user interactivity” according to Mayer and Chandler (cited in Tallent-Runnels et al., 2005, p. 22), do best by moving through sections of the course at their own pace. For example, the initial explorations of the user interface might be encountered briefly by the computer science major, while initial explanations of rhetorical expectations may be skimmed by English majors. Both, in fact, may be handled briefly by professionals. To a certain extent, building in student control of the pace through which they move through sections of the course will help students feel more connected and confident in the online environment.

Evaluation

Evaluation, the third of the online professional writing pedagogical challenges, addresses both student and teacher practices. Teachers and students in online writing classrooms are certainly critically aware of the absence of face-to-face contact with each other. Students might feel unsupported and isolated in their explorations of both the new formats and rhetorics of professional writing and the dynamic environment of the online classroom. Teachers could also face isolation, wondering whether the pedagogies presented online are understood by students. Substantive communication and evaluation, through individual written comments, group discussion, and peer review, help to circumvent such feelings, especially in professional writing courses where issues and practices are often new to students. Facilitating such evaluative practices online may seem a bit daunting to a teacher whose feedback in traditional

writing courses includes conferences, draft comments, classroom discussion, and group exercises. Indeed, commenting on student writing in online courses might at first appear more “cumbersome,” as Raymond Dumont argues (1996, p. 192), but many writing professors suggest that the comments which are made by both students and teachers in computer-based learning environments are more direct, thoughtful, and precise than those made in traditional conferences and peer-reviews. In online professional writing where evaluation is consistent, the class almost naturally becomes a sort of idealized professional writing environment, where online feedback, evaluation, and group contact might serve as an interactive model for the contemporary digital professional workplace.

Conclusions

By presenting the online classroom to professional writing students with appropriate nods to the dynamic media of their future work environments, we can help the students develop a higher degree of comfort with technology. I would also add Byron Hawk’s (2004) observation about the place of technology in a professional writing classroom. Using Heideggerian constructs of the multiple contexts of workplace writing, he suggests that our purpose as professional writing teachers and students “is not about intervening through technology, but about dwelling with/in technology” (p. 377). Indeed, the workplace has moved to such formats for its communication practices, and as a result, we ourselves, as professional writing teachers, are given a tremendous opportunity to guide our students through discipline-specific knowledge and more generalized workplace knowledge in online classrooms, resulting in confidence, preparedness, and understanding which might not be so easily developed in traditional settings. ■■

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YouTube Dilemmas: The Appropriation of User-Generated Online Videos in Teaching and Learning

Viera Lorencova

Abstract

This article explores specific examples of participatory and multimedia learning, along with questions of credibility, legal and ethical issues, and the educational value of online sources incorporated by students into their research papers and presentations in the seminar, Media and Society. YouTube, a video-sharing website with global contributions of user-generated videos, is of particular interest because its user-generated content is freely uploaded by a diverse pool of users who have no obligation to uphold standards of accuracy. I discuss my dilemmas concerning the inclusion of user-generated online videos into presentations and lectures, and explain why, despite the dilemmas, I consider YouTube to be a potentially useful tool for teaching and learning. I contextualize the educational value of user-generated online videos in the light of current research on multimedia learning, and suggest directions for future research.

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Keywords

participatory learning, credibility of sources, YouTube, copyright, fair use clause, multimedia instruction

Like other practitioners of participatory learning, I approach teaching as an active process that allows students to discover the meaning of new concepts and theories for themselves. In Fall 2007, I set out to teach my special topic seminar, Media and Society, with several envisioned outcomes: to provide students with a broader framework for understanding the relationship between media and society, to equip them with tools for critical interpretation of media content, to encourage them to search for credible sources of media scholarship, and to supplement their research findings with relevant multimedia examples. My ultimate goal was to motivate students to extend their understanding of media beyond the assigned readings and lectures, their leisure-time media consumption, and their own media production.

The class was composed of twenty-four students, mostly seniors and juniors, all of them Communication/Media majors from various concentrations—film and video, graphic design, interactive media, photography, professional communication, and communication studies. To facilitate collaboration, I asked

the class to create small groups based on their interests in topics outlined in the syllabus, which included the current media debates about the increasing concentration of media ownership; the political influences on the media; the role of the independent media sector; the rise and regulation of new media; the media portrayals of underrepresented segments of population; the relationship between media and identity; the active role of media audiences; and the growth of global media. Their task was to identify a research topic closely related to the assigned readings, search for credible outside sources, write individual research papers, and then, as a group, put together and deliver a multimedia presentation.

Online Research, Source Credibility, and the Impact of the Internet on our Brains

In preparation for this assignment, I scheduled a class meeting at the Amelia V. Gallucci-Cirio Library to review the basics of using college library catalogues and databases to locate full-text articles in scholarly journals and relevant trade publications. While most freshmen or sophomores are required to take library workshops to learn the routine and many juniors and seniors possess these skills, in my experience most continue to rely on Google as a starting (and often an ending) point of online research, frequently citing information from websites of questionable origin. To compel students to search for credible online sources as they write research papers, I instructed them to focus in their research primarily on scholarly journals and to avoid random websites stumbled upon while performing a simple Google search. To dissuade them further from using Google, I emphasized that searching through the library databases has multiple benefits: it allows one to conduct a more advanced search, to limit one's search to scholarly journals and other reputable sources, and to access full-text articles for free. (Certainly, one might be able to access the same articles through Google, but the search might take more time, and it could cost twenty dollars or more

to download a single journal article.) I was surprised to learn how many students were unaware that articles from scholarly journals could be costly to download and how many more did not know that their college fees pay for the privilege of having free access to many scholarly journals, if and when they used the library databases to search online. Some students even admitted they had never heard about the option of interlibrary loans and that they had no idea how to go about requesting books that were not readily available at the campus library. Belonging to a generation that is used to uploading and downloading texts, sounds, images and videos in a matter of seconds, many students find an interlibrary loan system unappealing, considering that the waiting period could range from seven to fourteen days. Much more enticing is direct access to the growing number of e-books and e-journals that are now available through the college library catalogue.

