Currents

In Teaching and Learning

WORCESTER
STATE
UNIVERSITY

About Us

Currents in Teaching and Learning is a peer-reviewed electronic journal that fosters exchanges among reflective teacher-scholars across the disciplines. Published twice a year, *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. Non-specialist and jargon-free, *Currents* is addressed to both faculty and graduate students in higher education, teaching in all academic disciplines.

Subscriptions

If you wish to be notified when each new issue of *Currents* becomes available online and to receive our Calls for Submissions and other announcements, please join our *Currents* Subscribers' Listserv. Subscribe Here

Table of Contents

EDITORIAL

"Crossing boundaries with integrative learning"

— Martin Fromm

Living in a globalized world, we are bombarded with news that reminds us of the porous boundaries between nations and regions of the world. Yet, in spite of this recognition of global connectivity, within academia real and perceived walls stand between disciplines, between "traditional" and "non-traditional" learning, and between classroom and community. The scholars contributing to this issue propose ways to breach these boundaries by introducing integrative approaches to and standards of teaching and learning. Collectively, they present a vision of intellectual cultivation and training that encompasses an awareness of the cognitive learning process, a belief that the core features of analytical writing apply across schools and disciplines, an observation that technology does not detract from the importance of the student-instructor relationship, and attention to the ethical imperative of tying theory with practice. At their core, the articles included here address a tension in academic values between specialization and compartmentalization on one hand and interdisciplinary collaboration and connectivity on the other. Their approach to confronting this dilemma is not so much to question the usefulness of specialized disciplinary approaches to producing knowledge, but rather to draw attention to core principles and strategies that underlie effective teaching and learning across multiple contexts.

In her article entitled "(Re)Defining Academic Rigor: From Theory to Praxis in College Classrooms," Manya Whitaker mobilizes theories of developmental and cognitive psychology to re-examine the core meaning of academic rigor. Her study redefines rigor as "emotional and cognitive processes instead of an academic standard" and suggests that "we must shift the focus of rigor from the teaching to the learning" by engaging in practices that emphasize a co-constructed, "dialogical" approach to producing knowledge. Criticizing the tendency to associate rigor with specialized research rather than teaching, the author points to the need for restructuring of institutional priorities, expectations, and programs in a way that clarifies and cultivates rigorous teaching practices.

Further complicating the search for a systematic definition of academic rigor has been the impact of technology on the form and structure of higher education teaching and learning. The implications of online education in particular for teachers' and students' mutual investment in the academic process has come under wide debate. In "Is this Course worth my time? Key Factors in Adult Online Student Satisfaction," George Howell, Amber Simos, and Keith Starcher address this issue in the context of online adult learning at a small faith-based Midwestern university. Examining students' perceptions of the learning process through "importance-satisfaction performance gap analysis," the authors contend that the teacher-student relationship continues to play a critical role in effective online learning and they argue that "institutions of higher education must invest in 'systematic assessment activities'" in order to align these new modes of learning with institution-wide standards of academic rigor.

Georgia Rhoades and Lynn Moss Sanders, in "The Evolution of Best Practice: Teaching Genre and Analysis Across the Curriculum," extend this conversation about core teaching principles to the specific areas of writing and research in and across the disciplines. With backgrounds in Rhetoric and Composition and Folklore Studies, the authors report on findings from their collaborative project to design and implement a hybrid model for introducing students to primary research, analysis, and writing. Aligned with broader institutional and state-wide initiatives in curricular renovation, their development and adaptation of core WAC and folklore assignments has inspired an integrative push in a variety of fields. While providing students with a common framework through which to transfer their skills across levels and specialties, the assignment that the authors developed has fostered pedagogical exchanges among faculty across the university and has even informed innovations in scholarly writing that can speak to mixed audiences.

The final perspective on integrative learning included in this issue directs our attention to the walls separating the worlds inside and outside the classroom. In her essay titled "'Sivilizing' Our Students: Asking Questions, Studying Literature, and Practicing Ethics," Jeraldine Kraver argues that "at the confluence of the intellectual, the pedagogical, and the ethical we can encourage students to *think* well. The challenge is to move them from thinking well to *doing* good." Challenging what she views as a tendency among instructors to eschew risky conversations about ethics in the classroom, the author proposes a systematic approach to incorporating rigorous examination of ethical issues into the study of discipline specific subject matter. In guiding students' analysis of texts in the context of English literature, Kraver uses the conceptual frameworks of *metaethics, normative ethics*, and *applied ethics* to deepen students' engagement with the subject, enhance their abilities in "translation, identification, and transference," and ultimately to dissolve the boundaries between theory and practice inside and outside the classroom.

In "Clips and Links," Kayla Beman directs readers to useful online sites in teaching and learning. Her goal in this issue is to provide links to a mix of resources dealing with both general academic and more specialized issues in teaching and learning. With her academic background in the field of Speech and Language Pathology, she directs special attention to resources related to teaching students with disabilities, including a link to the website of Landmark College that specializes in conducting research and offering workshops and webinars on this topic.

In lieu of book reviews, this issue features an Annotated Bibliography compiled by Kisha Tracy that features recent scholarship on the "seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education." These principles, originally conceived by Arthur W. Chickering and Zelda F. Gamson (AAHE Bulletin, March 1987), include "encouraging faculty-student contact, developing reciprocity and cooperation among students, encouraging active learning, giving prompt feedback, emphasizing time on task, communicating high expectations, and respecting diversity."

I would like to extend my thanks to all who have made this issue possible. Particular gratitude goes out to the team of referees and copy editors who generously contributed their time to strengthen the quality and clarity of scholarship. They are, in no particular order, Sven Arvidson, Mary Lynn Saul, Reabeka King, Daniel Hunt, Josna Rege, Jesse Kavadlo, Jim Henry, Tona Hangen, James Bailey, Don Vescio, John Chetro-Szivos, Mark Wagner, Charlotte Haller, Nathan Dickman, Elizabeth Bidinger, Sue Foo, Jim Dutcher, Kristin Waters, Dan Shartin, Cleve Wiese, and Charles Cullum. Members of the Editorial Advisory Board have been an inspiring source of vision for moving forward. They are Daron Barnard, Charles Cullum, Emanuel Nneji, Josna Rege, Dan Shartin, Kisha Tracy (also Book Review Editor), and Cleve Wiese. My thanks to the web designer, Amanda Quintin, and to the supportiveness of the Executive Director of Marketing, Tara Probeck, as well as the new Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning, Sue Foo. I am excited about the expertise and dedication that Linda Larrivee, Dean of the School of Education, Health, and Natural Sciences, is bringing to her oversight of the journal as Managing Editor. Last but definitely not least, I would like to acknowledge the superb work of the Editorial Assistant, Kayla Beman, whose astute professionalism has been essential to the everyday functioning of the journal.

ESSAYS

(Re)Defining Academic Rigor: From Theory to Praxis in College Classrooms

— Manya Whitaker

Manya Whitaker, PhD is a developmental educational psychologist with expertise in urban education. Her latest research focuses on teacher preparation for culturally and linguistically diverse schools. Whitaker is also founder of Blueprint Educational Strategies, an educational consulting firm that works with families and schools to enhance equitable learning opportunities.

Abstract

Drawing on psychological and sociological theories, this paper offers suggestions for redefining and implementing academic rigor in higher education. After examining the misunderstandings and misuse of rigor through an overview of common definitions and measurements, I propose a new conceptualization of rigor grounded in developmental and cognitive psychology. Rooted in that definition, I provide two pedagogical methods, with detailed examples, for cultivating academically rigorous experiences in college classrooms. Lastly, I briefly summarize the cultural and structural changes necessary in academe to facilitate the progression of rigor from theory to praxis.

Keywords

rigor, higher education, sociocultural learning, Vygotsky, dialogical methods

(Re)Defining Academic Rigor: From Theory to Praxis in College Classrooms

The absence of critical conversation about rigor in higher education has engendered the belief that academic rigor is an automatic and obvious component of college coursework and therefore does not require explanation, analysis or training. The reverse is true. Rigor is not automatic or obvious; it is a multifaceted construct the presence of which is quietly linked to almost every aspect of teaching and learning. Because rigor is tied to hot topics such as faculty tenure and promotion, it is time we became clear about what we mean by rigor and make a clear plan for its implementation. This is what I offer here.

(Mis)Uses of Rigor

With the emergence of online learning, *definitions* and *measurements* of rigor in higher education have become conflated, leading to pervasive misconceptions, misuses and misevaluations of academic rigor. In a search for research on academic rigor, you will certainly find more blogs, commentaries, and editorials about rigor than peer-reviewed scholarly work. In fact, discussions of rigor are often embedded within a larger discourse of teacher and school evaluation (Nordvall & Braxton, 1996; Schnee, 2008; Wyatt, 2005) or on the debate about what constitutes academic rigor (Hechinger Institute, 2007; State Scholars Initiative, 2008; Washer & Mojkowski, 2006). The few reports on implementing academic rigor are largely focused on high school curriculum (Daggett, 2005; Education Trust, 2004; National Center for Educational Accountability, 2006), and even then, limited to analyses of Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

After synthesizing these search results, this study found what seem to be eleven common descriptors: the challenge presented by the course, students' perceptions of 'easy versus hard', amount of content learned, success of the course in preparing students for employment, level of expectations of students, amount of effort students put into coursework, amount of time spent outside of class engaging coursework, grade received in the course, if the course required outside help, if the course pushed students to do their best, and student growth throughout the course (Arum & Roska, 2011; Nordvall & Braxton, 1996; Schnee, 2008; Thomas & Bolen, 1998; Zimmerman, 2002).

Though in no way an exhaustive list of how educators think about rigor, these eleven notions have validity issues. First, some of them are in fact too similar to assess separately. For example, the *challenge of a course and students' perceptions of easy versus hard* are cognitively and logically linked. If I found a course easy, it likely did not present a challenge. Second, some of them are more closely linked to constructs other than rigor. Variables such as *amount of effort put into a course and time spent on work outside of class* have been demonstrated to be measures of motivation (Maehr & Meyer, 1997). Third, many of the aforementioned descriptors are outcomes of a rigorous course, but do not necessarily represent rigor itself. *The amount of content learned, the grade received, and student growth* are summary achievement measures with many associated predictor and mediating variables (e.g., class size, student self-efficacy, self-regulatory skills, prior knowledge about the subject; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Kokkelenberg, Dillon, & Christy, 2008; Thompson & Zamboanga, 2003; Zimmerman, 1990) including academic rigor. Fourth, most of these are too individualized and subjective to be of much use in determining course or teacher quality. They do not fully account for the social context of learning but are incongruously context-dependent. Students at private versus public universities, in a biology versus theater major, in a small versus large department would certainly vary in their perceptions of these variables. How then can we devise a universally applicable concept of rigor?

The remaining three ideas from this list offer a promising start. *Expectations of students, need for outside help, and challenge for students to do their best* seem to be the descriptions most closely linked to what I believe is rigorous curricula and pedagogy: material that students may not be able to master alone, but that with assistance can lead to academic growth. In other words, I propose that academically rigorous courses occur within the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Zone of Proximal Development

The idea of a learning zone is not my own. Lev Vygotsky introduced the world to the Zone of Proximal Development (ZoPD) in his 1978 text, *Mind in Society*. There, he described a sphere in which a learner can achieve on her own, but in which she can achieve more with the help of a knowledgeable other. He thus coined the phrase ZoPD when describing the distance between a learner's actual developmental level as determined by independent work, and the level of potential development as determined through assisted work. Perhaps what was most striking about this concept at the time was not the concept itself; it was the implication that if learners could do more with the help of someone else, then according to Vygotsky, development did not in fact necessitate learning as Jean Piaget (1964) asserted. Development could follow learning.

This theory is at the heart of higher education. We have structured our educational institutions around the idea that through coursework and social experiences, students will develop the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in society. In this section, I review and question our methods for determining students' abili-

ties and capabilities. I challenge the ways in which we help students reach their potential and suggest that an emphasis on the process of learning could alleviate inconsistencies in conceptualizations of rigor. Through an application of sociocultural theory we begin to explore how we might determine students' Zone of Proximal Development.

Where we are/Where we can be.

Actual development. When we measure students' actual development in education, we do not do so in the ways suggested by Vygotsky (1978). He believed that what one can accomplish on one's own is a good indicator of the learning processes one has mastered. For example, on the first day of an introductory statistics course I might ask a student to calculate the mean, median, mode, and range for a 10 number data set. I might then ask the same student to use the data set to construct a bell curve. Finally, I could ask the student to indicate where on the bell curve data points would be at one, two, and three standard deviations from the mean. An 18-year-old college freshman is likely to accomplish the first task quickly and accurately. Mean, median, mode, and range are concepts learned in late elementary school, so are well within the developmental abilities of college students. The next task is a bit more complex. A bell curve is not something often covered outside of statistics classes, so if a student has not heard the phrase before, he or she would not know what that means. If my student cannot move forward with step two, Vygotsky suggests this student has reached his/her developmental maximum in this area. This idea is fairly straightforward.

How we assess students' abilities is not as simple. We do not use specific measures to assess specific abilities. On the contrary, we use summary measures as indicators of particular skills and/or content. We look at students' grade point averages, standardized test scores and prior coursework as proxies for students' background knowledge and preparedness for the course. On the first day of a course most teachers have students introduce themselves, stating their year, major, and perhaps why

they enrolled in the course. This is relevant information but offers little in determining cognitive, academic or social abilities.

Such summary measures of achievement are limited by the inconsistent methods and less than (statistically) reliable measures through which they are acquired. With no standard grading scale within departments, nor across an institution, a 3.2 grade point average can carry many meanings. Even at institutions with a standard grading scale, that number must be interpreted within the context of a student's chosen major, his/her preparedness for college, and out of class commitments (e.g., sports, clubs, employment). Credit given for high scores on AP and IB exams must be viewed through their own lens of rigor (Byrd, 2007). A listing of prior coursework at the college offers some indication of students' exposure to particular content, but does little to reveal if they understood that content.

These measures are retrospective snapshots subject to the influence of situational variables. They portray students' abilities as fixed, suggesting that future coursework will merely build upon, not reshape, this foundation. These domain-specific representations of students do not account for knowledge in other areas that undoubtedly affect the construction of knowledge in traditionally measured content areas. Vygotsky (1978) was adamant that one's actual development is influenced by learning that has happened and is happening outside of formal school settings. If we insist upon using summative measures of achievement we must interpret them in a summative fashion. Grade point averages, test scores, and transcripts are therefore not representations of students' accomplishments in specific domains. These measures are reflective of the historical and cumulative nature of learning, and if interpreted as such—as a body of data—*could* offer useful information.

Analyzing students' summative achievement alongside more specific measures would be ideal. For example, the most direct way to assess students' actual abilities is to measure their actual abilities. This means a task-specific test pertinent to course content, but also pertinent

to required course skills. Too often we focus heavily on what students know instead of what students are able to do. Instead of jumping right into course content, a Philosophy professor might ask students to formulate a critical thinking question about a philosophical issue such as the state of being, nature, identity, or death. Such an assessment would help a professor assess students' logic, creativity, breadth of knowledge, and their ability to synthesize knowledge from different sources coherently.

Piaget (1964) believed that information becomes knowledge when it can be manipulated and understood in all its forms. Our tests should therefore measure cognitive skills like logic, reasoning, metacognition, and abstract thought. These tests should also assess self-regulatory skills such as goal setting, planning, organization, information seeking, environmental structuring, and evaluating (Zimmerman, 1990). Armed with such data, we can better interpret a student's GPA, but more importantly, we know what students can do that will facilitate their success in a course.

Potential development. Knowing students' baseline abilities allows teachers to set realistic goals for their students. This logic is prevalent in K-12 where teachers differentiate curricula on a daily basis. We see evidence of this in ability groups, leveled workbooks, and in individualized education programs (IEPs). For some reason, such differentiation is largely absent from higher education. I hesitate to state that college professors believe that upon matriculation, college students are developmentally and cognitively equipped to an equal extent. Given the rarity of this position, why do we find it acceptable to homogenize students' potential development into a narrative of goals sometimes found in the final sentence of a lengthy course description?

Vygotsky (1978) believed that students' potential development is determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. Take for example my previous scenario in an introductory statistics class. My student was able to calculate mean, median, mode, and range without assistance, but was not able to create a bell curve using the

data. According to Vygotsky, it is reasonable that with guiding questions my 18-year-old student could draw such a distribution relatively easily. I might prompt my student by asking *how could you represent this data another way?* Because most students have experiences with bar graphs, line graphs, and pie charts, she might choose one of those. I would then say *which one of those would look most like a bell?* She would then narrow it down to a bar graph or line graph. I could then say *which should we use if we plan to add more data points later?* Because through my pretesting I know this student is cognitively able to think hypothetically, I can be relatively certain she will choose a line graph due to its ease of alteration compared to bar graphs. She then draws a line graph representing the data and because I've given her a good data set, the image of a bell is immediately apparent. Having completed step two with my assistance, I can comfortably state that this student is capable of constructing a bell curve, though she was not able to do it alone. This then, is her potential development.

If I continue this example and ask her to insert data points at varying standard deviations from the mean, I will probably find that asking guiding questions is not enough to complete this task. I could ask *can you define a standard deviation from your knowledge of the word 'deviate'?* but I doubt this would help. Learning about standard deviations generally requires formal instruction through which one is provided a definition, observes the calculation process, and practices this skill using varying numbers, visual aids and manipulatives. Here then I've asked my student to do something beyond even her potential development; therefore, this particular topic is one she will have to learn from the beginning. This could become a learning goal for my course for that student.

We can imagine a scenario where a few students were able to draw a bell curve with my assistance but another could not. Should this student then be set the same learning goals as my first student? Likely not. What student A found rigorous would lie in the challenge of working through how to apply her existing knowledge of graphs to the new task of creating normal distribu-

tions. What student B would find rigorous may be in determining how one could pictorially represent a set of numbers. Rigor therefore cannot be determined based upon student outcomes because students will always have diverse outcomes. Rigor lies in the process through which students manipulate what they know to develop an understanding of something they almost know. Rigor lies in the Zone of Proximal Development.

