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# The Scholarship of Teaching: Faculty Development Through Cross-Campus Collaboration

Fall 2007

Center for Teaching Excellence  
Bronx Community College  
The City University of New York

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# Introductions

## **Message from the Senior Vice President**

*George L. Sanchez, Bronx Community College*

The publication of this collection of faculty writings on teaching and learning represents an important milestone in faculty development activities that were launched with the opening of the Center for Teaching Excellence at Bronx Community College (BCC) of the City University of New York (CUNY) in Fall 2002. The Center, a hub for faculty focus on pedagogical inquiry and scholarship of teaching efforts across disciplines, provides a cohesive framework to nurture best teaching practices in an environment that promotes continuous learning for our campus community.

An important annual focus of the Center has been to promote inquiry and sharing of pedagogical ideas and practices in workshops, seminars and other activities with the collaboration of BCC faculty and faculty colleagues from our sister CUNY colleges in the Bronx, Lehman College and Hostos Community College.

Our three colleges share the same students, whose lives mirror a multitude of challenges reflecting diversity in background and academic preparedness for college. The Bronx is a borough with a large sector of immigrants. Approximately half of our students are foreign born and come from 110 countries.

Who our students are, and what they do or do not bring with them to the classroom, provide a continuous and challenging context for our faculty to script educational experiences for enabling and empowering our students as collegiate learners. In the pages that follow, you will see evidence of the ongoing inquiry and reflection about teaching and learning that have earmarked a variety of projects, all of which are inspired by the objective of developing course-specific teaching strategies to improve student learning.

This objective, moreover, is part of a broader goal which Bronx Community College supports, namely the advancement of the scholarship of teaching, whereby the process and products of inquiry about teaching and learning are documented and shared in a wider and public academic arena. It is our hope that you will find our endeavor engaging, and that the work in these pages will stimulate further exploration to improve undergraduate education.

## Overview from Co-Editors

*Susan Polirstok, Lehman College*

*Harrriet Shenkman, Bronx Community College*

The Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) at Bronx Community College (BCC), an outgrowth of a Title V Collaborative Grant with Lehman College, is dedicated to improving teaching and learning and increasing student retention at both institutions. This collaboration focused initially on faculty development for both campuses in metacognitive and cognitive learning and teaching strategies, integration of technology, and the development of action research projects to examine questions related to improving classroom pedagogy.

Engaged, reflective and responsive teaching is critical to the success of our students, especially because English is not the first language for a large percentage of the population that both institutions serve. As a consequence of our joint activities, the conversations among faculty were enriched by the different perspectives of community college and senior college faculty and reflected their diverse academic disciplines.

The CTE assessed the needs of faculty from both campuses and offered experiences that provided opportunities for faculty to study literature on teaching and learning, identify problems of pedagogy in their own classrooms, and experiment with instructional approaches and techniques that would contribute to increased student success. During each summer over the five year period of the grant, an Action Research Institute was offered as well. The Institute provided an intensive week-long experience in the theory and principles of action research and challenged faculty to design research projects that focused on questions related to the efficacy of their own teaching.

Our model of action research emphasized improved student learning through faculty engagement in a systematic process of examining their own teaching using a lens from their own discipline. Systematically assessing how well students learn provides a powerful insight into what changes might be made to maximize student performance in a given course. The action research model provided a framework for faculty to plan and identify an approach to improve student learning and then to observe, collect data, and analyze and reflect on that data. Before any data could be collected, participants completed the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects approval process at their respective colleges.

Action research is best understood in the context of Boyer's (1990) model of scholarship, in that it enlarges the scope of scholarship from the more traditional "scholarship of discovery" to include the "scholarship of application and integra-

tion,” where already proven data in the research literature are applied to school-based settings and teacher-learner interactions. As Huber (2001) emphasizes, “One of the first lessons we have learned is that the scholarship of teaching and learning is neither a single nor a simple thing. . . . It is not just teaching, but teaching gone ‘meta.’ It is teaching that involves inquiry into learning and that is being made public in a way that can be critiqued, reviewed, built upon, and improved” (p. 22).

We recognized the important role that the scholarship of teaching could play as impetus for “engaged pedagogy.” We were also interested in fostering classroom-based inquiry that could result in formal publications and in the establishment of a line of inquiry over time. Beyond the classroom-specific outcomes for improved teaching and learning, the overall goal was to establish a collaborative learning community between the two colleges, and across disciplines, which would provide a framework for sharing perspectives, draw on the support and expertise of the learning community, and disseminate the findings in collaboratively produced scholarly forums and publications. This is in keeping with Shulman’s notion of teaching as community property and his belief that communication and interchange are essential (1993).

As a result of the initial collaboration, new faculty development ideas emerged and were adopted. An outgrowth of Lehman College’s work with Aesthetic Education and the Lincoln Center Institute, for example, was offered as a parallel Action Research Institute devoted to Aesthetic Education. Works of art which exist on both campuses became the focus of inquiry. The “Intersections Walkway” at Lehman, which highlights quotations, scientific formulae, and words and symbols from the span of human history, and the Hall of Fame for Great Americans at BCC, were used as the focus of the aesthetic inquiry. By highlighting these public works of art, the Action Research Institute on Aesthetic Education offered faculty a way of engaging students in an inquiry process right on our campuses, demonstrating that opportunities for aesthetic learning and “deep noticing” are not of necessity museum-based.

Another extension of our cross-campus collaboration was a National Endowment for the Humanities supported Hall of Fame for Great Americans Seminar which enabled twenty-four faculty from both institutions, as well as from Hostos Community College, to study literary and historic figures in the Hall of Fame for Great Americans. The historic site on the BCC campus was a catalyst for critical inquiry during two summer sessions. Faculty had the opportunity to develop projects designed to enrich and deepen their own humanities curricula under the leadership of several renowned guest scholars and local scholars.

In this volume, professors write about a journey of inquiry stimulated and informed by the faculty development opportunities they experienced. The scholarship of teaching is reflected in these writings as a continuum of experience with

many points of entry. Authors in this volume were led to inquire about a diversity of questions ranging from whether incorporating particular cognitive learning strategies into instruction is effective to why there is a disparity between student satisfaction with online courses and academic performance in these courses. Four of the authors reflect upon their attempts to integrate works of American Renaissance literature into their English composition courses, and several faculty write about constructing meaning through aesthetic education and the use and modification of a rubric to assess aesthetic capacities.

These articles set forth the questions, the processes, the interventions, and either the collected data or the observations made of student learning, and identify additional questions for future inquiry. Two authors describe how faculty development experiences have had a cumulative and synergistic effect on their teaching and on their professional growth.

The writers in this volume make their scholarship of teaching public and open to review and inevitably raise more questions than they answer. The scholarship of teaching is an ongoing process of inquiry which drives and illuminates the ineffable process of teaching and learning. We invite you to read what twenty-two colleagues from three CUNY institutions have to say and to join us in learning about teaching and learning.

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Above all, we are grateful to our colleagues who contributed to this volume. They permit us to learn from their efforts and they embody the spirit and dedication of teacher-scholars at City University of New York.

Susan Polirstok and Harriet Shenkman

# Action Research and Inquiry

## **Application of the LETME Approach to Gateway Courses in Allied Health**

*Seher Atamturktur, Carlos Liachovitzky, Shylaja Akkaraju, and Maureen Gannon,  
Bronx Community College*

### **Introduction**

Gateway science courses are extremely challenging for most students, who often have little or no science background. As a gateway course for many allied health programs such as nursing, radiology technology, and nuclear medicine, Human Anatomy & Physiology I (A&P I) has one of the highest enrollments at BCC (approximately 10% of total student population). Yet student performance is poor, with only about 30% of students achieving the required standard in A&P I (C+ or greater). Therefore, teaching this course is extremely challenging, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the collective frustration of the students and the instructors.

The A&P I & II course series is tremendously rigorous, and student performance in A&P I correlates with performance in other science and allied health courses. Moreover, the students start with weak academic backgrounds and are still developing analytical and critical thinking skills. In addition to this problem, many students have indicated to us that they also work full-time while fulfilling their parenting jobs and other family obligations. For many, this unfortunate combination of limited time and poor study skills makes the challenges faced in A&P I insurmountable. Students often complain about the staggering amount of course content and unfamiliar vocabulary, and feel lost when faced with the comprehension of difficult concepts.

The majority of students starting the A&P sequence at BCC have declared an allied health major, most often nursing, and are extremely eager to learn. Successful completion of nursing programs and licensing exams is directly proportional to the grade achieved in prerequisite science courses, including Anatomy and Physiology (Dean & Fisher, 1992; Newman, 1991.) However, many at-risk

students fail to meet the required standards, or simply give up, in the early stages of the A&P sequence. Most of these at-risk students do not appear to independently engage in effective study strategies, lack appropriate background knowledge in the sciences, and fail to comprehend the relevance of mastery of this subject area to their future career goals. At least in part, this is because their different abilities and learning styles are not successfully addressed in the conventional large physiology lecture class.

Failure to succeed in A&P and subsequent professional courses occurs despite the fact that most students have the potential to reach higher levels of learning, as evidenced in studies using individual student instruction (Bloom, 1984). Individual tutorials are too costly for most community college settings. Therefore, efforts must be made within the lecture classroom to identify and implement instructional techniques that engage students in independent learning strategies, while not detracting from the need to cover course content.

In order to give students advance training on course content and conceptual understanding of A&P I, we offered a two-week student development workshop in summer 2006 and winter 2007. The workshop focused on helping students (pre-allied health majors) to develop strategies that helped them to master scientific content, including basic medical vocabulary, while maximizing opportunities to develop comprehension and critical thinking skills. The objective of this workshop was to encourage students to become self-regulated learners and develop problem-solving skills while providing a background in basic biology.

In this article we will discuss (a) the format of the pre-A&P workshop, (b) assessment of the workshop, and (c) what we learned from this experience.

### **Format of the pre-A&P workshop**

To achieve our goal of encouraging self-regulated learners, we decided to use a variety of active learning strategies such as writing-to-learn activities, oral communication, interpretation of graphs and textbook figures, etc. One attempt to develop self-regulated learners at Bronx Community College has been to integrate a teaching strategy called LETME (*Link, Extract, Transform, Monitor, Extend*) into classroom instruction across the disciplines (Shenkman, 2002). We learned this cognitive framework in a semester-long workshop, Reading, Learning, and Thinking Across the Disciplines, sponsored by the Center for Teaching Excellence. The LETME approach developed by Shenkman integrates theories from research in study skills, reading comprehension, cognition, metacognition, and critical thinking (Shenkman, 2002). While including the higher order thinking skills identified in Bloom's Taxonomy (1956), as summarized by Giddings (1998), the LETME approach attempts to make learning strategies more visible

to at-risk students who have never successfully mastered basic study skills. This is accomplished by training faculty across all disciplines in teaching strategies that integrate both basic and higher order processing skills.

The LETME strategy agrees with Stanley & Waterman (2000), who state, “a first step towards developing resources that engage the two-year college student is to make more use of pedagogical strategies that recognize and build upon the prior experience, knowledge, and practical learning strengths of adult students.” A primary goal of the LETME approach is therefore to assist novice student learners in acquiring the study skills necessary to succeed in college. LETME enabled us to closely examine the idea of instructional scaffolding, refine the strategies, and apply new ones to our teaching in this workshop. We used all five elements of LETME and designed our workshop to introduce students to active ways of transparent learning in a student-centered atmosphere.

We developed a workbook for our workshop students in order to facilitate student-centered learning. In this workbook, we used all five elements of LETME to apply fundamental concepts to solve different problems. We were encouraged by the immediate response to this method; students seemed interested and enjoyed solving the problems and answering the questions. In this workbook, we used empty webs to *link* any prior knowledge they might have for specific topics, and concept maps for them to link newly acquired knowledge. For example, we asked students about “What they know about an atom” in the beginning of the lecture. The response was very limited. However, when we repeated the question at the end of the lecture, almost every student participated in answering the question. This was a significant way to give students a “warm up” to a potentially difficult subject.

Our next strategy was to use the *extract* feature of LETME. Outside of reading, writing, and mathematics, extracting information from illustrations, graphs, and tables is perhaps the most valuable skill a student needs to succeed in college science courses, but many students in community colleges struggle with reading and interpreting the figures and graphs. We employed the extract strategy at various junctures by providing students the opportunity to interpret numerous graphs, tables, and figures. For example, students learned the concept of homeostasis by extracting information from figures, as illustrated in Figure 1. Repetition using similar exercises appeared to progressively improve student performance. Towards this end, we believe that the workbook provided the students with sufficient exercises of figure and graph analyses and also helped them improve their analytical thinking skills.

We also used the *transform* feature of LETME. Most subjects lend themselves very well to transforming information from print to visual and vice versa. To promote deeper understanding, students were provided with the figures and

information about the figures separately and asked to transform the knowledge from one form to another. We also included exercises providing intense practice in drawing different structures. For example, some activities required students to use the text to extract written information on the characteristics of a particular atom, and to then transform this information into a diagram depicting atomic structure. Many students study the course content thinking they know everything. However, they experience difficulties in expressing their knowledge in the language of science, and we believe that this is the main cause of their low grades in the exams. The workbook provided them with enough exercises to practice and express their knowledge.

The workbook also included the *monitor* feature of LETME. Since the major focus of this workshop was to create self-regulated learners, constant monitoring overlapped with other strategies of the LETME assemblage. At the end of many lectures, we included question charts and homework that were developed based on Bloom's taxonomy (knowledge, comprehension, and application/prediction). Students were also asked to independently complete informal quizzes at the beginning and the end of each class. In both quizzes, questions were focused on evaluating student comprehension of the content and concepts taught. Student interest in reviewing the quizzes was high. Many appeared to recognize that, while they felt they understood the activities as they were presented, their errors on tests reflected a greater requirement for independent study outside of the classroom to consolidate their knowledge. Thus, the use of quizzes, question charts, and other rubrics was an excellent way to enable students to begin monitoring their own progress and also provided instructors with feedback on the efficacy of the pedagogical approach used in the workshop.

Finally, the workbook used the *extend* feature of LETME. Ultimately, we hoped that our students would be able to succeed in solving higher-order problems that involve prediction and application. We included some exercises for our students to extend their knowledge to broader activities and problems. For example, concepts of membrane transport learned in earlier classes were extended and applied to the study of neurophysiology. Instructors also demonstrated how comprehension of the basic physiological concepts covered in the workshop was required, and could be applied, to understand several clinical conditions, such as hypertension and diabetes mellitus. We believed that these activities would not only show our students the importance of the knowledge they gained in the workshop but also how they could extend it to daily life situations.

Overall, the pre-A&P workbook takes students in a slow and stepwise fashion through all the stages in problem solving. The LETME activities in the workbook progress to problems where students are required to integrate several concepts and apply them to solve further problems. We believe that this inte-

grated approach enabled the students to improve their critical thinking skills, as well as directed them towards the independent study skills necessary for success in allied health programs. Furthermore, we are attempting to integrate similarly structured activities into the A&P core course sequence, both through activities developed for individual classroom use and by communicating our observations to other instructors during departmental and curriculum committee meetings.

## Assessment

Assessment of student progress and the workshop outcomes began on day one of the workshop with a pre-test. Two independent sections of the workshop were taught, utilizing the same workbook and identical tests and quizzes, by different instructors, all of whom had received prior training in the LETME pedagogical approach. We evaluated student performance in these workshops by means of two full-length examinations (pre- and post-tests), homework assignments, and learning journals. As noted above, students also took two quizzes each time we met. The first quiz, at the beginning of the class, reviewed what they learned in the previous class and the second quiz, at the end of the class, focused on reviewing what they cover during the same class.

Formal assessment of the pre- and post-tests (Table 1, below) showed that students' scores improved, on average, from thirty-three to sixty-eight percent. While pre-test scores were similar in both groups, post-test scores suggested that the workshop was more effective when the class size was limited to fewer students. However, in both groups, the improvement is very significant considering the vast amount of information they covered each day.

**Table 1.**  
Pre-test and post-test comparison for students who attended the entire workshop.

	Group 1 (N=23)	Group 2 (N=13)	Groups Combined (N=39)
Pre-Test Score*	33±8	34±13	33±10
Post-Test Score*	65±14	74±12	68±13
Difference (Post - Pre)*	32±12	40±15	35±14

\* Scores out of 100. Values expressed as mean ± standard deviation.

## What We Learned

We believe that after completing this workshop, our students gained some background knowledge in human anatomy and physiology, since their scores improved significantly in the post-test. Judging by the responses in the student surveys and conversations with the students in the workshop, it is evident that many students realized the enormous time commitment required to achieve a grade of C+ or better in the A&P I course. They also became aware of the depth of understanding that was expected from them. This realization is very important for students who often underestimate the level of engagement required on their part for successful completion of this course.

As instructors, we have made one or two observations that are troubling. Students struggle with basic comprehension, logical reasoning, and even attentiveness. The comprehension and logical reasoning issues may be helped by introducing a segment of metacognitive scaffolding into most of their active learning exercises. The lack of attentiveness is understandable when we consider the fact that many of our students exist on very little sleep and often come to the workshop after working the night shift. Perhaps devoting a section of our workshop to time-management strategies might provide students with practical ways of finding time for study and rest.

In the future, we plan to focus on these aspects of the preparatory workshop: (a) providing opportunities for metacognitive thinking in students and (b) developing effective ways to teach time-management skills.

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## **Integrating a Cognitive Strategy with the Use of PowerPoint in an Undergraduate Classroom**

*Kathleen McClure, Lehman College*

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to discover whether using “empty” PowerPoint handouts as a tool will help students in an undergraduate class categorize and organize new material more effectively. This topic is of interest because I have noticed that some of my students have great difficulty organizing new material, particularly in distinguishing between main topics and specific facts and details. They also have difficulty in seeing how different topics are linked and retaining knowledge from one week to the next. Consequently they do not perform as well on exams as students who have these skills.

This problem is not unique to my classroom. John Bean (2001) comments on how it is a common occurrence in the United States to have college classrooms with students with enormously diverging skills. He describes his own classrooms as a mix of “high-GPA students heading for graduate or professional school with at-risk students” (p. 39). To prevent those at-risk students from falling further behind, it is imperative to design interventions to improve their skills.

One way to improve skills is to educate students about cognitive learning strategies (e.g., rehearsal, elaboration, organization, comprehension monitoring). These are techniques for learners “to improve their understanding, integration, and retention of new information” (Cross & Steadman, 1996, p. 57). Learners can use them not only “to focus attention, organize, and rehearse new concepts,” but also “to build connections to existing knowledge structures, in order to facilitate later recall and use of new information” (p. 60). My students were in particular need of “organization strategies.” Cross and Steadman (1996) describe them as helping learners “condense large amounts of new information and make sense of relationships among new concepts and knowledge” (p. 60) as well as cluster “ideas into categories that indicate shared characteristics” (p. 61).

The literature on learning strategies is closely associated with that on metacognition, the awareness of one’s own learning process. It is thought that practice in observation and reflection helps in understanding and in controlling one’s learning. Learners can improve their knowledge of cognition by self-awareness, awareness of task, and awareness of effective strategies needed to finish the task (Flavell, 1976). Zimmerman and Pons (1986) have shown that “high” and “low” achievers could be classified as to how many strategies they use for their assignments, and research in metacognition and learning strategies suggest that strategies can be taught (Weinstein & Meyer, 1991).

The issue for me was how I could teach my students to organize material covered in class more effectively. I often use PowerPoint slides as part of my lectures. I also give handouts of the slides at the beginning of the class so that my students can fill in additional information as I speak. The purpose is two-fold: 1) to free students from spending all their time copying information from the slides, so they can have more time to listen and participate, and 2) to give lower-achieving students a model of how the information should be organized. Wilmoth and Wybraniec (1998) reported that their students found that the structure of the slides contributed to their “comprehension and performance” (p. 176). The hope is that with handouts of the organization of the lectures, students will perceive not only the main issues and how they are interconnected, but also how they are subdivided and what details are needed to describe them.

In spite of the advantages, there are disadvantages associated with this approach. Handouts of slides may contribute to students becoming bored and less engaged in the class. Taking notes is a way of attending to material; however, if the attitude is that this is unnecessary because all the information needed to pass the course is already on the handout, then the handouts can contribute to less participation and a passive approach to learning because learning is seen as something that can be done later.

Furthermore, the handouts may contribute to rote learning rather than learning with deep understanding. I have found this particularly true for my lower-achieving students. They memorize the handouts, then regurgitate the information on essay exams. However, handouts are only outlines. To understand any issue properly, students need to integrate information on handouts with what is discussed in class and in the text. Only then can the handouts be helpful for improving answers on essay exams.

To address these concerns I decided to use an “empty” template of the handout at the end of class and ask students to complete as much information as they could remember from the lecture. The aim was to make them aware of what they had actually learned during class. Because the intervention took the form of the handout with only the major heading and subheads remaining, it focused specifically on the organization of the material.