A similar observation—the increasing preference for reading shorter and readily available texts online as opposed to the “old-fashioned” thorough reading of books and journals printed on paper—is further explained by Nicholas Carr in his July/August 2008 *Atlantic Monthly* article “Is Google Making Us Stupid? What the Internet is Doing to our Brains” (Carr, 2008a). In his recent book *The Big Switch: Rewiring the World, from Edison to Google*, Carr suggests that reading online is reshaping the wiring of our brains, as we skim from one website to another (Carr, 2008b). As revealed in an online research study, *Information Behaviour of the Researcher of the Future* (carried out by University College London's CIBER Group (2008), and commissioned jointly by the British Library and the Joint Information Systems Committee), this new form of reading is characterized by “power browsing” horizontally through titles, tables of contents and abstracts; by a relatively short amount of time spend on e-book and journal sites; and by what they call a “squirreling behavior” by users who quickly download selected content,

especially if the content is free, and store it for later (UCL CIBER Group, 2008; UCL Ciber Group as cited in Carr, 2008a). The research reveals no evidence of whether the content is thoroughly read or read at all afterwards.

Carr's Google article (2008a) inspired a thought-provoking discussion about the impact of the Internet on our brains in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Goldstein, 2008), followed by Thomas H. Benton's (2008a, 2008b) two-part series "On Stupidity," arguing that several recent books concerning younger generations of learners suggest that the Internet has a damaging effect on our intelligence. For example, Naomi S. Baron (2008) in her recent book *Always On: Language in an Online and Mobile World*, points out that "the proliferation of electronic communication has impaired students' ability to write formal prose; moreover, it discourages direct communication, leading to isolation, self-absorption, and damaged relationships" (Baron as cited in Benton, 2008a). In his book, *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes our Future*, Bauerlein (2008) provides statistical support for his disquieting conclusion that "young Americans are arriving at college with diminished verbal skills, an impaired work ethic, an inability to concentrate, and a lack of knowledge even as more and more money is spent on education" (Bauerlein as cited in Benton, 2008a).

As alarming and dystopian these conclusions are, and many confirm my own observations of students in college classrooms, I remain cautiously optimistic as I push my students to learn to navigate online scholarly databases and library catalogues in their search for primary sources. At the risk of sounding redundant, I keep reminding them that the sources one selects, and what one does with the information from these sources, make all the difference. It goes without saying (but I say it anyhow) that cross-checking for accuracy should be their primary task throughout the research

stage of the assignment. To encourage students to utilize their media production skills (skills that many Communication Media students possess prior to taking a media theory seminar with me), an integral part of the assignment is to illustrate the key points of their research findings with multimedia materials. For example, if they chose to research the impact of the Internet on news journalism, they could consider presenting samples of e-newsletters, blogs and vlogs to contrast the views of blog-enthusiasts, who view blogging as an expression of democratic pluralism, with blog-critics, such as journalism professor Elizabeth Osder who compares bloggers to "navel-gazers" who, in her opinion, are "about as interesting as friends who make you look at their scrapbooks" (Shachtman, 2002). According to Osder, bloggers have an over fascination with self-expression and opinion, which she claims is "opinion without expertise, without resources, without reporting" (Shachtman, 2002). However, as Shachtman (2002) argues, bloggers are usually free "to burrow deep into issues the mainstream press wouldn't ordinarily touch" (para. 18) and thus to challenge the privileged role of traditional journalists. As this example suggests, the question of credibility of sources is clearly an important concern on both sides of the argument, and could be well illustrated in a multimedia presentation through relevant examples.

YouTube Dilemmas

When a group of students inquired about including in their presentations videos from YouTube, a video-sharing website that currently enjoys unprecedented popularity because it allows users to upload, view, comment on and download user-generated videos for free, I agreed but asked them to exercise their judgment in selecting audiovisual content that they considered to be relevant, accurate (in the light of their previous research), and not offensive or defamatory. Instead of browsing, I advised them to peruse YouTube's advanced search

engine¹ that allows users to search for videos based on specific words, exact phrases, at least one word, without words, location, duration, and language; to refine searching by relevance and category; and also to filter out content that might not be suitable for minors. Each search result includes video's opening frame and its title, its total length, tags (keywords reflecting the content), a short description of the video, and such information as who uploaded the video and when, how many times it had been viewed, and its current rating (on a scale from zero to five).

As Michael Miller (2007) puts it in his book *YouTube 4 you*, "there's a lot of chaff out there among the wheat, and it's often hard to separate one from the other" (p. 175). Miller suggests that another option for sifting through the millions of available videos more effectively is to peruse websites that specialize in indexing videos from YouTube and other video-sharing websites into categories such as TV shows, sports, music videos, and education, e.g., Index Tube; Search The Tube; Best of YouTube; Vidspedia; VideoRemote; and The World Internet TV Charts, among others. To keep track of newly uploaded videos, users also have the option to subscribe to RSS (Real Simple Syndication) feeds, a useful tool for anyone conducting online research.

To guide my students in their search for relevant videos and to provide them with feedback while their presentations were still in progress, I required that they email their presentation outlines and online sources to me in advance, along with their dilemmas and questions. While not all selected sources received my endorsement, many did, along with a list of reminders to attribute and properly cite all sources and to make explicit the connections between the readings, multimedia examples, and scholarly sources. For example, the group of students who initially inquired about the possibility of incorporating YouTube videos selected five

short videos (out of many available on YouTube) featuring the MIT professor of linguistics Noam Chomsky to exemplify some of the key points from the readings on the consequences of the increasing horizontal and vertical integration of media ownership. I supported their choice but suggested that they limit their selection to one video and further supplement their presentation with research on the most current data on media ownership; among other possible sources, I recommended the *Columbia Journalism Review* website that lists major media companies and their subsidiaries, as well as articles presenting the most current debates about media ownership.