Assistance. The assistance provided in the prior example is not often found in college courses. The questions I posed were examples of cognitive scaffolding. Never did I give her an answer or expect her to jump from her initial calculations to drawing a line graph. Instead, I walked her through how to apply her knowledge to a new task. In modeling this process for her the hope is that she will internalize that process to be used on future tasks. In other scenarios with different content we might see how a demonstration could be more useful than scaffolded questioning. Dance professors might model a particular technique for barrel turns. An environmental science professor may show students how to build a telescope with a popsicle stick and construction paper so they can observe the phases of the moon. In my education department our students consistently report the value of their practicum experiences to their understanding of how pedagogical theories translate to practice.

Assistance can also be delivered through mediums beyond the teacher through the use of cultural tools (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). We complement our formal instruction with books, movies, music, and peer-reviewed research. Some institutions have access to academic resources like qualified library staff, writing centers, quantitative centers, and a thorough library with licenses for the most up-to-date and quality databases and software. Many of us are even fortunate enough to work at institutions with professorial collegiality and strong community ties so we have social capital in addition to informational capital (Bordieu, 1985; Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998).

Though present, these resources are underutilized. More often we encourage students to seek support in instances of remediation, not growth. Sociocultural learning theorists advocate for the use of resources to aid students proactively instead of retroactively (Paradise & Rogoff, 2009; Rogoff, 1990; Rogoff, Paradise, Arauz, Correa-Chaves, & Angellilo, 2003), so they are given timely opportunities to work toward their potential. The absence of these resources from the learning process is reflective of the lack of rigor in college courses. Students do not seek assistance because they a) truly do not need assistance or b) do not know they need assistance. In either case, if our courses were designed to truly engage students within their ZoPD, students would certainly need assistance and would have no choice but to recognize that need.

A Redefinition of Rigor

"[Academic] rigor comes from the effort to overcome a naïve understanding of the world" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 20).

This statement embodies coursework occurring within the Zone of Proximal Development. Indeed, first understandings of anything are absolutely incorrect at worst and hesitant at best. But later understandings, those understandings we've come to with the help of experience—be they academic, social, behavioral—are the understandings we've reached through considerable effort and through considerable help. I therefore propose that we reconceptualize rigor in two ways: first, we must view rigor as emotional and cognitive processes instead of an academic standard; second, we must shift the focus of rigor from the teaching to the learning.

Rigor is creating a learning experience in which students must seek assistance to meet learning goals. Though each student should have individualized learning goals (as determined by their starting points), students should share an academic experience that is highly emotional and cognitively engaging. Students should feel frustrated, challenged, and sometimes confused. It is frustrating to be asked to critique what is already 'known'. It is challenging to consider alternative perspectives and incorporate them into your existing beliefs. It is confusing to negotiate conflicting conceptualizations of the same construct. But it is exciting and rewarding when

students successfully navigate the difficulties of moving beyond their first understanding.

Instead of asking students 'what', we must ask them 'why' and 'so what.' Instead of emphasizing cognitive recall, we need to prioritize application. Students should be required to do something beyond writing papers and taking tests. Film students create documentaries, theater majors write and perform plays, music majors write entire scores of original music. Why then can't history majors use social media to archive history? Or math majors develop a new proof? Rigorous learning requires innovation so students become scholars contributing to a canon of knowledge.

Rigorous learning is not, however, a course in which students feel hopeless, unsupported, or defeated. These emotions emerge when learning goals are unrealistic and unobtainable. We must attend to each student's bank of knowledge and skills when he or she enters our classroom. Once we have an indication of their actual development, we can establish learning goals that with proper support can be achieved within the timeframe of the course. If students are not provided with the cultural tools to pull them through their Zone of Proximal Development, we cannot expect them to reach their potential development.

Too often educators rely on outcome variables to ascertain if a course was rigorous. We cite high course numbers and positively skewed grading distributions as indicators of a difficult class. Rigor should not be a static objective, nor should it be measured retroactively. Rigor should be flexible and responsive to the needs of each cohort of students. Grade distributions should reflect growth and not levels of achievement. The distribution of ability level at the end of a course should be the same shape as it was at the beginning of the course. It merely shifts so that what was students' potential development is now their actual development. Measuring rigor through student growth acknowledges the boundaries of what students can do on their own when they start a class and what they are prepared to do on their own when they leave a class. Academic goals are not what make a course

rigorous; what students do to achieve those goals is what makes an experience rigorous.

Rigorous Pedagogy within the Zone

The ideas presented in this section again are not new. I am borrowing from long-standing theories from the fields of psychology and sociology and applying them, unchanged, to the classroom within the framework of the Zone of Proximal Development. In essence, I am combining these theories to create a new understanding of what it means to be rigorous when *effort* and *amount of work* do not capture the nuances of the teaching and learning processes.

Dialogical methods. This method of teaching is a process through which problems are posed for inquiry; however, this is not a recreation of constructivist pedagogy or a precursor to inquiry-based learning. It is not merely a question-answer dynamic, but a shared generation of questions and answers discovered through meaningful dialogue about specific topics situated in culturally relevant themes. This dialogue can occur on multiple levels including whole class, small group, and dyads; through multiple media such as peer editing, presentations, debates, and labs; and in multiple learning environments including the classroom, community, and in informal social settings.

Dialogical methods (DM) are grounded in the co-construction of knowledge involving a collaboration not only between students, but between teacher and students. These exchanges are collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful. DM differ from traditional discussion-based classrooms because in those settings, one is focused on personal thoughts and relaying those thoughts to others most often for validation and support. Conversely, true dialogue is focused on listening. It is natural to know one's own thoughts and beliefs but much more unnatural to know those of others. Listening—not hearing—is the rigorous part of dialogue that is often absent from discussion.

In listening we are offered the opportunity for immediate feedback, even for things we've yet to say. Un-

ESSAYS

(Re)Defining Academic Rigor *continued*

like in writing assignments in which students think and communicate in a very individual and unidirectional manner, dialogue requires students to think and communicate with the pressure of knowing there will be immediate and public responses that cannot be placed in the back of a notebook without further acknowledgement or reflection. Without this pressure that some may view as negative, students may not be required to rethink. If they are not rethinking, where is the rigor of cognition? It is easy to have a first thought but is more difficult to revise that thought.

Even in an English class, or any heavy writing course, dialogical methods are possible. It is common for students to rewrite papers after receiving feedback from a peer or professor. Importantly, for the revision process to be rigorous, feedback must be focused on the development or refinement of a particular skill, instead of on the content itself. If a student produces a paper in which they interpret conceptual and literal Whiteness in *Moby Dick* as evil, feedback might include asking the student to practice their close reading skills to find evidence from the text to substantiate their interpretation. But more rigorous feedback would also require the student to submit a commentary along with their revision in which they discuss how and why their interpretation differs from that of their classmates. That final piece forces a student to consider how their personal assumptions and ways of thinking influence their interpretation of texts. After listening to classmates explain their perception of Whiteness as pure and divine, a student is prompted to reengage with a text through a more open and more critical lens. The reengagement is when students rethink and are able to substantively revise a paper beyond addressing prescriptive comments.

It is through the revision process that students gain deep understanding. Here is the point in the learning process that one moves from the acquisition of knowledge to the manipulation of knowledge. Even in traditional discussion groups we see students ready to substantiate their beliefs with examples from their own lives—an easy task. But rigorous learning necessitates a

justification of beliefs *despite* examples from others. In constructing such justifications students come to know the material in its many formulations, especially those beyond their own experience. As Shor and Freire (1978) suggest, students must reformulate their knowledge to absorb their subjective positions.

In this way, students become the authors of their knowledge and by extension, of their learning process. DM challenges the traditional curriculum and traditional narratives while also challenging familiar power hierarchies. The teacher in these classrooms is knowledgeable of course content but relearns the material every time it is taught because new students bring new perspectives to the construction of knowledge. This means therefore that knowledge is not fixed and delivered through a static lecture. It means that in the same way a body of knowledge, say, religious theories, is not ahistorical; classroom knowledge cannot be a-contextual.

For example, the course I most often teach is Educational Psychology. I offer this course for undergraduate education and psychology majors/minors, graduate students in the teaching program, and for students who simply want the distributive credit. During the second week of the course after we've read about and discussed learning theories like constructivism, socioculturalism, humanism, and behaviorism, I ask the class to decide if these theories are domain specific, task specific or domain general. They must also work in small groups to complete a chart asking them to indicate which theorists would agree or disagree with particular statements (e.g., 'initial knowledge is innate'). Like any good teacher I had an answer key that upon my second time teaching the course I realized was useless. Each class answers these questions differently, but with equally reasonable and logical justifications. And when they ask for the 'right' answer, I simply respond: *why isn't your answer the right answer?*

They do not like this response but they grow to respect it because eventually, toward the end of a course, they face the biggest hurdle in the learning process: the application of knowledge. Although this requires effort,

listening, evaluating, manipulating and creating are not terribly arduous cognitive processes individually. I argue that true rigor arises in the culmination of these processes in the application phase of learning. Here, students must take what they believe to be knowledge—their co-constructed knowledge—and either use it to understand new information or adapt it to accommodate old information. This cognitive reorganization, more than any other aspect of DM, is rigorous because students must begin to interpret information in existing schemas or create new ones.

Take for example the current scholarly movement of using hip-hop as an ethnographic lens for complex issues such as feminism (Morgan, 1999) and activism (Chang, 2007; Rose, 2008). This movement encourages the meshing of social identities with cognitive processes. One can be viewed as a feminist, but that identity is not accompanied by a bank of thought processes endemic to feminism. Through DM students must not only reconcile the sometimes contradictory coexistences of their classmates' social and cognitive beings, but also of their own. Such reflection is indeed rigorous because it forces one to use the social as a mirror for the self.

During the reflective process we see students move from where they are to where they could be. DM offers the opportunity for students to "reflect on their reality as they make and remake it" (Shor & Freire, 1987, p.13). Here, in the remaking process, our students develop. They become critical thinkers by employing listening skills. They practice evaluation and revision skills to become self-regulated learners. They mature into cognitive beings empowered not by their grades, but by their growth. The successful development of students requires that we educators start where students are, but not stay there: the foundation of the Zone of Proximal Development.

Reflective judgment.

…the challenge of college, for students and faculty members alike, is empowering individuals to know that the world is far more complex than it first appears, and that they must make interpretive arguments and decisions—judgments that entail real consequences for which they must take responsibility and from which they may not flee by disclaiming expertise (Association of American Colleges, 1991, p. 16-17).

Yes, the real challenge of college arises in the decisions students must make about where they stand and how and why they occupy that position. Reflective judgment is a cognitive process that elucidates these issues and is a good example of a dialogical teaching method. Reflective judgment describes changes in epistemic assumptions by focusing on the development of logic and reasoning skills. King and Kitchener (1994, 2002) designed this three-level cognitive model for educators to use when helping students question their assumptions about knowing and learning in an effort to make better reasoned, more defensible judgments. In the first level, pre-reflective reasoning (stages one, two, and three), students believe knowledge is gained through the word of an authority figure or through firsthand observation. In level two, quasi-reflective reasoning, stages four and five describe a sense of knowing that acknowledges uncertainty because of missing information and diverse interpretations. In the third level, reflective reasoning (stages six and seven), students accept that knowledge claims cannot be certain because knowledge is contextual and always changing.

This final level is an example of the socially constructed nature of knowledge advocated by sociocultural theorists like Vygotsky (1962). This model is grounded in the idea that development in reflective thinking is influenced by one's background, educational experiences and current situation (King & Kitchener, 1994). Because knowledge is co-constructed by social participants, it is certainly context-dependent and open to influence as a body of people are exposed to new data and new methods for gathering and interpreting data. The reflective judgment model elucidates the process of becoming a socially reflective thinker. Many of our students struggle to achieve this.

By the time students reach college most of them are entering the quasi-reflective reasoning level, with very few exceptional students already in stage four (Kitchener, Lynch, Fisher, & Wood, 1993; Kozak, 1996; Overbay, 2003). These same studies also found that upon college graduation, many students are in stage five but only some of them have entered the reflective reasoning level. I argue then that the Zone of Proximal Development for reflective judgment lies between stages four and six, and that is where our students will experience rigorous cognition.

Stage four of the reflective judgment model marks a transition in thinking that necessitates evidence to support statements. For example, someone in the prior level may believe in the theory of evolution because a teacher said it was true, but a student in stage four would request proof of this assertion. Students in this level are not sophisticated enough to detect qualitative differences between types of evidence, so much of their support is reliant on a single source (e.g., a textbook or a single journal article) without regard for how and why separate pieces of evidence may be in tension with one another. The promise in this stage is that students are beginning to question the presence of knowledge and recognize the need to support their beliefs with objective evidence.

We can see why students struggle to get to this point. To begin to question the nature and origin of knowledge, one must first accept the reality of uncertainty. Though obvious to most adults, this marks significant growth in cognition because not only must new information be subject to thorough evaluation, information students once believed to be valid must now be re-evaluated. For example, in my Educational Psychology class we begin the course with a discussion of the nature of the relationship between learning and development. Students are asked to decide individually if they believe learning precedes development, development precedes learning, they are cyclical, or they are independent. I ask them to find evidence to support their claim and to develop an argument with like-minded classmates as group members. At the end of the debate, after all groups have presented their arguments and their supporting evidence (derived from their personal experiences), they want to know which answer is correct. I tell them they are all correct because the interaction between learning and development is in itself developmental. In other words, the dynamic between those constructs changes over time and is influenced by situational variables. For many of my students this is the first time they've not been given a clear answer and their faces reflect their internal struggle with cognitive dissonance. *Are these all really true?* they ask. Yes. They are. Thus begins students' entrance into intelligent confusion (Kroll, 1992a).

But I do not stop there. Because I know my students are capable of handling such confusion I push them harder. I want my students to move beyond their dissonance and begin to understand how and when opposing ideas can be equally valid. This marks stage five of the reflective judgment model. Here, students recognize that knowledge is contextual and subjective because all knowledge is individually interpreted. Indeed, according to sociocultural theorists, socially shared beliefs are individually appropriated and subject to unique internalization processes (Bruner, 1962; Leontiev, 1981; Wertsch, 1991). This is the point at which our students can begin to genuinely agree to disagree with classmates not out of tolerance, but of acceptance of difference.

I am happy if my students leave my courses firmly within stage five. I am thrilled, however, if students graduate college as close to stage six as possible. Upon entering the reflective reasoning level students understand that knowledge requires deep investigation and the consideration of many sources of evidence. Interpretations of knowledge are grounded in the evaluation of bodies of evidence across multiple contexts. Unlike in stage five, students are no longer using evidence provided to them; they are seeking and synthesizing evidence beyond what is immediately available. I would argue that this type of cognition is more often found in graduate school where the courses and curricula are designed around a specific domain of knowledge to be explored over an extended period of time. This type of thinking requires deep familiarity with content and is often beyond the grasp of undergraduates not because they cannot become deeply familiar with a subject, but because our undergraduate school structure does not facilitate such familiarity. Because of such contextual reasons, this stage of reasoning often exceeds undergraduate students' potential development.

So the sweet spot in this model where rigor and reality coincide is in stage five. Here is where we guide our students to challenge their own and others' formation of knowledge through the consideration of objective evidence interpreted within the appropriate context. Here is where our students must leave the safety of relying on authority to guide their thinking and decision-making and take that first step toward self-reliance. Here is where we push our students to think in ways previously unconsidered and underdeveloped. This is where we see rigor facilitate academic growth.

Structuring Academic Rigor

Designing and executing rigorous academic experiences is a difficult task; however, the absence of academic rigor in undergraduate schooling is likely not because of the time and effort professors must dedicate to this endeavor. Rigor is absent because the philosophies of learning and professorship in academia are not aligned with the prerequisites for rigor. If we are to move toward the reinstatement of academic rigor in higher education, we need to alter the way we think about and support course goals, the context of learning and faculty development.

Role of the teacher. Reconceptualizing rigor requires a shift in how we construct the role of the teacher in formal instruction. In traditional classrooms teachers are the primary source of knowledge, but when using dialogical methods the teacher is also a learner. Theoretically, I can see many professors accepting this idea. At some point in our professional development we acknowledged the importance of creating a classroom environment where everyone felt comfortable contributing their thoughts. But somewhere along the way we forgot how to construct such an environment because we became preoccupied with lesson planning, power point creation, ordering textbooks, writing tests and grading. These are all critical components of the instructional process but they have little to do with creating a rigorous classroom climate.

Our classrooms have long been teacher-centered and though we tout learner/student-centered models it is unclear how to enact such a model. In order to truly create an environment where students are at the heart of learning, we cannot continue to ignore students' contributions to their learning. We do not respect our students' input because they do not have enough experience or evidence to support their opinions. We do not allow them to speak freely in class for fear they may get off topic and divert our carefully designed lesson plans. We do not trust our students to read texts correctly or follow instructions so we provide outlines, guiding questions or rubrics. In essence, we do not offer our students the space they need to make mistakes in order to grow.

If we want to create rigorous academic experiences where students are pushed to grow, we must begin to view learning as an act of the community. This means there is no single source of information and that learning is not restricted to formal classroom settings. This means that personal experiences, observations and opinions are valued contributions to classroom discourse as much as peer-reviewed research and best-selling texts. It also means that we must incorporate the community into our curriculum through community based learning (CBL) opportunities. CBL is not volunteerism or community service; it is a way to connect academic content to the needs of the local or global community. It is a way to help students understand why information is relevant and how it can be used in the 'real world'. CBL opportunities add rigor to traditional curricula because it asks students to experience the not-so-clean-cut nature of learning and delve into the context-dependent construction of knowledge. It gives students a chance to integrate theory and practice beyond the safe walls of academia. So we teachers must be willing to do the same.