The specific questions addressed in the study are the following: 1) To what extent are students entering the course aware of using learning strategies? (This is important because the first step in improving student learning is for them to become aware of how they learn.) 2) To what extent does awareness improve over the course of the term; 3) Does the intervention of the blank PowerPoint template improve students’ preparedness for exams; and 4) Does it improve performance on exams?

## Method

### Participants

Twenty-seven students from an undergraduate course, entitled “Bilingualism,” initially participated in the study, though three dropped out by the end of the semester. The course, which is introductory in a department of Speech-Language-Hearing Sciences program at a major urban university in the Northeast, was offered in the fall of 2006. The course is designed to look at the phenomenon of bilingualism from both individual and the societal perspectives. The majority of the students were from minority groups: 41% Hispanic, 26% Black, 11% Asian, and 3% other. Twenty-five of the students were women and two were men, with an average age of 28 years.

### Procedure

Data were collected from the following: PowerPoint handouts used as “empty” templates, a questionnaire, exams, and the LASSI (The Learning and Study Strategies Inventory).

### PowerPoint Handouts

An intervention was designed using handouts from PowerPoint presentations given in class. Before a lecture using PowerPoint, handouts of the slides were distributed to the students so that they could take notes during the lecture. On two different occasions at the end of the class, a template of the same handout was distributed with only the slide titles or major headings remaining. The students were asked to fill in as much detail as they could remember.

Using an “empty” template as a technique to assess how well students are understanding and remembering the main points in a lecture and then organizing the information in an appropriate structure is an idea from the Empty Outlines, a classroom assessment technique CAT 4 (Angelo & Cross, 1993). This technique aims to improve attention, concentration, listening, and ability to develop “appropriate study skills, strategies, and habits” (p. 138) as well as the facts of the subject matter.

This assessment procedure using “empty” templates was conducted on two occasions. Students were given handouts with seventeen slides each. A percentage of slides answered and a percentage of slides answered correctly were calculated. A slide was considered answered if the student attempted an answer; a slide was considered answered correctly if the answer was at least 50% correct.

### Questionnaire

A questionnaire was administered to students at the end of the course for feedback on how effective they found the PowerPoint slides and handouts as well as the tool of the “empty” templates. The questions included:

1. Did you find the PowerPoint presentations helpful in learning the course material, or would you have preferred another format? If you did, then how so?
2. What did you learn about how you learn from having to fill out the empty PowerPoint presentation handouts?
3. Did filling out PowerPoint handouts help you prepare for the test? If so, how?
4. Name one or two new things you have learned this semester about how you learn?

### **Exams**

Midterm and final exams were used to assess student performance. These exams consisted of short definitions along with essay questions. A comparison of mean scores was taken for both exams.

### **The LASSI**

Students were administered the LASSI (Weinstein, Palmer, & Shulte, 2002) at the beginning and end of the semester to assess their awareness of their own learning strategies and address the first two research questions. The inventory consists of 80 statements such as the following: “To help me remember new principles we are learning in class, I practice applying them”; “I try to find relationships between what I am learning and what I already know.” The students were asked to respond to each statement by circling one of the following: “not at all typical of me,” “not very typical of me,” “somewhat typical of me,” “fairly typical of me,” and “very typical of me.” Their responses then form the basis for calculating a score for each of ten learning strategies or attitudes toward study:

ANX	anxiety and worry about school performance
ATT	attitude and interest
CON	concentration and attention to academic tasks
INP	information processing, acquiring knowledge, and reasoning
MOT	motivation, diligence, self-discipline, and willingness to work hard
SFT	self-testing, reviewing, and preparing for classes
SMI	selecting main ideas and recognizing important information
STA	use of support techniques and materials
TMT	use of time management principles for academic tasks
TST	test strategies and preparing for tests

(Weinstein, Palmer, & Shulte, 2002, p. 13)

Once students have a score for each scale, they can locate their scores on a chart that compares their score with percentiles for other college students who have taken the inventory. For example, a student might have a score of 26 for Information Processing (INF) and 33 for Selecting Main Ideas (SMI). An INF score of 26 would put him below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile, indicating an area of weakness where improvement was necessary; an SMI of 33 would put him above the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile, indicating an area of relative strength. Any score below the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile indicated that strategies and skills were needed to improve in order to succeed in college.

## Results

### PowerPoint Handouts

Results show that when an independent sample was taken, the mean percent for PowerPoint slides answered at Time 1 was .4169 (SD = .1553) and for PowerPoint slides answered at Time 2 was .5962 (SD = .1920). A t-test indicated a significant difference between the two:  $t(38) = 3.25, p < 0.01$ , two-tailed. Results also show the mean percent for the PowerPoint slides answered correctly at Time 1 was .3164 (SD = .1722) and at Time 2 was .4592 (SD = .2074). A significant difference between the two times was also found:  $t(38) = 2.37, p < 0.05$ , two-tailed. These results indicate that the empty templates did help students retain content from a lecture. One follow-up question might be whether the content retained from the lecture can be applied successfully on an exam.

### Questionnaire

When students were asked whether the PowerPoint handouts were helpful in learning the course material, all but one student said they were (23/24). When they were asked, "What did you learn about how you learn from having to fill out the 'empty' PowerPoint handouts?" they responded in the ways presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

What did you learn about how you learn from having to fill out the “empty” PowerPoint handouts?

4 <sup>1</sup>	Participating in class
4	Coming to class prepared
4	How I remember
3	Taking notes during the lesson
3	Paying more attention in class
1	Having subheadings on slides
1	Having cohesive slides
1	Writing what I know in my own words
1	Reviewing material after class

1. No. of students who mentioned this point

“Participating in class” and “coming to class prepared” were the most frequent answers. This finding indicates that when they read the assignment before class and then answered questions in class, this helped most in becoming active learners, and thus being able to complete the “empty” templates successfully (i.e., “I learned that I learn better when I participate in class and read the assigned readings before class”). “How I remember” referred to becoming more aware of what contributed to remembering material. “Taking notes during the lesson” had to do with augmenting the PowerPoint handouts that were given at the beginning of the class. Elaborating on what was on the slide as the professor spoke was thought important to understanding the material and eventually remembering it. Three of the students also commented that the activity made them more aware of how much they were attending to during class (i.e., “I learned that I have to pay more attention. I need to concentrate from beginning to end”). Interestingly, two students commented on the organization of the slides, that subheadings helped them organize and remember the information as did the extent to which the slides were coherent. Finally, one student noted that reviewing the material at home after class was helpful (i.e., “It showed me that it is very important to go home and read over what you have learned. This will help you remember”).

All of these responses seem quite obvious to teachers and students with good study skills; however, the students in this class, as evidenced by their mean scores on the LASSI, had study skills that needed improvement. These students came to understand how they learned and how to improve their learning through participa-

tion in the class and through the interventions. The first time they had to complete an “empty” template, it was quite a shock. It demonstrated more clearly than anything a professor could say how much more was required to master the material.

When students were asked on the questionnaire whether they felt that the handouts helped them prepare for the tests, 71% said yes, whereas 29% said no. Table 2 reports the reasons they gave.

**Table 2.**

**Did filling in PowerPoint handouts help you prepare for the tests? If so, how?**

41% (7/17)	Showed me what I needed to review
29% (5/17)	Helped me organize the material
24% (4/17)	Helped me remember
18% (3/17)	Gave me another opportunity to learn, because I study by writing, putting the material in my own words

The most important reason was pointing out gaps in knowledge, which then helped students focus on what to review. Second most important was in organizing the material. This question of organization is interesting because it was also cited by the two students who commented on why the handouts did not help them prepare for the tests. One said that although the handout helped with key points, for anything more detailed, she needed to organize the information on her own. The other commented that she did better on a test if she came up with the key points and organization herself. Her mental effort contributed to her learning.

### **The LASSI**

When mean scores for the undergraduate students at the beginning of the study for each of the ten scales were compared to the national norms, the class scored below the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile on all scales, indicating that the profile of the class overall needed improvement on all scales to be successful in college (Weinstein, Palmer, & Shulte, 2002). On two scales, Anxiety (ANX) and Attitude and Interest (ATT), the class scored below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile, indicating an area of particular weakness. Table 3 shows mean scores for the undergraduate class at the beginning of the study for these scales compared to the expected national norms at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile.

**Table 3.**  
LASSI mean scores for undergraduate class  
compared to expected national score at 75th %ile

	UG*	Nat**
ANX	24	31
ATT	33	37
INP	28	31

A mean score of 28 for Information Processing was particularly noteworthy, since this is the area this study specifically addressed. Information Processing was defined in this inventory as how well students are able to elaborate and organize new information. Weinstein and Palmer (2002) explain in the LASSI manual:

Students' scores on this scale measure how well they can create imaginal and verbal elaborations and organizational schemes to foster understanding and recall. Students who score low on this measure need to learn methods that they can use to help add meaning and organization to what they are trying to learn. (p. 10)

A mean score of 28 put the class at the 55<sup>th</sup> percentile.

Mean scores on the LASSI scales for the end of the study were compared to those at the beginning. When a multivariate t-test was performed globally, it did not show a significant change between the independent scores or the subtests at the beginning and end of the semester. Table 4 shows the LASSI mean scores at the end and at the beginning of the semester for Anxiety, Attitude and Interest, and Information Processing.

**Table 4.**  
LASSI mean scores at end (E) and at beginning (B) of semester for ANX, ATT, and INF

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Anxiety scale, E*	25.5833	24	8.81164	1.79867
Anxiety, B**	23.9167	24	9.15526	1.86881
Attitude & Interest, E	32.6667	24	8.00905	1.63484
Attitude & Interest, B	33.0000	24	5.09902	1.04083
Info process, E	29.7083	24	7.53819	1.53873
Info process, B	27.7500	24	6.47571	1.32185

\*end \*\*beginning

Information Processing showed the greatest positive difference in means, changing from a mean score of 27.75 at the beginning of the study to a mean score of 29.71 at the end. Anxiety showed the greatest negative difference (23.92 at beginning; 25.58 at end).

The difference in results between the “empty” PowerPoint templates, where a significant difference was found between two times, and the LASSI, where a significant difference was not found, may be because the inventory is more effective at getting students to start thinking about how they study and how they learn rather than highlighting subtle changes across time. The inventory, however, was useful as a baseline to indicate where students started and as a means of comparing them to national norms.

## Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to determine whether using the “empty” PowerPoint handouts as a technique would help students improve their organizational skills. Results provide evidence that they did improve students’ self-awareness of how they study and did help them prepare for exams. Students improved significantly in their ability to answer questions and to answer them correctly from one assessment point to the next. Students reported that the “empty” templates helped them pay more attention in class, organize new material and remember it better, and clarify what they had not understood. Most important, students became more active learners. Rather than allowing the complete PowerPoint handouts to serve as a crutch for review at the end of the term, the empty templates prompted them to think about their learning during class. How much were they concentrating in class? Had they really understood what was presented? Did they prefer to listen or to write and take notes? What worked best for them?

Results from the LASSI also demonstrated some improvement in the Information Processing scores. Although not significant, there was a 6.6% positive change in the means. Additional research is needed to determine whether more interventions would increase this trend. Interestingly, there was also a 6.5% negative change in the means for the Anxiety score. This may reflect that as students attempted to improve their performance, their anxiety also increased.

There remains the question of whether the intervention of the “empty” PowerPoint templates helps improve test scores. Comparing the mean scores for the midterm and final exams, one finds the mean score for the midterm was slightly higher at 83.69 (range, 43-100) than that for the final 79.92 (range, 22-100). Although students reported that the interventions helped them prepare for the exams better, this did not translate into improved test scores. Further investigation using “empty” PowerPoint handouts should consider how many times

during a semester this intervention should be employed and how many slides at a time presented.

This project improved my teaching: first, in carefully examining what I was teaching and second, in forging strong relationships with students around their performance.

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# **Developing and Validating a Rubric to Measure Aesthetic Education Capacities Across Three Different Graduate Education Courses**

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## **Introduction**

While participating in a unique weeklong summer action research seminar, supported by a Title V grant related to student retention that focused on aesthetic education, three college professors of different disciplines within the same education department decided to study what graduate teacher education candidates learn through involvement in aesthetic education. We decided to use the “Capacities” (Holzer, 2007), categories of learning within the aesthetic realm developed by the Lincoln Center Institute, and design a rubric to use with our students. The three courses targeted for study were: EDC 756 (Teacher as Researcher), EDE 621 (Introduction to Teaching Reading in the Elementary School), and EDE 716 (Children’s Concepts of Art).

In this article, we describe the design, implementation, and assessment of a project that would integrate aesthetic education into three very different graduate courses. We focus on the “what” and the “how” teacher candidates learn in keeping with our current efforts to prepare for our continuing accreditation review by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), which particularly emphasizes assessment of student learning.

## **The Relationship between Lehman College and Lincoln Center Institute**

Our project is situated within a twelve-year collaborative partnership between The Lincoln Center Institute (LCI) and Lehman College that has explored the meaning of aesthetics and aesthetic education in teacher education. Increasing faculty involvement over time has resulted in research projects that examine the nature and effect of learning in the aesthetic realm, as well as a desire on the part of more experienced faculty to take more ownership and leadership in the work.

## **The Project**

We decided on a line of inquiry, a question that would guide the project: How do pre- and in-service teacher education candidates construct meaning through aesthetic education and a specific work of art? This overarching question would be

redefined within the context of each course: action research, literacy education, and art education. We next selected the art form, available this year through LCI, that our teacher candidates would experience, Hans Christian Anderson's *The Snow Queen*, and we designed a plan for each course around this performance. Planning was complicated by a variety of problems: (1) the timing of the performance itself during the second week of the semester; (2) inherent differences among our courses; and (3) a new LCI/Lehman initiative wherein faculty experienced in the aesthetic education process would work directly with their classes without the guiding influence of an LCI teaching artist.

The following course-related inquiry questions emerged:

How do pre- and in-service graduate teacher education candidates develop an understanding of:

their own and young children's developmental themes as expressed in their own research...

(EDC 756)

their own and children's concepts of the literate world around them...

(EDE 621)

their own and children's artistic development through thematic connections...

(EDE 716)

**determined through the experience of art resources:**

Picture book/s, as an art form, which focus on Hans Christian Anderson's tales with specific focus on the *The Snow Queen*, available to students in the LCI resource room;

Performance of *The Snow Queen* at the Lincoln Center Institute (each course);

**through course procedures:**

Introduction of picture book/s as art and relation to the course content (EDE 621, EDE 716);

Design and implementation of an in-class workshop preparing students for the performance of *The Snow Queen* and its relation to course content (each course);

Design and implementation of a pre-performance workshop preparing students for the performance itself.

**through student assessment tools for each course:**

Informal journaling assignments (each course);

Blackboard Discussion;

Formal writing assignment—research or case study (each course).

Assessment of the teacher candidates' experience, using the assessment tools described above, was based on the Capacities, a qualitative assessment instrument that evaluates outcomes of aesthetic learning (Holzer, 2007) developed by the Lincoln Center Institute as follows:

**Assessment Outcomes/Capacities\*:**

1. Noticing Deeply (to identify and articulate layers of detail in a work of art through continuous interaction with it over time);
2. Embodying (to experience a work of art through your senses, as well as emotionally, and to physically represent that experience);
3. Questioning (to ask questions throughout your explorations that further your own learning; to ask the question, "What if...?");
4. Identifying Patterns (to group the details you notice and to see patterns);
5. Making Connections (to connect what you notice and the patterns you see to your prior knowledge and experiences, as well as to others' knowledge and experiences including text and multimedia resources);
6. Exhibiting Empathy (to respect the diverse perspectives of others in our community, to understand the experiences of others emotionally, as well as in thought);
7. Creating Meaning (to create your own interpretations based on the previous capacities, see these in the light of others in the community, create a synthesis, and express your own voice);
8. Taking Action (to act on the synthesis of what you have learned in your explorations through a specific project);
9. Reflecting/Assessing (to look back on your learning throughout an experience, continually assessing what you have learned, what challenges remain, what further learning needs to happen).

\*Holzer, 2007, Teaching and Learning at Lincoln Center Institute. Lincoln Center Institute

We decided to use the LCI Capacities instrument as a means of assessment because we believed it to be 1) a valid tool to assess student learning in the aesthetic realm, 2) an instrument that resonates with our own pedagogical approach, and 3) an alternative assessment instrument to share with our students for use in their own classrooms. To operationalize the LCI Capacities for classroom application, it was necessary to develop a rubric.

## Capacities Rubric

(developed by Andrea Zakin based on M. Holzer's Capacities)

Capacity	Unsatisfactory	Developing	Satisfactory	Exemplary
1. Noticing Deeply	Inability to identify/articulate details (to generalize specifics) in an artwork	Ability to identify/articulate a few details in an artwork	Ability to identify/articulate several details in an artwork	Ability to identify/articulate many details in an artwork
2. Embodying	Inability to show evidence of experiencing an artwork emotionally & through the senses through a physical representation	Ability to show some evidence of experiencing an artwork emotionally & through the senses through a beginning representation of it physically	Ability to show adequate evidence of experiencing an artwork emotionally & through the senses through an adequate physical representation	Ability to show convincing evidence of experiencing an artwork emotionally & through the senses through a convincing physical representation
3. Questioning	Inability to ask "what if" questions that deepen understanding	Ability to ask a few "what if" questions that begin to deepen understanding	Ability to ask an adequate amount of "what if" questions that show evidence of deepening understanding	Ability to ask important "what if" questions that deepen understanding
4. Identifying Patterns	Inability to group details and find patterns among them	Ability to group a few details and find a few patterns among them	Ability to group several details and find patterns among them	Ability to group details and find patterns among them
5. Making Connections	Inability to connect details & patterns to prior knowledge & experience	Ability to connect a few details & patterns to prior knowledge & experience	Ability to connect several details & patterns to prior knowledge & experience	Ability to connect details & patterns to prior knowledge & experience

Capacity	Unsatisfactory	Developing	Satisfactory	Exemplary
6. Exhibiting Empathy	Inability to respect & understand diverse perspectives/ experiences of others emotionally & intellectually	Developing ability to respect & understand diverse perspectives/ experiences of others emotionally & intellectually	Evidence of some ability to respect & diverse perspectives/ experiences of others emotionally & intellectually	Ability to respect & understand diverse perspectives/ experiences of others emotionally & intellectually
7. Creating Meaning	Inability to create/ synthesize interpretations of capacity-based understanding that incorporate diverse perspectives & do not demonstrate voice	Developing ability to create/ synthesize interpretations of capacity-based understanding that incorporate diverse perspectives & begin to show evidence of voice	Ability to create/ synthesize some interpretations of capacity-based understanding that incorporate diverse perspectives & show some evidence of voice	Ability to create/ synthesize interpretations of capacity-based understanding that incorporate diverse perspectives & demonstrate voice
8. Taking Action	Inability to act on an exploratory-based synthesis in a specific project	Developing ability to act on an exploratory-based synthesis in a specific project	Evidence of ability to act on an exploratory-based synthesis in a specific project	Ability to act on an exploratory-based synthesis in a specific project
9. Reflecting/ Assessing	Inability to look back on & continually evaluate experiential learning & to specify future learning challenges	Developing ability to look back on & continually evaluate experiential learning & to begin to specify future learning challenges	Evidence of ability to look back on & continually evaluate experiential learning & to specify some future learning challenges	Ability to look back on & continually evaluate experiential learning & to specify future learning challenges

Each class participated in in-class and pre-performance workshops that introduced students to the fairy tale genre, the animation of objects (related to the performance in which dancers animate large-scale puppets), and the creation of short skits that explore the elements of the fairy tale (combination of magic, fantasy and reality, happy ending, animal characters, royalty), fairy tale themes (good vs. evil, the quest, triumph of innocence, determination, and love), and performance (characters, plot, music, movement, scenery, props, etc.). Classes maintained communication through in-class and Blackboard discussion.

### **Evidence of Capacities Development**

We evaluated our teacher candidates' written comments, consisting of responses to the performance and to one another's responses in relation to the capacities rubric. A review of our ratings of the rubric found that the Capacities were evidenced primarily at the middle two levels, Developing and Satisfactory, rather than at the lowest (Unsatisfactory) or the highest (Exemplary) levels. What this suggests is that candidates possessed some ability to engage in a Capacity, Noticing Deeply for example, but required more experience to become proficient.

In the research course (EDC 756), Embodying and Making Connections were the Capacities most frequently evidenced by candidates at either the Developing or Satisfactory level. Questioning and Exhibiting Empathy were evidenced by no candidates at either the Developing or Satisfactory level. Noticing Deeply and Making Connections were most frequently evidenced by candidates at the Satisfactory level.