Using YouTube as a source of multimedia examples in my Media and Society seminar inevitably brought to the forefront questions pertaining to intellectual property rights, legal responsibility and copyright infringement. I asked students to read closely YouTube's Terms of Use, with special attention to Section 5, entitled, "Your Use of Content on the Site":

You understand that when using the YouTube Website, you will be exposed to User Submissions from a variety of sources, and that YouTube is not responsible for the accuracy, usefulness, safety, or intellectual property rights of or relating to such User Submissions. You further understand and acknowledge that you may be exposed to User Submissions that are inaccurate, offensive, indecent, or objectionable, and you agree to waive, and hereby do waive, any legal or equitable rights or remedies you have or may have against YouTube with respect thereto, and agree to indemnify and hold YouTube, its Owners/Operators, affiliates, and/or licensors, harmless to the fullest extent allowed by law regarding all matters related to your use of the site.²

The potential inaccuracy of content is clearly

1 YouTube. "Videos. Advanced Search." Retrieved from <http://youtube.com/browse?s=mp>.

2 YouTube. Terms of Use. Retrieved from <http://youtube.com/t/terms>

acknowledged here, and I almost wish that a similar disclaimer, perhaps a more concise but clearly noticeable reminder that credibility of sources is not guaranteed online, would appear every time one runs a search on Google. A similarly important issue deserving a red flag that is often overlooked by many web users, and YouTube users in particular, is the infringement of copyright, despite the fact that anyone attempting to upload a video on YouTube is faced with the following disclaimer:

Do not upload any TV shows, music videos, music concerts or commercials without permission unless they consist entirely of content you created yourself. The Copyright Tips page and the Community Guidelines can help you determine whether your video infringes someone else's copyright."³

Thus, while every registered user knows that YouTube states explicitly in its Terms of Use⁴ that users may upload videos only with the consent of the copyright holder or persons depicted in the videos, it is not a secret that infringement of copyright continues to be commonplace on YouTube. It happens routinely despite the fact that section 6 of the Terms of Use, entitled "Your User Submissions and Conduct," explicitly states:

In connection with User Submissions, you further agree that you will not submit material that is copyrighted, protected by trade secret or otherwise subject to third party proprietary rights, including privacy and publicity rights, unless you are the owner of such rights or have permission from their rightful owner to post the material and to grant YouTube all of the license rights granted herein.⁵

Given that YouTube does not preview the

uploaded content for copyright violations, it is up to an injured party to demand remedy under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998 that criminalizes some forms of copyright infringement. Since its launch in February 2005, YouTube has faced several lawsuits concerning copyright violations, most notably the 2007 lawsuit issued by Viacom, claiming one billion dollars in damages due to unauthorized circulation of more than one hundred thousand Viacom-copyrighted videos on YouTube and demanding that the videos be taken off the site (Miller, 2007, p. 119). However, many media companies view the circulation of copyrighted video clips on YouTube as free promotion and thus are less likely to sue over copyright infringement, as Miller (2007) points out. And while YouTube's implementation of antipiracy software aims to reduce copyright violation, the main limitation of this approach, according to Miller, is that YouTube protects only selected copyrights, limited primarily to business deals with major record labels. While this might be good news to many YouTube subscribers, in its defense, YouTube claims that eventually their antipiracy software will be available to all content owners (Miller, 2007). To protect themselves from secondary liability for their users' copyright violations, YouTube's Terms of Use state clearly that a user who uploads videos is solely responsible for the submission:

You shall be solely responsible for your own User Submissions and the consequences of posting or publishing them. In connection with User Submissions, you affirm, represent, and/or warrant that: you own or have the necessary licenses, rights, consents, and permissions to use and authorize YouTube to use all patent, trademark, trade secret, copyright or other proprietary rights in and to any and all User Submissions to enable

3 YouTube. Video Upload. Retrieved from http://youtube.com/my_videos_upload

4 YouTube. Terms of Use. Retrieved from <http://youtube.com/t/terms>

5 YouTube. Terms of Use. Retrieved from <http://youtube.com/t/terms>

inclusion and use of the User Submissions in the manner contemplated by the Website and these Terms of Service.⁶

Understanding the implications of the Fair Use provision of the 1976 Federal Copyright Act, codified as 17 U.S.C. § 107,⁷ which explicitly permits the republishing of copyrighted materials for the purposes of criticism, commentary, and education, is particularly important for media scholars, educators, and students who produce and circulate multimedia presentations that include segments from copyrighted videos; in these cases, implementation of the copyrighted video content is not an infringement of copyright. For example, the Media Education Foundation routinely includes segments from films or TV content in their educational media for the purposes of criticism, commentary, and education. Nevertheless, there is a substantial record of lawsuits over “fair use” filed by copyright owners, many successfully defended by media scholars and educators. It does not come as a surprise that copyrighted educational video clips are now widely circulating on YouTube (often without permission); of course, the copyright owners are entitled to file complaints and to request that the videos are pulled from circulation. Based on short descriptions of many educational videos that I came across on YouTube, there seems to be a tacit understanding (if not explicit incitement) on the part of many YouTube uploaders that circulating educational videos on YouTube is a good thing, potentially inspiring creativity and critical thinking, facilitating free access to education, and/or encouraging production of new user-generated educational videos. And while these uploaders are probably well aware that they are legally liable for uploading copyrighted content without permission (yet another angle of this ethical dilemma), viewers of

YouTube videos have no legal liability and can never be sued for watching videos that infringe copyrights.

YouTube Videos and Multimedia Learning

Ultimately, after discussing with my students which YouTube videos were relevant, appropriate and/or worthy of being included in their presentations and encouraging them to think critically about copyright issues, my experience with guiding students through this research assignment compelled me to take a closer look at the existing scholarship on multimedia learning. How do students benefit from including YouTube videos in their presentations? Cognitive psychologists interested in multimedia learning (Moreno & Mayer 1999; Mayer 2001), Mayer and Moreno (1998, 2002), are primarily concerned with identifying different cognitive processes of learners who are presented with multimedia instruction. According to a cognitive theory of multimedia learning, auditory and visual stimuli could be processed by learners simultaneously, because we possess two sub-components of working memory—a verbal information processing system and a visual information processing system that have a tendency to work in parallel, in such a way that “auditory narration goes into the verbal system, whereas animation goes into the visual system” (Mayer & Moreno, 1998, p. 2). According to Mayer and Moreno (1998), in a multimedia learning environment, a learner engages in three cognitive processes: selecting, organizing, and integrating. Selecting is applied to incoming visual and auditory information to yield an image base and a text base, respectively; organizing is used to create a visually-based model and a verbally-based model of the system to be applied; and integrating occurs when connections are made between the two models, the two corresponding events. Contrary to the beliefs of skeptics that learners could be overwhelmed by multimedia instruction, Mayer (2003) argues that