ESSAYS

(Re)Defining Academic Rigor *continued*

We must be willing to change our approach to our profession by altering our purpose in the classroom. Because of the way we define and measure rigor, we've tailored our instructional practices toward lecturing and test taking. We are so focused on the assessment of student learning we have neglected to assess for learning (Stiggins, 2002). Assessing for learning is about using formative assessments such as quizzes, one-minute papers or even discussions as indicators, not evaluators. These classroom assessment techniques can provide valuable information about what students know, do not know, and most of all, what they almost know. Assessing for learning advances student learning by providing information that helps students and teachers set appropriate learning goals by providing descriptive instead of evaluative feedback to students, by engaging students in self-assessment, and by helping the teacher adjust instruction to fit the evolving needs of the students.

If we as teachers do not know what our students know, how can we expect to help them learn more? How can we expect them to be motivated and confident when we do not solicit or value their input? How can we hope to create a rigorous course when we have no idea what counts as rigor? By changing how we interact with our students, and the material and contexts through which we interact, we change expectations of our students from passive recipients of information to active participants in the construction of knowledge.

Faculty development. To engender such change, academia itself would also have to change. Higher education is less about teaching and more about research. Where we once valued the development of well-rounded students, we now value the development of grant proposals, book chapters, and partnerships with corporate organizations. In prioritizing research over teaching we have prioritized the cultivation of researchers over teachers. We see evidence of this in doctoral programs during which many graduate students never instruct a course but might be a teaching assistant—as if that is adequate enough preparation for a career of teaching. In fact, most top-ranked graduate programs are ranked highly because of their status as Research Institutions,

not because they routinely prepare qualified instructors. Requirements for receiving a doctoral degree rarely involve teaching but can carry as many as five research milestones. I am not advocating for a reduction in research preparation or expectations, but for the inclusion of teaching preparation and support. Even at many small teaching colleges opportunities for instructional support are few. There are certainly workshops about grant writing and forming research groups, but far fewer opportunities to interact with colleagues around substantive pedagogical issues. This is not because professors or institutions do not value teaching. This is because teaching is viewed as less rigorous than research, so is therefore less demanding of institutional support.

I find this mindset particularly troubling because if we professors do not professionalize teaching why should our students take seriously their learning? In not treating teaching as a rigorous endeavor we tell our students learning should not be rigorous. We can no longer allow professors to teach the same courses for 40 years with no significant changes to the syllabus. If we want our students to respect the advancement of knowledge, we must present them with current and relevant academic experiences. We cannot assume professors are prepared to deliver quality instruction because they have a doctoral degree. We must view teaching with the same critical eyes used to assess research. Just as our scholarship is an outcome of many drafts with substance feedback, so must our teaching be.

I propose four major ways to support the development of faculty as teachers. First, the value of teaching must be made explicit. Teaching needs to be weighed as heavily as research in the tenure/promotion process if professors are to devote their limited time to the improvement of their pedagogy. Unfortunately, because of the weight placed on research, many professors choose to limit interactions with students, time in the classroom and time spent grading and lesson planning in favor of time spent at conferences, and time spent writing and reading research. Second, professors must be given time and opportunity to develop as teachers. Publication expectations vary across institutions, but first-year

faculty members are rarely expected to publish anything beyond their dissertation. Conversely, first-year faculty are expected to teach a full course load (unless they negotiate otherwise), often of introductory courses with full enrollment and without the aid of teaching assistants (who are usually reserved for senior faculty). Professors should be given two years to acclimate to teaching before they are required to offer upper level courses that are generally (or should be) more rigorous than foundational courses. Third, to facilitate development, professors must be given feedback about their teaching beyond student course evaluations. While student feedback is valuable it must be complemented with feedback from colleagues who have a better understanding of the nuances involved in teaching. This means that an institution would need to require professors to be observed by colleagues on a *continual* basis instead of a couple of times bracketing a third year or tenure review. Fourth, to properly interpret and utilize feedback, the institution must offer continuing education opportunities that do more than introduce faculty to current educational trends. For example, many colleges and universities are offering faculty workshops on flipped classrooms and instructional technology but it is less common to offer workshops on how to write a syllabus, choose quality readings, design effective assessments or lead discussions. It is even more uncommon for faculty to be required to attend such workshops. The lack of discourse about teaching in higher education has led to low teaching expectations and less demanding courses. To provide a rigorous learning experience we must first structure a rigorous teaching experience.

We can do this in the same ways I've proposed we rethink about academic rigor for students. Just as our students must be pushed to reach their capabilities, so must we. In encouraging our students to be reflective and self-regulated, we should model this behavior by being honest about our teaching strengths and weaknesses and by seeking opportunities to attain the knowledge and develop the skills necessary to be effective instructors. By relinquishing our *easy versus hard mentality* as a way of comparing teaching and research, we open ourselves to the reality that we get out of teaching what

we put into it. Effort is not a measure of rigor, but a measure of commitment. If we become as equally committed to our teaching craft as to our research agenda we will inevitably improve our outcomes, which will in turn improve our students. We can adopt the same measures of rigor for learning to assess rigor of teaching. We should walk out of the classroom at the end of every course asking ourselves *did I consult a colleague for advice during this course? Did I recognize what I could do better and work toward that goal? Do I know, and can I do more now than before this course?* If the answer to any of these is no, do not expect your students to reply yes.

References

Arum, R., & Roska, J. (2011). *Academically adrift: Limited learning on college campuses*. Illinois: University of Chicago Press.

Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Caprara, G. V., & Pastorelli, C. (1996). Multifaceted impact of self-efficacy beliefs on academic functioning. *Child Development, 67*, 1206–1222. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.1996.tb01791.x

Bourdieu, P. (1985). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.). *Handbook for theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-58). New York: Greenwood.

Bruner, J. (1962). Introduction. In L.S. Vygotsky. *Thought and language* (pp. v-x). Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Byrd, S. (2007). Advanced placement and international baccalaureate: Do they deserve gold star status? Thomas B. Fordham Institute. Retrieved from http://www.fcps.edu/MtVernonHS/academics/special_programs/ib_diploma_program/forms/apib-fordham_report.pdf

Chang, J. (2007). *Can't stop won't stop: A history of the hip-hop generation*. United Kingdom: Picador.

Coleman, J.S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology, 94*, S95-S120. doi: 10.1086/228943

Daggett, W.R. (2005). *Achieving academic excellence through rigor and relevance*. Retrieved from http://www.leadered.com/pdf/academic_excellence.pdf

Education Trust-West. (2004). *The AG curriculum: College prep? Work prep? Life prep*. Retrieved from http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/College%20Prep%20Work%20Prep%20Life%20Prep.pdf

ESSAYS

(Re)Defining Academic Rigor *continued*

Fischer, K.W. (1980). A theory of cognitive development: The control and construction of hierarchies of skills. *Psychological Review, 87*(6), 477-531. doi: 10.1037/0033-295X.87.6.477

Fischer, K. W. (2008a). Dynamic cycles of cognitive and brain development: Measuring growth in mind, brain, and education. In A. M. Battro, K. W. Fischer, & P. Léna (Eds.). *The educated brain* (pp. 127-150). United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Fischer, K. W., & Bidell, T. R. (2006). Dynamic development of action, thought, and emotion. In W. Damon & R. M. Lerner (Eds.). *Theoretical models of human development. Handbook of child psychology* (6th ed., Vol. 1, pp. 313-399). New York: Wiley.

Hechinger Institute. (2007). *Understanding and reporting on academic rigor*. Retrieved from http://ceep.indiana.edu/hssse/pdfs/Understanding-and-Reporting-on-Academic-Rigor-Hechinger.pdf

John-Steiner, V., & Mahn, H. (1996). Sociocultural approaches to learning and development: A Vygotskian framework. *Educational Psychologist, 31*(3/4), 191-206.

King & Kitchener. (1994). *Developing reflective judgment: Understanding and promoting intellectual growth and critical thinking in adolescents and adults*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

King, P.M. & Kitchener, K.S. (2002). The reflective judgment model: Twenty years of research on epistemic cognition. In B. K. Hofer & P. R. Pintrich (Eds.). *Personal epistemology: The psychology of beliefs about knowledge and knowing*, (pp. 37-61). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, Publisher.

Kitchener, K.S., Lynch, C.L., Fischer, K.W., & Wood, P.K. (1993). Developmental range of reflective judgment: The effect of contextual support and practice on developmental stage. *Developmental Psychology, 29*(5), 893-906. doi: 10.1037/0012-1649.29.5.893

Kokkelenberg, E.C., Dillon, M., & Christy, S.M. (2008). The effects of class size on student grades at a public university. *Economics of Education Review, 27* (2), 221-33. doi: 10.1016/j.econedurev.2006.09.011

Kozak, A. I. (1996). *Epistemological development and adaptation: Reflective judgment and stressful affect and their relationship to affect-tolerance and attributions of pragmatic structure*. Retrieved from Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering.

Krathwohl, D.R. (2002). A revision of Bloom's taxonomy: An overview. *Theory into Practice, 41*(4), 212-264. doi: 10.1207/s15430421tip4104_2

Kroll, B.M. (1992a). Reflective inquiry in a college English class. *Liberal Education, 78*(1), 10-13.

Leontiev, A.N. (1981). *Problems of development of mind*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.

Maehr, M. L., & Meyer, H.A. (1997). Understanding motivation and schooling: Where we've been, where we are, and where we need to go. *Educational Psychology Review 9*,(4), 371-409. doi: 10.1023/A:1024750807365

Morgan, J. (1999). *When chickenheads come home to roost*. A hip-hop feminist breaks it down. New York: Touchstone Press.

National Center for Educational Accountability. (2006). *Orange Juice or Orange Drink? Ensuring that "Advanced Courses" Live Up to Their Labels*. Retrieved from http://www.nc4ea.org/linkservid/96204B7F-F3C2-494A-AE4EB5B5532821BC/showMeta/0/

Nordvall, R.C., & Braxton, J.M. (1996). An alternative definition of quality of undergraduate college education. *Journal of Higher Education, 67*(5), 483-497. doi: 10.2307/2943865

Overbay, A.S. (2003). *Persuasive developments: Reflective judgment and college students' written argumentation*. Retrieved from http://repository.lib.ncsu.edu/ir/bitstream/1840.16/3267/1/etd.pdf

Paradise, R., & Rogoff, B. (2009). Side by side: Learning by observing and pitching in. *Ethos, 37*(1), 102-138. doi: 10.1111/j.1548-1352.2009.01033.x

Piaget, J. (1964). Development and learning. In R.E. Ripple and V.N. Rockcastle (Eds.), *Piaget rediscovered* (pp. 7-20).

Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern society. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, 1-24. doi: 10.1146/annurev.soc.24.1.1

Rogoff, B., Paradise, R., Aruaz, R. M., Correa-Chaces, M., & Angelillo, C. (2003). Firsthand learning through intent participation. *Annual Review of Psychology, 54*, 175–203. doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.54.101601.145118

Rose, T. (2008). *The hip hop wars: What we talk about when we talk about hip hop--and why it matters*. New York: Basic Books.

Schnee, E. (2008). "In the real world no one drops their standards for you": Academic rigor in a college worker education program. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 41*(1), 62-80. doi: 10.1080/10665680701764502

Shor, I., & Freire, P. (1987). What is the "Dialogical Method" of teaching? *Journal of Education, 169*(3), 11-31.

State Scholars Initiative. (2008). *Education beyond the rhetoric: Making rigor something real*. Retrieved from http://www.wiche.edu/info/publications/SSI/EducationBeyondTheRhetoric.pdf

Stiggins, R. (2002). Assessment crisis: The absence of assessment FOR learning. *Phi Delta Kappan, 83*(10), 758–765.

Thomas, B., & Bolen, Y. (1998). Student perception of the academic rigor of the college physical education curriculum. *Physical Educator, 55*(1), 2-8.

Thompson, R.A., & Zamboangal, B.L. (2003). Prior knowledge and its relevance to student achievement in introduction to psychology. *Teaching of Psychology, 30*(2), 96-101. doi: 10.1207/S15328023TOP3002_02

Vygotsky, L. S. (1962). *Thought and language*. Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Washer, E., & Mojkowski, C. (2006). What do you mean by rigor? *Educational Leadership, December*, 84-87.

Wertsch, J.V. (1991). *Voices of the mind: A sociocultural approach to mediated action*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Wyatt, G. (2005). Satisfaction, academic rigor and interaction: Perceptions of online instruction. *Education, 125*(3), 460-468.

Zimmerman, B. (1990). Self-regulated learning and academic achievement: An overview. *Educational Psychologist, 25*(1), 3-17. doi: 10.1207/s15326985ep2501_2

Zimmerman, A. (2002). Reduced rigor and grade inflation diminish the quality and credibility of higher education. *NACTA Journal, December*, 49-51.

ESSAYS

"Sivilizing" Our Students: Asking Questions, Studying Literature, and Practicing Ethics

— Jeraldine R. Kraver, Department of English,
University of Northern Colorado

Jeraldine Kraver is professor of English and Director of English Education at the University of Northern Colorado. She has published variously on teaching with graphic novels *(SANE)*, teaching Richard Wright *(Journal of Teaching American Literature)*, and Holocaust education *(PRISM)*. Her scholarly work in literature has considered Anzia Yezierska, Henry James, Katherine Anne Porter, and Benjamin Disraeli. Jeri's current work explores using museums and memorials in the teaching of writing

Abstract

Whether we like it or not, the public school classroom rivals the home as a crucial site for fostering moral truths and directing ethical practice. This essay examines ethical practice through the teaching of literature, offering a question-driven pedagogy that proceeds from meta-ethics to normative ethics to applied ethics. It models this approach with the example of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which shares with all worthy literary creations a narrative about complex people in complex situations who must make complex decisions.

Keywords

morals, ethics, education, teaching

"Sivilizing" Our Students: Asking Questions, Studying Literature, and Practicing Ethics

My understanding of *morals* (codes of behavior forwarded by society or a group that are accepted by an individual for her own conduct) and *ethics* (the principles of conduct an individual chooses for herself) was framed during my undergraduate years as a Theology major at Georgetown University. By the time I graduated, I felt that the connection between morals and ethics in that aerie academic environment was more abstract aspiration than tempered reality. However, during the many decades since my graduation, I have witnessed a variety of sustained and constructive discussions among English colleagues about the need to affirm among their students an agenda of equity and social justice. They, like me, know that at the confluence of the intellectual, the pedagogical, and the ethical we can encourage students to *think well*. The challenge is to have them think well while *doing* good. It is this dynamic balance, moreover, that I now strive to teach at the regional university where I am employed. In this essay, I explore why this goal, though daunting, is not so far removed from what we already do as critical readers and teachers of literature. It is merely a matter of asking the right questions.

Essential to my pedagogy is an emphasis on informed action. This impulse comes naturally given my role as director of my school's program in English Education, but it is, equally, founded on John Dewey's enduring counsel: "give the pupils something to do, not something to learn; and the doing is of such a nature as to demand thinking, or the intentional noting of connections; learning naturally results" (Dewey, 1916, p.181). Not only does my Dewey-inspired pedagogy compel teacher candidates to reconsider and often revise their moral points of view, but it also requires them to adhere to an ethical code of professional behavior. Once teacher candidates are in classrooms, abstract moral notions are quickly made concrete on a daily basis. Teachers—to use a word rarely used precisely—must *profess* by summoning moral sensitivity when judging complex human motivations and actions, some even against what they believe. This much of my job is almost to be expected; it is in the courses I teach as a professor of English, including American literature, and the interdisciplinary courses I teach in my university's "Life of the Mind" program, that matters get more difficult.

The biggest challenge to teaching morals and ethics in any course lies not in finding content that encourages discussion but rather in starting the discussion. One professional exchange about this very issue confirms my challenge. At Stanford University's McCoy Family Center for Ethics in Society, a panel of educators gathered in May 2014 to consider how ethics and curricula mesh" (Monin, Schapiro, & Fried, 2014). The panel, composed of faculty from the university's business school, law school, and philosophy department, addressed a series of questions about teaching ethics: "Does teaching ethics do any good?" "Can something as personal as ethics be taught in a classroom?" and "Can classes in ethics make students more virtuous individuals?" At some level these questions were less philosophical than practical, for the university now requires every undergraduate to take a class that deals explicitly with ethics. In an oblique way, the panel was assessing the efficacy of this requirement.

Although the panelists agreed on the importance of teaching ethics as a way of making students more tolerant, less dogmatic, and more clear about their own value system, the particulars of their stances varied. For example, social psychologist Benoit Monin found that instruction in social psychology was often more effective than instruction in moral philosophy in creating responsible social actors. Philosophy professor Tamar Schapiro argued that preparing students to examine their ethical commitments was essential if they are to assess those commitments in meaningful ways. A curious (and, quite frankly, unanticipated) similarity between the students at Stanford and the students at my university was Schapiro's characterization of her students as unprepared for the complicated discussions attendant to the study of ethics. She explained that the students in her ethics courses arrive as "moral relativists" reluctant to assert any moral position. She added, they tend to "shut down ethical discussion because they have no confidence in their ability to engage in it. . .They don't feel empowered to engage in ethical discussion [in a way that does not lead to] taking sides and digging their heels" (Monin, Schapiro, and Fried). If students at an elite university like Stanford feel disempowered and reluctant, imagine the reluctance of the first-generation students at my regional university. At both places, the classroom becomes the safe-and-sanctioned space for engaging with ethical dilemmas. The academic course provides the social license to discuss uncomfortable topics, and the formal study of ethics provides the language for that discussion.