In the reading course (EDE 621), eight of the nine Capacities were evidenced at the Developing and Satisfactory levels by all candidates and most frequently at the Developing level, except for Making Connections; for this Capacity, candidates were equally divided between the Developing and Satisfactory levels. Making Connections was also the Capacity most frequently evidenced at the Satisfactory level.

In the art education course (EDE 716), all of the candidates evidenced all of the Capacities at either the Developing or Satisfactory levels except for Questioning and Reflecting/Assessing. Five of the thirteen candidates evidenced at the Satisfactory level for Embodying, Identifying Patterns, and Creating Meaning. Twelve candidates evidenced at the Developing level for Noticing Deeply, ten students for Exhibiting Empathy, nine students for Reflecting/Assessing, and eight students for Embodying, Identifying Patterns, and Creating Meaning.

While there is some overlap, candidate evidence at the Satisfactory level is not the same for each course (Noticing Deeply and Making Connections for

EDC 756; Making Connections for EDE 621; Noticing Deeply, Identifying Patterns, and Creating Meaning for EDE 716), possibly reflecting the emphases inherent in each course. Overall, however, evidence of the Capacities at the Developing and Satisfactory levels was most frequent for three Capacities, Embodying, Making Connections, and Creating Meaning, and least frequent for two Capacities, Questioning and Taking Action.

**Table 1:**

**Capacities Evidenced by Students in the Three Courses**

Capacities	Developing			Satisfactory			% of Students Evidencing Levels 1 & 2
	EDC 756 N=10	EDE 621 N=16	EDE 716 N=13	EDC 756 N=10	EDE 621 N=16	EDE 716 N=13	
1. Noticing Deeply	3	14	12	5	2	1	95%
2. Embodying	9	14	8	1	2	5	100%
3. Questioning	0	14	2	0	2	1	49%
4. Identifying Patterns	3	10	8	2	4	5	82%
5. Making Connections	6	8	9	4	8	4	100%
6. Exhibiting Empathy	0	12	10	0	4	3	90%
7. Creating Meaning	3	16	8	0	0	5	100%
8. Taking Action	1	16	1	0	0	1	49%
9. Reflecting/ Assessing	1	16	9	0	0	4	77%

N=39

## Examples of student responses for Capacity 1: Deep Noticing

**Developing Level:** “The puppets were amazing. It almost seemed like their eyes were really looking at you. The narrator set the tone with her voice and it was backed up in the change of the music from scene to scene. The puppets were larger than life and I think this helped with the sparse scenery. It would have been great if the fan fire had worked.”

**Satisfactory Level:** What I noticed in the performance of *The Snow Queen* was that there was very little of stage props and how the characters were able to tell the story. I enjoyed how the puppets were brought to life by the people dressed in black. Sometimes three people were together to get the puppet to perform, as if it was alive. The narrator’s voice told the story and her voice was so soft and gentle. The lighting changed in different scenes to set the mood or the tone of what was about to happen. The Snow Queen herself was so larger than life – so bigger than I ever imagined her to be. The mirror that everyone looked into gave a distorted reflection that people tended to believe. Distorting reality and making everything that was beautiful and bad or worthless.”

## Examples of student responses for Capacity 5: Making Connections

**Developing Level:** “The story of *The Snow Queen* is about never giving up and it shows its viewers how determination can lead to success.”

**Satisfactory Level:** “While watching *The Snow Queen* I was able to acknowledge how the story represented the characters and their behaviors with the aesthetics...the use of big costumes to represent a powerful character. Most of the time authors represent the characters in their story in a certain way that causes an impact not only on the development of the story, but also on the visuals. The aesthetics of the play is what I enjoyed most. I value aesthetics greatly in my education. Therefore, I will always try to bring aesthetics into my classroom. A curriculum that exposes children to aesthetics is adding an experience that will be hard to forget. Visuals add color and movement to learning. As I have been reading to gather information on my research topic (assessing day care environments for young children), I have been walking through [the topic] in my mind...visualizing every area that makes an early childhood environment efficient.”

## Examples of student responses for Capacity 6: Exhibiting Empathy

**Developing Level:** “I wondered how children would react to the play. There was a little girl who sat in front of me and I kept looking at her to see her reaction.”

**Satisfactory Level:** “I know that Gerda’s determination to find Kay and befriend him once again despite what he said to her showed the power of forgiveness. I think children who are watching the play can realize, like we do, that at times we are going to argue and be upset at a friend but despite any misunderstandings we may have, we should be willing to accept apologies and forgive others.”

## Conclusion

Although the aesthetic education work is ongoing because the semester is not yet finished, we believe that using the Capacities to assess teacher candidates’ learning in aesthetic education provided us with qualitative data that can contribute to enhanced course design. Techniques for supporting levels of performance not evidenced can be better tailored to evoke the desired outcomes. Beyond this, although the samples were small, we will need to evaluate why, for instance, more students evidenced Noticing Deeply at the Satisfactory than the Developing Level in the research course (the last course of the graduate early childhood teacher education program), than in the literacy or art education courses. It could be that, by the end of their graduate studies, students understand the significance of close observation, which, we suspect, aesthetic education integrated across the curriculum, has helped them to achieve. More research is needed to clarify connection between aesthetic education experiences and outcomes/Capacities. The variability in the overall data of this study raises the question of whether these differences are a product of faculty/course emphasis on specific capacities, or ongoing emphasis on the work of fairy tales throughout the course, which was more possible in the literacy and art courses than in the research course. In other words, how much to integrate an art form in a course is as much an issue as how to integrate it. Clearly, all three classes have gained an appreciation for *The Snow Queen*, while broadening their creative and critical thinking abilities (Eisner, 2002; John-Steiner, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) as a consequence of this experience.

We find that the Capacities have helped our graduate teacher candidates to be more thoughtful and rigorous in their responses to aesthetic phenomena. Awareness of the Capacities can possibly produce similar outcomes for them pedagogically with the students they teach. Noticing Deeply, Questioning, Identifying Patterns, Making Connections, Exhibiting Empathy, Creating Meaning, Taking Action, and Reflecting/Assessing are useful in responding to aesthetic phenomena and also key in responding to student behavior in other areas.

The arts have proven difficult to assess formally (Gardner, 1999; Eisner et al., 1996; Feldhausen & Goh, 1995), and the capacities may well serve the arts in ways not yet investigated, particularly with regard to the assessment and evaluation of aesthetic experience. We conclude with the words of one of our students: “Knowing the capacities helped me look at elements of the performance that I might have missed...which made it more meaningful for me.”

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## Developing Inquiry and Assessing Aesthetic Education

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During the Title V Aesthetic Education Action Research Seminar in June 2006, I developed a project to assess the impact on my teaching practice of Writing Across the Curriculum and the Lincoln Center Institute Teacher Education Collaborative (LCITEC) for the study of aesthetic education. Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), a program initiated by the Lehman College Institute for Literacy Studies, expanded the genres I asked students to engage in as written assignments and structured for our classroom discussions. LCITEC changed the extent to which I use and model inquiry and encourage teacher candidates to bring their own questions to our discussions. My research question for the action research seminar was: “How do WAC practices (particularly journaling) complement LCITEC aesthetic education experiences with specific works of art in building a learning community of teacher candidates who construct and articulate meaning through writing?”

The teacher candidates’ experiences with the LCITEC include three phases: preparation with an LCITEC Teaching Artist before viewing a performance, attending a performance at Lincoln Center, and a course assignment in which teacher candidates reflect in writing and synthesize the first two phases. These experiences helped to shape a learning community among the teacher candidates in which discussion of their LCITEC experience was deeper and more personal than abstract discussions of teaching practices. The research project that follows is my attempt to qualitatively assess the impact of the WAC practice of journaling and the LCITEC process through the use of Capacities for Aesthetic Learning developed by the Institute (Holzer, 2007). To facilitate this assessment, I collaboratively developed rubrics with a colleague in the Title V seminar to assess certain of these aesthetic education capacities such as Questioning, Exhibiting Empathy, Noticing Deeply, Identifying Pattern,; Making Connections, Creating Meaning, and Reflecting/Assessing (Appendix 1).

## **Aesthetic Education and Reflective Journaling**

Over the past ten years, Lehman College faculty in the Division of Education have participated in the LCITEC. We have learned the aesthetic education process so that we can include it across the teacher preparation curriculum at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Our commitment to integrating aesthetic education in our courses is part of the Lehman Urban Teacher Education Conceptual Framework, a document that provides a philosophical foundation for our education program, which I participated in developing.

The LCITEC aesthetic education (AE) approach can be contrasted to approaches in which art history or skills in art or musical performance are learned. AE integrates exploration of the media and craft involved to enable the expression of one's responses to a work of art. The AE approach embodies Berger's (1972) advocacy of "a total approach to art which attempts to relate it to every aspect of experience" (p.32). Berger also sees the possibility of empowerment:

Not only personal experience, but also the essential historical experience of our relation to the past: that is to say the experiences of seeking to give meaning to our lives, of trying to understand the history of which we can become the active agents (Berger, 1972, p.33).

For ten years, LCITEC Teaching Artists have been my aesthetic education teachers during intensive five-day LCITEC Summer Institutes and three-day Winter Institutes. In those experiential institutes, we explored different art forms and media such as painting, collages, and sculpture, as well as embodying and expressing feelings and ideas in choreographed movement within small groups. We even tried out musical instruments and developed extemporaneous musical compositions. These experiences deepened our noticing of the craft and vocabulary of various art forms, so we might articulate our responses to the multiple layers in a particular work of art that was performed at Lincoln Center or seen at the Metropolitan Museum of Art during an Institute. We were asked to describe whatever we saw, then to connect to our prior experiences and feelings that were evoked by a play, performance, painting, or sculpture. We were encouraged to ask questions about the work of art and later read further about it. Frequently we were asked to journal about our experience and its meaning for us—our interpretations, memories, and explorations of what we imagined it might be.

In the LCITEC process, reflective journaling, in which we linked prior experiences to feelings evoked by a work of art, seemed to parallel the reflective journaling advocated by WAC since we often began WAC sessions by journaling about our experience with the topic we were going to address. In our monthly WAC seminars across the academic year, we read relevant articles, wrote about

them, and formed a learning community. Lehman College faculty shared different ways they had integrated writing in their various courses after being engaged in WAC. Assisted by a graduate student WAC Writing Fellow, we each developed a revision of one of our course syllabi and assignments. I used drawing to graphically organize how the themes of my course related to the written assignments, to activities in my classes, and to each other.

### **The Inquiry Process**

At the core of both LCITEC and WAC is the inquiry process. The LCITEC teaching artists are master teachers who are consistently constructivist in their approach. In preparing our teacher candidates to see a performance, the teaching artist and I develop a Line of Inquiry specific to the work of art. One example of a line of inquiry was, “How do the actors in *Woza Albert!*, using only themselves and limited props, embody, in one moment, the oppression that defined Apartheid and, in the next, the individual’s power to change the course of discrimination?” We then planned activities around that line of inquiry.

The LCITEC teaching artists model an inquiry approach that builds an arc of questions from what we are experiencing to how and why. LCITEC teaching artists follow a structure for planning with faculty that encourages brainstorming, inquiry, reflection, deep noticing, creating meaning, and respect for multiple perspectives based on the philosophy of aesthetic education developed by Maxine Greene (2001). Her lectures each summer over 25 years of LCITEC have been collected into *Variations on a Blue Guitar* (2001):

For us, education signifies an initiation into new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, moving.... the nurture of a special kind of reflectiveness and expressiveness, a reaching out for meanings, a learning to learn.... We see [aesthetic education] as integral to the development of persons—to their cognitive, perceptual, emotional and imaginative development....as part of the human effort (so often forgotten today) to seek a greater coherence in the world (Greene, 2001, p.7).

### **Developing as a Learning Community**

Being engaged in developing a project and having time to discuss it with colleagues was valuable in both LCITEC and WAC. Through hearing about writing dialogues in WAC, I became particularly excited about teacher candidates using this technique, metaphorically stepping into the shoes of the authors they were reading in my historical/philosophical foundations course. I assigned original

articles written by two authors/educators/philosophers of education each week. In turn, each teacher candidate wrote an imagined conversation between the two authors about an issue. We first read and discussed a short chapter by Freire (1970) on authentic dialogues. When they brought in their weekly dialogues (or essays or letters to an author), I asked five or six teacher candidates to present them with another classmate. Later in the semester, the students included themselves in a dialogue with one author and then two. Some benefits from this practice are that shy students become more comfortable as they have more practice, and teacher candidates have an opportunity to hear multiple perspectives from their classmates. Approximately a third of Lehman students are immigrants; many speak and write English as their second language. Weekly writing assignments are an opportunity to write and receive feedback on their writing. During the first two months, as an incentive to revise, if candidates improve their writing in a revision, their grade is increased.

### **Assessing Aesthetic Education Capacities**

At the conclusion of our Title V seminar, all faculty shared our action research proposals. Several of us were interested in exploring the outcomes of aesthetic education capacities, which the Lincoln Center Institute had developed for students at their High School for Arts, Imagination, and Inquiry based on the Institute's thirty-year history of philosophy and practice (Holzer, 2007). We thought these capacities were just as relevant to teacher candidates as to high school students. Working with colleagues on developing rubrics for aesthetic education outcomes for teacher candidates enabled me to find a lens through which to qualitatively assess aspects of aesthetic education that are typically not assessed. I thought that assessing teacher candidates' reflective journals was one way of determining whether they would demonstrate those capacities after a semester in which practices of LCITEC and WAC were integrated.

After I introduced the aesthetic education rubrics to the teacher candidates, each identified aesthetic education capacities in his/her written reflection of *Wozza Albert!* with yellow highlighters and named the capacity in the margin. Later they switched papers with a partner to verify or question their assessment. Having tried out this process last semester, I have adapted the original rubrics (Appendix II) and will use them more frequently with teacher candidates this semester in my course, "Aesthetic Education: Visual Arts."

## Implications for Future Study

Given the revised rubrics and a commitment to engage teacher candidates earlier and more frequently in the assessment of aesthetic education capacities, I will conduct assessment at the beginning and end of the semester with a work of art from the same genre. Teacher candidates will first assess their own aesthetic education capacities through their reflective writings. Each will switch with a partner and assess their partner's aesthetic education capacities to verify or question each other's assessment. I will then review these assessments to see whether there is a match between my assessment and that of the teacher candidates. From a research perspective, the goal would be to identify whether there is any increase in the quality and level of the Capacities assessed in their reflections over the course of the semester. Teacher candidates' reactions to the self-assessment process as well as to their overall learning in the course will provide additional qualitative evidence. Changes in candidate assessment of aesthetic education capacities across a semester would be one way of assessing the impact of aesthetic education.

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**APPENDIX I**

Examples from Capacities Rubric developed by Andrea Zakin (based on Lincoln Center Institute Capacities (Holzer, 2007)  
(for complete rubric contact [Amanoart@aol.com](mailto:Amanoart@aol.com))

<b>Capacity</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Exemplary</b>
Noticing Deeply	Inability to identify/ articulate details (to generalize specifics), in an artwork	Ability to identify/ articulate a few details in an artwork	Ability to identify/ articulate several details in an artwork	Ability to identify/ articulate many details in an artwork
Embodying	Inability to show evidence of experiencing an artwork emotionally & through the senses through a physical representation	Ability to show some evidence of experiencing an artwork emotionally & through the senses through a beginning representation of it physically	Ability to show adequate evidence of experiencing an artwork emotionally & through the senses through an adequate physical representation	Ability to show convincing evidence of experiencing an artwork emotionally & through the senses through a convincing physical representation
Questioning	Inability to ask “what if” questions that deepen understanding	Ability to ask a few “what if” questions that begin to deepen understanding	Ability to ask an adequate amount of “what if” questions that show evidence of deepening understanding	Ability to ask important “what if” questions that deepen understanding
Identifying Patterns	Inability to group details and find patterns among them	Ability to group a few details and find a few patterns among them	Ability to group several details and find patterns among them	Ability to group details and find patterns among them
Making Connections	Inability to connect details & patterns to prior knowledge & experience	Ability to connect a few details & patterns to prior knowledge & experience	Ability to connect several details & patterns to prior knowledge & experience	Ability to connect details & patterns to prior knowledge & experience

**APPENDIX II**

Rubrics For LCI Capacities For Aesthetic Learning (Holzer, 2007)

adapted by Marietta Saravia-Shore from rubrics developed by Andrea Zakin

<b>Capacity</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	<b>Developing</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Exemplary</b>
Noticing Deeply	No evidence of articulating layers of details in an artwork	Some evidence of articulating a few details in an artwork	Evidence of articulation of more than one layer of details in an artwork	Evidence of articulating several layers of details in an artwork
Questioning	No evidence of asking “what if” questions that deepen understanding	Evidence of asking a “what if” question that begins to deepen understanding	Evidence of asking a few “what if” questions that deepen understanding	Evidence of asking several “what if” questions that deepen understanding
Identifying Patterns	No evidence of grouping details and finding patterns among them	Evidence of grouping some details and finding a pattern among them	Evidence of grouping details and finding some patterns among them	Evidence of grouping details and finding several patterns among them
Making Connections	No evidence of connecting details & patterns to prior experience and knowledge	Evidence of connecting a detail or pattern to prior experience and knowledge	Evidence of connecting some details & patterns to prior experience and knowledge	Evidence of connecting details & patterns to several prior experiences and prior knowledge
Exhibiting Empathy	No evidence of respect & understanding of diverse perspectives & experiences of others emotionally & intellectually	Some evidence of respect for diverse perspectives or understanding of experiences of others emotionally or intellectually	Some evidence of respect for diverse perspectives and understanding experiences of others emotionally & intellectually	Much evidence of respect for diverse perspectives & understanding experiences of others emotionally & intellectually

Capacity	Unsatisfactory	Developing	Satisfactory	Exemplary
Creating Meaning	No evidence of individual voice or interpretations based on making connections or identifying patterns or understanding diverse perspectives	Evidence of individual voice or interpretations based on making connections or identifying patterns or understanding diverse perspectives	Some evidence of individual voice and interpretations based on making connections or identifying patterns or understanding diverse perspectives	Much evidence of individual voice and interpretations based on making connections or identifying patterns or understanding diverse perspectives
Reflecting/ Assessing	No evidence of looking back & evaluating experiential learning or specifying future learning challenges	Little evidence of looking back to evaluate experiential learning or specifying future learning challenges	Evidence of looking back to evaluate experiential learning & specifying some future learning challenges	Evidence of continually looking back & evaluating experiential learning and specifying future learning challenges

**EXAMPLES of RUBRICS for LCI Capacities for Aesthetic Learning developed by M. Saravia-Shore using examples for each rubric from her teacher candidates' reflections:**

**Noticing Deeply:** to identify and articulate layers of detail in a work of art through continuous interaction with it over time.

4 – **Exemplary:** “Umbrellas were effectively used in depicting the forest as well as indicators. Example, an umbrellas rolling around, making that tick, tick sound with the edges alerted the actor to the next scene. The colors on the floor also enhanced the scene. The increase or decrease in the volume [of music] according to the action in progress was very effective. The increasing and decreasing of the lights also gave more emphasis to the various scenes, as it created shadows where necessary, and full view at other times, and a dwindling effect as one scene closed and another opened.”

3 – **Satisfactory:** “The workshop with [an LCITEC teaching artist] prepared us adequately for the performance and gave us good insight to the acting methods we would be seeing. For instance, similar to the interaction activity with our partner, the actors were completing each other’s sentences, changing their voices for necessary emphasis, as well as sharing personal feelings and thoughts.”

2 – **Developing:** “I have been to Lincoln Center and saw a performance which is named Viajes en un Mundo Nuevo. It was a band playing music with several instruments. The music which, the musicians played had Spanish rhythm with a mixture of jazz. The combination was different from any other music I have heard. The combination of this rhythm was made up by the drummer and the pianist along with the two guitarists. The beat was very new and interesting to me. The musicians also clap their hands to make a beat too.

The drummer plays several musical instruments; he started with the rain stick and a combination of three metals triangle and three bells. The other musician plays the piano along with two guitarists. They play very well together.”

1 – **Unsatisfactory:** “The performers were all diverse in nationality. There were two of African American descent, three of Asian descent, and one that was Caucasian. The fusion of all of these nationalities coming together for this performance to play Asian instruments and make chant noises was so moving that, I felt like joining in on the performance. The costumes looked like traditional

Asian clothing. Each performer had a different style, which allowed the audience to differentiate all of the performers. In the performance each performer were playing different instruments. There was a huge gong and five to six drums.”

**Making Connections:** to connect what you notice and the patterns you see to your prior knowledge and experiences, as well as others’ knowledge and experience, including text and multimedia resources.

4 – **Exemplary:** “I think that it [Secret History performance] makes a student aware of their own stories.... It connects people from different backgrounds by relating similar experiences we share in our pursuit to have a new and better life in this country. I look forward to going back to Lincoln Center.... I hope that other students do the same. I believe that these kinds of events expand the world of students. Learning should not have barriers. The class is about diversity and this performance just enhanced my learning.”