6 YouTube. Terms of Use. Retrieved from <http://youtube.com/t/terms>

7 The Fair Use Network. (2008). Retrieved from <http://fairusenetwork.org/>

there is a growing body of research that suggests that “learners learn more deeply⁸ from well-designed multimedia presentations than from traditional verbal-only messages, including improved performance on tests of problem-solving transfer” (p. 127). According to Mayer (2003), “the promise of multimedia learning is that teachers can tap the power of visual and verbal forms of expression in the service of promoting student understanding” (p. 127). As Gauntlett and Horsley (2004) and other media theorists predict, interactive media will continue to evolve, and with them, new types of participatory experiences will emerge, with differing levels of participation and more sophisticated modes of interactivity. I have no doubts that a proliferation of new multimedia technologies and new forms of interactivity will continue transforming our methods of teaching and learning. Our ongoing task will be to figure out how to use new technology to facilitate active learning and to stimulate critical thinking.

In my own teaching experience, students are more successful in making connections between the readings and their research findings if they are asked to articulate their ideas in writing as well as in the form of a multimedia presentation. Similarly, I am more successful in getting my points across, and engaging the class in a discussion when I combine lectures with multimedia presentations. Based on my observations, students are more engaged in learning about media, and more likely to actively participate in class discussion, if multimedia instruction is included.

Preliminary Reflections

When I originally designed the research assignment in my seminar, Media and Society, my goal was to invite students to practice a critical thinking approach to learning that emphasized creative and active pursuit of knowledge, practical application of gained knowledge,

and critical analysis. This approach is in sharp contrast with the so-called “banking method,” a term coined by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970) to describe a method whereby teachers deposit information that students “withdraw” for tests and exams. A critical thinking approach encourages students to examine and question their own assumptions and perspectives, as well as the assumptions and perspectives underlying the assigned reading, and the lectures and examples they hear and see in the class. In other words, I asked students to contribute creatively to their learning, instead of repeating the knowledge they had already received from the assigned readings and my lectures. This was the main reason why I decided to include multimedia presentations in the assignment.

My first year of experimenting with multimedia presentations yielded several preliminary observations that I incorporated in the assignment guidelines as I prepared to teach my Media and Society seminar for the second time. I revised a rubric that I had originally used for the assessment of this assignment in order to provide students with detailed guidelines and a clear outline of the envisioned learning outcomes (see Table 1). In the revised rubric, I further specified the assignment components and the evaluation criteria of the envisioned outcomes to help students to understand how the assignment would facilitate their learning experience before they began to search for outside sources, select multimedia examples, and discuss and document their findings in the research report. The revised rubric included guidelines for each of the four components (outline, research, research report, and presentation) and specified four levels of performance (each with a numerical and a descriptive value—1 indicating a beginning level, 2, developing, 3, accomplished, and 4, exemplary). The four components, listed in the left-hand column of my rubric, broke down the assignment into four distinct steps, as follows:

» Outline: Write a brief summary of the selected

8 Deep-learning is defined by Mayer as learning that results in problem-solving transfer (2003, p. 127).

research topic and an outline of your upcoming presentation. Submit by email five days in advance.

- » Research: Conduct outside research to extend your understanding of the key concepts from the readings. Each student has to find two outside scholarly sources.
- » Research Report: Write a research report (define your research topic; explain how it relates to other topics we have discussed in the course; summarize your main research findings). 3 double-spaced pages plus complete bibliography. MLA.
- » Presentation: Individually or together with your research partner, present your research findings along with relevant multimedia examples. In the conclusion, engage the class in a discussion, and/or interactive activity.

Considering that this assignment consists of four different steps, my revised rubric now includes a narrative description of specific criteria applied to each component (as opposed to using numeric evaluation only, as I did last year). My main rationale for describing the criteria was to identify (for students and also for myself) the required skills to fulfill the envisioned learning outcomes, each corresponding to a task that had to be accomplished if the assignment were to fulfill its main purpose: to creatively enrich the process of learning by conducting outside research, by explaining what they learned, by comparing and contrasting different points of view, and by exemplifying their knowledge through multimedia examples. While this rubric might give an impression that the assignment is rigidly structured, it is, in fact, relatively open, given that students have to decide for themselves how to approach the process of knowledge production; they have to choose their own research topics, search for sources, and ultimately, teach and engage their classmates by using multimedia examples, initiating discussion, and/or soliciting alternative

interpretations. Because there is no prescribed topic and formula for the presentations, the assignment leaves space for creativity; inevitably, it also generates potential misunderstandings, since it requires students to make choices in the process.

To prevent some mistakes and dilemmas that occurred in the previous year (e.g., some students failed to submit their outline in advance, some struggled with locating relevant academic sources and multimedia examples, and many did not know how to cite properly), this year I decided to distribute the rubric at the beginning of the semester (and I also made it available on the course website, in a pdf format), to provide students with detailed guidelines and to help them envision in advance how their work would be evaluated. At the conclusion of their research projects, I will use the rubric again to provide students with a numerical grade and feedback on each component of the assignment. Currently, while students are still in the process of conducting their research, I am initiating regular class discussions about their research-in-progress, their views of what constitutes a credible outside source, their experiences with using academic electronic databases, and their competence to properly cite their sources. To provide students with more information on the copyright issues, this year I decided to assign additional readings devoted to intellectual property rights, copyright infringement and newly emerging academic scholarship on YouTube that further extends our discussions about media and offers guidelines for multimedia learning.