Discussing morals and ethics is important, but it is only a starting point toward personal reflection and informed practice. Dewey, again, is worth citing as foundational: "Reflection is not identical with the mere fact that one thing indicates, means, another thing. It commences when one inquires into his or her experiences and relevant knowledge to find meaning in his or her beliefs (sic)" (Dewey & Boydston, 1986, p.120). Reflection, like learning, is an active process; therefore, we must address both the abstract study of what we mean by morals and ethics and the concrete ways these no-

tions are tested. The result is the "praxis" at the center of one such as Freire in his pedagogy, for "human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world. And as praxis, it requires theory to illuminate it. Human activity is theory *and* practice; it is reflection *and* action. It cannot [. . .] be reduced to either verbalism or activism" (Freire, 2000, p.120), (emphasis added). To limit discussions of ethics to the classroom is incomplete--it is theory without practice. At the same time, to act merely for the sake of action is, in Eliot's phrasing, "to do the right deed for the wrong reason"--or for no real reason at all (Eliot, 1963, p. 47). Either way, the action is inauthentic. Indeed, in the estimate of Stanford law professor and McCoy Family Center panelist Barbara Fried, action is what matters most. Fried fears that undergraduate ethics courses stop at the abstract and fail to illustrate to students how they can act in society. She contends, "We are inducing a certain kind of passivity in students by focusing on moral thinking rather than moral action." Fried's graduate students engage with authentic and meaningful moral and ethical problems outside the classroom, not only by assisting at law clinics but by teaching at San Quentin prison or "working on projects like designing a better system for matching bone marrow transplant donors to recipients." Such fieldwork projects provide students with a "sense of efficacy" and a "taste for effective moral behavior." The result is what Freid describes as a kind of "muscle memory" of ethical choice. Students will have already engaged, she explains, with moral issues in advance of their confronting important ethical choices.

In pushing our students toward ethical practice, we as teachers find our greatest discomfort when we are seen as moral authorities. It is a tricky negotiation between encouraging action and avoiding the perception that one is a moral arbiter. In my classes, I present myself as a "moral reasoner." As such, at issue is not the ethical positions I take; rather, it is the process of arriving at those positions. The goal of incorporating ethics into instruction is that students reason about moral dilemmas, frame their own ethical code, and then act in line with that code. The texts I select are designed to

encourage these goals. Yet, in the simple act of choosing what texts to include, I am, in effect, tipping my moral hand. For many years, that burden kept me from entering this discussion at all. Such inaction, though, carries with it its own rhetoric: we can wring our hands and complain that this is the job of parents or of some vaguely framed "society," but, one way or another, the reality is that someone is falling down on that job.

Education without Apology

The concept of schools as sites for connecting morals to ethics is pure Dewey. In his *The School and Society* (1916), Dewey argues that the ideal school should look very much like the ideal home, and, in the same way that parents nurture and direct their child's natural impulses, schools should direct the student. However, the "ideal" home never was, is, or will be reality. If anything, schools often less reinforce the lessons of home than initiate them. This situation is the case for not only "at-risk" students in urban classrooms or children from fractured homes but a wider sphere as well. According to Damon (1999), Director of the Stanford Center on Adolescence, young people generally

> [show] little interest in people outside their immediate circle of friends and relatives (other than fictional media characters and entertainment and sports figures); little awareness of current events; and virtually no expressions of social concern, political opinion, civic duty, patriotic emotion, no sense of citizenship in any form. (Damon, 1999, p. 82).

Damon does not address the behavior of adolescents in terms of ethics but, rather, in terms of civic responsibility. As Fried and Freire (and I) would argue, we must address both. I want students to recognize that their actions take place in the context of a larger community and involve more than themselves. It is my hope that, as a result of considering ethics in the safe space of our classes and through the study of literature, students are willing to put aside self-interest and move towards a more communal ethical code founded on regard for others. It is a broadly framed notion, but it is one congenial to multiple points of entry.

In believing the task of teaching morals and ethics falls to educators, I find myself in good company. In the white paper *Education for Democracy* (McPike, 2003), researchers at the Albert Shanker Institute assert that we are not born possessing the "values and habits upon which democracy rests." Rather,

> The values and habits upon which democracy rests are neither revealed truths nor innate habits. There is no evidence we are born with them. Devotion to human dignity and freedom, to equal rights, to social and economic justice, to the rule of law, to civility and truth, to tolerance of diversity, to mutual assistance, to personal and civic responsibility, to self-restraint and self-respect--all these must be *taught* and *learned* and *practiced*." (McPike, 2003, p.10)

The mission implicit in *Education for Democracy* resonates. Classrooms must be "laboratories for social justice," places where teaching connects students' lives and culture to curriculum. Our challenge as teachers is helping students understand how the content of their in-school curriculum and the realities of their out-of-school lives unite them with a larger society. This connection is the very foundation of education, as formulated by Dewey, iterated by Rosenblatt (1995) in her formative *Literature as Exploration*, and reiterated by practitioners such as Noddings (1984), Greene (1978), Shor (1992), Carey-Webb (2001), and Gallagher (2009). Only when we connect students' diverse and varied experiences to larger social issues does our pedagogy become critical and, I would add, do we encourage in our students an inclination towards ethical action. The resulting critical pedagogy, as McLaren (2002) explains, seeks "to empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities and injustices [. . .]" (McLaren, 2002, p. 29). It injects into teaching a concern for matters of equity and human rights--that is, issues of ethics. The signatories of the *Education for Democracy* document cited above concur, concluding, "Education for democracy [. . .] must extend to education in moral issues and democratic dispositions: *training the heart as well as the head*" (emphasis added). Such critical education produces

not just knowledgeable but ethical citizens. The role of teachers within this paradigm, argues Giroux (1997), is as public and transformative intellectuals engaged in the construction, not merely the transmission, of knowledge. The goal is an empowering pedagogy that transforms the school from a site of ritual performance to one of resistance and emancipation, where discussions of morals and ethics are concomitant with lessons about reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Literature for Teaching Ethical Practice

When discussing literature--, I deliberately distinguish between fostering ethics and inculcating morals because the former is possible while the latter is futile. As Paula Moya (2014) observes, "the Marquis de Sade read and wrote lots of novels" and Nazi Heinrich Himmler delighted in Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha*. In this light, Moya argues, "literature [. . .] is brilliantly suited to the exploration of what it means to be an ethical human being in a particular socio-historical situation." More than what literature says to the reader, its value in discussing ethics thus lies in what it asks the reader to do. As Wolfgang Iser (1978) describes, "Literary texts initiate 'performances' of meaning rather than actually formulating meanings themselves" (Iser, 1978, p.27). Such texts confront us with a truth that can be easy to ignore in the routine of the everyday--namely, that not all people see the world the way we do. In other words, there is no single moral truth, only a kind of polyphony to which we add our voices.

Interpreting the moral truths and ethical codes dramatized in literary narrative is nothing new, and, increasingly, teachers from fields considered far removed from English have argued the benefits. For example, Richardson and Adkins (1997), writing about administrative ethics, argue that, "Properly presented, the dramatic interplay within appropriate works of fiction can intrigue and immerse students in ways that surpass almost all other approaches" (Richardson & Adkins, 1997, p. 202). Waldren (1988) describes his use of literature to explore ethical issues in medicine, noting that literature

ESSAYS

"Sivilizing" Our Students *continued*

"expose[s] students to a variety of value systems [and examines] how characters function within those systems [. . .] " (Waldren, 1988, p. 170). Even the very titles to a recent spate of works speak to the literature-ethics connection: *The Moral of the Story: An Introduction to Ethics* (2004), *Questions of Character: Illuminating the Heart of Leadership Through Literature* (2006); *The Moral of the Story: An Anthology of Ethics through Literature* (2006), The Moral Life: An Introductory Reader in Ethics and Literature (2007). Finally, Joseph Badaracco (2013), who has used literature in his classes at Harvard Business School, neatly summarizes its value to business ethics:

> Students in my class react to characters in the book as if they're real people. There's a much deeper engagement in the actual material. It's not about whether the debits and credits add up. They're making comments about who they are and what they care about, and how they feel about the world that differs from their fellow students. It also reflects the student's own character and judgment."

What these folks are discovering, those of us who teach literature well know. For those in professions outside literary study, there is an immediate applicability to discussing ethics with students. And application is essential to any authentic consideration of ethics. Abdelkader Aoudjit (2012) begins by comparing the two most familiar approaches to teaching ethics, the theoretical and the applied. The former begins with a presentation of theories and moves to considering key issues in ethics. Aoudjit describes that, although in some instances real-world problems might be addressed, the focus remains "the evaluation of arguments and the analysis of ethical concepts, principles, and theories" (Aoudjit, 2012, p.50). Applied ethics, in contrast, begins from a study of real or hypothetical cases from a variety of fields, including science and economics. With this focus on application rather than theory, the goal is that students analyze multiple options rather than arrive at a solution. Although there are benefits and drawbacks to both approaches, the major disadvantage, according to Aoudjit, is "their abstraction and their oversimplifi-

cation of the moral life." As a result, he concludes, the courses are "dull and uninteresting [because] students tend to dismiss course material in which the people do not think, feel, and behave the way they expect ordinary people to think, feel, and behave and tend to get more involved in courses in which they do" (Aoudjit, 2012, p. 50). In other words, the connection between morals and ethics is far more complicated than either theorists can posit or textbook cases can capture: they are interpersonal; they involve emotion, aspiration, and imagination; and they are entangled in society and in history. In the creative imagination, they are, in a phrase, the very stuff of great literature.

More than seventy years ago, Rosenblatt affirmed the social role of literature as "a springboard for discussions of human nature and society" in which students confront social issues and "develop habits of thoughtful ethical judgment" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 20, p. 17). She explained that, in the experience of the text, students will develop a more critical, questioning attitude and will see the need of a more reasoned foundation for *their* thoughts and judgments, a more consistent system of values" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 114). Not my values. Not their parents' values. Not knee-jerk, jingoistic values. Their own values; their own ethical code. Rosenblatt advised that we must balance the cognitive and emotional responses of students to the text and, at the same time, encourage a consideration of larger social understandings. The place of literature in this endeavor is not to be underestimated, for it offers an opportunity, if taught well, to engage the world. In particular, novels, because they evoke worlds unto themselves, can compel students to consider the ideological systems to which they subscribe both explicitly and implicitly, systems which too often make their decisions for them and provide them with what Bakhtin calls an "alibi for being" (Morson, 1989, p.17) Novels expose students to perspectives and emotions different from their own. They challenge their sense of self, their values, and the often unexamined ethical codes by which they live. As a result, novels provide students with opportunities for the kind of "imaginative rehearsal" central to Rosenblatt's thesis of

reading-as-transaction and an opportunity to build Freid's "muscle memory" for dealing with challenges. By leading students in dialogue with the text, teachers develop in them three skills essential to inspiring an ethical inclination: translation, identification, and transference.

Ethics Taught

In a long-ago undergraduate course in philosophy, I learned to divide ethics into three general foci: *metaethics*, which considers the origins and the meanings of our ethical principles; *normative ethics*, involving the task of determining the morals that regulate personal values; and *applied ethics*, in which one examines specific instances and issues in terms of metaethics and normative ethics. This tripartite approach might be deemed reductive by ethicists; however, I find it accessible for engaging students in discussions, especially in classes where morals and ethics are not part of the course title or description. In my pedagogy and through literary examples, my students and I travel this continuum; to illustrate, I shall turn to my *urtext* for all things literary: Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Twain's novel is far from unique in what it teaches. Rather, what keeps *Huck Finn* current for classroom use is what it shares with all literary creations--that is, narratives about complex people in complex situations who must make complex decisions. Other texts and "texts", to be sure, are also suitable: the biographies of historical figures, life-stories of scientists who challenge perceived knowledge, or ethnographic studies in the social sciences come to mind. *Huck Finn* is special for my purposes because it defies any conclusive responses.

In any discussion about how morals and ethics inform the world of *Huck Finn*, the preliminary questions we ask are as various as with any other literary text. "What does an action or a text suggest about one's moral obligations?" "What moral values are revealed by those actions?" "How does the text suggest we measure goodness and evil?" "How does the text define right and wrong?" "What ethical criteria does the text use to qual-

ify actions as moral, amoral, or immoral?" With Twain's novel in particular, any discussion of slavery cannot escape questions of morals and "inalienable rights." "What does the existence of the institution of slavery reveal about the values of the South?" "How do we balance Aunt Polly's religious zeal with her ownership of Jim?" As well, we have Huck's choice to break the law, to violate the moral sense and ethical code of the South in favor of his own often inchoate system of values, his own linking of morals to ethics. Therefore, we must ask the overarching question defining civil disobedience: "When is one justified in violating the law?"

Although ethical decisions and behaviors are usually public, metaethics moves to the more private assumptions and commitments behind such actions. The line between morals and ethics becomes fuzzier than ever. In thereby probing the private side of literary characters, students must, first and foremost, "get it": they must know what is the setting, who are the characters, and what is the story. On a more advanced level, they begin to consider the aesthetic elements of the text, including character development and potential change (i.e., "flat"/static versus "round"/dynamic), plot nuances such as foreshadowing, and figurative language such as symbols. A metaethical view, in the end, shows rather than tells students that life is messy--very messy.

In teaching ethical practice through *Huck Finn*, I do not engage explicitly with many of the debates about the novel's worth as art or social commentary. Such is not my purpose. When those issues are raised by students as part of *their* transactions with the text (for example, the controversial use of the work *nigger*), then we explore them. Students author class discussions; I facilitate them and provide context only as needed. This task is relatively light for me, though, for a host of literary scholars have done almost all the critical "heavy lifting."[2] Rather, what makes Huck such an effective case study for discussing ethics are the moral dilemmas that challenge him in the novel and reveal his evolution, flawed though it might be, from a person who acts purely out of self-interest

---

[2] As evidence of the vast resources available for considering any aspect of the novel, a cursory search of criticism on *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* yields more than 32,000 results.

ESSAYS

to one who acts in the service of others. Through the novel's plot and through Huck's interactions with and observations about the characters he encounters, we can trace the evolution of Huck's moral and ethical inclinations, beginning with the concept of metaethics.

Reading *Huck Finn* in terms of ethical practice begins with pondering what moral factors compel Huck to reject the ethical manifestations of civilization--not only its trappings and formalities but its laws. From a fractured family, superstitious in motivation, and pragmatic in behavior, Huck is a bundle of contradictions. As the novel's plot unfolds, we explore in our classroom discussion Huck's choices and actions, wondering what inspires him to accept the possibility of going to Hell that must follow from providing aid to the runaway slave Jim. And we ask what is Tom Sawyer's "power" and where is Huck's moral center when, in the final sequence, he joins in Tom's near torment of Jim for the sake of adventure. Kastely (1986) in his "The Ethics of Self-Interest: Narrative Logic in *Huckleberry Finn*," posits that Huck evolves from one motivated by an ethic of self-interest to one who does not necessarily reject self-interest but, rather, recognizes the humanity and the "legitimate interests" of others. This recognition is, Kastely contends, "The mark of an ethically superior character" and it is the fate of such characters to wrestle with this contradiction (p.418). However, in the first part of the novel, Huck's initial act of aiding Jim is informed purely by self-interest when he does not take the high but rather the easy road. Deferring in his reasoning to that bastion of ethical behavior, Pap, Huck decides, "what's the use you learning to do right, when it's troublesome to do right, and it ain't no trouble to do wrong" (p. 104). What is "handiest at the time" is what matters, a principle that, in its potential applications, overlaps with Eliot's "right deed for the wrong reason."

Students who read Huck's story are bombarded daily with their own moral dilemmas, most admittedly less significant than abetting a runaway slave in the antebellum South. Nonetheless, their dilemmas are too often addressed by a similar ethics of self-interest or expediency that fails to acknowledge or even consider the humanity of others. Starting from the basic assumption that human beings have a "moral sense" (a term that Twain would later use with no small derision), students will, it is my hope, recognize their own patterns of behavior. Inevitably--and with a bit of prodding from me--discussions about the literary text move to considering the kinds of difficult questions that students encounter in their own lives. Getting students to ask the hard questions is my task. "What would you do if placed in a similar situation?" "What values undergird your potential actions or choices?" "Where did your sense of ethics originate?" "Are ethics *only* a matter of social conventions?" We then build from discussing these questions to considering the dilemmas students encounter and how their motivations and their ethics might resemble those of Huck. Huck's dilemmas, as it turns out, are often not all that different from their own.

Ethics Learned

Delving deeply into literary texts means moving from discussions about generic qualities and aspects to considerations of larger, thematic issues--that is, to fundamental and universal observations. With an eye to the ethical, thematic discussion looks towards the moral assumptions at work in the text. Such considerations align with normative ethics--for, in assessing both a character's actions and the progress of the plot, we attend to the morals that drive right and wrong conduct, to the consequences of that conduct, and to the ethical inclination behind the characters' actions and/or the text itself. In other words, students, having examined the ethics revealed in the text (often in the form of how characters act), can begin to appraise the underlying morals that generate those ethics. When students ponder actions, motivations, and consequences, they engage with the notions that inform the three key "strands" of normative ethics: *virtue ethics*, which emphasizes one's moral character; *deontology*, which emphasizes duties or rules; and *consequentialism*, which emphasizes the consequences of actions. (Note that how much "philosophy" one brings to the classroom depends, of course, on one's students.

It is my practice to share with students the philosophical and critical underpinnings to what we discuss, even if only in the broadest strokes and only if it enhances the discussion and their understanding of the issues raised by the text.)

The issues in *Huck Finn* about the individual within a larger community are raised most prominently by the evolving relationship between Huck and Jim--one that stands apart from the flawed and corrupt ones through which they travel. Their community, defined by an ethic that recognizes and acknowledges each other's humanity, stands in sharp juxtaposition to the ethics of self-interest defining both the world off the river and Huck's initial actions. On the river, Huck and Jim establish a community defined by Kastely as one characterized by "mutual acts of trust that [. . .] bind] the two members together in a common identity" (p. 417). Only when Huck acknowledges Jim's humanity after his cruel trick in the fog will Huck act in ways that are not merely opposed to his own self-interest and wellbeing. If a fate in Hell awaits him, so be it. Students, having traced how Huck arrives at this resolution and having parsed the events and characters that compose the novel's middle section, now look to assess those ethics. And it is here that Twain's problematic narrative offers a rich field for study.