3 – **Satisfactory:** “I feel that my colleagues and I share the same experience, since most of them are immigrants. The session make a significant difference in the way I think because I was thinking that I am the only person going through changes in my life and changing places.”

2 – **Developing:** “Once they started playing the instruments I noticed that they used the same instruments we used in the previous class. The ‘Palo De Agua’ was used exactly the same way one of the groups used it in order to start their composition. There was a connection between countries; it was just amazing.”

1 – **Unsatisfactory:** “My colleagues are great. They’re unique. Because everyone here is from different races and a variety of ages. Every time I enter this classroom I feel as if I fit in more with them although we’re very much different.”

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## **A Second Chance at Learning: Benefits of Reflective Journaling**

*Robin Kunstler, Lehman College*

The Information Age has had a tremendous impact on health-related professions. The amount of data now available regarding disease and disability poses a challenge to teaching college-level content courses in professional preparation programs in health fields. Many faculty are facing the dilemma of how to impart this growing body of knowledge so that students are both willing and able not only to learn it but also to appreciate the significance of increasingly detailed and technical information. Because one goal of health professions education today is to develop reflective practitioners who can improve professional practice (Kerka, 1996), each time I teach the introductory course in my field of therapeutic recreation, I puzzle over the best methods to convey all that needs to be covered while encouraging students to be more proactive about their learning and overall classroom experience. Most of the time, in a typical classroom setting, students are involved only passively in learning, which leads to limited retention of knowledge (McKeachie, 1998). Many groups share these concerns, questioning the value of higher education today, focusing on the quality of learning that takes place in the college classroom (Stage, Muller, Kinzie & Simmons, 1998). This issue led me to investigate active learning techniques.

Active learning has been defined as engaging students in doing something, besides listening to a lecture and taking notes, to help them learn and apply course material (McKeachie, 1998). Information retention is one benefit of active learning, as students are involved in talking and listening to one another, or writing, reading, and reflecting individually (McKeachie, 1998). Memory research suggests that deep active processing of information increases the likelihood of recalling it later (Shakarian, 1995). Given the renewed emphasis on writing across the curriculum (WAC) and the offering of writing-intensive courses (WIC) at many universities, using writing seemed to be a viable strategy to enhance learning. Through my own participation in WAC and WIC, I had observed that as students became more used to weekly informal writing-related activities in the classroom, they began to write more readily and with more confidence. Their feedback at the end of the semester verified this: they had become more comfortable with writing, enjoyed writing more, and felt that their writing had improved. This experience suggested to me that reflective journaling might be an action research innovation I could implement in my class. Boyd (2002) proposes that reflective journaling deserves further research as an area that enhances student learning.

## Review of Literature

Journals have been written throughout history, from the ancient Greeks and Romans to Anne Frank (Dyment & O'Connell, 2003). Recent findings show that journaling promotes reflective thinking, learning (Boyd, 2002, Kok & Chabeli, 2002), and self-awareness (Ashbury, Fletcher & Birtwhistle, 1993). "The use of journals can be a powerful pedagogical tool that helps students and teachers advance writing and learning as well as provide opportunities for reflective thinking" (Bocarro, 2003, p. 18). Students themselves reported that reflective journals were useful (UTS, 2003) and major catalysts in promoting and refining strategies of reflective thought (Norton, 1997). Since learning is affected by students' beliefs and their attributions regarding success and failure, developing realistic attributions could lead to positive study behaviors (Stage, et al., 1998).

A correlation has been noted between academic self-monitoring and internal locus of control (Hall, 2001). Consequently, higher levels of academic performance might also result in higher levels of internal locus of control (Hall, 2001). Journaling also has been used successfully in the health disciplines. Several studies from medicine, dentistry, and nursing have reported on the use of reflective journaling to facilitate academic and personal learning (Ashbury, et al., 1993, Boyd, 2002) and problem-solving skills (Kok & Chabeli, 2002). "Professions such as therapeutic recreation, nursing and psychology utilize journal writing as a means of reflecting on personal development and positive change" (O'Connell & Dyment, 2003, p. 2). These findings seemed to bode well for the positive results of a reflective journaling innovation in my course.

Guidance on how to effectively use reflective journaling proved very useful in structuring what turned out to be a successful protocol for my class. Previous studies had shown that students felt that journaling was time-consuming and lacked clear guidelines or expectations for what to write, and some distrusted the process. These problems were compounded by students' procrastination and waning enthusiasm as well as their inability or unwillingness to reflect (Paterson, 1995; Kok & Chabeli, 2002). Strategies to overcome these barriers consisted of explaining to the students what a journal is, giving specific exercises or guiding questions on what to write, explaining its various purposes (e.g. as a study guide, record of what was discussed, place to sort out new ideas), and detailing how it will be used (read by the instructor, credited toward course grade, etc.) (Kerka, 1996). Norton (1997) reported that students asked for explicit guidelines for writing, journal topics that complemented class topics, and extensive and probing feedback on their journal entries. Students also described the benefits of journaling as helping them focus their thoughts on the subject matter and stimulating their thinking (Dyment & O'Connell, 2003). Ashbury et al. (1993) found that journaling encouraged self-awareness and enhanced rapport between students and teachers.

## **Methodology**

To carry out my action research plan, I formulated the purpose of my study as an investigation into the relationship between reflective journaling and academic and personal learning; student journals, classroom observations, and a focus group provided the means for assessment. The participants in the study were the thirty students enrolled in my Introduction to Therapeutic Recreation class in Fall 2003. The syllabus included a description of the reflective journaling assignment. Students were informed that each week they would be given ten minutes at the end of class to write a journal entry that would be guided by a prompt. The journal was worth ten percent of the total grade. All students were required to write a journal as part of the course requirements; however, they had to sign an informed consent release to have their journals included in the results of the project. This was done, and the form was placed in an envelope that was sealed in class and not opened until after the course grades were submitted. Students were told they could obtain journal books or write in their notebooks. I had planned to collect the journals periodically throughout the semester; in fact, I did collect every week.

## **Results**

The data analyzed in the study came from three sources: the students' final journal entry, the focus group held in January 2004, and my observations. All the students had given their consent to participate in the study. The final entry asked the students, "What is your opinion of the journaling experience?" Twenty-seven students responded to this prompt. Nine students volunteered to attend the focus group, where they were asked, "What did you like about the reflective journaling? What were your feelings about the process? How could it be used or improved in the future?"

The responses from both the journals and the focus group could be grouped into three categories: knowledge, writing, and reflection. The majority of responses related to knowledge; the students wrote that the journaling was an effective tool for understanding and learning the material and for review. The next two categories were fairly equal in the number of comments. In terms of reflection, the students felt that the journals helped them learn about, reflect upon, and express themselves, as well as engage in "soul searching." As for its benefits to the writing process, they indicated that the journals helped them work on their writing and write more easily, and that they enjoyed writing as a consequence. Some additional comments were that they liked the relationship with the professor and liked having the time to make a comment or ask a question that they didn't have

time to do or feel comfortable doing during class. Here are examples from their final journal entries:

“The journaling experience made me more interested in the class.”

“I like free writing, it gives me the opportunity to find out what’s on my mind as well as let you know. The journals gave you a chance to get to know each of us on a more personal level.”

“I also had the chance to ask you questions that I probably would not have asked you verbally.”

“It also gives the opportunity to the shy students who don’t speak in class to express their feelings.”

“I think other departments should consider borrowing this experience for implementation in their programs.”

“Through the journal I have been able to identify my future goals and objectives as a professional.”

“It’s a wonder what a paper and pen can find out about a person.”

“This journal has allowed me to know who and what I was capable of.”

“I have learned to proofread and evaluate what I want to interpret in an easier and conveyable manner.”

From the focus group:

“The journal is a third resource: the text, your notes, and the journal.”

“The journaling gives you a chance to make comments and have your voice heard.”

“It gives you a second chance at learning.”

I read the journals every week because I didn’t want to miss out on what the students were writing. I read over them the evening after class. then reread them a few days later and made my comments. I wrote a response to every entry, which reinforced to the students how much I valued the journal. As I returned them each week, the students all eagerly read my comments. This contrasts with what I’ve heard faculty say about how students don’t read the comments on their papers and that they are only interested in the grades. There were, however, no grades on these journals. The students and I developed a parallel conversation that existed apart from our face-to-face interactions. Occasionally, a student would ask me a specific question to which I could write a personal answer. Reading the journals helped me see each student with greater depth. Students from whom I least expected it, the ones who were quiet in class or rarely shared much of themselves and their thoughts or whose written papers were not of high quality, revealed unexpected insights and observations. I think this was one of the most significant things I learned, to be careful not to misjudge them. Once they were able to write freely and without fear of being graded or evaluated, they communicated much more of what they were learning and/or questioning. It

also gave me the opportunity to correct misunderstandings and misperceptions, which may not have been apparent if they didn't ask questions in class. Table 1 shows the weekly class topic, the corresponding journal prompt, and a sample entry from the students' journals.

As a result of this successful experience, journaling is now a standard component of this course; when adjuncts teach this course, they use it as well. They, too, have reported satisfaction with the process. For a graduate course on the philosophy of leisure, I implemented reaction journals to weekly readings, which were written at home and submitted three times during the semester. I have yet to be disappointed with the results of any form of journaling, especially as I observe the willingness of the students to engage seriously in this experience, how much they value this as a form of interaction with the professor, and the benefits it has as a "second chance at learning" as they let their voices be heard.

### **Implications**

Overall, my work in the Title V seminar has provided me with a strategy that can readily be applied across a broad range of courses. Several faculty members in the department have adopted journaling procedures developed as part of the Title V project. The present findings may serve as a beginning for subsequent study on the use of journaling, which could use a more quantitative framework for assessing the effects of journaling across a range of undergraduate and graduate courses in the health sciences.

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**Table 1.**  
**Weekly class topics, journal prompts and sample student journal entries.**

Weekly class topic	Journal prompt	Sample entry
What is therapeutic recreation?	What is the most significant thing you learned in class today?	"I learned how helping people betters you in so many ways. You feel good about yourself and know that you made a difference in someone's life."
History of therapeutic recreation	How does what we discussed today relate to other courses you are taking or have taken?	"It reinforces the interdisciplinary concepts one can ascertain throughout one's studies."
Attitudes toward disability, accessibility, legislation	How does your own personal experience relate to what we studied in today's class?	"the feeling of being rejected from job offers, over and over again and feeling that the reason for the rejection was the color of my skin."
Inclusion	What effect is this course having on your beliefs, values and your previous understanding of things?	"I am getting the courage to be able to face someone with a disability, not to just stare but to lend a helping hand if needed."
Field trip to nursing home	Imagine you're a resident in the nursing home. Write a letter to a friend telling about living in the home.	"Thinking back I thought I would grow old and boring here. But here I feel more alive than ever."
Overview of service settings and disabilities	My ideal job in TR would be...	"Mainly I want to work with children, make them laugh, make them feel special, make them feel worth it."
Field trip to children's hospital	Free write	"I do appreciate the field trips in this class because it gives us an opportunity to interact with professionals."

Weekly class topic	Journal prompt	Sample entry
Techniques and simulation for working with people with vision and hearing impairments	What did you learn about your strengths as a professional and which skills would you like to improve?	"We should consider to be more polite to each other and sometimes to put yourself in the shoes of the other person."
Physical disabilities	What is your mid-semester evaluation of your performance in this class?	"I can no longer be absent because I am able to learn more when I am in class, rather than just using someone else's notes. I will be satisfied with any grade I earn as long as I know I have put my all into studying."
Guest speaker on assisted living for the elderly	Free write	"I could use some of the methods I learned in class today so I won't be afraid of the unknown."
Guest speaker on psychiatric illness	Today I learned...	"The activity helped me to reveal what I thought to be very important in my life. I found out that I had a lot of things in common with my classmates."
Guest speaker on AIDS and substance abuse	How does your personal experience relate to what we studied in class?	"He mastered both worlds, meaning he has the 'street' knowledge and the educational knowledge. And that's why I was able to understand him and relate because I'm trying to master the same knowledges."
The future of TR, summary, and review for final	How will you use what you learned in this course in the future?	"Where do I begin?!?! The one lesson I will always use in the future and the present is to let my voice be heard."

## **Student Success Online: Perception vs. Performance**

*Robert Whittaker, Lehman College*

Lehman, like other CUNY colleges, has greatly increased online course offerings for its nine thousand students. Indeed, student demand for distance instruction exceeds our ability to offer sections. Students perceive the courses positively and rate their quality highly. In contrast to the expanding popularity of online instruction, however, student academic success online lags behind student achievement in regular classroom instruction. This suggests the need for special efforts to increase success in a popular instructional format.

The first online course at Lehman was Introduction to Geography, taught to eleven students in spring 1997 by email. In ten years, online instruction has grown to the point that by the Spring 2007 semester, eighty-three online sections had enrolled 1328 students (over 60% of the sections are totally online, i.e. asynchronous, and enroll nearly two-thirds of all online students). The increase in sections and students has proceeded steadily over the past decade.

Despite this consistent and rapid increase in offerings, the student demand continues to exceed Lehman's capacity to open sections. The most popular sections close immediately after the opening of registration. Given the unsatisfied student demand, it would seem obvious that increasingly more sections need to be opened. A dearth of trained, experienced faculty and the arduous process of converting classroom courses into online sections inhibits expansion of offerings to keep up with student demands. However, considerations of student experience with online instruction and academic performance suggest a need to proceed carefully in expanding online offerings, especially asynchronous sections. Courses taught totally online make special demands of students. Students, at a minimum, need time-management skills and self-discipline in order to succeed in this environment. Without these qualities, even the academically well-prepared student will not do well. Clearly the process of expanding the size of online enrollments must take into consideration such non-curricular prerequisites. At present, for example, there is no screening of students when they register: the process is simply first come, first served.

Each semester students complete a survey in which they evaluate the instruction in the courses they are taking. The same surveys have been offered to students enrolled in online courses; students in asynchronous sections have evaluated the quality of the instruction and the course and have provided additional information about the online environment and their experiences as

students in an asynchronous course. These surveys are administered several weeks before the end of the semester.

Responses to a standard set of questions asked of all Lehman students (with slight modifications for online) show uniform satisfaction. Over the four semesters from Spring 2005 through Fall 2006, over two-thirds of online students responded “excellent” to the following statements and questions:

1. The instructor plans and organizes the lessons.
2. The instructor pays careful attention to student questions, and attempts to answer them completely.
3. The instructor shows thorough knowledge of the subject.
4. The instructor makes difficult ideas clear without distorting or oversimplifying them.
5. The instructor attempts both to emphasize the importance of the course material and to make it interesting.
6. The instructor is accessible for consultation via e-mail or during posted hours and by appointment.
7. The instructor is regular and punctual in providing material and evaluations of work.
8. What is your overall rating of this instructor?
9. Not considering your instructor, but only the course and course material, what is your overall rating of this course?

An even greater majority of online students gave a “yes, always” response to a series of special questions aimed at surveying satisfaction with online courses and instructors:

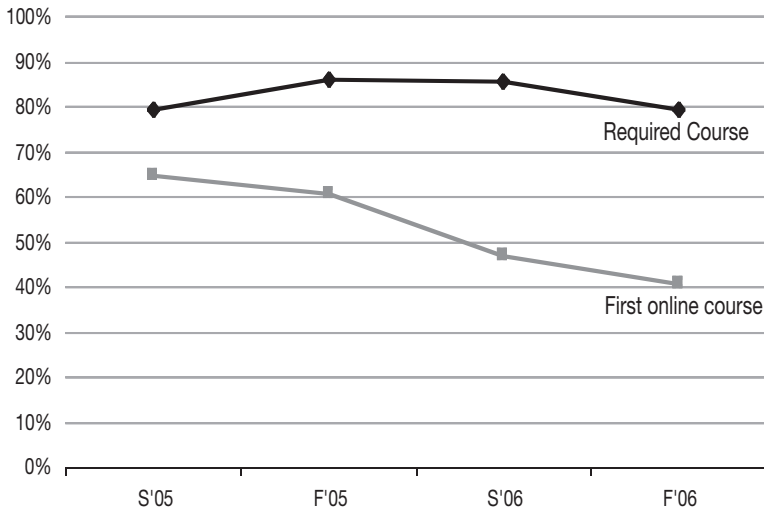
- a. Were the course goals, learning objectives and outcomes made clear to you at the beginning of the course?
- b. Did you have the necessary technological equipment and skills required for this course?
- c. Was there adequate technical support if you encountered difficulties?
- d. Was the format and page design of the online course easy to use?
- e. Were there sufficient instructions given for you to complete all assignments?
- f. Did this course require you to engage yourself in analysis, synthesis, and evaluation?

- g. Were standards for evaluation of assignments made clear?
- h. Did you receive prompt feedback on your completed assignments?
- i. Did you participate in online or email conversations with your instructor during the course?
- j. Did you participate in online or email conversations with your classmates during the course?

Clearly the satisfaction of online students who have completed most of the semester is very high, and they rate their instructors and courses at an equally high level.<sup>1</sup>

Given this positive response to online instruction, it is not surprising that students return to take more online courses. Over the same four semesters the number of students taking an online class for the first time decreased significantly. As Chart 1 indicates, 2/3 of the students responding in Spring 2005 were taking their first online course; by Fall 2006 the proportion had fallen to 2/5.

**Chart 1**



However, the proportion of students taking required courses online remained relatively stable, within a range of 80% to 86%. Among students taking required courses online, an increasing proportion of them have already gained experience in this learning environment.

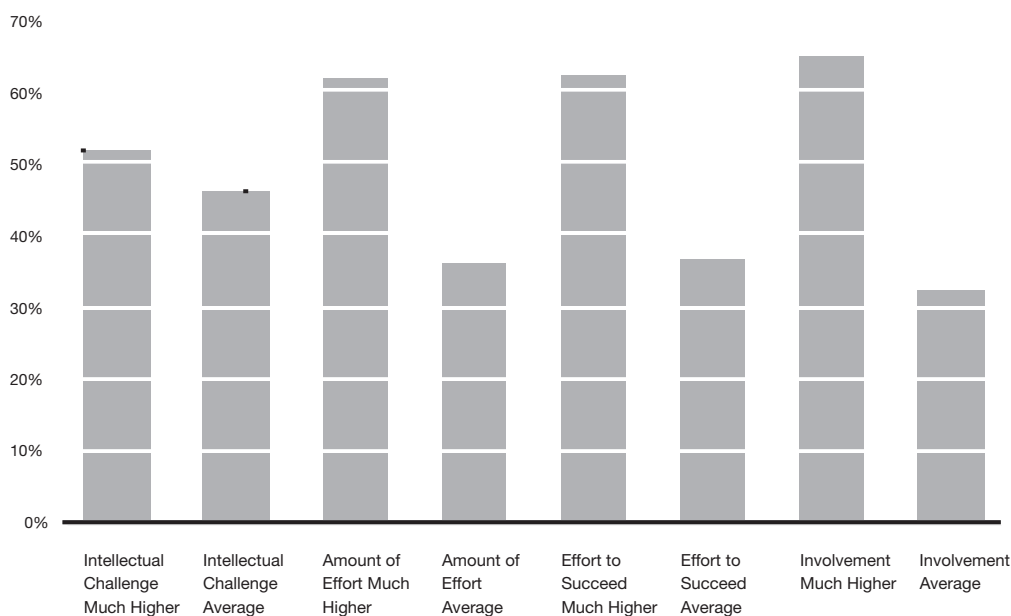
<sup>1</sup> These and subsequent data are aggregated from unpublished data gathered by surveys of 815 students taking asynchronous courses from Spring 2005 through Fall 2006.

Why are online courses so popular? Convenience is certainly one obvious factor. If the students' impression of online courses is that they are easier than regular classroom courses, however, this impression is soon proven wrong. By the time they get to the final stages of a course, the students clearly feel that online is definitely not easier than in-class learning.

Students in online courses over four semesters, Spring 2005 through Fall 2006, were asked to compare the online course they were taking with other college courses they had completed. In answer to four questions about the level of intellectual challenge, the amount of effort put into the course, how much effort was required to succeed in the course, and level of their involvement (e.g., doing assignments, participating in discussions, etc.), students were given the choice of "much higher," "average," and "much lower." Chart 2 illustrates the results: students found the intellectual challenge higher or average, the amount of their effort much higher, and the effort to succeed much higher as well. Highest of all was the level of involvement. Only about 2% of the respondents rated the level of effort and involvement "much lower" than in-classroom learning. Students believe they are challenged more and respond with more involvement in online courses than in regular classroom courses.