These are my preliminary impressions based on my pedagogical practice and observations, and a starting point of my research project that will unfold in response to the following questions: How do multimedia presentations contribute to learning? How is critical thinking fostered through multimedia learning? Is multimedia learning more effective than learning based on verbal instruction? Is it more enjoyable? Is more enjoyable

Media and Society: COMM 4206

Student:

Assignment : Research Paper and Presentation

Your task is to research a topic of your choice, write a literature review based on your outside research, and present to the class a multimedia presentation. Start by conducting additional research related to the assigned readings, locate two articles from academic journals or books, and search for relevant multimedia examples from popular culture. A presentation outline, your research report (3 pages double-spaced, MLA format), and your presentation will count for **30%** of your final grade. See below for more details. Your work will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

	Beginning 1	Developing 2	Accomplished 3	Exemplary 4	SCORE
Outline /Summary - Write a brief summary of the selected research topic and an outline of your upcoming presentation. Submit by email 5 days in advance.	Outline/summary of presentation topic reflecting a beginning level of work-in-progress	Outline/summary of presentation topic reflecting a developing level of work-in-progress	Outline/summary of presentation topic reflecting an accomplished level of work-in-progress	Outline/summary of presentation topic reflecting an exemplary level of work-in-progress (submitted via email five days before your presentation).	
Research - Conduct outside research to extend your understanding of the key concepts from the readings. Each student has to find 2 outside scholarly sources.	Outside sources (journals, books, reputable web-based sources) revealing beginning research skills	Relevant outside sources (journals, books, reputable web-based sources) revealing developing research skills	Relevant outside sources (journals, books, reputable web-based sources) revealing accomplished research skills	Relevant outside sources (scholarly journals, books, reputable web-based sources) revealing exemplary research skills	
Research Report - Write a research report (define your research topic, explain how it relates to other topics we have discussed in the course; summarize your main research findings). 3 double-spaced pages plus complete Bibliography. MLA.	Research paper reflecting beginning writing skills, underdeveloped and disorganized summary of research findings. Less than 3 pages long, does not follow MLA format.	Research paper reflecting developing writing skills and summary of research findings lacks details. Less than 3 pages long, multiple mistakes in MLA format.	Research paper reflecting accomplished writing skills, and detailed summary of main research findings. 3 pages long, minor mistakes in MLA format.	Research paper reflecting exemplary writing skills, excellent organization and detailed argumentation in presenting summary of research findings. 3 pages long, follows MLA format.	
Presentation - Individually or together with your research partner, present your research findings along with relevant multimedia examples. In the conclusion, engage the class in a discussion, and/or interactive activity	Interactive presentation reflecting a beginning level of presentation skills, lacking relevant multimedia examples, and no attempt to initiate class discussion	Interactive presentation reflecting a developing level of presentation skills, including some relevant multimedia examples, and attempt to initiate discussion	Interactive presentation reflecting an accomplished level of presentation skills, including relevant multimedia examples, and successful attempt to initiate class discussion	Interactive presentation reflecting an exemplary level of presentation skills, including well explained & relevant multimedia examples, and a creative approach to class discussion	

Table 1.

learning more effective learning? How do we teach students to design multimedia presentations (and to choose and interpret appropriate videos) to exemplify or support their arguments? Would it be more effective if students produced their own videos as part of their multimedia presentations? Do we, as educators, have the resources necessary to produce our own educational videos and design multimedia presentations?

Sharing the sense of excitement about learning that I am observing among many students as we experiment with multimedia learning, I am persuaded that carefully selected online sources, including user-generated videos available on YouTube, have the potential to become

useful tools for teaching and learning and, perhaps, an inspiration for new interactive multimedia educational technologies. Further research will allow us to evaluate the pros and cons of multimedia learning and to understand further the connections between multimedia learning, teaching effectiveness, critical thinking, and creativity. ■■

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Welcome to Current Clips and Links

Each issue will include links to a wide range of interesting, non-commercial websites related to teaching and learning. We invite reader suggestions and will assume responsibility for seeking permissions for use in the *Currents*.

1. MAA Online: An ongoing struggle for faculty involves balancing classroom time, discussion, review, new material, and question/answer time. This site provides a series of articles on time-saving teaching techniques that are applicable to the general classroom. "Teaching Time Savers" is an article designed to share easy-to-implement activities for streamlining the day-to-day tasks of faculty members everywhere." *Recommended by Maria Fung, Assistant Professor of Mathematics, Worcester State College.*

<http://www.maa.org/features/TeachingTimeSavers.html>



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2. MIT OpenCourseWare: With the mission of advancing knowledge, MIT OpenCourseWare provides free access to over 1,800 courses, serving as a reference for readings, course design and assessment. There is no registration fee or process and materials may be downloaded for free.

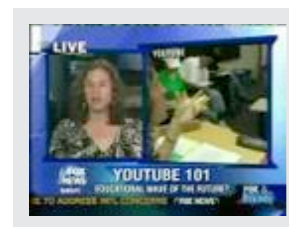
<http://ocw.mit.edu>



3. Learning From YouTube: Media Studies Professor Alexandra Juhasz, Pitzer College, CA, has introduced a course "Learning From YouTube;" an example of an experimental, creative, and innovative approach to teaching about the role and impact of the media on society.

<http://www.youtube.com/MediaPraxisme>

<http://www.youtube.com/group/lfty0>



4. Slide Share: an on-line site which allows individuals to share presentations on a wide range of topics. Recently posted by Kayeri Akweks is a presentation delivered at Everett Community College called "Five Ways Technology Can Save Faculty Time." <http://www.slideshare.net/kayeriakweks/five-ways-technology-can-save-faculty-time-presentation>



5. Centre for Sociology, Anthropology, Politics (C-SAP):

C-SAP's "aim is to support teaching and learning within our subject areas, and to improve the student learning experience." Its resources page provides quick links to projects, teaching tips, publications, research, book reviews



and more, serving as a supportive teaching tool for social science disciplines. *ELISS (Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences)*, is C-SAP's new online journal, launched in May 2008.