To illustrate how classroom discussion about *Huck Finn* can unfold, I turn to one episode from the novel's middle section that not only reflects the plot's complexity but is especially significant to Huck's moral education. The King and the Duke embody both the novel's unsteady moral sense and the complexities inherent in any discussion of ethics. As readers, we, like Huck, initially applaud their exploits, if somewhat covertly. They dupe and fleece communities as morally bankrupt as they. And Huck himself rationalizes their duplicity. Kastely explains, "This portion of the novel allows us to understand the appeal of an ethics of [self-interest and] exploitation when civilization is corrupt" (p. 427). In this world of upside-down morals and ethics, Huck resorts to Pap's philosophy, explaining that going along "was all easy, so we [he and Jim] done it" (p. 130). Only

when he meets the Wilks sisters does Huck consider an alternative to the ethic of self-interest. Their kindnesses to him, even while he wrongs them, are a kind of epiphany for Huck, one that precedes his more frequently cited exhortations about going to Hell. For Kastely, this moment, this revelation, "break[s] the grip of meanness and brutality" that has defined the middle section of the novel. Guided by a communal ethic, Huck proclaims, "[the Wilks sisters] all jest laid theirselves out to make me feel at home and know I was amongst friends. I felt so ornery and lowdown and mean that I says to myself, 'My mind's made up; I'll hive that money for them or bust'" (p. 171). Among the Wilks, Huck makes a social connection: he is embraced by a community and recognizes the humanity of the Wilks clan. As MacIntyre (2007) explains, virtues are generated out of the community in which they are to be practiced--they are grounded in a particular time and place. The feelings that Huck develops among the Wilks compel him to act not merely on behalf of the sisters but, more importantly, in ways that directly threaten his own self-interest. This decision paves the way for Huck's rejection of the King and the Duke and for his resolution to go to Hell in order to secure Jim's freedom. He is developing an ethical center that informs how he engages with the world.

It is my hope that, by identifying and then assessing the morals and ethics that propel the middle section of the novel, students are prepared to assess both the system of ethics to which they subscribe as well as those that direct present society. Thus, we ask yet another series of questions: "What ethics direct our actions or choices?" "Should we attend to what inspires our actions or to the consequences of those actions in measuring virtue or right action?" "What are our means for assessing goodness or error?" "Based on our answers, how do we act?" This kind of reflective questioning compels students to examine their own ethical inclinations, those of their peers, and those that define the larger society, endorsing some ethical codes and rejecting others based on their own evolving moral sense.

ESSAYS

"Sivilizing" Our Students *continued*

Ethics Lived

After the books are closed and class is dismissed, abstract theories about morals and ethics are so much stuff and nonsense without subsequent application. For this reason, the transference of what students discover in the classroom to their lives outside of it is at the heart of ethical teaching. Applied ethics places normative rules in practical contexts. It is a game of "What ifs?" However, truly critical education asks students to do more than ponder; it requires them to name the forces at play in the world around them, reflect critically on those forces, and act based on those reflections. Metaethics asks students to name, normative ethics compels reflection, and applied ethics demands action. Although, by definition, applied ethics involves examining specific controversial issues and, using the conceptual tools of metaethics and normative ethics, trying to achieve some resolution (typified by the case study), I, like Stanford's Fried, take applied ethics a bit more literally.

More than working through the moral quandaries presented in a situation or a text ("Would you or would you not rat out the runaway Jim?"), I try to push students to walk their talk--to apply in the world outside the classroom the ethics and moral standards they study in the text and articulate for themselves in the classroom. I want my students, in other words, to take that resolution to the streets. With love. I challenge them to locate opportunities and outlets for exercising their applied ethics "chops." "Where can you advocate for the less fortunate?" "In what venues can you lobby against injustice?" "How can you work to create, secure, and nourish a community that encourages its members to put aside self-interest in favor of acting in ways that are at once based on, acknowledge, and sustain the humanity of all its members?" By now, students know the questions before I can finish asking them. They look for opportunities in their own community to make choices and to take action. Since placing discussions of ethics more explicitly at the center of my teaching, I have seen my students take their activism public. I watched on the nightly news as one of my students stood with undocu-

mented workers at a local factory and confronted agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Three of my students protested with Somali Muslims over mandatory break times during Ramadan by standing on picket lines while others advocated on campus and in the pages of the local newspapers. My education students, now classroom teachers, lead boycotts of standardized testing. I see them among their peers at rallies standing with the Occupy Movement and Black Lives Matter. I wish I could affirm that it was our class that inspired their activism. I can't be sure. I said go and do. And they did. They built their rafts, hopped aboard, set them afloat, to see what adventures awaited beyond the next bend in the river.

References

Aoujdit, A. (2012). Teaching moral philosophy using novels: Issues and strategies. *Journal of Thought, 2012* (Fall), 49-66.

Badaracco, J. (2006). Questions of character: Illuminating the heart of leadership through literature. Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press.

Damon, W. (1999, August). The moral development of children. *Scientific American, 281*(2), 72-88.

Dewey, J. (1916). Thinking in education. In *Democracy and education* (pp. 179-192). New York, New York: Macmillan.

Dewey, J., & Boydston, J. (1986). What is thinking? In *The later works, 1925-1953* (pp. 113-125). Carbondale, Ill., Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press.

Edmundson, H. (1995). Teaching administrative ethics with help from Jefferson. *PS: Political Science & Politics, 28*(2), 226-229.

Eliot, T. (1963). *Murder in the cathedral*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed.). New York: Continuum.

Gallagher, K., & Allington, R. (2009). Readicide: How schools are killing reading and what you can do about it. Portland, ME.: Stenhouse.

Greene, M. (1978). Landscapes of learning. New York: Teachers College Press.

Iser, W. (1978). The act of reading: A theory of aesthetic response. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Leddy, C. (2013, August 8). Truth in Fiction. *Harvard Gazette*.

Macintyre, A. (2007). After virtue: A study in moral theory (3rd ed.). Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press.

McLaren, P. (2002). Critical pedagogy and predatory culture oppositional politics in a postmodern era. London: Routledge.

McPike, E. (2003) *Education for democracy*. Washington, DC: Albert Shanker Institute.

Monin, B., Schapiro, T., & Fried, B. (2014, May 4). Panel discussion: Does teaching ethics do any good? Retrieved from Stanford University McCoy Family Center for Ethics in Society https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Gxxtuy1cRY

Morson, G. (1989). Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and challenges. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press.

Moya, P. (2014, February 24). Does reading literature make you more moral? *Boston Review*. Retrieved from http://bostonreview.net/blog/paula-ml-moya-does-reading-literature-make-you-more-moral

Noddings, N. (1984). Caring, a feminine approach to ethics & moral education. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Peter, S., & Renata, S. (2005). The moral of the story: An anthology of ethics through literature. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell.

Pojman, L. (2000). The moral life: An introductory reader in ethics and literature. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rosenblatt, L. (1995). Literature as exploration (5th ed.). New York: Modern Language Association of America.

Rosenstand, N. (1994). The moral of the story: An introduction to questions of ethics and human nature. Mountain View, Calif.: Mayfield.

Twain, M., & Graff, G. (1995). Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A case study in critical controversy. Boston. MA: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press.

Waldrom, W. (1988). Using literature to teach ethical principles in medicine: *Of Mice and Men* and the concept of duty. *Literature and Medicine*, 7, 170-176.

Webb, A. (2001). Literature and lives: A response-based, cultural studies approach to teaching English. Urbana, IL.: National Council of Teachers of English.

TEACHING REPORTS

Is this Course worth my time? Key Factors in Adult Online Student Satisfaction

— George Howell, Amber Simos, and Keith Starcher

George Howell, D.B.A., is an Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Business Specialization in the DeVoe School of Business at Indiana Wesleyan University. Previous to being an Associate Professor, he worked in several leadership positions within the school. He has over 25 years of sales and marketing experience in the electrical industry and started working in higher education in 1999. He holds a B.A. in Economics from Ripon College, an MBA from Indiana Wesleyan University, and a D.B.A. from Anderson University. His research and teaching interests include marketing, services marketing, customer satisfaction, and adult education.

Amber Simos has served as adjunct professor at Indiana Wesleyan University for eight years. She has also worked extensively in the area of market research, particularly in market research for higher education institutions. She received a Bachelor of Science in Management and Marketing from Indiana Wesleyan University and a Master of Business Administration from Ball State University. Amber currently teaches Marketing Principles, Marketing Research, Services Marketing, and Marketing Seminar courses for Indiana Wesleyan University. Her research and teaching interests include topics in adult higher education and marketing research in higher education institutions. Amber has completed marketing research consulting work for multiple universities in the US.

Keith Starcher is a Professor of Business in the DeVoe School of Business within the College of Adult & Professional Studies at Indiana Wesleyan University. He has 30+ years of experience in both Fortune 500 and family-owned companies. His undergraduate degree is in metallurgy from Penn State. He obtained his M.B.A. and a PhD from the University of South Florida.

Abstract

The study was initiated after a student of one of the authors wrote, "You have proven you are worth my time," in response to the question, "Why are you taking this course?" on a student information inventory. This statement led the researchers to perform action research on what instructors (full-time and adjunct) do that online adult learners feel is "worth" their time and a "waste" of their time. This paper investigates survey response data from approximately 1,400 online students using importance-satisfaction gap analysis, factor analysis, matrix analysis and multiple regression to study important student-identified educational activities for assessment and quality improvement initiatives. Results suggest that students' loyalty to their educational program is primarily impacted by specific instructor behaviors and educational activities.

Keywords

online, assessment, adult learners, adult learning theory, adult education-evaluation

Key Factors in Adult Online Student Satisfaction

The study was initiated after a student of one of the authors wrote, "You have proven you are worth my time," in response to the question, "Why are you taking this course?" on a student information inventory. This statement provoked the researchers to study what full-time and adjunct instructors do that online students feel is "worth" their time versus a "waste" of their time. Understanding instructor behavior from students' perspectives can lead to improved instructor effectiveness. "Being responsive to students' experiences of learning makes your assessments of your effectiveness as a teacher at least partially dependent on students' perceptions of what is happening to them" (Brookfield, 1990, p. 42). With this in mind, online students at a private, faith-based Midwestern university participated in an online survey whose purposes were to determine both the educational activities that the institution's adult students feel are most important and how satisfied the adult students were with various educational activities.

Overview of Adult Learning Theories

Fully online programs are offered at more than 80% of public universities and half of private colleges (Aldridge, Clinefelter, & Magda, 2013). According to the Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) 5.5 million students (26% of all college students) took at least one online course and 2.6 million (13%) studied fully online in 2012 (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Adult learners have many choices when it comes to online education and are able to select programs that meet their specific needs. This has implications for both recruiting and retention of online students (Broekemier, 2002; Brown, 2004). Especially relevant to this study of online students are adult learning theories and how their application can enhance learning in the online classroom.

One of the early thought leaders in adult education, Knowles, posited key components of adult learning theory (Fall, 2001, Fleming & Gardner, 2009; Huang, 2002: Laher, 2007; Merriam, 1996). The first component is that adults need to know the "why." Why do they need to know about a particular subject or concept? Second, adult learners are often self-directed learners who take control of their learning. Third, adult learners enter the classroom with prior knowledge and experiences that can provide a great deal of knowledge that can be used by an instructor. Fourth, adult students exhibit a readiness to learn as they see the value of advanced education within their career and personal goals. Fifth, adult learners are problem-centered versus subject-centered, and they desire, if possible, the immediate application of knowledge in their careers. Finally, adults are motivated to learn (Fleming & Gardner, 2009; Huang, 2002: Laher, 2007; Merriam, 1996). Also important to the discussion of adult learners are learner-centered, constructivist, and transformative learning theories and how these help support the development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions in adult students (Flumerflet, Ingram, Brockberg & Smith, 2007; Hawkes, 2005; and Laher, 2007).

Conventional teaching strategies use a teacher-centered pedagogy where instructors are the focus of the teaching with the student following the instructor (Schiller, 2009). In learner-centered approaches, students actively participate and have control in the learning process (Chaeng, 2009; Kerka, 2002; Schiller, 2009). One researcher summarized the following four learner-centered practices: (1) engage and motivate students to discover new knowledge and abilities, (2) design learning to start at the level of knowledge of the student, (3) encourage students to be self-directed, and (4) help students determine what tools to use in their problem solving (Law, 2007). Having students engage actively in the choice of their educational experiences and the relevancy of course content can encourage the development of critical thinking skills and lifelong learning (Cheang, 2009; Pololi L., Clay, M., Lipkin Jr, M., Hewson, M., Kaplan, C., & Frankel, R. 2001).

Learning-centered pedagogy is further explored by Chickering & Gamson (1987) who identified seven

principles that can help to improve undergraduate education. These include (1) encouraging contacts between students and faculty; (2) developing reciprocity and cooperation among students; (3) using active learning techniques; (4) giving prompt feedback; (5) emphasizing time on task; (6) communicating high expectations; and (7) respecting diverse talents and ways of learning. Chickering and Ehrmann (1996) discuss the use of technology in implementing these seven principles. In Guidera's study (2003), full-time faculty teaching online classes rated online instruction as more effective for promoting prompt feedback, time on task, respect for diverse learning styles, and communicating high expectations, but online instruction was rated less effective for promoting student-faculty contact and cooperation among students.

Past experiences of students help to shape their perspective of the world around them. Transformative learning theory encompasses the prior assumptions, experiences, knowledge, and values of adult students as well as how these form a *frame of reference* (Mezirow, 1997; Laher, 2007). At the center of transformative learning is "the process of effecting change in a frame of reference" (Mezirow, 1997, p.2) in the student. Transformative learning occurs through a change in a student's frame of reference "through critical reflection on the assumptions upon which [his or her] interpretations, beliefs and habits of mind or points of view are based" (Mezirow, 1997, p.7). The transformative learning process and changes in the student's frame of reference help him or her in developing new knowledge, skills, and dispositions (Flumerfelt, Ingram, Brockberg & Smith, 2007). This notion of the learner's knowledge, skills and disposition is also expressed as the "…head, heart and hands" (Giles & Alderson, 2008, p. 466) of the student.

It is important to assess what students already know in order to build on this knowledge. A tenet of constructivist learning theory is that students retain more and handle information better when it is grouped around existing knowledge and ideas. Students assimilate new experiences and modify their existing ideas and structures to create new mental models (Henry, 2002). The theory supports the notion of faculty serving more *as a guide on the side* versus a sage on a stage to cultivate a student-centered learning process in the classroom. (Schweitzer & Stephenson, 2008; Spigner-Littles & Anderson, 1999). Another key principle is that learning and knowledge are constructed though interaction and communication with others in study communities external to the classroom (Huang 2002; Schweitzer & Stephenson, 2008). The introduction and use of project or learning teams within the instructional design of courses in adult degree programs is an application of constructivism theory. Participation on project teams within the classroom can add to the student's team skills and can transfer to the student's workplace.

As adult learners become a larger segment of the overall student population, institutions of higher education must invest in "systematic assessment activities" of the adult learners' educational experience (Noel-Levitz, 2005). One type of assessment activity involves using an importance-satisfaction performance gap analysis (Mugdh, 2004).

Method

The researchers first developed a survey of two open-ended questions that was sent electronically to a random, stratified sample of 1,000 students enrolled in adult educational programs at a private, faith-based Midwestern university. This questionnaire asked students to discuss anything that they considered to be "worth their time" versus a "waste of their time" in regards to their educational experience. Two hundred and eighty (280) open-ended responses were received. Qualitative analysis of these responses using Nvivo software led to the creation of several "items of interest" to our students. A subsequently developed survey instrument asked students how important each item was to them and how satisfied they were with each item. The survey instrument employed five-point Likert-type scales to collect both importance and satisfaction ratings on 22 attributes. It also included questions on student demographics as well as asking on an eleven-point Likert-like scale how likely the student was to recommend the program to a colleague or friend.

A pre-test of this survey was sent to a random sample of 100 students (35 responded). Changes were made to the survey based on the pre-test results, and the survey was sent to approximately 11,000 students. Approximately 2,800 responses were received to this survey. This paper focuses on the 1,382 responses from students who experience their education exclusively online. SPSS version 17.0 was used for the quantitative statistical analysis of the survey data.

Results

Demographics and educational program characteristics of the respondents may be seen in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

Factor analysis was conducted to validate the performance gap scores (importance scores minus satisfaction scores). Using the principal component method and varimax rotation, factor analysis identified three dimensions: Instructor, Educational Activities, and Spiritual (Cooper & Schindler, 2003; Green & Salkind, 2008). This methodology to identify new variables has been used in other higher education studies: Adult student worries (Kelly, 2007), adult student course format (Fall, 2001), adult student program quality (Harroff & Valentine, 2006), and service quality in adult student programs (Mugdh, 2004), as well as trainee attitudes (Jin-Ton, Ching-Hsiang, & Humg-Wen, 2008) and senior manager attitudes (Clark, Tynan, & Money, 1994) in the business sector. The three factors (Instructor, Educational Activities, and Spiritual) explained 62.57% of the total variance (Table 3).

Tests of internal consistency across the three factors showed that overall, the survey instrument was a reliable tool to measure performance gaps in educational activities to our online adult learners. According to Nunnally (1978), reliability coefficients greater than 0.70 are standard for adequate reliability of questionnaires. The Cronbach's alpha score for the three factors ranged from 0.81 – 0.92, establishing the reliability of this execution of the survey instrument. Table 4 displays factor means and reliability estimates.

Once the factors were isolated, a scatter plot of importance and satisfaction means of the three factors yielded a quadrant analysis (Figure 1).

The findings suggest that resources be focused on improving Factor 1 (Instructor) as it lies above the overall Importance Mean of 4.35 and below the overall Satisfaction mean of 4.01. Factor 2 (Educational Activities) and Factor 3 (Spiritual) fall in Quadrant III (low priority for action).

The four quadrants present a matrix for prioritizing action (Noel-Levitz, 2005). Factor 1, Instructor, requires immediate attention for improvement efforts. Items related to Factor 1 and their respective performance gaps are listed in Table 5.

Note that only one Importance Mean (Lectures effectively) falls below the overall Importance Mean of 4.35 and that only three Satisfaction Means (Accessible, Who is Prepared, Cares About Students) fall above the overall Satisfaction Mean of 4.01. Given that our research focused on "educational activities," it appears that resources may well be diverted from areas of lower importance to faculty development activities that will result in an improvement in the above instructor-related items.