## Chart 2

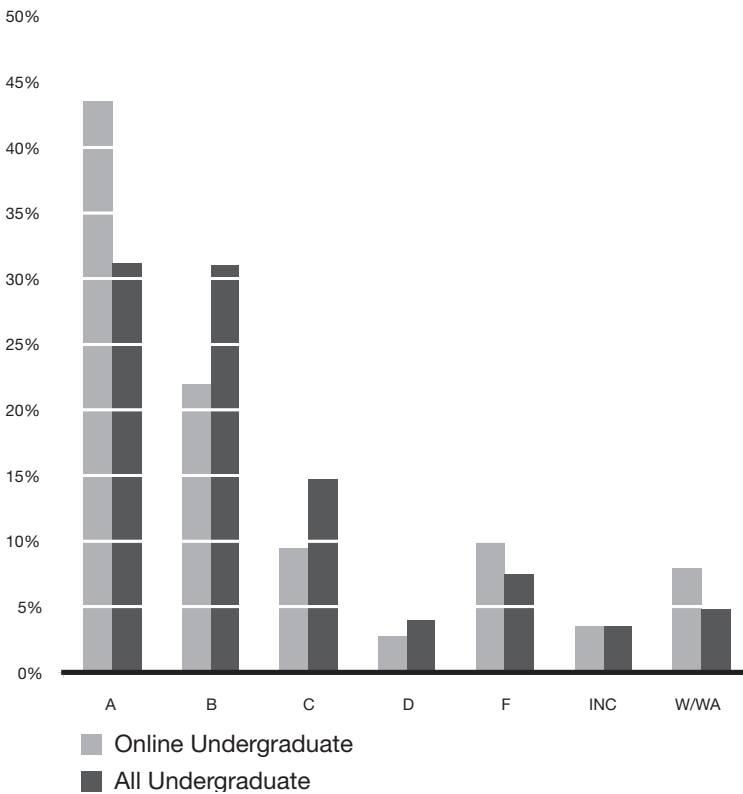
Compared to Other Courses, Describe Your Online Course  
Spring 2005 - Fall 2006



Online courses seem more difficult and demand more: how is this reflected in the academic performance of the students in these courses? The data on grades received in online courses as compared to grades received throughout the College suggests that the higher demands have two effects. In response to greater challenges and demands, a significant number of students respond with a level of excellent performance, greater than in regular classes. However, the majority of students in online courses do not do so well. The overall level of student success is lower.

Chart 3 reflects the grades received by undergraduate students in online asynchronous courses as compared to all undergraduate grades earned in the four semesters from Spring 2004 through Fall 2005.<sup>2</sup>

**Chart 3**

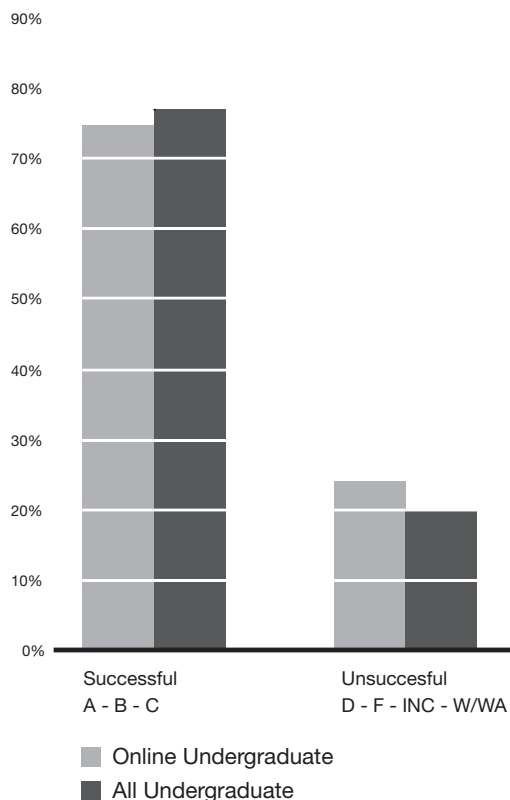


<sup>2</sup> These and subsequent analyses of grades are based on data provided by Lehman's Office of Institutional Research in November 2006.

Online students received 13%-14% more A's (except in Fall 2005: 9%) than the average throughout the college. The percentage of B's and C's, however, was significantly smaller for online students. The online students received fewer D's but a somewhat more F's. Incompletes were awarded in roughly equal amounts. However, withdrawals from online courses (with the exception of Spring 2004) were higher than the rate for the college at large. In short, students in online courses excel in much greater proportions than in the average undergraduate course; however, the performance at modest levels is lower, and the withdrawal rate is higher.

These data paint a bleak picture of student success online. Moreover, the trend offers no encouragement: the rate of academic success is decreasing. If academic success is represented by grades A, B, and C, and if a lack of academic success is represented by grades D, F,<sup>3</sup> Incomplete, and Withdrawal, then the data produce Chart 4:

**Chart 4**



<sup>3</sup> CUNY policy suggests that D and F represent unsuccessful academic performance, and, within limits, students are allowed to retake courses for which they received these grades in order to raise their averages.

Only in Spring 2004 was the proportion of successful grades greater in online courses than for undergraduate courses as a whole. The same was true for unsuccessful academic performance. Beginning with Fall 2004, the relative success of students in online courses has been declining, and the percentage of unsuccessful grades has been increasing.

The contrast of positive student perceptions of online learning and their increasingly unsuccessful academic performance suggests several avenues for further research. Possibly the increasing enrollment in online sections has resulted in a larger proportion of students who lack necessary, non-curricular prerequisites: time management skills and self-discipline. Perhaps the first-come-first-served principle needs to be revised, and students need to be screened before being allowed to register for online courses. Another change might be to introduce an interim evaluation at mid semester to allow for advising and correction, perhaps even withdrawal without penalty.

The fact of unsuccessful academic performance online may not indicate poor performance generally: research should be undertaken to learn whether students who are unsuccessful online are also unsuccessful in regular classroom studies. If not, assistance and counseling to develop self-discipline and time-management skills would be indicated. Another line of research might be to inquire as to the reading and writing skills of students who are not successful: online instruction is at this point almost exclusively textual, and difficulties with written information and writing might well amplify otherwise less-critical weaknesses.

Alongside further research, these data suggest the need to assist students to increase their success in online learning. Online courses represent an opportunity for students to increase their credit loads and thus reduce the time to degree completion. In response to the general attractiveness of online learning for our students, Lehman College is planning to offer more required general education sections online, as well as more oversubscribed courses in popular majors like sociology and business and in popular minors like elementary education. At the same time, however, the preliminary research described here indicates that we need to increase our attention to student advising and counseling in the selection of online courses as well as to students' academic progress after enrollment in online courses. Coupled with increased tracking and evaluation of success rates and reasons for failure, we need to intervene in ways specific to online learning. Two obvious forms of intervention are screening students considering online learning for the first time and tracking student academic progress dur-

ing the semester. This special student support must be accompanied by greater efforts to increase instructors' awareness of student difficulties and ways to address situations that threaten successful completion of courses. Increasing the number of online sections will not serve our ultimate goal of student progress towards degree and overall academic success if it only provides increased opportunities for academic failure.

The increasing enrollments in online classes and the persistent demand and positive impressions by students suggest remarkable success. However, the academic performance of online students clouds this picture and demands a clearer understanding of the special challenges of this form of learning. In the meantime, until this new research is completed, it is clear that we need to intervene and provide some special guidance and support for online learning.

# Instructor Prompts and Student Responses in an Online Course

*Rogelio Fernandez, Lehman College*

## Literature Review

The purpose of the action research project I undertook was to investigate the degree to which an online teacher education course I taught affected students' higher-order thinking.

Specifically, the following questions were addressed: (1) what is the relationship between the type of instructor prompts and the type of student replies? (2) How does the frequency of instructor prompts affect the frequency of student responses? And, (3) what do students report as facilitating their "higher order" thinking?

I was particularly interested in the investigation of distance learning in teacher education for a variety of reasons. The demographics of undergraduate teacher education students have changed in recent years. Universities and, in particular, schools of education are increasingly under demand to accommodate a variety of student needs: varying schedules, job and childcare responsibilities, transportation, and accessibility to main campus (Simonson, Samldino, Albright, & Zvaelk, 2003). Anecdotally, I have surveyed past students in two of my undergraduate courses, who have indicated these aforementioned reasons for participating in online courses.

In addition, as a teacher educator, I am constantly wondering about the "quality" of instruction in online courses versus the "quality" of instruction in weekly face-to-face courses. More specifically, do online courses develop higher-order thinking to the same degree (at a minimum) or to a higher degree (at a maximum), as face-to-face weekly courses?

Past studies in distance learning have indicated varying results in the area of the development of higher thinking skills. Herning (2004) suggested that the type of instructional activity utilized in distance learning could affect the development of higher thinking skills. He listed the development of "meaning-making" communities as alternatives to weekly "broadcasts" or "pre-recorded lectures" as a means of facilitating higher thinking skills. Similarly, Spalter, Stone, Meier, & Simpson (2005) indicated that interface and interaction techniques affected the degree to which participants develop higher order thinking. Dennen (2005) further agreed that "presence" and continuous "feedback" during online courses positively affect resulting discourse among students. Finally, Aliko (2005) found that participation in online courses develops students' self-directed learning and higher-order thinking.

Other studies have found no significant relationship between online courses and the development of higher thinking skills. Natar (2005) reported that online courses, like weekly face-to-face courses, had no significant impact on students' development of higher-order thinking. He recommended further research in the area. More important to this action research, Christopher, Thomas, Tallent-Runnels, & Roeper (2004) found no relationship between instructor "level of prompt" and students' "level of responses."

In conclusion, past research in the relationship of distance learning and the development of higher thinking is inconclusive, and perhaps more important, nascent. Almost all studies indicated a need for further research. This, added to a changing teacher education student demographic and my own "inquisitiveness" in the area, made this a timely action research project, which will no doubt grow in complexity as the questions in this area evolve.

## Method

This action research examined the thinking level of students' replies to level of instructor's prompts on Discussion Board strands<sup>1</sup>; relationship between frequency of instructor's questions and corresponding students' replies on Discussion Board strands; and students' perceptions of their higher-thinking development as a result of online course participation.

This study took place in an undergraduate teacher-education foundation online hybrid course. The course is part of a twelve-credit minor in teacher education that explores issues of race, gender, ethnicity, and class in education. The course had both synchronous (chat) and asynchronous (Discussion Board, email) activities. This particular course met six times in face-to-face sessions and the rest through online activities.

The instructor randomly chose five students at the beginning of the course to examine.

The student responses were coded using Christopher, Thomas, Tallnet-Runnels, & Roeper's (2004) coding protocol, which codifies student responses as either (1) low, explaining, recalling response (Piaget believed that children's cognitive development occurs in stages); (2) medium, organizing, relating response (in a way, Piaget's theory of cognitive development is similar to Vygotsky's in that children need interactions with materials to learn); or, (3) high, justifying, break-

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1 Discussion Board is a bulletin board messaging system used in Blackboard (platform on-line based program.). The instructor posted a weekly strand/question, theme and students responded/ reacted to one another as well as to the instructor. More specifically, the instructor encouraged higher-level thinking utilizing prompts that encouraged higher-level thinking.

ing down into pieces, or forming a new perspective response (I think that Piaget and Vygotsky were basically in agreement: they both believed children are instrumental in “constructing” their knowledge). This coding occurred on a weekly basis over a four-week period. A pre- and post-analysis of instructor prompts and students’ responses was made.

The number of instructor prompts/comments and corresponding student responses/questions were tabulated for frequency counts. This occurred at the end of the course.

## Findings

Question 1: What is the relationship between the type of instructor prompts and the type of student replies?

The early October responses were used as the pre-measure and the late-November responses as the post-measure.

Table I reports the number of responses by levels. It reports initial responses (in early and late October) and later responses (in early and late November). Of the five students randomly selected, only one ended in November responding at the third (reformulation) level. The other four mostly, if not exclusively, responded at the second (organizing) level, and only three responses were coded at the very basic, first level (recalling).

Table II reports the totals of responses by levels for each of the five students. The totals were three replies at level one; thirty-six at level two, and only two at level three.

**Table I**  
**Relationship between Instructor Prompts and Student Responses in an Online Course**

Student #	Student Response Level DB1 October	Student Response Level DB2 October	Student Response Level DB3 November	Student Response Level DB4 November
1	2	2	2	3
2	1	2	2	2
3	2	2	2	2
4	2	1,2	2	2
5	2	2	2	2

Key: 1 = low: explaining, recalling response; 2 = medium: organizing, relating response; 3 = high: justifying, breaking down into pieces or new perspective response. DB=Discussion Board Weekly Topic

**Table II**  
**Number of Responses by Levels**

Student #	Level 1: low, explaining	Level 2: organizing response	Level 3: new perspective response
1	0	6	2
2	2	6	0
3	0	8	0
4	1	8	0
5	0	8	0
Totals	3	36	2

Except for student 1, there were no significant gains in the level of higher-thinking responses to instructor's prompts. The majority of the students ended the course responding to discussion board topics at the same level in which they began: organizing, relating. These findings are similar to Natar's (2005), wherein he reported no significant gains in higher-thinking skills as a result of ongoing instructor prompts on a bulletin board discussion.

Question 2: How does the frequency of instructor prompts affect the frequency of student responses?

Since students knew they had to post a minimum of two replies per week, the number of student responses equaled the number of instructor prompts. The instructor initiated eight replies and received eight replies (except for one student who posted an additional reply).

Question 3: What do students report as facilitating their "higher order" thinking?

Although this unstructured question asked students how they thought the online course facilitated their higher-thinking skills, no student discussed this.

The five students did, however, comment on how the online course helped them manage their "study" time more effectively. Alikei (2005) reported similar results.

Student two wrote, "I had to really buckle down and divide my time among other courses to get this work done."

## **Conclusions**

My action research project explored the relationship between instructor prompts/questions, and student responses in an online bulletin board discussion forum. Since only five students participated, and only over four weeks, the findings cannot serve as anything other than an impetus for further research.

Of the five students randomly selected, only one ended in November responding at the third stage (reformulation I). The other four mostly, if not exclusively, responded at the second level (organizing), and only three responses were coded at the very basic, first level (recalling).

The number of student replies equaled the number of instructor prompts.

Students did not comment on how this online course facilitated their higher-order thinking skills. Rather, they all reported on how online courses help them develop time-management skills. During a past online course I taught, students commented that among the several advantages of taking an online course, one of the main benefits was being “able to work on one’s schedule,” and “the [online] course makes one responsible for their own time management.” These comments are in alignment with past studies on time management and online courses. Vivoda (2005) and Lawless (2000) both reported online courses as facilitating the development of time-management skills for both instructors and students.

Although the instructor prompts specifically encouraged student replies about higher-order skills, the fact that there was no significant increase in students’ higher-order thinking suggests that there may be other variables to investigate as “higher-order thinking facilitators.” Perhaps the “context” of the discussion would be an interesting variable to examine. In other words, students’ ability to “reflect” at higher thinking levels may be related to familiarity with the context of discussion.

Additionally, all students began the discussion board replies, responding to prompts at the second level of “organizing” and were consistent in responding at that level throughout the four-week period. A longer period of reflection may be needed to see greater gains in levels of critical thinking.

Action research is by definition a recursive process. Initial lines of inquiry lead to further questions to be investigated. I am hoping that this initial action research project will serve as an impetus for a wider, longer research agenda.

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# Practice and Reflection

## Starting to Reflect on the American Dream in Freshman Composition

*Christina Sassi-Lehner, Bronx Community College*

One of the pleasures of teaching at Bronx Community College is working with students who are frequently first-generation Americans, hailing from as many as 117 different countries. More often than not, they are the first in their families to attend college, and they are burning with the desire to succeed, eager to get their degrees, move on to the career of their choice, and provide themselves and their families with a better life. They are in hot pursuit of the American dream. What better way, then, to engage student interest and channel their energy to their Freshman Composition course than by designing a humanities project that presents them with an opportunity to pause and reflect on the nature of their pursuit, the basis of the “American dream,” both from their own perspectives and from those of the media and the culture at large, and to identify and question the values that these representations reinforce?

In the summer of 2006, the two-week Hall of Fame for Great Americans Seminar at BCC, sponsored by the NEH, invited CUNY faculty to study the Hall of Fame and make it the locus for new courses in the humanities. We studied the site as an artifact and explored the criterion that had been used to select honorees. I was eager to take part in the venture and design a new English 11 course entitled “Creating America.” The questions posed at the seminar later informed the basis of inquiry for students in my class: What does it mean to be an American, let alone a great one? Has the definition changed from 1900, when the Hall of Fame was built? Why or why not? Who was included in the Hall, and who was excluded, and by what criteria? Who might we induct today? Ultimately, the course that I created and taught in the fall of 2006 combined a study of Stanford White’s Hall of Fame with a reading of the great letters, political documents, short stories, and poems by prominent Americans from the eighteenth century to the present, with a focus on the works of such honorees as Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Walt Whitman.

One of the themes of the Hall of Fame seminar was the dual strains of American character, which, on the one hand, valorizes the rugged individual going it alone—Thoreau’s majority of one and Emerson’s insistence on self-reliance above all else—and, on the other hand, asserts the importance and the necessity

of community and of providing for the greater good of society. While these two different impulses, libertarian and communal, are at odds with one another, they tend to check and balance each other, just like the separate branches of the federal government itself, through many different voices in American history and literature. This dichotomy was to become an important theme in my English 11 course. At the beginning of the first class, I asked students to write their definition of a “great American.” Their unmediated responses tapped into this issue beautifully, and they are worth relating here. (Please note, student writing is verbatim, reproducing all errors as well as the charm of their authentic voices.) By turns, they noted: “A great American is a person who wants to build up the community.” “A great American is someone who works for unity and progress.” “I think a great American is someone who is motivated, hardworking and bold. I have been in this country for less than a year and I seen all kinds of people pursuing the American dream but it takes the ones with high self-esteem to make it. A great American works hard to achieve who he wants to be.” “A great American in my eyes is someone like Martin Luther King Jr. because he wanted to bring all races together and to keep the peace between them. He also wanted unity so any American that wants America to be unified is a “great American.”” Students articulated a wonderful compendium of the traits ascribed to great Americans: boldness, belief in oneself, community building, and promoting unity and progress. With these remarks as a starting point, we were off and running. Students were curious to learn more about what it means to be an American and to discuss how they reconciled their own sense of nationality with their identity as Americans; our classroom became a place where we could engage in these discussions.

I should note that in the first class I also asked students to write what, if anything, they knew about the Hall of Fame on campus. Of the twenty-six responses, only nine students could identify the site and knew something about it. It was surprising to me that such a beautiful landmark, prominently placed on our campus, would go unnoticed by the majority of the students. As a class, we toured the Gould Memorial Rotunda and the Hall of Fame, and students appreciated having the opportunity learn more about these places. Many said they returned to the colonnade to look at the busts and record some of the sayings inscribed under them. Most BCC students—as elsewhere in CUNY—are busy commuters, juggling the demands of college, work, and family, and unless we faculty encourage them to get to know and appreciate what our campus has to offer, most will leave without ever really knowing or feeling a part of our college and its history.

Additionally, the Hall of Fame itself created for those students an immediate, concrete, physical impression, helping to make real for them the enduring legacy of the individuals honored there. The Neoclassical architecture possesses a grandeur which harkens back to past glories while canonizing inductees unique



to our new nation. Perched on the highest peak of the Bronx overlooking the Harlem River, students feel the visionary, forward seeking nature of anyone who aspires to be an eternal “great American.” Conversely, looking out on the world from this exalted vantage point makes painfully evident those who were not represented. Students were quick to note the dearth of women and African Americans, and the absence of any Native Americans or Hispanics. The physical presence of the Hall of Fame, and the multifarious history that it taps into, became an essential part of connecting classroom discussions of values, visions, and interpretations of American identity with

the larger, changing contexts of the outside world. I suspect that it could play an equally galvanizing force on like-minded classroom discussions at campuses other than BCC—though those students would have to travel to and experience the site in person to really benefit from its study.

For our main text, I chose the anthology *Creating America*, edited by Joyce Moser and Ann Watters, for its excellent selection of primary sources and critical commentary. I supplemented these readings with my own handouts of longer works. We began by studying the *Declaration of Independence* and discussing the fundamental principles it sets forth. In the version that Moser and Watters present, the words and phrases in the first draft are underlined, while the final changes are provided in the margins. This was an effective way of introducing the topic of drafting and revising an essay while also learning more about American history. Addressing both content and style, we discussed why Jefferson may have made the changes he did. Of particular note, students were surprised to find that, originally, Jefferson had devoted a lengthy paragraph to excoriating the evils of slavery, but ultimately the passage was removed, proving to be too contentious an issue. We discussed which concepts and phrases students had known about before their class reading. Most of them knew that among an American’s “unalienable rights” are those of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” However, what do these rights really mean? And when a company such as Cadillac, in a recent ad campaign, appropriates that language to sell automobiles (“Life, liberty, and the pursuit” is the slogan under a car in a print advertisement), what assumptions are they making?