<http://www.c-sap.bham.ac.uk/resources/>

<http://www.eliss.org.uk/>

6. The Teaching Tips Index: from Faculty Development at Honolulu Community College, lists articles for topics such as: the First Day, Course Design, Using Questions Effectively in Teaching, Motivating Students, Dealing with Stress, and Teaching Techniques. Piper Fogg's article "A Dozen Teaching Tips for Diverse Classrooms" is of particular interest. <http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/teachtip.htm>



7. The MERLOT Chemistry Portal: is an educational resource for teaching and learning. MERLOT Chemistry has partnered with the *Journal of Chemical Education* to provide the best in chemical education resources. The site provides links to teaching tips, learning materials and other resources for Chemistry faculty. <http://chemistry.merlot.org>



8. The Open Learning Initiative (OLI): at Carnegie Mellon University, builds courses using intelligent tutoring systems, virtual laboratories, simulations, and frequent opportunities for assessment and feedback. <http://www.cmu.edu/oli/>



9. Monthly Update: is the newsletter of the Center for Teaching and Learning, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. We highlight two articles in the February 4, 2008 issue: Yvonne Shafer's "Student Success: Faculty Make a Difference" and Thomas Wortman's "Serving the Underserved." <http://ctl.mnscu.edu/about/newsletter/documents/newsletter02-4-08.html>



10. E-Learning Queen: is a blog written by Dr. Susan Smith Nash, that "focuses on distance training and education, from instructional design to e-learning and mobile solutions, and pays attention to psychological, social, and cultural factors. The edublog emphasizes real-world e-learning issues and appropriate uses of emerging technologies. Who is the Queen? You are, dear reader. Susan Smith Nash is the Queen's assistant." <http://www.elearningqueen.com>



The Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education at Worcester State College

Bonnie Orcutt

Introduction

Recent events have given us greater reason to understand our perilous times and to ask what we can do as a faculty to give our students the means to adjust to a dynamic, often-volatile economy, and to have a life as well as to earn a living. What knowledge and skills will arm them to address the moral and ethical dilemmas of the current political, social, environmental, biological and economic upheavals? As educators, we are faced with the task of teaching the competencies needed to succeed in this new global economy, while developing the broader elements of a liberal education such as effective communication, integration of learning across disciplines and cultures, leadership, and overall well-being. Our charge is to move students beyond a solely utilitarian conception of the college experience, in which the desire for credentials is primarily linked to employment and income, toward one that encompasses the broader goals of civic engagement, social responsibility, and an examined life. How do we do both while validating the legitimacy of each?

Two major undertakings currently in progress at Worcester State College (WSC) are the implementation of the Liberal Arts and Sciences Curriculum (LASC), and participation in the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education. As noted by Dr. Andrew G. DeRocco (Chairman of the Board of the Connecticut Academy for Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology and former Commissioner of Higher Education in Connecticut), at a workshop recently held at WSC, “Zen and the Art of Curricula Reform: The Eight-Fold Way,” LASC opens up the prospects for students to move beyond a discipline-based approach to learning to “develop a sense of connectedness, and along with it a growing curiosity, a growing imagination, and a healthy dose of skepticism” (2008). It provides an opportunity for the faculty at Worcester State College to reconsider the role of general education in the twenty-first century. The Wabash National Study seeds to facilitate an understanding of (a) the practices, pedagogies, programs, and institutional structures that improve teaching and learning and support liberal education and (b) corresponding methods of assessment.

Worcester State College enters the Wabash National Study at a pivotal time in the College’s recent history: over the last decade the College has undergone a high rate of turnover in its upper administration, the replacement

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of approximately 70% of the faculty primarily through retirement and growth, a twelve-year process of discussion and revision of its general education curriculum, culminating in passage of the College's Liberal Arts and Sciences Curriculum, the expansion of its residential population, and initiatives to expand its global reach through study-abroad initiatives and exchange programs. These changes have generated an increased need for dialogue across campus. We look to participation in the Wabash Study to help provide the basis for ongoing discussions about curriculum reform, to facilitate opportunities to engage students and faculty in discussions about teaching and learning, to allow for an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of our first-year experience program, and to highlight interconnections between academic and student affairs that may be essential to achieving the outcomes set out by the new curriculum. For WSC specifically, the data generated by the Wabash Study will provide benchmarks by which to measure learning outcomes of LASC, which has a Fall 2009 implementation date, in comparison with the general education program currently in place.

The Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education

The Center for Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College seeks ways to strengthen the liberal arts through collaborations with institutions nationwide. As part of this mission, the Center initiated a study designed to investigate factors that influence learning outcomes associated with a liberal education. The Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education began in 2006 and, to date, there are 49 participating institutions, including community colleges, private and public four-year liberal arts colleges, and research and regional universities from across the nation (Center for Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College, 2008a). As detailed on the Center's website, the Wabash National Study focuses on the educational conditions

and experiences that foster selected liberal arts education outcomes. These outcomes include: inclination to inquire and lifelong learning, effective reasoning and problem solving, integration of learning, intercultural effectiveness, leadership, moral reasoning, and well-being (for an extended discussion, see Center for Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College, 2008b).

The Study's first cohort consists of 4,501 first-year students who entered in Fall 2006. An additional 3,371 first-year students joined the Study in Fall 2007 to form the second cohort. This year, Fall 2008, students from an additional 26 institutions will join the Study and comprise the third cohort. Each cohort will be surveyed three times over the course of the Study, the first time as incoming freshman, the second time at the end of their freshman year and the third time, at the end of their senior year. The longitudinal design allows for examination of the extent to which students have changed during their college years.

The fall assessment surveys administered to incoming freshmen students include a registration form which asks students to give consent for the study, provides demographic information, and solicits information about high school activities, and a student survey that collects background information on high school experiences, values and goals, and health, among other things. Incoming freshman are also given a set of student assessments that constitute the outcome measures and include the: Need for Cognition Scale, Socially Responsible Leadership Scale, Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale, the Miville-Guzman Universality-Diversity Scale, CAAP Critical Thinking Test, and Defining Issues Test 2. (For an overview of these surveys and what they are designed to capture, see Center for Inquiry in the Liberal Arts at Wabash College, 2008c).

In the spring semester of their first and fourth years, participants will be administered the National Survey of Student Engagement, the Student Experiences Survey

and the Outcomes Measures Surveys outlined above.

According to Wabash's Center for Inquiry (2008d), the data may be used to address the following research questions:

- » What are the institutional conditions, practices, programs and structures that foster the development and integration of the seven student outcomes noted above?
- » What are the specific qualities and characteristics of institutional conditions, practices, programs and structures that foster the development and integration of the seven student outcomes?
- » Are the institutional conditions, practices, programs and structures that foster the development and integration of these outcomes different for different kinds of students?
- » Are there combinations of these institutional conditions, practices, programs, and structures that advance all seven outcomes?
- » What are the qualities and characteristics of institutions that are more effective at promoting the combination of outcomes?