In regards to Educational Activities (Factor 2), note in Table 6 that the two Importance Means that are above the overall Importance Mean of 2.35 (Assignments which help me develop new skills for my professional career, Assignments that positively impact my learning) are also above the overall Satisfaction Mean of 4.01.

To determine the extent to which each of the identified factors (Instructor, Educational Activities, and Spiritual) contributes to the overall impact, regression analysis was conducted with the three factors as independent variables. The "loyalty" variable was treated as

the dependent variable. Loyalty was measured by response to this question: "How likely are you to recommend _____ to a colleague or friend?" (11-point Likert-type scale from "Not at all likely" to "Extremely likely"). Summary results of the regression analysis are listed in Table 7.

Results show that two of the three factors have statistically significant positive effects on loyalty with items associated with Educational Activities (Table 8) having slightly stronger effect than items associated with the factor, Instructor. Although the educational program at this institution is promoted as being faith-based, the Spiritual factor (Table 8) did not yield a statistically significant effect on loyalty.

Implications

Across the items identified in Tables 5 and 6, satisfaction scores had smaller means than the importance scores revealing a performance gap in all elements that make up the Instructor factor (Factor 1) and the Educational Activities factor (Factor 2). Results from quadrant analysis and subsequent item analysis of the Instructor factor (Factor 1, as reflected in the research of others such as Chickering and Ehremann, etc.) indicate that resources should be focused on faculty development (and accountability tools) so that instructors see the importance of (at a minimum) providing timely and meaningful feedback, setting clear expectations, and being active on the course discussion boards. Implications from this study can provide significant rationale to schools to help acquire resources in these areas. This research supports the results of other studies that conclude that students, even in online courses, expect faculty to be responsive (Carr, 2000; Frankola, 2001). These findings (Table 6) corroborate several adult learning theories: Learner-centered, Transformative, and Constructivist. Thus, insights from this study provide additional rationale to university administration and faculty about how imperative it is the university course designers create assignments that positively impact the students' learning, that relate to solving problems at the

students' workplace, and that help the students develop new skills for their professional careers.

Furthermore, implications of this research can be seen in the facilitator guidelines provided to all online instructors at the authors' home university:

Online faculty are expected to provide regular and personal feedback to students and to closely monitor and participate as appropriate in discussion forums. By setting clear standards for in-class behavior and online behavior and course requirements the faculty can help students succeed. One must set high academic standards and stick to them. Faculty should always grade student work with objectivity and consistency. The utilization of grading rubrics for each assignment is highly recommended (Indiana Wesleyan University, 2015).

In addition, facilitators are required to:

1. Set a friendly, open, and encouraging environment.

2. Guide discussions.

3. Set clear rules, standards, and expectations.

4. Provide workshop grades/feedback within seven days of assignment submission or due date, whichever is later. Provide final grades/feedback within seven days after the last date of class.

5. Ensure students treat each other respectfully.

6. Respond to student inquiries within 48 hours.

Results from multiple regression analysis suggest a statistically positive effect of the two Instructor and Educational Activities factors on loyalty. Although the institution's educational program is promoted as being faith-based, the Spiritual factor did not yield a statistically significant effect on loyalty. Thus, being faith-based may be a necessary, but not sufficient condition, to attract and retain online students at a private, faith-based Midwestern university. Consequently, resources should be focused on improving the items that have the largest performance gaps within the Instructor and Educational Activities factors.

Because of the gaps between importance and satisfaction in items within the Instructor factor (Factor 1) in our study, there is evidence that the instructor guidelines at the authors' home university may not be enough to ensure instructors are interacting effectively with students. Suggestions for improving these guidelines include, but are not limited to: the required use of grading rubrics, a minimum number of points per discussion forum, and closer oversight of the school concerning the frequency of interaction between instructors and students in the online classroom.

Limitations

The online survey data was collected from students enrolled in a private, faith-based Midwestern university with a nontraditional adult student population of approximately 12,000. In that regard, this may limit the generalizability of the findings, except at similar colleges and universities. These results do not discriminate by type of course or educational program and do not result in a longitudinal study.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future research include: (1) qualitative studies to learn students' reasons for lower satisfaction scores, (2) further study of program-specific characteristics that may impact student satisfaction, (3) a replication of this study at various institutions of higher learning (state schools, for-profit schools, etc.), and (4) a longitudinal study revealing the impact of faculty development and educational activities development on the performance gaps that were identified in this study. Further research is these areas has the potential to expand the guidelines of these findings.

References

Aldridge, S. C., Clinefelter, D. L., & Magda, A. J. (2013). Online learning at public universities: Building a new path to a college degree. Louisville, KY: The Learning House, Inc.

Broekemier, G. M. (2002). A comparison of two-year and four-year adult students: Motivations to attend college and the importance of choice criteria. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 12(1), 31-49.

Brookfield, S. (1990). *The Skillful Teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Brown, J. (2004). Marketing and retention strategies for adult degree programs. In J. Pappas & J. Jerman (Eds.), Developing and delivering adult degree programs: No. 103. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, (pp. 51-60). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Cooper, D. & Schindler, P. (2003). *Business Research Methods*. McGraw Hill Irwin: Boston, MA.

Carr, S. (2000). As distance education comes of age, the challenge is keeping the students. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2/11/2000, p.A39. Retrieved from http://chronicle.com/weekly/v46/i23/23a00101.htm

Cheang, K. (2009). Effect of Learner-Centered Teaching on Motivation and Learning Strategies in a Third-Year Pharmacotherapy Course. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education, 73*(3), 1-8. Retrieved from Academic Search Complete database.

Chickering, A., & Gamson, Z. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *Biochemical Education*, 140-141.

Chickering, Arthur and Stephen C. Ehrmann (1996), "Implementing the Seven Principles: Technology as Lever," AAHE Bulletin, October, pp. 3-6.

Clark, F., Tynan, C., & Money, A. (1994). Senior managers' views on quality a strategic perspective. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 2(1), 61. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Fall, L. T. (2001). Three-Weekend Course Format and Adult Student Satisfaction. *Journalism And Mass Communication Educator, 55*(4), 39-48. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Frankola, K. (2001). Why online learners drop out. *Workforce*, 80 (10), 53-59.

Fleming, C. & Garner, B. (2009). *Brief Guide for Teaching Adult Learners*. Triangle Publishing: Marion, IN.

Flumerfelt, S., Ingram, I., Brockberg, K., & Smith, J. (2007). A study of higher education student achievement based on transformative and lifelong learning processes. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 15(1), 107-118. doi:10.1080/13611260601037413

Giles, D., & Alderson, S. (2008). An Appreciative Inquiry into the Transformative Learning Experiences of Students in a Family Literacy Project. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 48*(3), 465-478. Retrieved from ERIC database.

TEACHING REPORTS   Is this Course worth my time? *continued*

Green, S. & Salkind, N. (2008). *Using SPSS for Windows and Macintosh: Analyzing and Understanding Data*, Fifth Edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ : Pearson Education.

Guidera, S. (2003). Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Online Instruction in Terms of the Seven Principles of Effective Undergraduate Education. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 32(2-3), 139-178.

Harroff, P., & Valentine, T. (2006). Dimensions of Program Quality in Web-Based Adult Education. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 20(1), 7-22. doi:10.1207/s15389286aj-de2001_2

Hawkes, M., & Eastmond, D. (2005). Learner-Centered Theory and Practice in Distance Education: Cases from Higher Education. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education, 6*(3), 275-279. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database.

Henry, M. (2002). Constructivism in the Community College Classroom. *History Teacher, 36*(1), 65-74. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Huang, H. (2002). Toward constructivism for adult learners in online learning environments. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 33*(1), 27. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database.

Indiana Wesleyan University (2015). *Faculty Handbook*. Unpublished manuscript.

Jin-Ton, C., Ching-Hsiang, L., & Hung-Wen, L. (2008). Relationship between Trainee Attitudes and Dimensions of Training Satisfaction: An Empirical Study with Training Institute Employees. *International Journal of Management*, 25(4), 756-765. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Kelly, W. E. (2007). The Structure of Adult Students' Worries. *Educational Research Quarterly,* 31(1), 17-26. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.

Kerka, S., & ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, C. (2002). *Teaching Adults: Is It Different? Myths and Realities*. Retrieved from ERIC.

Laher, S. (2007). Reflections on teaching undergraduate psychology to part-time adult students. *South African Journal of Psychology, 37*(2), 383-388. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier database.

Merriam, S. (1996). Updating our Knowledge of Adult Learning. *The Journal of Education in Health Professions, 16*(3), 136-143.

Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*, (74), 5. Retrieved from Academic Search Premier.

Mugdh, M. (2004). Measuring Service Quality in a Nontraditional Institution Using Importance-Performance Gap Analysis. *Online Submission*, Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov/

Noel-Levitz, Inc. and Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. (2005). *National Adult Learners Satisfaction-Priorities Report*.

Nunnally, J. C. (1978). *Psychometric theory* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Pololi, L., Clay, M., Lipkin Jr, M., Hewson, M., Kaplan, C., & Frankel, R. (2001). Reflections on integrating theories of adult education into a medical school faculty development course. Medical Teacher, 23(3), 276-283. doi:10.1080/01421590120043053.

Schiller, S. (2009). Practicing Learner-Centered Teaching: Pedagogical Design and Assessment of a Second Life Project. *Journal of Information Systems Education, 20*(3), 369-381. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Schweitzer, L., & Stephenson, M. (2008). Charting the challenges and paradoxes of constructivism: a view from professional education. *Teaching in Higher Education, 13*(5), 583-593. doi:10.1080/13562510802334947.

Spigner-Littles, D., & Anderson, C. (1999). Constructivism: A paradigm for older learners. *Educational Gerontology, 25*(3), 203-209. doi:10.1080/036012799267828.

U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. (2014). Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

Table 1

Demographics of 1382 Respondents

Gender		Male			Female	
(%)		29.7			70.3	
Ethnicity	Caucasian, non-Hispanic	Black, non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Native American	Multi-Ethnic	Other
(%)	83.1	10.5	1.7	0.4	1.4	2.9
Age	18 – 24	25 – 34	35 – 44	45 – 54	55 – 64	65 or older
(%)	5.0	35.0	33.4	21.4	5.0	0.2

Table 2

Educational Program Characteristics of 1382 Respondents

Program Level	Associate's	Bachelor's	Master's	
(%)	22.7	38.3	39.0	
Program Completion	< 25%	26 – 50%	51 – 75%	> 75%
(%)	36.2	23.2	18.6	22.0

TEACHING REPORTS   Is this Course worth my time? *continued*
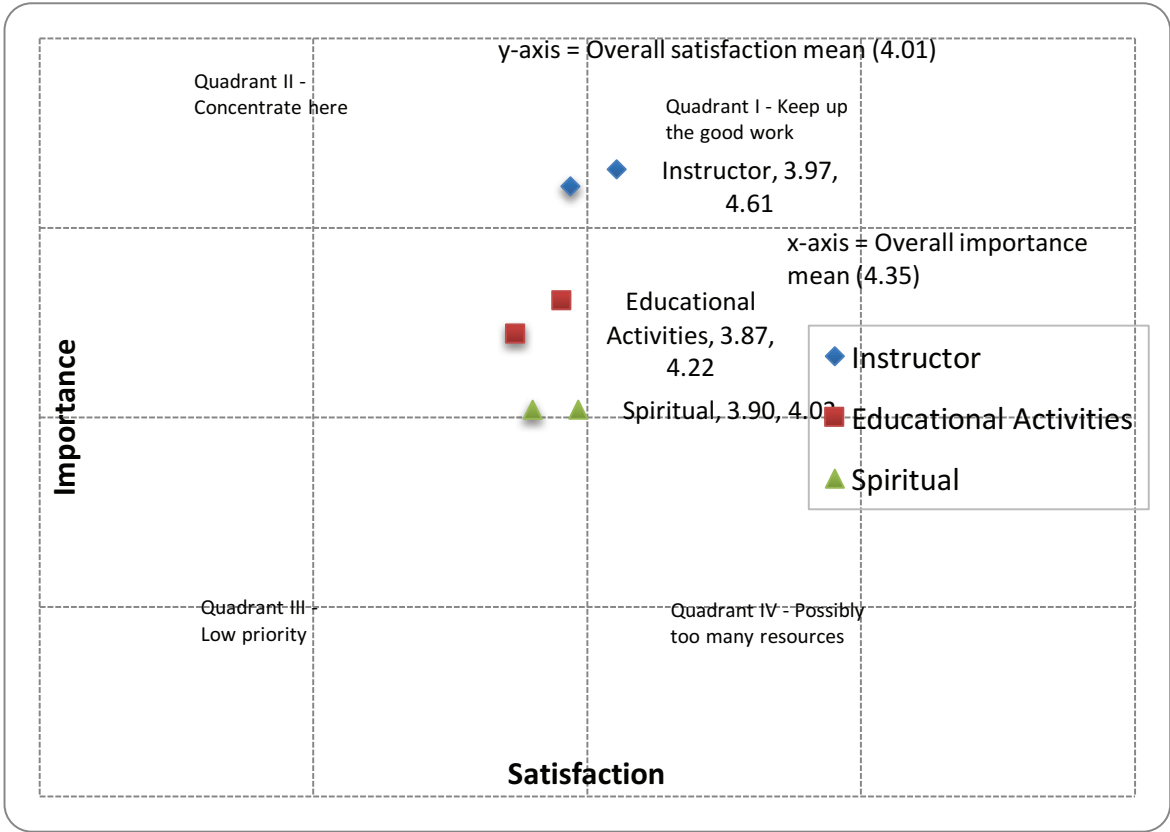
Table 3

Total Variance Explained by the Model

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cum. %	Total	% of Variance	Cum. %	Total	% of Variance	Cum. %
1	10.63	43.31	48.31	10.63	43.31	48.31	5.92	26.89	26.89
2	1.77	8.06	56.38	2.00	1.77	8.06	4.43	20.13	47.01
3	1.36	6.19	62.57	1.36	6.19	62.57	3.42	15.55	62.57

Table 4

Factor Means and Reliability Estimates

Factor	Factor Name	Importance Mean	Satisfaction Mean	Performance Gap	Alpha
1	Instructor	4.61	3.97	0.64	0.92
2	Educational Activities	4.22	3.87	0.35	0.81
3	Spiritual	4.02	3.90	0.12	0.90

Figure 1 Matix Analysis

Figure 1 Matix Analysis

TEACHING REPORTS   Is this Course worth my time? *continued*

Table 5

Items that make up Factor 1 (Instructor) listed by Size of the Performance Gap

	Importance Mean	S.D.	Satisfaction Mean	S.D.	Performance Gap
Clear expectations	4.81	0.61	3.88	0.97	0.93
Meaningful feedback	4.69	0.71	3.86	1.04	0.83
Timely feedback	4.69	0.71	3.88	1.01	0.81
Active on discussion boards	4.46	0.81	3.68	1.08	0.78
Accessible	4.73	0.66	4.05	0.88	0.68
Who is prepared	4.78	0.66	4.15	0.85	0.63
Lectures effectively	4.29	0.91	3.72	0.94	0.57
Reviews next week's assignments	4.24	0.90	3.74	0.90	0.50
Cares about students	4.63	0.74	4.17	0.81	0.46

Table 6

Items that make up Factor 2 (Educational Activities) listed by Size of the Performance Gap

	Importance Mean	S.D.	Satisfaction Mean	S.D.	Performance Gap
Assignments: Develop new skills	4.66	0.86	4.11	0.80	0.55
Assignments: Next week's reviewed	4.24	0.90	3.74	0.90	0.50
Assignments: Impacts learning	4.55	1.06	4.10	0.83	0.45
Assignments: Problem solving	4.29	0.94	3.91	0.80	0.38

Table 7

Regression Analysis of Loyalty on Three Factors

	Unstandardized Coefficients			
	B	Standard Error	t	p
Constant	-0.178	0.274	-0.650	.516
Instructor	0.915	0.080	11.393	.000
Educational Activities	1.170	0.094	12.469	.000
Spiritual	.108	.078	1.382	.167

Table 8

Items that made up the Educational Activities Factor and the Spiritual factor

Educational Activities Factor	Spiritual Factor
Assignments which help me develop new skills for my professional career	Prayer time
Assignments that positively impact my learning	Devotional time
Effective use of class time	An instructor who incorporates biblical principles into class material
Assignments that relate to solving problems at my workplace	Assignments that help me understand, develop, and grow in my relationship with God
Writing papers on topics of importance in my discipline	
Effective group work	

TEACHING REPORTS

The Evolution of Best Practice: Teaching Genre and Analysis Across the Curriculum

— Georgia Rhoades and Lynn Moss Sanders

Lynn Moss Sanders has directed the English department Honors program, the University Honors program, and the First Year Seminar program, all at Appalachian State University in Boone, NC. Currently she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in American literature, folklore, and Appalachian studies.

Georgia Rhoades directs the WAC Program at Appalachian State University in Boone, NC, which, along with the University Writing Center and Composition Program, was awarded the CCCC Certificate of Excellence in 2011. She has written about the WAC Glossary project and the vertical writing curriculum and is also a playwright.

Abstract

At mid-career, Georgia Rhoades and Lynn Moss Sanders, co-teachers with a group of Teaching Assistants in a developmental writing course at Appalachian State University, changed their practice by introducing a primary research report assignment, which was outside their experience as English professors. Their experience and research was published in The Subject is Research, edited by Wendy Bishop and Pavel Zemliansky (2001). In this essay, they discuss how that assignment has since evolved for them in different contexts, including Folklore and Writing Across the Curriculum program faculty development, and affected not only their practice but teaching theories as well. Rhoades explains her use of the assignment as part of a statewide faculty development program for community college faculty in North Carolina, and Moss Sanders discusses her work in advanced and graduate folklore courses as the basis for ethnographic research.