Discussions about the *Declaration* lay the foundation for our later explorations of civil liberties, justice, and equality through such works as Susan B. Anthony's "Women's Right to Vote," Frederick Douglass's "Independence Day at Rochester," and King's "Letter From Birmingham Jail" and "I Have a Dream." Students understand the *Declaration* as a foundational work, and they became proficient at noting the intertextuality among these sources. Then, for a wry look at a master of self-invention recounting his classic rags-to-riches tale, we read excerpts from Ben Franklin's *Autobiography*, and for an idiosyncratic view of how to redistribute the wealth from the rich to the poor we read Andrew Carnegie's "Wealth" (both Franklin and Carnegie are Hall of Famers). While addressing issues of community and identity, we read Alexis de Tocqueville's "Origin of the Anglo-Americans," Henry David Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience," Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Ethan Brand" and "The Minister's Black Veil," excerpts from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, Langston Hughes' "Let America Be America Again," Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address," and John F. Kennedy's "Inaugural Address." For different perspectives on the West, environmentalism, and the mythic elements of the frontier and the pioneering spirit, we read Wallace Stegner's "Coda Wilderness Letter," Luther Standing Bear's "What the Indian Means to America," and Mark Twain's "Roughing It." In the future, I plan to include a viewing of Clint Eastwood's subversive Western, *Unforgiven*, since almost none of the students had ever seen a Western movie.

For their final project, a research paper, students chose from the following two options: 1) research any one of the individuals represented in the Hall of Fame, explain the reasons for his/her inclusion, discuss both his/her contributions to American culture and the significance of the quotation under his/her memorial bust, and, finally, either confirm or argue against the individual's placement in the Hall; or 2) propose one new inductee based on the criteria used since 1973 (the individual has to be an American citizen, deceased at least twenty-five years, and must fall within one of the five disciplinary categories: Arts, Sciences, Humanities, Government, Labor/Business). A strong, well-researched case must be argued to demonstrate the significance of the individual's contributions to American culture. Primary sources must also be consulted for a suitable epigram in the individual's own words (to be placed under the bust), which will sum up the individual's legacy. I emphasized that whether responding to option one or two, all papers must provide a definition of what it means to be a great American, addressing whether this definition has changed or remained a constant over the past century. I let the students know at the beginning of the semester that I would publish their papers in a class anthology, which they would receive at the end of the course. My hope was that they would take the project more seriously if they knew that they would be sharing their efforts with their classmates. Overall, I was

impressed with the quality of the work that they produced. I have found that my students were more invested in their own learning and writing processes when they were pursuing answers to compelling questions that they connected with.

In responses to end-of-semester questionnaires, all of the students reported that they had learned something worthwhile about American culture and the Hall of Fame. One student's critique also reveals the strength of a course of this nature: "At first I felt the class was beginning to feel too much like a history class, but after the first three weeks I got the point, and I understood she wanted us to learn from the day she asked what a great American was until now.... I felt that it was strongly in her interest to focus on 1) great Americans, 2) good research papers and dissecting readings from poets to presidents and many more."

Initially, I was unsure of how students would respond to an immersion in American literature for their first college-level composition course, but I have been struck by how powerfully they connected to the literature and wanted to learn even more about American history. I think that a course of this kind would work extremely well as a part of a learning community, where it could be linked to a section of American history. The reflexivity between the literature and history would have greater depth, enhanced by an additional focus on the Hall of Fame. Furthermore, students might have greater insight into community building in America—one of the course's central themes—while they are working together as a community of learners. On the whole, I have been pleased with students' engagement with the course content, which I think had a positive effect on the quality of their essays, reading journals, and research papers. I am hoping to continue teaching this course in the future.

### Select Seminar & Course Readings

Delbanco, A. (2000). *The Real American Dream: A Meditation on Hope*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.

Moser, J. & Watters, A. (Eds.). (2006). *Creating America: Reading & Writing Arguments*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Reynolds, D. S. (1988, 1999). *Beneath the American Renaissance: Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.

# The Paradox of Freedom: Engaging the Tension between Representation and Canonization in the Classroom

*Julie Bolt, Bronx Community College*

## Questions

How does one reconcile a monument that canonizes predominantly dead white men with a culturally and economically diverse student body: men and women who are predominantly brown? What messages does such a monument send to these young people, and how can they dialog to transform our encounter with ninety-eight bronze busts from the past into a vision of active citizenship for the future?

These are some of the questions I found myself posing while participating in the cross-disciplinary NEH/CUNY seminar on the Hall of Fame for Great Americans. There is no doubt that Stanford White's monument is architecturally significant, providing an oasis from the urban bustle outside of campus. As a new faculty member at Bronx Community College, I delighted in the beautiful, sun-speckled colonnade, which includes many of my favorite authors, important scientists, and some admirable revolutionary figures. Yet it also includes busts of military heroes and politicians who worked directly against the interests of people who may well be ancestors of many of our students. I found it disconcerting that there were very few individuals immortalized in the Hall of Fame who would have resembled our students at all. This absence is notable given all the "Great Americans" who emerged during abolition (before the last bust was installed) and the Civil Rights era (after). I couldn't ignore the disconnect with our student population, especially since the colonnade has several empty spots, and the memorial could, in theory, be expanded to be more inclusive.

These issues of canonization and representation led me to create a special section of the BCC freshman composition course, which I called "The Paradox of Freedom." My goals for the course were for the students and I to mutually explore ways that academic and cultural canons, as well as their accompanying ideologies, impact our social realities. Furthermore, I aimed for us to "fill in" some of the representational gaps in the Hall of Fame.

As stated in our syllabus, "We will use the Hall of Fame for Great Americans as a starting point to explore competing and contradictory notions of freedom, and ways writers, artists, and activists—including you—have tried to understand freedom and act in its interests."

## The Encounter

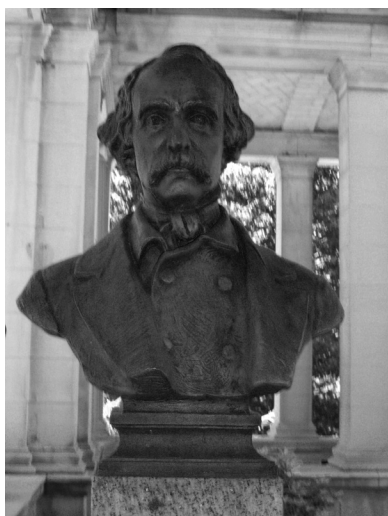
On a balmy, late-August day, our first week opened with a tour of the Hall of Fame. Students were allowed time to contemplate and roam. I was interested in using this public space as a town square of sorts. I shared this intent with the students since it was important to me that we consciously transform the site into a space for dialog, a site of possibility and multiplicity.

Very few of our students had ever walked through the Hall of Fame before, or visited Gould Memorial Library, suggesting how easy it is to have something under our nose but not “see” until it is required of us. Fortunately, students were overwhelmingly interested and engaged. To help focus our investigations, I asked them to read the plaques and consider these questions: *Who is included? Who is left out? What Americans or social movements would we like to see represented? Also: What definitions of freedom and democracy are framed or neglected here, and why?*

When we returned to the classroom, the tour prompted extensive consideration of the historical and architectural importance of the site itself, and we then turned to focus on the accomplishments of many of the ‘Great Americans’ honored. Several students recognized some of the historical figures, but some knew few to none, indicating a significant cultural chasm. Similarly, some students were smitten with the pantheon represented at the monument, while others argued that there was a disproportionate lack of women represented—and only a few African Americans. Notably, two of the twenty-seven students in the class saw the desire for inclusion as “political correctness,” and with my background in post-colonial literature of the Americas, I felt compelled to point out the irony of the total absence of indigenous people.

When I asked students who they would like to see represented, I received wide-ranging responses. Hector Hernandez argued for Bill Gates, Mathew Perry (who opened up trade agreements with Japan), and Dr. Mary Dixon, one of the first doctors to make strides in women’s reproductive health. Another student, Evelyn Encarnacion, focused on popular contemporary humanitarians, such as Bono and Angelina Jolie. Evelyn writes, “I chose these philanthropic figures because they work to support and enhance the lives of others... The students at BCC can learn by the action of these heroes that we cannot have any future without education and health. Our students can learn through them how they apply their knowledge, their fortune, and their life to make the world a better place to live in.”

Still other students chose more radical revolutionaries, with a considerable percentage choosing Malcolm X. Sabrina Carrero argued for The Young Lords, the Nuyorican civil rights group, maintaining that their work needed to be revitalized today. Poignantly, one student took exception that the site was limited to Americans. As an African descendent, this student gestured to global citizenry, making an argument for the inclusion of Nelson Mandela.



As conversation developed, students' responses proved unpredictable as ideological tensions emerged in the classroom. I saw the tensions and emotional investment as a fertile context to examine the "paradox of freedom." Why do we hold the positions we hold? Do we benefit from them? How often do we question our assumptions? Indeed, multiple truths were emerging. I pointed out that, like our classroom contestations, the choices made for canonization at the Hall of Fame were historically and ideologically bounded. We pondered how freedom for some was dependent on the enslavement of others and how genocide of Native peoples

translated into Manifest Destiny for European descendents. These are just some of the paradoxes of freedom in America, and in all the Americas and colonial countries. However, the identification of social injustice as historical process also caused us to discover exciting voices of liberation and hope. It was not at all hard to claim "Great Americans," both living and dead.

## Discourse

Experiencing and critiquing the colonnade became a means for students to engage their critical consciousness and encourage a sense of agency. My hope was that our encounter could help us deconstruct inherited social roles, economic and political barriers, and deterministic notions of identity.

As we explored paradoxical notions of "freedom," I defined "discourse" as it is used in post-colonial theory: a bounded set of beliefs that are socially constructed. I found this definition to be useful in examining power relations and individual identities. Discourse theory also helped students contextualize the canonization of the busts in the Hall of Fame within the socio-political times that they were selected. Understanding that canons reflect historical power struggles helped students recognize that concepts of "freedom" and "democracy" change over time, and can continue to change in their own interests.

Significantly, our problematizing of discourse urged us to reflect on our own assumptions and modes of reasoning. Many of us were able to contend with our own belief systems as subjective truths, no matter how deeply felt, that reflect not only our experiences but also inculcations from the media as well as academic and religious institutions.

## Counter-Discourse

After problematizing canons and our own notions of objectivity and subjectivity, I used the Hall of Fame for Great Americans to add dimension to the meanings of the busts represented there. Through a historical arc, we read, discussed, and questioned the words of revolutionary nineteenth-century figures who were ignored in the Hall of Fame, such as Sojourner Truth, Sitting Bull, and Frederick Douglass. Then we engaged in a re-visioning of Walt Whitman—who is included—but was not then popularly seen as an openly gay voice, or the abolitionist and feminist who emerged in our reading of “I Sing the Body Electric.” Finally, we explored more contemporary voices, such as Beat poet Allen Ginsberg, Toni Morrison, and Spokane native writer Sherman Alexie, individuals whose writing overtly and playfully challenges the sacredness of institutional canons.

As we filled in some of the discourse gaps from the Hall of Fame, students increasingly began to see recorded “knowledge” as contestable, based on subject positions, recognizing how several truths can sit side by side. Sometimes de-centering notions like “freedom” and “democracy” was frustrating, for there is comfort in the easily coherent. Still, many students were quick to counter encroaching complacency, holding that contending with complexity is more useful for social change than accepting sanitizing homogeneity.

## Agency

Critical pedagogy theorist Peter McLaren (1992) states: “We need to develop a praxis that gives encouragement to those who, instead of being content to visit history as curators or custodians of memory, choose to live in the furnace of history.” Here, McLaren politicizes the education process in the best sense of the word. It is in this sense that my experience teaching “The Paradox of Freedom” as an outcome of the NEH/CUNY seminar demonstrated that we can become conscious of the process of history-making. If we do not run from paradoxes, we can deconstruct the rhetorics and ideologies that shape them, and in the process become more self-aware about what kind of relationship we want with our world.

By the end of the semester, students such as Abdul Buhari felt increased agency and hope to address injustice as global citizens. In an essay on global warming, Abdul wrote, “Even though it might look and sound like there is no hope for the future, it’s never too late if we determine to reinvent the wheel.” Similarly, Alan Harris wrote about the dream of a revitalized UN as the world’s best hope for peace.

After much writing, reading, and debating, my students transformed the Hall of Fame from a relic of past ideologies to a space for making new knowledge collectively with others. The texts we read, wrote, and spoke took on the life of an ongoing dialog for social transformation, a contact zone of both contestation and possibility. Our investigations of the tensions between representation and canonization encouraged us to practice reflexivity, investigate counter-discourse, and ponder modes for social change.

\* \* \*

It is now late fall and leaves are scattered throughout the colonnade. There are ghosts dancing among the bronze busts. They speak in multiple vernaculars and idioms. The students and I take our second walk and hear them. We can sense that the Great Americans are also in the monument's empty spaces and unwritten words.

But that's not all. They are in the teeming classrooms in the buildings that surround the busts, and moving through its temporal path are global citizens, our students, traveling into stories and histories yet to come.

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## **Incorporating “Unteachable Texts”: American Renaissance Literature in English Composition**

*Carl James Grindley and Kathleen Kane, Eugenio María de Hostos Community College*

The pre-Civil War literature of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, and Emily Dickinson is sometimes criticized as being too culturally distant, linguistically difficult, or politically incorrect for the contemporary undergraduate audience. Nevertheless, during the first week of the NEH Hall of Fame for Great Americans Seminar in the summer of 2006, we were surprised when a colleague expressed his reluctance to assign some of these literary texts to his first-year students, and perhaps puzzled when he singled out the works of Hawthorne as being particularly alien. Yet, reflecting on our own undergraduate education, we admitted that we too had faced these challenges and had, as our colleague predicted of his contemporary students, come up short. Back then, works by the American Renaissance writers did not resonate with us because they did not fit into any sort of personal context; yet our professors expected us to digest and apply complex literary criticism and produce extended research papers. And until recently, we had not realized that our own students might be similarly lost. We have concluded, however, that the problem was not with the texts of the American Renaissance, but with the pedagogy used to teach them.

In previous semesters, both of us had taught ENG 110, Composition and Literature, using a standard introduction to literature anthology. To justify having our students buy these rather expensive publications, we had both “covered” a great number of writers—sometimes upwards of thirty poets—in very little detail and focused primarily on identifying the formal elements of literary texts. Our department’s official learning objectives for freshman literature, for example, require that students learn to analyze the plot, theme, characterization, setting, symbol, and language of literary texts. Students were also expected to do original research and to write a paper at the end of the term. We were mostly disappointed with the results. Some writers were particularly shunned, among them those writers we would characterize as being the stars of the American Renaissance: Poe, Hawthorne, Whitman, and Dickinson.

The NEH seminar focused on the integration of literary and historical events of the early to mid-nineteenth-century America through the socio-literary pedagogical model of Susan Amper, lectures by Andrew Delbanco, and readings in *Beneath the American Renaissance*, by David S. Reynolds. As participants, we were challenged to expose our CUNY community college students (recent



immigrants and high school graduates alike) to nineteenth-century American literature in conjunction with its historical and cultural contexts. During the summer, we collaborated on the design of an integrated approach to freshman literature based largely on selected works from the American Renaissance.

The process of constructing a new incarnation of our freshman literature course was not as straightforward as it initially seemed, and involved re-conceptualizing the course almost from the ground up. We wanted our students to recognize the influence of Puritanism, slavery and abolitionism, women's issues, and

popular culture in the emerging American national literature. At the same time, they would closely examine form (e.g., narrative, short story, the detective story, poetry, and drama) and theme (e.g., religion, good vs. evil, alienation, community, gender) and explain their socio-literary connection to history. This process eventually divided into four interrelated tasks: the creation of a course reader, the selection of complementary literary criticism, the separation of course materials and learning objectives into integrated learning units, and the application of sound assessment strategies with an eye to continuous course revision.

First, since these texts are in the public domain, it was a simple enough task to construct our own class readers, and we separately compiled printed and online anthologies for our students. Sharing a large number of common texts, we included short stories, poems, and narratives by Hawthorne, Poe, Whitman, and Dickinson. The printed version of our public domain reader was distributed by the college bookstore for a nominal charge. After the first cohort of students took the new course, we were able to revise the reader based on a student satisfaction survey, discarding for example, Whitman's "When Lilacs Last by the Door Yard Bloom'd" and replacing it with "The Wound Dresser." Hawthorne's "Ethan Brand," likewise, was discarded and replaced by "The Birthmark."

To ensure that our students were exposed to good models of literary criticism, we compiled a bibliography and created a collection of secondary literary criticism. Using academic search engines such as Academic Search Premier and JSTOR, we limited our searches to full-text copies of peer-reviewed scholarly articles that had fewer than five pages, and we set ourselves a goal of finding five or so articles for each one of the texts in our anthologies. These scholarly articles were then incorporated into the syllabus. Students read, discussed, and compared their own views of the primary texts with these secondary sources. They learned

how to quote, paraphrase, and document both online and printed sources. Some of the mandated departmental learning objectives for freshman literature include teaching students about MLA citation style, familiarizing them with college-level research, and helping to integrate secondary scholarship into their own works. Our work on the collection of secondary literary criticism helped to satisfy these learning objectives. As far as access is concerned, our library has an electronic reserve system wherein PDFs are electronically made available to the students, who could also use the bibliographies of the essays to find the articles on their own.

Rather than treat our texts in a scattershot manner, we divided course content into longer learning units that focused on a single author and his or her historical and cultural context. The materials were presented not only in class and through the primary texts and secondary literary criticism, but also through our college's online course delivery system—in this case, Blackboard. Using the example of Nathaniel Hawthorne to illustrate this approach, students were provided with specific Hawthorne texts, a link to the rest of Hawthorne's works, sample scholarship on Hawthorne's writings (cross referenced to the primary in-class texts and to a list of suggested additional texts), and links to Hawthorne's biography, the history of Salem, particulars of colonial life in New England, beliefs of the Puritans, and so on. At the same time, students were also presented with information and links supporting other aspects of the course. It was important, for example, to ensure that each unit contributed to our department's overall mission and fulfilled as many of the course's official learning objectives as possible, so students were given links and information on specific types of essays, MLA citation and documentation methods, the importance of avoiding plagiarism, and so on. Finally, special unit tests or essay assignments were constructed to ensure that our desired core competencies were met and properly assessed.

This final consideration—assessment—is increasingly becoming important in higher education. We followed a multistage approach, and assessed student mastery of the course's learning objectives at the start of term and at the end of term using a custom assessment tool we developed and which was administered through our college's Office of Institutional Research. We also used in-class, online, and take-home essays, research assignments, and tests to assess our students throughout the term, and—one of the course-mandated learning objectives—we assigned a research paper. We also decided to use a common final exam, which was designed to serve multiple purposes. Structured to mimic the CUNY Proficiency Examination (CPE), our final exam was a half-blind in-class comparison and contrast essay that used two texts: a poem by Whitman and a poem by a contemporary author. This format was adopted in order to determine whether a focused approach on one particular set of writers would nevertheless allow students to encounter unfamiliar authors with confidence. We were more than

satisfied with the results, and our student's grades did not suffer over the previous terms. That is, we were able to teach these apparently "unteachable" texts with no ill effects on our students. Finally, and in addition to our usual end-of-term evaluations, we created an additional assessment tool to determine our students' satisfaction with each individual text.

The process of assessment revealed several surprises. The assessment was undertaken in the final week of classes and utilized an instrument wherein students rated their enjoyment of each text on a score of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). In Grindley's class, for example, students had a clear preference for "Rappaccini's Daughter," which boasted an average satisfaction score of 4.5 and is a notoriously difficult, highly allusive and deviously symbolic text, but were considerably less satisfied by "Ethan Brand" (which scored 3.8) and "Young Goodman Brown" (which scored 4), both of which are far more commonly anthologized for a freshman audience. The inference is that richer texts, even if they are considerably more challenging or unfamiliar to students, will benefit most from an integrated approach. In Kane's class, Whitman's "I Hear American Singing" and "Song of Myself" (which scored 3.6 and 3.5, respectively), in combination with a PBS *Voices and Visions* series film on Whitman, inspired some students to do additional research on "Specimen Days," Whitman's Civil War journals.

Finally, at the end of the course, not only were students able to read, analyze, and enjoy works from nineteenth-century America, but also they were well-acquainted with the socio-historical contexts which influenced their authors. Viewed through this course construct, we found ourselves and our students engaged in a rich exploration and understanding of the foundations of the American Renaissance literature.