Data from the study may also be used to address institution-specific questions surrounding issues of retention, persistence, and student success, as well as to provide feedback on campus initiatives such as first-year programs and learning communities.

Next Steps: Wabash National Study

Wabash has completed written reports about the data drawn from the first year of the study. An analysis of the 2006-2007 data, described in their report entitled, *An Overview of Findings from the First Year of the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education* (Center for Inquiry, 2008e), revealed small changes in students over the course of their freshman year with respect to the outcomes measures. The largest positive change was students' growth in moral reasoning. There was no noted statistically meaningful change in critical

thinking measures, and very little change with respect to leadership and well-being. Of noted concern was the general decline in students' positive attitudes about diversity and declines in both students' academic motivation and their interest in academic subject matter.

The first-year overview noted that while students do not appear to be undergoing significant changes over their freshman year, a number of teaching practices and institutional conditions have been identified that predict positive impacts on the seven outcomes being measured. They found three broad categories of teaching practices and institutional conditions that predict growth with respect to a variety of student outcomes. These categories correspond to the following scales that were empirically derived from the survey questions in the Wabash National Study (Center for Inquiry, 2008e). Students who rank higher on these scales tend to show greater growth on the outcome measures.

Scale 1: Good Teaching and High Quality Interactions with Faculty, which includes the following subscales: faculty interest in teaching and student development, prompt feedback, quality of non-classroom interactions with faculty, teaching clarity and organization.

Scale 2: Academic Challenge and High Expectations, which includes the following subscales: academic challenge and effort, frequency of higher-order exams and assignments, challenging classes and high faculty expectations, and integrating ideas, information, and experiences.

Scale 3: Diversity Experiences, which includes the following subscales: meaningful interactions with diverse peers I and meaningful interactions with diverse peers II.

Three additional scales were developed, but have shown a mixed or weaker relationship with the outcomes than were revealed in the first three scales described above.

Scale 4: Frequency of Interactions with Faculty and Staff which includes the following subscales: frequency of interactions with faculty and frequency of interactions with student affairs staff.

Scale 5: Interactions with Peers which includes the following subscales: co-curricular involvement and degree of positive peer interactions.

Scale 6: Cooperative Learning.

Next Steps: Worcester State College

Worcester State College has completed the first administration of the surveys along with the other participating institutions. What lies ahead: first and foremost, student participation in the upcoming spring 2009 surveys. More generally, participating institutions, including WSC, need to begin campus-wide conversations about what we want to know and how we might use the data generated from the study to answer our questions. Participating institutions need to contemplate how to overcome potential unwillingness of faculty and administrators to engage fully with the implications of the data, how to incorporate outcomes into strategic planning initiatives for a liberal arts education, how to identify institution-specific questions which the data might be able to address, and what the identifiable implications are for dedicated faculty. At WSC, we anticipate that feedback from the Wabash Study will help us find answers to such questions and concerns as: How are we to identify and implement teaching, learning, and institutional changes in response to Study outcomes, What are the differential and analogous impacts of LASC on commuter versus resident students, How do we engage our students in the process of curriculum reform and implementation, and How do we integrate Student and Academic Affairs in order to accomplish the LASC objectives?

Much work lies ahead: many questions yet to be identified, answers yet to be provided, and changes yet to be made. ■■■

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From the Book Review Editors

Catherine Wilcox-Titus and Matthew Johnsen

Welcome to the book review section of *Currents in Teaching and Learning*. Teachers in higher education will always find book reviews a useful resource to improve their classroom experience. To this end, we intend to publish reviews of recent publications from any discipline that support faculty teaching, as well as reviews of older books that have served teachers well.

At this early stage in our journal's development, we are just beginning to build a list of reviewers. If you are interested in writing a review, we encourage you to start by reading the first issue of *Currents* and the information on our website. Please contact us if you think you might like to become a regular, or even an occasional, reviewer for *Currents*. Let us know your availability and your particular areas of interest/expertise and we will send you a title to review and guidelines for reviewers.

We welcome book reviews (500-1000 words) across all disciplines. Please contact us before writing a review to inquire whether it would be appropriate for *Currents*. Reviews may focus on a single monograph or may take a thematic approach and group several texts. Please feel free to recommend a title for review, or to make a suggestion for a longer review article.

We look forward to hearing from you,

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Making the Case for Rubrics

Catherine Wilcox-Titus

Introduction to Rubrics: An Assessment Tool to Save Grading Time, Convey Effective Feedback and Promote Student Learning. By Dannelle D. Stevens & Antonia J. Levi. Stylus Publishing, 2005, 131 pp., \$17.95 (PB), ISBN 978-1-57922-115-7.

Catherine Wilcox-Titus is Assistant Professor of Visual and Performing Arts at Worcester State College.

The use of rubrics has probably made its way into most of our repertoires as an essential resource for professors like me in a teaching-intensive environment. But rubrics have proven extremely useful for faculty in all colleges, as demands on time and energy seem to have no end. *Introduction to Rubrics* (2005) by Dr. Dannelle Stevens, professor of graduate teacher education and educational psychology, and Dr. Antonia Levi, professor of modern Japanese history and popular culture, has two vital things in its favor. First, it is short (131 pages), and second, it is packed with useful information. The book is neatly divided into two parts, theory and practice. Part I, "An Introduction to Rubrics," lays out the arguments for the usefulness of rubrics and Part II, "Construction and Use in Different Contexts," gives detailed descriptions of appropriate kinds of categories and descriptors for a range of disciplines. This is a book where ease of use has been clearly taken into account in the overall format. The table of contents lists each chapter heading with subheadings, and this facilitates finding the desired topic at a glance.