Keywords

primary research, writing across the curriculum, folklore, reflective practice, genre

Background

In mid-career, when we were two professors working with graduate assistants in teaching several sections of developmental writing, we decided to put together two ideas that were relatively new to us, Ken Macrorie's (1980) "I Search" and a format we had not assigned before, a basic social sciences and natural sciences report format. Our primary concern was that developmental students needed the challenges that Andrea Lunsford (1987) had suggested in "Politics and Practices in Basic Writing," and that it was likely that these students had not developed as writers partly because they had not been invested in topics. But we also liked the idea of their reporting primary research on topics in formats that allowed them to use headings instead of working toward smooth transitions and coherence and that allowed them to have a template for reporting, which most humanities assignment genres did not afford. We wrote about the results in "Creating Knowledge Through Primary Research," published in *The Subject is Research* (2001), edited by Wendy Bishop and Pavel Zemliansky. In this essay, we discussed the results of our assignments for developmental students in English 0900

in writing about their own primary research, choosing topics such as coffeehouses, WWII, and tsunamis. Our basic assignment asked students to interview, observe, or survey, and to write about their study in these sections: Introduction, Method, Results, and Conclusion.

Recently, we discussed that early collaborative experiment and how it had changed our practice, and we discovered that both of us have revised these assignments for other audiences and purposes. Moss Sanders has since taught several folklore courses in which the primary research genre has been a key assignment, and Georgia Rhoades directs Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) at Appalachian State University (2014) and teaches and recommends this format to Composition community college faculty across North Carolina as they create WAC courses. As we discussed our changing practice over the last thirteen years, we became interested in how teachers repurpose assignments as their experience widens and their theory of practice evolves. This essay is our own exploration into how teachers use the tools of their disciplines as they continue to explore best practice. We hope it encourages reflective practice about teaching strategies and a greater awareness of how an assignment evolves and has the power to bring about change in teaching philosophy.

Evolution of a practice: WAC

Initially, the idea of using primary research and the report format came from WAC workshops Rhoades had participated in with Charles Bazerman, Gary Tate, and Richard Marius at the University of Louisville and Elaine Maimon at Western Kentucky University. These early WAC discussions often focused on how much writing assignments differed from discipline to discipline, helping Composition faculty understand that once-sacrosanct rules of writing in English rarely applied for a student moving to writing in Economics, Sociology, or Nursing. Until 2009, the second required Composition course at Appalachian State University was a combination of literature and Composition, a hybrid approach

that repeated high school content and focused only on writing about literature. As Appalachian State University moved toward General Education reform and a vertical writing model (website at wac.appstate.edu), it became clear that the second course should prepare students for the writing challenges of all disciplines, not just English. As a result of conversations about the need to create a new course, Beth Carroll, the University Writing Center director, worked with a team of twenty-two Composition faculty members to create models for a second course in Composition, Intro to WAC.

During ten years as Composition director, Rhoades began to advocate for primary research and the report format as effective practice in the two required Composition courses, and both became standard practice, along with ethnography with the adoption of Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater's Fieldworking (2011), a result of faculty and student interest in this kind of research writing. As she adapted the assignment for the Composition course Intro to WAC, using Downs and Wardle's *Writing About Writing* (2007), Rhoades used the research focus adapted by WAC consultant Dennis Bohr, asking students to investigate writing in their majors, interviewing teachers, professionals, and students in the disciplines (versions of this assignment can be found at wac.appstate.edu). It became clear that students needed experience in developing research questions and in moving from Results to Conclusions. Moving the assignment from a general topic of the student's choice, as in the ENG 0900 course, to a more specialized topic, writing in the chosen major, allowed students to have choice within a narrower field. This approach moves students closer toward knowledge about writing in their majors but also shows them how some methods of inquiry and research choices are appropriate to the writing conventions of this genre. The assignment also required that students document using an appropriate style, in this case APA, which fits this type of research and allows students to see some of the logic behind different documentation styles.

This assignment also helped provide a point of common practice for WAC conversations. Working with faculty in all disciplines at Appalachian State University as they developed course proposals for the junior level of the vertical writing model, the Writing in the Disciplines (WID) course, Rhoades found the basic social sciences and natural sciences report format to be a widespread basic assignment, like the essay, that students could see as adaptable and valuable for later research. She has advocated its use in the Composition course Intro to WAC as well as encouraged a heightened awareness of its utility throughout the curriculum. For faculty development purposes, the report offered an easy way into writing in the disciplines, serving as the basis for work in many disciplines in a format relatively familiar to teachers writing primarily in essay and research essay structures. For these faculty members in Composition, the report assignment challenged them to teach headings, primary research methods and reporting, and APA style, allowing them to stretch their pedagogical skills but not requiring them to pretend to methods of inquiry specific to the disciplines. In conversations WAC conducts between faculty in the disciplines and Composition, the report format provides a common assignment and helps to foster transfer of skills as students move up the vertical writing curriculum.

In 2014, with the North Carolina Community College system reconfiguring requirements at the community college (including a second course in WAC composition) and Appalachian State University's WAC Program providing the faculty development for this shift, the basic report format has become a standard assignment that extends the conversation between community college and university faculty. (The program website, wac.appstate.edu, provides assignment and course support for WAC courses and includes assignments for the report format as adapted for NC community colleges).

The Report Format in Folklore

As Appalachian State University moved toward General Education reform and the vertical writing model, Moss Sanders began to teach more courses in Folklore; historically these courses at Appalachian State University have been cross-listed between the English department and the Appalachian Studies program. Although English 3050: Studies in Folklore is ostensibly a junior-level course, it really serves as an introduction to a field that is unfamiliar to most students. The course also fulfills a requirement for students from many disciplines, including English, History-Museum Studies, Appalachian Studies, Sustainable Development, and Anthropology.

Moss Sanders began teaching the Studies in Folklore course regularly, beginning in 2001, and by the time the authors' original chapter was published on primary research, she had begun adapting the assignment format for use as a folklore collection project model. Typically, introductory folklore courses must teach a new theoretical approach to students—one which combines theory from both the social sciences and the humanities—and most folklorists believe that students must actually collect and analyze original folklore to understand the theory. As ethnographers, folklorists tend to focus on the individual storyteller (or musician, or craftsperson), so the interview aspect of the primary research report model suited the assignment perfectly. Although some students came to the course with a project in mind, most were happy to use the standard assignment of interviewing a family member about a life story, a family tradition, or a family recipe; the social science report format gave them a clear model for completing the family collection project.

The authors' original chapter on primary research suggested that students organize a paper under four headings: Background or Introduction, Method, Results, and Analysis/Interpretation. In the conclusion of the article, Rhoades and Moss Sanders (2001) also suggested that student writers might include their "own

memories and impressions of the interview" (80) and they urged students to be aware of "health, safety, and privacy issues" (80). Both of these suggestions became important to adapting the assignment to a folklore project report. The collection project assignment that Moss Sanders now uses in her folklore classes begins by explaining "A report model traces the research from plan to analysis. One benefit is that you can rely on sections and headings to organize your writing rather than transitions." The sections include Introduction, Background, and Method; Results; Analysis/Interpretation; and Reflection. Adding a reflection section to the usual report model expands the usefulness of the project for upper-level students from a variety of humanities and social science majors.

Folklore Classroom Method

As Moss Sanders became involved in teaching both undergraduate and graduate-level folklore classes, she realized that students needed more guidance regarding the "privacy issues" described in the original assignment, so her adapted assignment included a standard university permission form to be signed by interviewees and student interviewers. Eventually, this focus on ethics in student ethnographic research evolved into an upper-level/graduate course on ethics in folklore where students examined the work of early collectors such as the Brothers Grimm, Richard Chase (collector of Appalachian Jack Tales), James Mooney (early collector of Cherokee lore) and Zora Neale Hurston (early collector of African American folklore).

Moss Sanders became aware that for many students, the project resulted in a new role—that of family archivist—and the suggestion for reflection became a requirement of the project. The benefits of writing a reflection section as part of the social science report become apparent when reading the conclusions of some students' papers. A number of students reported the personal benefits of this assignment. For example, after interviewing her grandmother (who worked as a public school teacher in North Carolina during the period

of early school integration), student Hannah Gladden wrote: "Granny's stories about integration are important to our family because, in a family full of former teachers, the stories represent how much things have changed in the classroom over the years. Although our community and our country have a long way to go in terms of true racial equality, it's nice to hear stories of the way things were because we are reminded of how far we have come." Another student, Perry Kendall, interviewed her mother about a family recipe and wrote: "It is special to know that I am carrying on a family tradition that has been handed down for so many generations." The grandson of a coal miner, Paul Sechrest's interview with his mother reminded him that "hard work and dedication" are the values that helped his family survive. Amanda Siegel's grandmother was born and raised in Israel; their interview "reinforced the love and appreciation" she has for her grandmother. Siegel compares the humorous stories she learned from her grandmother when she was growing up to those included in the interview, and explains that they "have a different relationship now that I am older and a mother." She admires her grandmother because "she has always been a strong woman in every aspect of her life" and Siegel concludes "it is important for me to hear the stories of my family's past in order for me to be able to pass them down to my daughter."

The Rhoades and Sanders' original research described using the report format with students in college English courses because it allowed them "to choose topics of real interest and to become a real authority" (70). With more advanced writers, such as the students in folklore courses, the format still serves those same purposes. The report format allows juniors, seniors, or graduate students collecting family folklore to assume an authoritative voice in their writing while also leaving room for personal reflection. Since folklore is not a major at Appalachian State University, students often take the course for fun or personal interest. If the courses in their majors have emphasized traditional research papers, the folklore collection project often gives them an opportunity to find pleasure in writing for a recep-

TEACHING REPORTS The Evolution of Best Practice *continued*

tive audience (ultimately the family) in a format that is adaptable to the variety of materials that folklorists collect—stories, songs, tales, and crafts.

Results and Conclusions

One by-product of our teaching this genre is that we have found ourselves writing in it. For most writing about Composition, particularly in writing about the vertical writing model and the Appalachian State University WAC Program, Rhoades has moved toward using headings in her own professional writing. This was not a practice accepted in the English essays in which she was trained, and initially journals in humanities did not lend themselves to headings. She has also regularly used her own primary research and experience as evidence in writing about writing program administrative (WPA) practice, which has gradually come to be accepted professional practice in Composition and in other women's studies and literature journals in her field.

In addition, as WAC director, Rhoades has found that knowledge of this genre has aided in discussion of writing assignments with faculty across the university. In conversations between Composition and WID faculty, knowledge of this genre has facilitated collaboration and exchange of knowledge that has been invaluable in supporting the vertical writing model. As she writes about the program, knowledge of this genre has been one of the key elements of transfer across levels for students and for faculty. As Mary Soliday (2011, p.2) points out, "genre study brings to WAC an important insistence on the socializing power of everyday assignments."

For Moss Sanders, writing in a report format solved a dilemma in her own research. Folklorists in the humanities have typically published in essay format, using MLA Style, while ethnographers with an anthropology background often use the report format. Since she was trained as an English teacher and folklorist, Moss Sanders had published articles in the accepted literary essay format. After the research and publication of "Creating Knowledge Through Primary Research," she began work on a book-length folklore manuscript and realized that the report format would solve many of the organizational issues she encountered. Her publisher encouraged a hybrid format—the use of headings from the social science approach, plus MLA internal citations. The resulting text was more readable for her mixed audience of folklorists, literature teachers, and historians.

This simple assignment represented a paradigm shift for our practice. In one way, it allowed us to practice feminist pedagogy by allowing for more choice in student topics. It allowed us to become more focused on writing across the curriculum, introducing research techniques and genres that we had not learned as graduate students in English and Rhetoric courses. It also afforded us a powerful tool for interactions with other fields, enlarging our interdisciplinary interactions within the university. In writing this essay, the report format allowed us to be more aware of our practice and evolving theory of practice, a metacognitive step that in turn aids us in creating best practice in our classrooms and administrative work.

References

Downs, D., & Wardle, E. (2007). Teaching about writing, righting misconceptions: (Re)envisioning "first-year composition" as "introduction to writing studies." *CCC, 58*(4), 552-584.

Writing across the curriculum. (2014). Appalachian State University. Retrieved from http//: wac.appstate.edu

Lunsford, A. (1987). "Policies and practices in basic writing." In T. Enos (Ed.), *A sourcebook for basic writers* (246-258). New York: Random House.

Macrorie, K. (1980). Searching writing: *A contextbook*. Rochelle Park, NJ: Haydn.

Rhoades, G., & Sanders, L. (2001). "Creating Knowledge Through Primary Research." In Bishop, W. and Pavel Zemliansky (Eds.), *The Subject is Research* (69-81). Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Soliday, M. (2011). Everyday Genres: *Writing assignments across the disciplines*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP.

Sunstein, B., & Chiseri-Strater, E. (2011). *Fieldworking: Reading and writing research*. 4th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

CURRENT CLIPS & LINKS

Websites Related to Teaching and Learning
—Kayla Beman

"Currents Clips and Links" is a list of links to interesting, non-commercial websites related to teaching and learning, compiled by Kayla Beman. Currents invites reader recommendations of similar sites that they've found useful.

The Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning is based out of Harvard University and provides information and resources on different aspects of teaching such as active learning, research-based teaching, grading and feedback, and syllabus planning. The website also has a link to the Bok blog, which features posts about special topics such as the use of mobile devices in the classroom. The Center also provides numerous links to other outside resources for teaching and learning.

http://bokcenter.harvard.edu/

The Columbia Center for Teaching and Learning is based out of Columbia University and provides links to external resources for teaching and learning. The CTL has information on designing new courses, assessing students, and classroom practices with sources from other universities, such as Vanderbilt and Cornell, and from Columbia University itself. The CTL also features information on new innovations in the classroom from Columbia University and around the world.

http://ctl.columbia.edu/

The Disability Services Office at Texas A&M University provides a faculty guide to working with students with disabilities. The guide provides information on classroom accommodations, curriculum planning, and preparing supplemental learning materials for students. The website also offers guidelines on how to work with students who have specific disabilities, such as visual impairments and hearing difficulties.

http://disability.tamu.edu/facultyguide

The Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of North Carolina in Charlotte provides a multitude of resources for faculty. The website has a blog with special interest articles and features a listing of academic research articles with corresponding links. The CTL also has a series of podcasts that are available for download that cover topics such as peer review, effective communication skills, and preparing different test formats.

http://teaching.uncc.edu/learning-resources

Landmark College in Putney, Vermont is known for pioneering techniques for teaching students with learning disabilities and specializes in creating programs to help students with learning disabilities to succeed in college. **The Institute for Research and Training at Landmark College** provides information for faculty and professionals on teaching students with disabilities. The website features selected publications of research done by the college and provides links to organizations that correspond to learning disabilities and other disorders, such as the Council for Learning Disabilities and Autism Speaks. The Institute also offers research-based professional development webinars and workshops for faculty and professionals.

http://www.landmark.edu/institute

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education

— Kisha Tracy

Principle 1: Encouraging Faculty-Student Contact

Cox, B.E., McIntosh, K.L., & Terenzini, P.T. (2010). Pedagogical signals of faculty approachability: Factors shaping faculty-student interaction outside the classroom. *Research in Higher Education*, 51(8), 767-788.

This article is based on the long-held principle that it is important for faculty and students to interact in a substantive manner outside of the classroom as it has a profound effect on various key student outcomes. Yet, these interactions very rarely happen, and this study seeks to discover why that is the case and why the amount of interaction varies. Their findings, however, tend to be unenlightening. Cox, McIntosh, and Terenzini comment that "the effects of classroom pedagogy on out-of-class interaction are inconsistent and vary across gender and full-time/part-time status" (p. 786). I find this conclusion to be problematic, particularly as they define one of their limitations in the study as "influential variables that were not explored in this study," one of which is "faculty beliefs about teaching and advising, or about their role in the system of higher education, may affect the frequency with which they interact with students outside of class," which "may actually manifest in classroom behaviors too subtle to register in our pedagogical scales" (p. 776). It really should come as no surprise that faculty with a learner-centered approach to teaching are likely to have more, in quantity and significance, out-of-class interactions with students.

DeFreitas, S.C., & Bravo, Jr. A. (2012). The influence of involvement with faculty and mentoring on the self-efficacy and academic achievement of African American and Latino college students. *Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning,12*(4), 1-11.

In an attempt to close the achievement gap for African-American and Latino students, researchers are looking at the effect of mentoring programs and faculty interaction, especially upon self-efficacy. These two factors in particular were chosen as minority students tend to have less of a support system. It seems that increased faculty interaction also leads to experiencing high-impact practices such as outside research and internships. With respect to the Cox, et. al., article above, the limitation outlined for this study is that they did not define whether the mentoring was formal or informal, a factor identified by Cox, et. al., as key to the efficacy of these relationships. DeFreitas and Bravo conclude that "it is vital for faculty to make conscious efforts to have more positive relationships with their students outside of class," which coincides with Cox, et. al. (p. 8). The phrase that stood out the most to me in this article is: "Because faculty members are usually perceived as credible and knowledgeable, their encouragement and faith in students' academic abilities will be believed" (p. 2). In the conclusion, they state that "faculty members who show respect are also instrumental in helping students to feel motivated and capable" (p. 8). This last is essential to the faculty-student relationship, treating students like fellow human beings and, even, scholars.

Fuentes, M.V., Ruiz Alvarado, A., Berdan, J., & DeAngelo, L. (2014). Mentorship matters: Does early faculty contact lead to quality faculty interaction? *Research in Higher Education*, 55(3), 288-307.

Like the Cox, et. al., article, this article also posits that student-faculty interaction is key to student outcomes; however, the type of interaction is important. The type they study here is faculty mentorship, particularly to see if early faculty interactions provide socialization that encourages mentorship later in student careers, which they find to be true. Faculty then "act as institutional agents, utilizing their status within the academic institution to help students network and socialize to the institution" (p. 290). Unlike DeFreitas and Bravo, the limitations in this study are a predominantly white and female student sample, which limits how much we can extrapolate from it in a diverse student environment. They comment that students who are not "rising stars," self-motivated, need faculty interaction even more, especially in early stages, as this kind of interaction will "serve as a pathway to mentorship" (p. 301). This study confirms that students need faculty interaction of various kinds, even in the first year, which should influence how we approach these processes and at what level.