## When Teachers Become Learners: On a Journey into Aesthetic Education

*Joseph N. Todaro, Bronx Community College*

When I was invited to participate in the June 2006 Title V faculty development workshop on “Aesthetic Education,” I knew little of what to expect. The term *aesthetics* conjured up notions of art and beauty and seemed highly apropos to the course I teach on creativity and the arts in early childhood and childhood education. I imagined something akin to art appreciation, where I and the other workshop participants, my colleagues from Lehman College, might learn how to incorporate fine art into our respective course curricula. I expected to see posters or photographic slides of classical art, perhaps a Raphael, Monet, or Picasso. I thought we might listen to music or read short stories. Perchance we would discuss the concept of aesthetics, maybe tease out a relative definition. And I assumed that we would be assigned a culminating project, such as to develop a lesson plan or some other approach to the use of aesthetics in the classroom.

Little did I know that I was about to enter a highly active, highly participatory mode of learning that not only challenged many of my preconceived notions of teaching but, more important, allowed me the opportunity to step out of my role as teacher and into a process of experiencing and learning very much as a student. Under the guidance of the workshop facilitators, Holly Fairbank (Lincoln Center Institute) and Amanda Gulla (Lehman College), I entered a week-long journey that was far more concerned with *experiencing* the arts in personal and individual ways than it was with teaching *about* the arts.

To a great extent, the aesthetic education process is grounded in transaction theory: the proposition that what viewers bring to a work of art is as important as the work of art itself. In fact, transactional theorists suggest that artworks do not have meaning in and of themselves without the response, perceptions, and meanings that the viewer brings to it. Thus, a central feature of the aesthetic education process is experiencing a live work of art.

New York City is certainly one of the great art centers of the world, and we did not have to go any farther than the campus where I teach to find a work of art rich with potential. Bronx Community College happens to be the home of America’s first hall of fame, the Hall of Fame for Great Americans—an open-air, architectural landmark rendered in neoclassical style and designed to commemorate those Americans who have made a significant impact on the nation’s history. Certainly the Hall of Fame is rich in academic connections to history, architec-

ture, even biography, but for us it became the space where we examined the ways in which art can actively motivate exploration, inquiry, and response.

The Hall of Fame for Great Americans is where I brought my students when I sought to implement the process of aesthetic education into my own teacher preparation course, and they experienced it in very much the same way that I had in the faculty development workshop. I offered my students neither preliminary preparation nor any historical background but merely brought them to the entrance of the hall and asked them to do what I had done in the workshop: wander along the colonnade and make note of what they noticed, what they saw and heard, and what questions came to mind. What their journal entries revealed was that the Hall of Fame had motivated them to acquire information. All of the students recorded names of the honored Americans and copied quotes or phrases from the commemorative plaques that accompany each of the busts. Some made note of the occupations represented in the Hall of Fame, observing the educators among them. Some had even gone so far as to copy the entire contents of the dedication plaque at the entrance.

But aesthetic education pushes us to move beyond the quest for information to a more reflective, deeper level of inquiry. So when I gathered the students together at the end of the colonnade and asked them to share what they noticed, we heard about the names and the quotes that had caught their attention. We heard words of praise for the structure and its placement overlooking the Harlem River. We heard from those who recognized some of the elements of classical architecture about which they had learned in their art history courses: column, arch, cornice, frieze. I encouraged more response, stimulating them to reflect in other ways on their experience, to focus on the feelings and thoughts that rose within them. Only slowly and gradually did a few critical questions come forth. One student remarked, "I noticed that mostly here are men." Several students concurred. Then others responded by asking, "Where are all the great African-Americans and Latinos," and "Who decides who gets a spot in the Hall of Fame?" Before long, the students were locked in a hearty exchange on the issues of gender inequality, civil rights, and the rights of representation. Their questions and their queries still may have been motivated by information, but lurking behind those questions was a developing sense of the feelings that the work had evoked, the associations that had been aroused within them.

Lest the process be left there as a sort of free-floating, question-generating session, the aesthetic education process mobilizes participants into taking action. Fundamental to the aesthetic education model is the conviction that learning occurs through purposeful activity, specifically, activities that involve art-making,

which provides a concrete, hands-on opportunity for reflecting on one's encounters with a work of art and for embodying that experience in much the same way that an artist might. It is an open-ended, problem-solving enterprise that has the potential to deepen one's engagement and involvement with works of art and all that they resonate within us and for us.

So with their 99¢ store supplies (crayons, markers, watercolor paints, and brushes) and a stockpile of recycled materials (cardboard, magazines, paper towel tubes, etc.) my students set out to transform their experiences into art by creating personal "halls of fame." I had the privilege of observing my students as they planned and replanned, then looked for the materials and the means for shaping their ideas with color and form, dimension and design. I observed as they worked out problems: How do I get this piece of cardboard to bend in this way? How do I make this look important? What color should I use for that? I observed students drawing, coloring, cutting, tearing, pasting, sculpting, threading, and knitting. What I witnessed was a classroom full of teacher prep students actively engaged in the very experience of learning like young children. No text I could have assigned nor lecture I could have delivered would have taken the place of the lived-through, physical process of exploration and creation that went on for all of those individuals.

By the end of the semester, my classroom had become a gallery filled with colorful, two- and three-dimensional expressions around the theme of "greatness." There were hall of fame creations representing the "greatness" of students' children, parents, families; of teachers, African-American leaders, Puerto Rican culture; of computers, children's literature, and cartoon characters (like Superman). And there was a classroom of teacher prep students who had ventured on a journey into the unknown and returned with a newly formed sense of accomplishment and confidence.

Aesthetic education offers us a unique perspective on the teaching and learning experience that other models and methods do not. It offers possibilities for engaging learners in academic content through action and reflection. It empowers students by allowing them the opportunities to imagine, create, and develop the critical thinking skills essential to any liberal arts education.

# Metamorphosis of an Idea: The Aesthetic Education Action Research Faculty Development Seminar

*Amanda Nicole Gulla, Lehman College*

*Holly Fairbank, Lincoln Center Institute for the Arts in Education*

## From Eureka to Shared Experience: How it Began

How does a momentary flash of inspiration become the raw material for a shared experience?

In the summer of 2006, faculty from Lehman College and Bronx Community College participated in a week-long intensive aesthetic education course created and facilitated by Amanda Gulla, Assistant Professor of English Education at Lehman College and Holly Fairbank, Assistant Director of the Teacher Education Collaborative at Lincoln Center Institute ([www.lcinstitute.org](http://www.lcinstitute.org)).

This workshop took place under the aegis of the Title V program, which was dedicated to action research projects intended to improve student learning and retention. Lehman College and Bronx Community College had been collaborating for several years through BCC's Center for Teaching Excellence on providing summer faculty development courses designed to support faculty from both campuses in developing action research projects with the intention of studying their own pedagogy in relation to student achievement.

Our idea was that teachers in all disciplines could benefit from applying the “art and science of attention” (Sullivan, 2000) to their pedagogy. The action research course provided a context in which faculty could create a structure for applying these principles to their courses and for documenting their impact on students.

In classrooms that are grounded in principles of aesthetic education, “Students gain practical insights and strengthen core skills that readily apply across the curriculum and throughout life” (Holzer & Fairbank, 2006). Maxine Greene (2001) defines aesthetic education as “integral to the development of persons—to their cognitive, perceptual, emotional, and imaginative development...part of the human effort (so often forgotten today) to seek greater coherence in the world” (p. 7). Aesthetic education focuses its pedagogy on the study of a work of art, engaging the learner's imagination to “look at things as if they could be otherwise” (Greene, p. 112). Action research is defined by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence (<http://crede.berkeley.edu/>) as: “research conducted by classroom teachers, often concurrent with their teaching.” Hence, this aesthetic education action research seminar brought together both of these important strands.

The course focused on two works of art. *Intersections*, a walkway and plaza installation on the Lehman College campus was designed by artist Wopu Holup and completed in 2003. The *Hall of Fame for Great Americans*, a neo-classical structure located on the campus of what is now Bronx Community College, was designed by architect Stanford White and formally dedicated in 1901.

Amanda and Holly began planning for the course by developing a line of inquiry that the Lincoln Center Institute defines as “an open, yet focused question that emerges from an in-depth brainstorming process around a specific work of art, and is designed to invite further inquiry and exploration” (2006, p. 4). Our line of inquiry explored how the notion of greatness was embodied by White and Holup at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries respectively, and what each work of art had to say about the era in which it was created.

Moving outward from our exploration of the works of art, each faculty member designed an action research project centered on an aspect of his or her teaching practice.

### **The Hall of Fame for Great Americans**

The original idea for the aesthetic education workshop came in response to a question about how to bring Bronx Community College into the work with Lincoln Center Institute. I (Amanda) had just been wandering through the *Hall of Fame for Great Americans* and emerged with an initial question: “What is the space saying to those who enter?” I began thinking about how spaces are designed to convey implicit messages to the recipients for whom they were intended. In the case of the *Hall of Fame*, the message seemed to me to be that those who entered might benefit from the examples of those who were enshrined there. It brought to mind images of newly arrived immigrants pouring in through Ellis Island—my own grandparents among them—and how the purpose of public schooling was to lift all boats and bring the new generation into the American fold. There is something of the shining citadel on the hill in this structure, and I can’t walk through it without hearing it whisper to me that anyone could become a great American; it is really a matter of intention, and that the inclusion and arrangement of historical figures suggests a pathway towards greater knowledge and achievement that might be followed by all who enter. It seemed that all of the quotes reflecting the works and the beliefs of these putative Great Americans had to do not with what made these people stand apart from others, but with what they believed was possible and right. Artists, statesmen, writers, physicians, and scientists were memorialized here, each represented by a bronze bust footed by a plaque bearing a quote intended to capture his (or in a few cases her) life’s work. In each case, the quote reflected a belief in healing the sick, feeding the hungry,

or freeing the enslaved. It occurs to me that this structure was conceived and built not only in the midst of a great wave of immigration and at a time of great optimism and prosperity preceding the First World War; it was also only about forty years after the country had been torn apart by the brutal Civil War that brought an end to slavery as an American institution.

These ruminations on the whispered messages of long-dead Great Americans made me think about the fact that all learning spaces speak, in their own way. The space, in a sense, tells the people who enter what it expects of them. As Holly and I began to plan our course, the notion of the implicit and explicit messages articulated by learning spaces became a central theme for us.

### **Creating a Social and Historical Context**

It was difficult to think of conducting an aesthetic inquiry into the *Hall of Fame for Great Americans* without considering its social and historical context and its purpose as a structure so clearly intended to educate and edify. The way to go about this seemed to be to think about other works of art that reflected the time in which the *Hall of Fame* was constructed, as well as other works of art that carried out a similar social purpose but reflected a different time period. The natural choice for a work of art that served the latter purpose was *Intersections*, the installation on the Lehman College campus. As a monumental tribute to great works and ideas, *Intersections* seemed like a postmodern mirror image to the *Hall of Fame's* classical structure. Instead of monumental busts overlooking the cliffs and the river, *Intersections* is stripped down to the ideas themselves. The authors of those ideas are almost an afterthought. In some cases, the work represented is prehistoric and anonymous. We are literally left with nothing but the ideas, which we walk on and among. Instead of a shining monument on the hill, *Intersections* is a work that could easily be stumbled upon accidentally. The discovery of the work makes it all the more exciting, because the person who finds it can feel as if he or she owns it, and can take time with it as if tending a garden. The non-linear design of *Intersections* captures conversations in stone around a theme and across disciplines. Wandering through the installation (and it is best experienced by “wandering,” unlike the highly linear journey of the *Hall of Fame*), one finds a poet, a mathematician, a statesman, a religious leader, and a scientist in conversation with each other around a particular idea. This structure lends itself to the kind of open-ended and engaged pedagogy that is central to aesthetic education.

As the idea of an aesthetic education action research faculty seminar around two monumental works of public art developed, institutional support under the umbrella of the Title V student retention grant provided both a challenge and an opportunity by bringing together faculty with a broad range of experience in relation to both aesthetic education and action research. Participants were from the disciplines of literacy studies, early childhood and elementary education, art education, theater, nursing, and economics. Each participant had to design an action research project that addressed questions about how aesthetic education might apply to his or her discipline and to assess the impact of integrating aesthetic education on student engagement and performance.

For the faculty in the Early Childhood and Elementary Education Department who had a substantial history of working with Lincoln Center Institute, this was an opportunity to begin to do organized research on the impact this work was having in their programs. It also gave them focused time to discuss the aesthetic education work they had been doing in their respective courses, their students' responses to the work, and to some extent on their own practice and approach to teaching and learning in ways they had never explored before. These faculty members developed qualitative action research projects, studying how teacher candidates can learn about their own development and children's development through aesthetic education experiences.

Another faculty member in this department was looking at how aesthetic education experiences enhance the development of learning communities in classrooms, and how these experiences impact learning. A professor of Literacy Studies developed a research project designed to foster teacher candidates' understanding of literature and literacy through multiple modalities such as performance, visual art, and music.

Faculty members from Nursing and Economics, who had never even considered introducing works of art into their teaching, rose to the occasion in wonderful, sometimes difficult and consistently unexpected ways. This was possible largely because Holly, with the support of Lehman College, found ways to engineer an ongoing relationship between the Lincoln Center Institute and these faculty members once the Summer Aesthetic Education Action Research Institute was over and the fall semester had begun.

The nursing professor was interested in exploring issues of how nursing students cope with stress in their profession. Prior to participating in this workshop, she had never considered that an encounter with a theater piece might be the launching point for these conversations. Holly encouraged her to bring her class to see *Woza Albert!*, an original South African play on the theme of apartheid, which was part of the Lincoln Center Institute '06-'07 repertory. When the nursing professor brought her class to Lincoln Center's Clark Theater to see the

production, the class reflected after the performance on the play's connection to their coursework in nursing. Several students commented that the content of the play reminded them of their experiences in the hospital and the empathy that it evoked. Holly shared with the students a recent conversation with director Ricardo Kahn, who had commented that he felt this play was "all about healing."

For the economics professor, incorporating art into his coursework seemed to be even more of a challenge. Lincoln Center Institute enlisted the services of Teaching Artist Tenesh Weber. Along with Amanda and Holly, they co-designed an experiential workshop that would help students to consider the aesthetics of how text-based information is organized spatially. A visit to *Intersections* provided the perfect segue to having his students examine and compare financial websites, and look critically at how we navigate information in both physical and cyberspace through an aesthetic lens.

Participation in the aesthetic education workshop led this faculty member to address the issue of engagement in his teaching. During and after their experience with *Intersections* and their study of the financial websites, the professor reported much livelier class discussions with many more students participating than before.

### **The Aesthetic Education Conference: A Larger Context**

A further iteration of the Title V Aesthetic Education Action Research group came about when the Queens College Equity Studies Center sponsored the first Aesthetic Education conference. Susan Polirstok, Amanda Gulla, Holly Fairbank, and Andrea Zakin, a Lehman faculty member who participated in the summer institute and has since taken on a leadership role in the Lincoln Center/Lehman collaboration, presented at the conference and had the opportunity to share their respective experiences of the summer. This was not the end of the story, though.

### **Aesthetic Education and the Scholarship of Teaching**

For practitioners of a pedagogy grounded in aesthetic education, such venues as the action research faculty development seminar and the Aesthetic Education conference at Queens College provide opportunities to shape the discussion around the assessment of teaching. Teachers at all levels, from early childhood to university, who pose research problems aimed at understanding and improving their teaching practices are participating in the "scholarship of teaching," (Bass, 1999) a discipline that regards teaching as "an extended process that unfolds over time" (Shulman, p. 5). This unfolding, as described by Lee Shulman, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, includes all phases

of course development, from “a broad vision of disciplinary questions and methods,” to “interactions, outcomes, and assessments.”

Aesthetic education is concerned with nurturing an engaged pedagogy that is grounded in the qualities of attention, description, and reflection. As one of my students once described it, “this is a course about paying attention.” Deep engagement with the capacities to attend, describe, and reflect on learning seems to be a natural context in which to engage in the scholarship of teaching. Moreover, sharing that scholarship within an emerging tradition of engagement in similarly reflective endeavors can serve to shift the debate over what counts when we measure teaching. As Maxine Greene says:

We are interested in openings, in unexplored possibilities, not in the predictable or quantifiable, not in what is thought of as social control. For us, education signifies an initiation into new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, moving. It signifies the nurture of a special kind of reflectiveness and expressiveness, a reaching out for meanings, a learning to learn. (p. 7)

For those of us who believe that learning cannot be measured solely by test scores, action research holds the opportunity to explore a broad spectrum of pedagogical questions. For a group of teachers still involved in action research projects that began unfolding last summer, aesthetic education has provided a powerful lens through which to look at engaged and reflective learning in their respective disciplines. For Holly and me, who created and facilitated this course, we hope that the Aesthetic Education Action Research workshop represents the beginning of an ongoing and expanding conversation about teaching and learning across disciplines. As the research continues to unfold in each of the participants’ courses, we look forward to learning more about how aesthetic education has helped to shape the pedagogical practices of a diverse group of faculty members.

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## **Success through Synergy in General Biology: Integrating Multiple Faculty Development Experiences**

*Laura C. Broughton, Bronx Community College*

### **Introduction**

As professors interested in our students' success, we are constantly seeking ways to revise and improve the courses we teach. New ideas are gleaned from reading education journals, speaking with other professors, attending education meetings, and participating in workshops. However, often we run out of time, motivation, or confidence when it comes to implementing the new pedagogical strategies. How do we integrate new pedagogies and techniques from multiple sources into our existing courses while maintaining their original goals and content?

I have taught introductory general biology at Bronx Community College for two years. In that time, I have been constantly evaluating and revising the way I teach while taking a series of workshops sponsored by a Title V grant: the Content and Method in Online Teaching workshop centered around the use of Blackboard; the Reading, Thinking, and Learning Seminar focused on pedagogy; and the Writing Across the Curriculum Workshop, which concentrates on critical thinking skills. My experience in these workshops has influenced my development of a way of approaching course revision and improvement.

### **Maintain the Goals of the Course**

The objective when revising is to improve the existing course. Every change that is made should reinforce the goals inherent in the course. Not every interesting and worthwhile idea will fit those goals.

The introductory biology sequence at BCC (Biology 11 & 12) is an information-packed survey course taught by over twenty different full-time and adjunct professors each semester. The goals of Biology 11 and 12 are for students to acquire a number of laboratory and analytical skills while mastering a large variety of concepts including simple inorganic chemistry, organic molecules, the cell, plant structure and function, cellular respiration, photosynthesis, human biology, plant and animal development, genetics, the molecular basis of inheritance, evolutionary theory, ecology, and a survey of biodiversity.

Students need help assimilating the overwhelming amount of information. Therefore, I have two main objectives in revising the Biology 11-12 sequence: 1) to determine prior knowledge and 2) to help students extract, organize, and

transform the large amount of information. In order to achieve these objectives, I am in the process of incorporating ideas from all three of the Title V workshops.

To determine prior knowledge, I am using two different strategies from the Reading, Thinking, and Learning workshop: a series of pre-tests and anticipation guides. I administer four different pre-tests, all through Blackboard. Three are surveys that assess the students' reading skills, technological skills, and learning styles. The fourth is a concepts pre-test, which allows me to determine which knowledge areas will need the most attention in the upcoming semester. In addition, I have incorporated anticipation guides into some of my lectures. An anticipation guide includes a series of questions that the students answer both before the lecture and after it. They allow both the students and the professor to see learning as it takes place, and they encourage students to take control of their own learning.

I introduce some strategies from the Reading, Thinking, and Learning workshop that help students with the extraction, organization, and transformation of information. I expose students to information extraction techniques like outlining and concept mapping, both in class and as homework assignments. My goal is to introduce the students to several techniques, and, after they become familiar with them, to allow each student to use the technique that best fits his or her own learning style. In addition, I provide summary questions, PowerPoint presentations, practice exams, and practice problems through Blackboard to encourage students to interact with and think about the course content.

Finally, the concept pre-test serves a dual purpose both for the determination of prior knowledge and, when administered again as a post-test, to determine the amount of progress each student has made over the course of the semester. This should allow me to evaluate my strategies over the entire semester and make the necessary revisions prior to the next semester.

### **Reflect the Needs of Students**

When revising and improving a course, it is important to keep the prospective audience in mind. It is necessary to focus on the academic strengths and weaknesses of the students. Improvements should be made to the aspects of teaching that will build on their strengths and address their weaknesses.