Part I presents in summary form a compelling case for the use of rubrics for both faculty and students. From the student's point of view, one of the most important reasons for using rubrics derives from the definition given by the authors: "At its most basic, a rubric is a scoring tool that lays out the specific expectations for an assignment" (p.3). The emphasis here is on the word "specific," since a well-designed rubric includes all those comments that the instructor would formerly include in hand-written comments. A rubric alerts the students to precise expectations for an "A" paper *before* they start the assignment. Among the most persuasive reasons faculty should use them is that they save time, since rubrics will keep those handwritten comments to a minimum. In my case, this has added benefits, since I am told that my handwriting tends to be illegible. Furthermore, sadly, we all know that some students don't bother to read our wonderful comments. The authors also remind us that without rubrics, grading tends to be more variable according to the grader's state of

mind, the assignment's place in the stack of papers, the time of day, and so on: subjective factors we know all too well. A rubric keeps the focus on the criteria set out at the beginning.

Lest the instructor think that using a rubric encourages sound-bite education and the mere accumulation of disconnected facts, the authors take some pains to make the case that the smart use of rubrics encourages critical thinking. An intelligently constructed rubric cues the students to the kinds of things they should be thinking about and nudges them toward nuances of judgment and the thoughtful evaluation of information. A good rubric will break the assignment down into manageable parts. Stevens and Levi cover all of this in a concise manner, carefully referencing the sources that support their conclusions.

The authors are careful to take the readers through a process of thinking through how they might want to use a rubric. Design of the appropriate rubric for the assignment is key. In addition, the book presents pros and cons for constructing rubrics, paying particular attention to the needs of first-year students as they encounter college-level expectations of independent, self-motivated learning, some for the first time.

Part II takes up the details of how to begin constructing a useful rubric. Again, the authors break down the process into stages to help guide the instructor through the process. Special attention is given to the needs of first-year students, and there are numerous examples of the kinds of comments the instructor might want to include in the categories of achievement and criteria of grading. There is a chapter on how to use the rubric in the classroom as a teaching tool, motivating students to think through what they themselves would include in a rubric. This "stakeholder" model is useful for prompting students to have an emotional as well as intellectual investment in their learning. There is also a chapter devoted to using rubrics with teaching assistants and tutors. Another chapter goes over the

various ways of using the rubric to grade, assigning percentages to the various categories, circling relevant criteria, or adding handwritten comments. The last chapters give discipline-specific examples. Appendices include blank rubric templates, as well as few examples of rubrics for specific assignments from Portland State University, such as "Holistic Critical Thinking," "Leading a Classroom Discussion," and "Quantitative Literacy." In addition, the authors have also included their website address (Stevens & Levi, n.d.), where they have posted the blank rubrics from their appendices, some useful tips, and a few more examples. There are other resources on the web that have many more rubric samples, such as Rubistar (n.d.), but the strength of Stevens and Levi's (n.d.) resource is that it is geared exclusively to college-level teaching, where a site such as Rubistar is not.

This book is an ideal resource for those who are just beginning to think about using rubrics. However, it is also very useful for those of us who already use rubrics but need to refine our applications or get new ideas about how to optimize their use. *Introduction to Rubrics* is an inexpensive paperback, well worth adding to your collection or your institution's teaching and learning center. ■■■

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Listening to the Experts

Matthew Johnsen

Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds by Richard J. Light. Harvard University Press, 2001, 2004 (PB), 256 pp., \$15.95 (PB), ISBN 978-0-674-01359-9.

Matthew Johnsen is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Worcester State College.

What steps can students and faculty members take to improve the undergraduate experience? *Making the Most of College*, by Richard Light (2001), provides some useful answers to this question. Light was commissioned by the President of Harvard University to conduct a qualitative study involving in-depth interviews with 1,600 Harvard undergraduates. While some of the findings and recommendations may be anticipated, others may surprise even seasoned faculty.

The author suggests how students and faculty can enrich the overall college community through the following strategies:

- » *Structuring Coursework*: Most students reported that they learned significantly more in highly structured courses, such as those with many quizzes and short assignments. As Light explains, “crucial to this preference is getting quick feedback from the professor—ideally with an opportunity to revise and make changes before receiving a final grade” (p. 8).
- » *Encouraging Collaboration*: In contrast with his own undergraduate experience, Light suggests that there is now greater emphasis on encouraging students to work together outside of class. Students who do so benefit enormously: they are more engaged, better prepared, and learn significantly more.
- » *Working with Faculty*: In addition, he finds that “students who get the most out of college, who grow the most academically, and who are happiest organize their time to include activities with faculty members, or with several other students, focused around accomplishing substantive academic work” (p. 10).
- » *Providing Good Advice*: Advising was important to these students. Light suggests that advisors can promote good practices: students should try to get to know at least one faculty member well each semester; students should pay close attention to their use of time;

and students should become engaged in at least one campus-based extracurricular activity. He writes, “a large majority of undergraduates describe particular activities outside the classroom as profoundly affecting their academic performance. Some point to study techniques, such as working in small groups outside of class” (pp. 10-11).

- » *Learning beyond the Classroom*: Learning outside of classes, especially in residences and extracurricular activities, is vital to the collegiate experience. When students were asked to think of a specific, critical incident or moment that had changed them profoundly, Light reports that “four-fifths... chose a situation or event outside of the classroom” (p. 8).

In all, to create a more cohesive sense of community and connection, greater direct involvement between students and faculty is recommended. Small class size is certainly one factor which encourages academic development. For these students, however, direct involvement often continued far beyond the walls of the classroom: “some undergraduates, when asked to identify a particularly critical or profound experience at college, identify a mentored internship *not done for academic credit*” (p. 9). In this study, mentoring emerges as a powerful component in the undergraduate experience. Light also reports that the experience of racial and ethnic diversity within the college community had a highly positive impact for most undergraduates. College seemed to create an ideal environment for creating a diverse community that fostered an attitude of open-mindedness: “an eagerness to meet and engage with people who look different from oneself and come from different backgrounds” (p. 135).

This well-written book should be a welcome addition to faculty bookshelves for several reasons. While its results were forged from studying a single university, its findings can be generalized to other colleges

and universities. In addition, it provides a useful and therapeutic reminder for faculty and administrators that to listen carefully to what *students* say is helpful and important and encourages us to incorporate this learned experience into our practice. Such lessons from these learned (or learning) experts would seem to be extremely valuable. ■■

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Volume 1, Number 2, Spring 2009

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