Principle 2: Developing Reciprocity and Cooperation Among Students

Katzlinger, E., & Herzog, M.A. (2014). Wiki based collaborative learning in interuniversity scenarios. *Electronic Journal of e-Learning, 12*(2), 149-160.

This study looks at the benefits of using a wiki in order to increase digital collaborative learning among students in different institutions. Wikis, they say, "support an active construction of knowledge as well as a self-regulated learning process" (p. 149). They define collaboration as reaching for a "common goal." Wikis are by their very nature a collaborative space that requires students to come together to achieve specific goals. They place a high importance upon the student-driven aspects of learning, or, as Katzlinger and Herzog call them, the "self-regulated learning process." I have been using and researching pedagogical wikis in higher education for some time, and this study confirms my own assessment and observations that wikis provide opportunities for student learning and are a useful tool. This idea of interregional learning is exciting and needs to be explored more. The study did find that interregional groups did better with a moderator, which I can see as there needs to be someone guiding the work in some way.

Takeda, S., & Homberg, F. (2014). The effects of gender on group work process and achievement: an analysis through self- and peer-assessment. *British Educational Research Journal, 40*(2), 373-396.

Like the previous article by Katzlinger and Herzog, this article also emphasizes that teamwork and cooperative skills are highly important in the job market. This study, however, adds the dimension of gender, particularly with respect to visible "social loafing" and the benefits of peer assessment. Studies of team member diversity (i.e. equitable number of male and female groups members) in workplace settings are not consistent, some finding that diversity hinders productivity while others find it is a benefit. The researchers acknowledge that there is a higher achievement rate in general in female students, which could skew the data. They did find that gender balanced groups "make more equitable contributions to the group work," yet that did not "necessarily have positive effects on the students' learning outcomes," which they attribute to the "existence or absence of a member with outstanding contributions" (p. 386). They suggest that "male gender exception groups should be especially avoided" (i.e. a group with only one male group member) as well as all-male groups (p. 390). These findings have implications for forming groups in classes as self-selected groups will often fall into the categories recommended to be avoided.

Williams, S. (2011). Engaging and informing students through group work. *Psychology Teaching Review, 17*(1), 24-34.

Williams attempts to prove that active group work, as opposed to passive lectures, "will enhance both engagement (synonymous with active learning) and maintain/enhance levels of understanding around the topic (synonymous with deep learning)" (p. 24-25). She also believes that group work encourages time on task (another of the principles here). Two of the principles that Williams introduces are seemingly opposite, that students need to have individual accountability in a group but must also feel that their contributions aid in

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Seven Principles of
Good Practice *continued*

group success. She advocates for problem-based learning, "developing student's cognitive skills, such as the ability to identify problems and develop plans" (p. 26). Contrary to the Takeda and Homberg article, Williams found that students reported more open communication in "friendship groups," or groups who knew each other prior to being formed. Her students also reported that they were more effective when they were able to choose their own topics, especially when their findings were presented to the whole class. The benefit of this study is the relationship made between group work and the principles of active learning. By working in groups, students were more engaged in their own learning and took more responsibility for it.

Principle 3: Encouraging Active Learning

Barr, M.L. (2013). Encouraging college student active engagement in learning: The influence of response methods. *Innovative Higher Education, 39*(4), 307-319.

Barr examines the results of a study that compared clicker response systems and hand-raising as forms of engagement in classes. She begins by questioning the deep learning and, in particular, critical thinking that takes place in large classes that operate on traditional models of students passively receiving information from the instructor. New technologies provide tools to help alleviate this issue. Clickers, for instance, have been proven to help with "improved learning outcomes" (p. 308). Getting students to participate in class can be difficult; however, clickers "gave participants the confidence to answer questions in class" (p. 314). This concept of confidence is especially essential, for it is often a lack thereof that prevents students from participating and getting into a habit of not doing so. I have found that confidence is also a key issue in other active learning strategies, such as "Think, Pair, Share," wherein students are more apt to participate once they have "allies."

Kurtyka, F. (2013). What does your money get you?: Active learning as an alternative to consumerism in the composition classroom. *Composition Forum, 27.*

Kurtyka looks at active learning from a different perspective: as an antidote or alternative to the consumerist view of education that has become prevalent in the last few years. In particular, she examines it in composition classrooms. She "argue[s] that students position themselves as consumer and as marketing strategist because these roles have significant standing in the contemporary capitalist culture, helping students adjust to a new place where they may feel powerless or disoriented." Students then use this to complain about "teacher-centered education." Instead, Kurtyka offers the idea that "the identity of 'active learner' is comparable to the identity of 'consumer' [. . .] from which they can shape their university experience." The idea of replacing consumerism with active learning in order to give students identity is an intriguing one. Students, like all of us, have to position themselves in some way and, more than those of us who are older, are attempting to develop an identity. By helping them identify themselves first and foremost as "learners," we would be providing guidance in a number of ways.

Park, E.L., & Choi, B.K. (2014). Transformation of classroom spaces: Traditional versus active learning classroom in colleges. *The International Journal of Higher Education and Educational Planning, 68*(5), 749-771.

This article and study approach active learning from the perspective of space, arguing that the very space in which students learn affects the way in which they learn: "Educational spaces convey an image of educational philosophy about teaching and learning" (p. 750). Their argument is that, as our teaching and learning has shifted, so have the spaces in which we teach and learn. Having said that, we are shifting our teaching and learning again, especially in response to new technolo-

gies and resources, but the spaces have not caught up. Park and Choi mention the SCALE-UP project, which features altering learning spaces to include aspects such as whiteboards on all of the walls, round table, and dueling projector screens. They recommend the following: institutions need to consider their learning spaces, active learning environments requires thought and planning, and more research is needed. This idea is particularly interesting in thinking about fostering Principle 2: Developing Reciprocity and Cooperation Among Students. To do so, students actually have to be able to communicate in a space that reflects the importance of this activity.

Principle 4: Giving Prompt Feedback

Buckley, E., & Cowap, L. (2013). An evaluation of the use of Turnitin for electronic submission and marking and as a formative feedback tool from an educator's perspective. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 44*(4), 562-570.

My institution has only had Turnitin for a couple of years now, and, thus, I am interested in its effectiveness in providing feedback. This article asserts that instructors found it to be "a faster method of marking" and observed "their workload was decreased" (p. 564). They continue to state, "through using Turnitin as a formative learning tool, ultimately student submissions should be of a greater quality" (p. 564). The main problem with this study is that it focuses strictly on the instructor point of view; it doesn't take in consideration how students perceive the feedback, if it is helpful and makes sense. In particular, I would be interested in knowing what types of student training on Turnitin make it more useful to them. In addition, the study only really finds the feedback useful in terms of academic misconduct avoidance even though there are other types of feedback for which it can be used.

Clark, I. (2012). Formative assessment: Assessment is for self-regulated learning. *Education Psychology Review, 24*, 205-249.

The very first sentence of this article is exciting: "The paper advances the proposition that the theory and practice of formative assessment combines cognition, social, and cultural theories which guide instructional methods and drive self-regulated strategies and lifelong learning competences among learners" (p. 205). The idea that formative assessment can be used to encourage self-regulated learning (SRL) is intriguing. The first part of Clark's work is useful in that it provides an overview of the different kinds of feedback. Then, he makes the connection between formative assessment and SRL, stating that they both "emphasize meta-cognition and self-efficacy" (p. 215). Like the Barr article above, Clark emphasizes the level of confidence in students – basically, believing that you can accomplish something leads to actual accomplishment. Formative assessment typically includes a "supportive learning environment" (p. 235). This article is a treasure-trove of research on this subject, bringing in, as Clark states, 199 sources.

Nordrum, L., Evans, K., & Gustafsson, M. (2013). Comparing student learning experiences of in-text commentary and rubric-articulated feedback: Strategies for formative assessment. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 38*(8), 919-940.

Unlike the Buckley and Cowap article, this study is focused almost exclusively on student experiences with feedback formats – here, in-text commentary and rubric-articulated feedback. They argue that "criteria based assessment [. . .] mak[e] both grades and learning tasks more transparent [. . .] a crucial prerequisite for both assessment for learning and [. . .] deep approaches to learning" (p. 920). Nordrum, Evans, and Gustafsson acknowledge that there are negative perceptions of rubrics, indicating that some believe they are just as sub-

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Seven Principles of
Good Practice *continued*

jective as any other form of feedback and that they prevent student transfer. Their study found that students "attribute different functions to the two feedback types and therefore integrate and use them for different purposes" (p. 926). These results indicate that one cannot be a replacement of the other, but should, rather, be used as supplements. They do suggest that what is needed is student reflection upon whatever types of feedback is offered. This is indeed a method I have found to be effective as it encourages metacognition.

Principle 5: Emphasizing Time on Task

Aagaard, L., Conner, T.W., & Skidmore, R.L. (2014). College textbook reading assignments and class time activity. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 14*(3), 132-145.

As with pretty much all research on this topic, the problem outlined in this article is that students do not do the course readings as assigned. Aagaard, Conner, and Skidmore focus not just on what instructors can do to encourage reading outside of class, but also "what students might prefer professors do with the time they share together learning within the classroom context," stating that "education should be a dynamic process that involves engagement not only from the perspective of the educators, but also from the students" (p. 133). This is an overarching principle that could guide most learner-centered teaching. The significant result of this study is that students prefer the use of multiple teaching strategies to engage them and to encourage them to complete assigned readings and spend time on the material. The use of one strategy – whatever that may be – is a disadvantage and turns students off. This is directly related to the "to lecture or not to lecture" debate; the real question is not whether to lecture but how to vary modes of delivery.

Gibson, D., et. al. (2013). Digital badges in education. *Education and Information Technologies, 20*(2), 403-410.

Gibson defines the benefits of educational badges as being "categorized into four key areas: motivation, recognition and credentialing, evidence of achievement, and research on the linkages among and impacts of the affordances" (p. 407). The abstract for this article indicates that badges increase "time on task." Unfortunately, the article itself does not discuss much about this concept. It does, however, speak to motivation, which is directly linked to the amount of time students spend on learning. For instance, Gibson mentions that "[a]cquiring digital badges motivates some learners to continuously engage with online materials and activities that have been designed to help them achieve intended learning outcomes" (p. 408). This "continuous engagement" is relevant to time on task, especially in that it provides continuity with material rather than a choppy, "only engaged in class" approach to learning. The article does seem to study the use of badges on a large scale, rather than using them as a supplement, which is how I would recommend them as a means to encourage time on task.

Romero, M, & Barbera, E. (2011). Quality of learners' time and learning performance beyond quantitative time-on-task. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning, 12*(5), 125-137.

Romero and Barbera emphasize that time on task is only important when allied with "the quality of learning time" (p. 125). Rather, "[q]uality e-learning requires quality in instructional time and quality in students' time" (p. 126). They suggest that motivation is one of the key factors in terms of time on task. However, particularly in online courses, the flexibility of time provided by technology, which can be a positive, also comes with students' willingness to be self-motivated. Indeed, students will sometimes sign up for online courses think-

ing that the flexibility will be of an advantage to them because they are "time poor." Instructors "do not have a direct way to ensure the quantity and quality of their online learners' time-on-task because instructional time flexibility leads the learner to regulate it themselves" (p. 127). What they found was that the quality of time on task depended on various factors, including the time of day that students could devote to learning activities.

Principle 6: Communicating High Expectations

Allan, J., Clarke, K., & Jopling, M. (2009). Effective teaching in higher education: Perceptions of first year undergraduate students. *International Journal of Teaching And Learning In Higher Education, 21*(3), 362-372.

Rather than engaging in the debate of what the aim of higher education is, this article defines teaching effectiveness through the reaching of student learning outcomes. Teachers perceive effective teaching as including: supportive learning environment, academic expectations, scaffolding learning, and clarity. Other findings cited by the article indicate that students have different perceptions of effective teaching than teachers. For instance, "teachers demonstrated little or no awareness of the importance students place on teachers' approachability" (p. 365). Allan, Clarke, and Jopling also are interested in student perceptions. They found that "[s]tudents in this sample regarded the provision of a supportive learning environment in which teachers scaffold learning as a requisite of effective teaching" (p. 368). They did not, however, rank high expectations as important. This is interesting in terms of perception in that it is the support structure and the interaction with instructors that seem to matter to students. This indicates to me that we can set high expectations and students will meet them if these other factors are in place.

Larkin, H., & Richardson, B. (2013). Creating high challenge/high support academic environments through constructive alignment: Student outcomes. *Teaching in Higher Education, 18*(2), 192-204.

This article seems to bear out what is between the lines of the previous one. Here, Larkin and Richardson broadly posit, "Good teaching needs to provide academic environments that maintain high academic standards, while at the same time providing supportive academic environments that facilitate the learning of a more diverse group of learners" (p. 192). This position melds this Principle with that of Principle 7, Respecting Diversity. Through studying the benefits of constructive alignment, which match up with what we call learner-centered teaching, they conclude that this approach "can assist less academically inclined students to achieve at levels more readily achieved by their more academically inclined colleagues" (p. 202). Once again we see that high expectations must be allied to a support system. Without the support system, only those students who are "academically inclined" already are likely to meet the goals. I think that this is an especially valuable concept when considering the teaching of students with learning disabilities.

Scager, K., Akkerman, S.F., Pilot, A., & Wubbels, T. (2013). How to persuade honors students to go the extra mile: Creating a challenging learning environment. *High Ability Studies, 24*(2), 115-134.

While this article is about honors students, which is unto itself a valuable study, it has many applications to teaching students in general, and it makes an interesting parallel to the Larkin and Richardson article. For instance, they suggest that there needs to be a balance between challenge level (what I am reading as high expectations) and ability level: "a challenge level slightly above the ability level for positive effects on motivation and learning" (p. 116). Such a notion is relevant to all

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Seven Principles of
Good Practice *continued*

types of students. If the challenge/expectation is too high, then the chance of students giving up is high. If the challenge/expectation is too low, there is no point in it. If, as they suggest, it is set within the right limits of the ability level, then motivation can be maintained. They also found that "challenge factors" tend to include: "autonomy, complexity, and teacher expectations" (p. 121), with the best results happening when all three were present at the same time. The methods proposed for "teacher expectations" include "announcement of challenge" – simply telling the students from the beginning that it will be a challenge but that they will accomplish it. Students also did better when they were "treated as (near) experts by their teacher," "creat[ing] an image they wanted to live up to" (p. 127). These are two methods that can be integrated fairly easily into courses to raise expectations.

Principle 7: Respecting Diversity

Case, K., Bartsch, R., McEnery, L., Hall, S., Hermann, A., & Foster, D. (2008). Establishing a comfortable classroom from day one: Student perceptions of the reciprocal interview. *College Teaching, 56*(4), 210-214.

This article at first may not seem to have a direct bearing on "Respecting Diversity." However, I believe that it is an example of classroom environment and an activity that can indeed foster diversity and a space in which diversity is accepted. The study includes a first-day student interview activity, in which students as individuals and then groups write answers to specific questions and then discuss them. It culminates with groups sharing out and then asking questions of the instructor. The results indicate that students found the interviews "very useful in providing information about class requirements, glean-

ing an overall impression of the professor's 'standards,' and initiating the creation of a supportive classroom community" (p. 213). It is the last point on which I will focus. The researchers themselves note that "minority students especially found the activity to be worthwhile" as the "dialogue brings students from diverse groups (e.g., gender, race, sexual orientation) together to practice constructive intergroup relations" (p. 213). By setting this dialogue up on the first day, students begin as they should continue in the rest of the class.

May, C. (2010). An investigation of attitude change in inclusive college classes including young adults with an intellectual disability. *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities, 9*(4), 240-246.

This study is based upon the idea of "contact theory," which posits that "positive contact between different groups of people can reduce negative biases, stereotyping, expectations, and discriminatory behaviors" (p. 240). Here, they are applying this theory to interactions between those with and without disabilities and also other forms of diversity. They did find that students in inclusive classes had a "shift in attitudes more favorable towards diversity" (p. 244). It is important to note here that the instructors also had a background in teaching in diverse environments: "These students were also instructed by faculty who had received training in universal design and best inclusive practices, and who were quite eager to have students with intellectual disabilities as part of their course community from the outset" (p. 244). This point may be the most significant of the study in that it certainly suggests that instructors need more training in teaching students with disabilities in order to create a positive learning environment for all students.

McKeon, B, Alpern, C.S., & Zager, D. (2013). Promoting academic engagement for college students with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 26*(4), 353-366.

Continuing with the idea from the previous article, this study begins by indicating that students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) need sometimes more and definitely sometimes different support systems to succeed academically; these are listed in the article. Rather like the previous article, McKeon, Alpern, and Zager do spend time discussing the fact that many faculty do not feel comfortable with their knowledge-base concerning ASD or similar disabilities and that more faculty training, particularly that which offers specific teaching strategies, is necessary. The article does provide an excellent and useful list of instructional strategies that could help students with ASD. These include the categories: organizing the classroom, organizing the lesson, design handout/exams/PowerPoint slides to increase focus, use visual organizers with explicit information, provide frequent and varied assessment of performance to increase feedback, and promote collaboration and social engagement. As the authors note, these categories for improving instructional strategies are likely to help all students, not just the ones with disabilities.

Currents

In Teaching and Learning

Information

Call for Submissions

Currents invites general submissions on issues of teaching and learning, including:

Short reports from different disciplines on classroom practices (2850-5700 words).

Longer research, theoretical, or conceptual articles, and explorations of issues and challenges facing teachers today (5700-7125 words).

Book and website reviews.

Each year we release two issues of *Currents,* an open-ended Fall issue and a themed issue in the Spring. The theme for the Spring 2017 issue is "Teaching students with disabilities: concepts, approaches, and practices."

We welcome both individual and group submissions. All submissions must be original, previously unpublished work. Submissions received will be reviewed on a rolling basis.

Submissions and Contact Information

Please address all submissions and inquiries to Kayla Beman (Editorial Assistant) via

e-mail: currents@worcester.edu

For further information and submissions guidelines see our **website:** www.worcester.edu/currents