For the majority of students taking the Biology 11-12 sequence, this is their first and only experience with a college-level science course. Many did not take biology in high school. A good proportion of the students are weak in math and reading skills and have never learned the information extraction and synthesis skills necessary to excel in a science course. The skill set of the students must be incorporated into any pedagogical decisions made by the professor. Both Biology

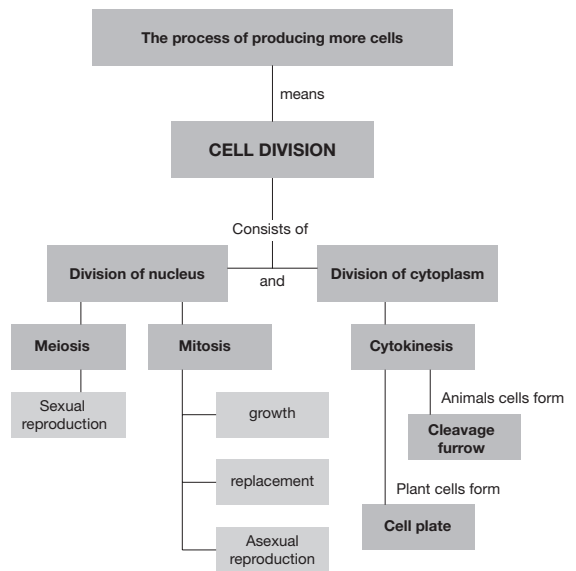
11 and 12 already incorporate reasoning and analysis, mathematical methods, and scientific methods in the course of the semester just by the nature of the material taught. For example, Biology 11 focuses on the skills necessary to generate data, to organize those data visually in a graph, and to interpret graphs made by other people. However, topics that include math (like genetics) are taught with more emphasis on the arithmetic than is standard in a four-year college setting.

**Figure 1.**  
A. Empty Outline and B. Concept Map for the Cell Division Laboratories in Biology 11 and 12.

**A. Cell Division Empty Outline**

- I. Cell Division
  - A. Definition
    - i. \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. Components
    - i. Division of \_\_\_\_\_
      - 1. called \_\_\_\_\_
      - 2. in plants, requires \_\_\_\_\_
      - 3. in animals, requires \_\_\_\_\_
    - ii. Division of \_\_\_\_\_
      - 1. called \_\_\_\_\_
        - a. Daughter cells are \_\_\_\_\_
        - b. functions
          - i. \_\_\_\_\_
          - ii. \_\_\_\_\_
          - iii. \_\_\_\_\_
      - 2. called \_\_\_\_\_
        - a. Daughter cells are \_\_\_\_\_
        - b. function \_\_\_\_\_

**B. Cell Division Concept Map**



When incorporating ideas from the Title V workshops into my Biology 11 & 12 courses, I have focused on strategies that reinforce reading and mathematics skills. In addition, I have encouraged the development of skills necessary for information extraction and synthesis, as well as strengthened skills necessary for communication, personal growth, and professional development. The ability to take good notes, both through active listening and when reading the textbook, is extremely important. In addition, in order to remember information, students must first transform it. For example, I introduce both outlining and concept mapping (from the Reading, Thinking, and Learning workshop) in my intro-

ductory biology classes (Figure 1, A & B). Last semester, my students requested that I post the examples of the empty outline and concept map for cell division on Blackboard. Finally, these changes are designed to encourage students to take control of their own learning and encourage integrity and responsibility. Providing opportunities for students to perform self-assessment (like the anticipation guide) encourages students to take responsibility for their learning.

On the other hand, most of the students involved in my courses are familiar with technology, particularly computers and the internet. Almost all students have computers and access to the Internet at home. My students all have some experience using computers for fun, if not for school work. There is a close to universal familiarity with Microsoft Word, and all students have some experience surfing the Internet. It is sensible to incorporate computer and Internet usage into the fabric of the course both because they can provide motivation and interest and because using familiar skills may provide a level of comfort and security when learning new information.

### **Leave Sufficient Time for Evaluation**

Making improvements to any course takes time, thought, and effort. Course revision is a recursive process, which involves 1) discerning a need or weakness of the course, 2) integrating a new pedagogical technique or technology into the course to address that need, and 3) evaluating the effects of this new technique on student learning. It is important to make the best use of both time and effort. It is not necessary to fix all of the perceived weaknesses of a course at one time. In fact, it is much more efficient and effective to change one thing at a time, allowing for evaluation and changes in strategy when necessary.

For Biology 11 and 12, I have a long-term plan to implement ideas to which I was exposed in the Title V workshops (see Table 1). Each semester I am changing one or two aspects of each course. Some techniques, like administering a pre-test and post-test to measure student improvement over the semester, can be implemented in both courses with little effort. Other changes, like transforming Biology 12 from a Blackboard-enhanced to hybrid course, require more long-term effort.

**Table 1.**

Schedule of improvements for Biology 11 & 12 based on techniques learned in three Title V Workshops. (RTL: Reading, Thinking, and Learning workshop; WAC: Writing Across the Curriculum workshop; Blackboard: Content and Method in Online Teaching workshop)

<b>Semester</b>	<b>Biology 11 Improvements</b>	<b>Biology 12 Improvements</b>
Fall 2005	Create review sheets	
Spring 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Post syllabus, link to textbook, &amp; grades in Blackboard</li> <li>» Make PowerPoint lectures and review sheets available through Blackboard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Post syllabus, link to textbook, &amp; grades in Blackboard</li> <li>» Make PowerPoint lectures and study guides available through Blackboard</li> <li>» Teach problem solving through scaffolding of questions (RTL)</li> </ul>
Fall 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Make practice exams and study guides for laboratory available through Blackboard</li> <li>» Introduce outlining and concept maps (RTL)</li> <li>» Assign scaffolded research paper on a disease (WAC)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Make practice exams for laboratory available through Blackboard</li> <li>» Begin creation of genetics practice problems in Blackboard</li> </ul>
Spring 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Administer pre-test/post-test (RTL) &amp; surveys through Blackboard</li> <li>» Use anticipation guides &amp; muddiest point 1-minute papers (RTL)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Administer pre-test/post-test (RTL) &amp; surveys through Blackboard</li> <li>» Create critical thinking writing assignments (WAC)</li> <li>» Make study guides for laboratory available through Blackboard</li> </ul>
Fall 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Evaluate results from pre-test/post-test (RTL)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Assign critical thinking writing assignments (WAC)</li> <li>» Create more Blackboard content</li> </ul>
Spring 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Evaluate course for weaknesses; adjust strategies accordingly (RTL)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Evaluate critical thinking writing assignments (WAC)</li> <li>» Begin teaching hybrid Blackboard course</li> </ul>

## **Integrate Techniques**

Often ideas from different sources can be synthesized to create a new and useful technique. This is particularly true when we are integrating pedagogical techniques with new technologies.

The pre-tests and surveys given to my classes this semester integrated the technology of the Content and Method in Online Teaching workshop with ideas from the Reading, Thinking, and Learning workshop. Students particularly like Blackboard, and, in several instances, they have asked me to add content to my Blackboard site.

Last semester in Biology 11, I assigned a series of assignments designed to culminate in a research paper on a human disease. They consisted of 1) a paragraph on the topic, 2) an information literacy assignment on sources, 3) an outline of the paper, 4) a rough draft, and 5) a finished paper. The students were allowed to revise the first four assignments, and all were assigned and could be handed in through Blackboard. This series of assignments draws on techniques I learned from all three of the Title V workshops.

## **Conclusions**

This article has focused on the first two steps in course revision: discerning a need for change and integrating a new technique into a course. The final step is evaluating the effects of the new technique on student learning. Most of the formal assessment in the introductory biology sequence consists of eight exams; this structure is imposed at the department-level. However, informal assessment can be a powerful tool. Both the cumulative final examination and the comparison of the pre-test and post-test will evaluate the overall progress of my students. The success of individual techniques can be evaluated using the anticipation guides and short in-class exploratory writing assignments like minute papers. Students' success on exam questions that address the same topic as a particular technique (like a series of scaffolded practice genetics problems) will provide an additional form of evaluation.

The nature of academic disciplines, particularly the sciences, encourages participating in the current dialogue about the concepts and facts related to the discipline. The same critical thinking skills that we are trying to teach to our students can be used in evaluating the process of teaching. By considering the goals of my course, assessing the needs of my students, making changes slowly and thoughtfully, and being creative with the synthesis of techniques, I believe I have made worthwhile improvements to my course that will result in increased student success.

## Scaffolding Reading and Writing Assignments

*Nathalie H. Bailey, Lehman College*

### Introduction

At the start of the one-semester Seminar on Reading, Learning, and Thinking, sponsored by the Center for Teaching Excellence at Bronx Community College, I knew that I was not happy with my students' comprehension of extensive reading, i.e., the reading of book-length texts. I teach advanced ESL students, using a sustained content-based approach. I select a theme for my course, which I sustain for the whole semester, in the manner of the disciplines. Because of their engagement with the subject matter, students are in a position to develop strategic reading, writing, and speaking skills that will serve them in other courses. The challenge for me as a teacher is to support them with appropriate materials, assignments, and learning objectives.

I was particularly concerned about my students' reading comprehension. To help them prepare for class discussion of their reading, I had been having the students keep triple-entry journals. They wrote excerpts from their reading in one column, listed their reactions to or questions about the excerpts in a second column, and elicited a response from a classmate to their reaction or question in the third column. Unfortunately, the students were making only short, cursory entries in their journals, and they were not quoting or citing the page numbers of their excerpts, important research skills. Even after an exchange of journals, only a handful of students participated in follow-up discussions.

I had considered the possibility of quizzing the students at the start of each class, but I was not comfortable with that idea. I felt I needed to find new ways of increasing their reading comprehension. Then I needed to find new ways to assess this comprehension both during the process of reading a book-length text and after they had completed reading it.

Another goal I had for innovation in my teaching was to improve my grading of writing assignments. I had been having a problem because the split grades (a content and organization grade over a language grade in the manner of a fraction) confused the students. They preferred a single grade.

## Reading Innovations

I found some solutions to my students' reading comprehension problem by experimenting with and applying in my instruction a variety of cognitive learning strategies that Harriet Shenkman, leader of the Seminar, has labeled LETME, (Link, Extract, Transform, Monitor, and Extend. I introduced linking in the form of concept mapping of a chapter of a book. I partially mapped the main concepts of one chapter of their book as a model of an exercise that would be engaging for them. They completed the map for homework and then compared their maps with those of their classmates. I taught my students to map the concepts of their reading assignment before teaching them to do triple-entry journals. I invited the students to substitute concept mapping for journaling if they chose. Some students ended up doing both. I believe mapping helped them get an overview of the material they were reading before they had to extract quotes and paraphrases from the text and then transform these into reactions and questions in their journals.

My concerns about appropriate assessment of my students' reading comprehension were addressed by a *monitoring* technique that was suggested to me in the seminar whereby students wrote their own test questions. This led me to a strategy that improved altogether my students' journal-keeping and classroom discussion and assessed performance. This strategy was to have my students select quiz questions from among the good, unanswered questions they identified in their own or each other's journals. I wrote these questions on the blackboard, and the students copied them down and came to the next class prepared to write their answers to them as a quiz. The students were motivated in this way to return to the text and re-read it, an invaluable reading comprehension strategy.

As the semester progressed, I progressed from administering quizzes in the following classes to having the students take open book quizzes right after the questions were collected and written on the board. These quizzes provided me with good feedback about what the students understood and what needed to be reinforced. But, more important, the learning strategies the students were acquiring resulted in better reading comprehension and better writing.

The finale of this scaffolded instruction was that the students constructed their own final exam, following the pattern of quiz construction that was already in place. They proposed their own test questions and prepared for a test which would be a subset of those questions. By applying the strategy of *extending* to their learning, I asked the students to create their questions in five areas of critical thinking. Giving the students ownership of their quizzes and final examination produced results that were illuminating to me as a teacher. The questions were challenging and differentiated the students who understood their reading well from those who did not.

## Writing Innovations

My grading of my student essays also improved, thanks to a discussion in the seminar of *monitoring*. As a result of that discussion, I decided to create rubrics for evaluating students' work. I developed a rubric that served for both student self-assessment and teacher grading feedback. I created a variant of the rubric for each writing assignment in my course, experimenting with this rubric over the course of one semester. I ended up with a grade breakdown as follows: content, 50%; organization, 25%; and language, 25%. My students first used this rubric as a self-assessment tool while drafting their paper and then received it as an analytical feedback sheet from me when I returned their final draft to them with a grade.

## Scaffolding of Student Learning

Scaffolding of student learning is best defined metaphorically. Scaffolding can be viewed as the superstructure that is provided by the teacher that is comparable to the scaffolding on the outside of a building under construction. The teacher stages student learning of difficult tasks by supplying models of completed or half-completed tasks and by sequencing assignments to build on previous learning.

I supplied my students with models for reading comprehension strategies in the form of concept maps and triple-entry journals. These represented stages in the work of understanding the text they were reading that included *linking*, *extracting*, and *transforming* knowledge as well as *monitoring* their own learning. The latter they accomplished by identifying what they did not understand about the text and then re-reading the text to prepare for quizzes and exams. By providing my students with scaffolded (modeled and sequenced) reading assignments, they were able to practice a variety of learning strategies for reading comprehension.

In the case of writing improvement, I scaffolded student learning by providing rubrics that identified the components of a successfully completed assignment. I also staged a sequence of assignments using these rubrics. The first stage was a self-assessment of a draft; the second, a peer review of a draft; and the third, my analytical assessment of their writing. Did the students learn to be better writers because of the scaffolding of their writing? I believe that they did. I felt much clearer about the grades I gave them, and I had fewer students questioning my grades. In addition, my students' grades steadily improved over the course of the semester.

## Conclusions

Teachers and students across the disciplines, not just those in language-focused classes, could benefit from the practice of scaffolding assignments. For instance, consider the case of outlining. I often hear faculty complain that their students do not know how to write outlines. This problem could be overcome by using a sequence of assignments, beginning with a teacher-modeled (partially completed) outline of a reading text. Following that, students could generate their own outlines of reading. In relation to writing, teachers could prepare a partial or complete outline for students to write from. Finally, students could be asked to write from an outline of their own creation. It is a real joy to experience the students' growing independence as learners when they are taught in this way.

I plan to extend my use of "scaffolded assignments" to a wider range of courses in the future. All entry-level students, not just ESL students, could use models of successful writing. Reading the work of other students can be invaluable. Upper-level students certainly benefit from reading and writing assignments that build on one another (i.e., reading journals leading to reading responses leading to critical reviews). Even graduate students learn to read and write about literature better if they are given the opportunity to collaborate with their classmates by sharing papers they have written. I use a two-stage approach with graduate students taking my course in Anglophone world

literature. After reading the first half of a novel, the students write two-page reading response papers and share these with each other by circulating them electronically or giving hard copies to their classmates. After a discussion in class of these initial responses, the students finish reading the book and write a two-page review of it, which they also share with their classmates. I have found that students respond extremely well to this two-stage approach to reading and writing.

Scaffolding, as the word implies, provides a gradual foundation for knowledge construction, and what we want most is to see our students become knowledge makers.

## Reflection on Action Research: A Learning Journey

*Marcia Jones, Bronx Community College*

The Center for Teaching Excellence at Bronx Community College invited me to participate in a semester-long seminar called “Reading, Learning, and Thinking Across the Disciplines.” The faculty participants were from diverse disciplines within the college. They taught subject areas such as history, biology, mathematics, chemistry, and English. I was from the Department of Nursing and Allied Sciences. Despite the various subjects taught, our goal was to find ways in which we could improve the quality of our teaching and the performance of our students. Week after week, as we learned a repertoire of cognitive strategies that have been shown to help students learn, we were asked to assess our own individual teaching styles, the way we currently taught, and the needs of our students. We were challenged to explore and test new ideas, methods, and materials. As we shared our ideas with fellow workshop members, it was fascinating to hear of the new approaches they were developing. As a group, we were able to analyze each other’s proposals, giving support and suggestions about approaches that we thought would be most effective.

This initial positive faculty development experience prompted me to sign up for the Action Research Summer Institute at BCC. As a nurse and clinical practitioner, my research experience was in clinical research, and I had never done an action research project before. The exposure to action research methodology motivated me, and, by the end of the Summer Institute, I was excited and committed to undertake research about my own teaching in the nursing field that would result in improved student learning.

My first question was “What should I focus on?” My dilemma was how I could design a research project that would teach me to teach while helping my students to learn. Given a full teaching load, I wanted to select a method of data collection that would not be too demanding on time. What methodology would be reliable enough to allow me to formulate hypotheses and develop strategies applicable to nursing education at Bronx Community College?

In order to gain an insight into the problems, I began to ask questions and to take particular notice of the concerns and comments of both the students and faculty. I discovered that the students were having difficulty with comprehension and application. For example, students had difficulty with connecting what they learned in theory with what they were exposed to in clinical practice. Colleagues I spoke with were concerned about students’ critical thinking and communication abilities. During the one-week Summer Institute, I learned more about the

research process and how to design and implement an action research project. Peer attendees helped me to refine my research question, locate the best literature to review, and identify an appropriate methodology.

By the end of the summer, I had developed my research proposal and designed a study to examine the use of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) as a teaching strategy. The study explored the impact of PBL on the development of critical thinking and communication skills in nursing in the clinical area. After getting the College's IRB approval, I set to work on my action research project.

I started by developing a timeline to gather evidence. I collected data throughout the semester via questionnaires, observations, students' written work, student and faculty interviews, and journal entries. I then analyzed the data using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Reflective journal entries were categorized and qualitative data analyzed for common themes.

I observed that the clinical setting allowed for small group reflection and discussion during pre- and post-conference sessions. It provided students with opportunities to glean multiple perspectives on nursing care, allowed students more chances to converse with the clinical staff, and helped them to build relationships and gain confidence in their communication skills. PBL, when used in the clinical setting, provided the students an opportunity to immediately connect the knowledge, information, and experiences they acquired to the theory of nursing. Students found it much easier to learn from the real experience than from the text. As the students built on their own links and learned from the experiences, they were better able to retain, recall and comprehend information.

The results were encouraging. The group that experienced the intervention demonstrated a highly significant increase in critical thinking and communication levels, compared to the control group. The majority (92%) of the participants in the PBL intervention found the intervention was useful. Several issues emerged from the participants' responses: ninety-five percent of the students indicated that the small group environment of PBL was more relaxing and intimate, which promoted learning. They felt less embarrassed about asking questions and giving their opinions. Ninety percent mentioned that it was instrumental in increasing their motivation to seek information.

There were mixed reactions to working as a team. Seventy percent of the group felt that it was a great and enlightening experience and that they learned more from the group approach than individual study. Thirty percent stated that they preferred to work alone because group work was either time-consuming or the work was unfairly distributed.

One hundred percent of the students indicated that PBL facilitated the development of self-assessment skills, enhanced their communication skills, and increased their ability to think critically. PBL encouraged the development of deep, rather than superficial, learning. Students learned to question assumptions and become more analytical.

Problem-based learning appears to offer the pragmatic way to encourage and support students in their efforts to develop critical thinking and good communication skills in the field of nursing. This pedagogy appears to provide an alternate way for educators to prepare nursing students to think critically, so that they are better prepared to meet the needs of clients who have complex health needs. It will also improve their ability to communicate effectively as members of multidisciplinary teams. The long-term benefits to the profession of nursing are that we will have graduates who are innovative, resourceful, adaptable, creative, and responsible.

An important element of action research is sharing what you have learned. Sharing with peers is important, but I wanted to disseminate my findings to a wider audience of nursing educators. I decided that publishing in a professional journal would be a way to have my findings reach a larger audience. What a daunting task for me! Good research and good teaching does not always mean good writing. I know my field, and, over the years, I have helped in the delivery of many babies, but writing is not one of my talents. I knew, however, that I had to change both my attitude about and aptitude for writing. I understood the importance of clear, persuasive writing, and I knew that if I was to become a good writer, I needed a writing coach.

Fortunately, I was at the right place at the right time. Just when I had completed the research project, CUNY offered a writing fellowship designed to help faculty develop writing skills for publication. It was with both excitement and dread that I applied. I was accepted to participate in the Faculty Fellowship Publication Program, and it was well worth my time. The program helped me to develop my writing style and structure, organize my thoughts, and present my work in a clear, well-thought-out and interesting way. Once I got over the writing hurdle, I searched for the peer-reviewed journal that would target the best audience for my work. I submitted the manuscript and then spent the next three months wondering if it would be accepted. My manuscript has been through the first round of peer reviewers. I am awaiting official acceptance, and it is my hope that my work will be in print by the end of the summer. However, my journey is not over yet. This year, I am participating in the PBL seminar sponsored by the Center for Teaching Excellence. It will enable me to further refine the problems I have developed and to integrate them with the latest technology tools.

My journey has been from initial learning of cognitive strategies to implementing action research methodology, publication of my findings, and beyond. The process evolved and unfolded over three years and is ongoing. I have discovered new teaching methods and ways that students learn, interacted with colleagues from different disciplines, learned about other research and writing activities, and networked with colleagues from other CUNY colleges. I hope that, along the way, I have become a better teacher, researcher, and writer.

## The Center for Teaching Excellence at BCC

The Center for Teaching Excellence is dedicated to learning about learning. We pursue four major goals: to foster growth in individual teaching skills and knowledge throughout a faculty member's professional career; to use interdisciplinary tools and insights to seek solutions to pedagogical problems; to support academic departments in their exploration of teaching objectives within programs; and to create, in collaboration with others, a campus environment where teaching and learning are central and valued. A dedicated advisory board of faculty and administrators help us to achieve our mission.

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